



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Section 3: Recent Evidence of Impact

Leveraging

**the Power of Afterschool
and Summer Learning
for Student Success**

A compendium of studies, reports, and commentaries by 100+ professionals and policy leaders on the best practices, impact, and future of expanded learning opportunities

Terry K. Peterson, PhD, Executive Editor

Contents

Section 3: Recent Evidence of Impact

-
- 1 The Importance of Afterschool Programs in Education Reform Worldwide: Making It Essential in America**
Eva L. Baker
-
- 7 Quality Afterschool Programs Supported by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Are Part of the Equation for Education Success in Wisconsin**
Superintendent Tony Evers
-
- 10 Afterschool Program Quality and Student Outcomes: Reflections on Positive Key Findings on Learning and Development From Recent Research**
Deborah Lowe Vandell
-
- 17 Fifteen Years of Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers: A Driver for Program Quality and Capacity in the Field**
Heather Weiss
-
- 24 Afterschool Programs That Follow Evidence-Based Practices to Promote Social and Emotional Development Are Effective**
Joseph A. Durlak & Roger P. Weissberg
-
- 29 Building on What We Have Learned About Quality in Expanded Learning and Afterschool Programs: Working Toward the Development of a Quality Indicator System**
Carol McElvain
-
- 37 The Promise of Summer Learning**
Gary Huggins
-
- 42 Engaging Families in Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs: A Review of the Research**
Priscilla Little
-
- 47 The Value of Partnerships in Afterschool and Summer Learning: A National Case Study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers**
Shawn Stelow Griffin & Laura Martinez
-
- 54 Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE): Achieving Positive Results and Preparing Texas Students for College and the Workforce**
Kristin Nafziger & Candace M. Ferguson
-
- 61 Improving Results and Expanding Learning: Using Research and Evaluation to Inform Practice in New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers**
Susan Martz
-
- 67 Strategies Used to Improve Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers**
Joseph Davis, Lani Lingo, & Shelah Woodruff
-
- 74 Working Together: How a County Government and School District Joined to Provide All Middle Schools Engaging, Safe, and Effective Afterschool Learning Opportunities**
Mark H. Emery & Patricia McGrath
-
- 79 Community-Based Afterschool and Summer Arts Education Programs: Positive Impact on Youth and Community Development**
Lauren Stevenson, Cristy Johnston Limón, & Tilly Reclosado
-

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The Importance of Afterschool Programs in Education Reform Worldwide: Making It Essential in America

As president of the World Educational Research Association, an organization consisting of American, European, Asian-Pacific, Latin American, African, and Indian-subcontinental research associations, I have given invited talks to international groups in 20 countries in the last 3 years. While so much travel is not wise, I have learned much about educational reform—indeed, much more than the usual stories that we have grown accustomed to hearing. We all know by now, for example, that Finnish schools have much independence, that children in many Asian countries have excellent math skills, or that teacher applicants in many countries are of high academic quality, in part because teaching in those countries is a highly respected profession.

Beyond these comparisons that are now very familiar to us, I have learned that places like Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—well-known for their high academic achievements— all have afterschool programs as a common educational option. Afterschool programs are being regulated in some countries; that is, they must close by 11:00 p.m. so that students do not work too hard! There also is some backlash in these nations directed at the extra money that parents pay year after year to enroll their children in these programs. New developments, such as Korea's comprehensive computer-based system, will provide a platform for afterschool activities, including homework help and other options, to engage students deeply in subject matter. Korea is changing its exam structure, as well, to be more oriented to the performance of complex, multistep tasks. Some of these changes have occurred in a context in which students are also expected to excel in sports, music, and other areas outside the usual U.S. curriculum. Computer systems are in place to support afterschool learning in countries such as Korea, in which broadband connectivity greatly exceeds that in the U.S. and in which afterschool activity is not principally focused on child care.

How are these developments received in the U.S. policy arena, especially in the light of unacceptable U.S. performance on international measures, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)? Such findings are primarily, but not completely, attributable to poorer performance by students in poorer communities, and many of these students also come from minority groups. The U.S. has not, in 50-plus years of attempts to solve this problem, found a scalable way to reduce persistent gaps in performance between black and Hispanic students on the one hand and white and Asian students on the other. There has been some movement, but the overall picture remains unacceptable. Without delving into the myriad plausible explanations for the inability of the U.S. (overall) to develop scalable, effective strategies in the context of the regular school day, let us turn back to U.S. afterschool programs.

Afterschool programs in the U.S. are of different types—public, private, tuition-bearing, free—and are conducted in a variety of settings. These programs may attempt to meet multiple goals: keeping students safe; supporting learning and higher academic achievement; providing mentoring by caring adults to support healthy psycho-social development; extending the school day with practice-oriented materials to reinforce concepts and skills taught earlier in the day; and providing social and intellectual enrichment, such as music, dance, artwork, field trips, and service learning opportunities to instill a broader set of values now missed by many schools that focus their attention almost exclusively on accountability needs.

Do afterschool programs implement findings from research and evaluation? Yes, they do, as many are focused on a simple premise: time-on-task aids learning. Student engagement and interest in learning is a key aspect of time-on-task. Quality afterschool and summer programs therefore increase learning time by providing learning opportunities that are more engaging, broadening young peoples' skills and interests. So which learning tasks are used? In the countries ranking highest on the

Highlander Afterschool Program Helps Students Realize Their Full Potential

Students end every week at the Highlander Charter School's Afterschool Program in Providence, Rhode Island, by participating in "Freedom Friday." Through group projects, school assemblies and performances, field trips, and community service, these Fridays introduce students to a variety of social issues—from bullying to homelessness—and encourage critical evaluation and engagement. This is just one of the many ways the Highlander Afterschool Program takes the education of its students beyond the classroom to help them absorb the lessons from the school day and to develop important skills such as leadership, teamwork, and community involvement.

The Highlander Afterschool Program is integrated seamlessly into the regular school day, connecting its activities to the core curriculum, which reinforces school-day skills and provides students the opportunity to learn new ones in a hands-on, inquiry-based, experiential manner. By effectively leveraging the time outside of school, Highlander is improving academic achievement; data shows a direct connection between student participation in afterschool and performance on the New England Common Assessment Placement (NECAP) exam, with students who participate in 90 days or more of afterschool programming showing 20% greater proficiency in both math and literacy.

PISA, there is increasing variety in afterschool activities; these countries no longer emphasize practicing routine test items. Countries such as Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea are changing their expectations of students' competencies to include the development of character, identity, an understanding of their role in society, and key affective outcomes, such as resiliency and having high aspirations. In addition, they have embraced so-called 21st century skills and are planning to implement strategies and activities that foster creativity and entrepreneurship within these programs.

Why is this information relevant to us? If we cannot import the cultural context that values schools and teachers and that brings parents into close contact with the schools, we must approximate it and adapt these features to our own setting. The U.S. stagnation in performance levels (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011), in graduation rates (Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2011a), productivity in STEM (Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2011b), and the educational component of the credit downgrade should impel us toward the highest goals for educational reforms. Encouragingly, there is some forward movement. The newly developed Common Core State Standards in mathematics and language arts, soon to be augmented by science, can provide clear benchmarks for attainment, with one caveat: The tests developed to assess attainment must be of high quality in terms of their match to learning, as opposed to employing psychometric approaches that merely assess low-order learning.

Returning to afterschool programs, there is a rapidly growing body of evidence that draws on the explosive growth of the field in recent years. This evidence is somewhat mixed, in part because of the considerable variation in afterschool programs. A substantial and growing number of studies, however, support the significant and positive impact of these programs on students and families in myriad ways. These afterschool programs should therefore be granted the same opportunities, including policy and budgetary supports by political leaders, as are being granted to other, more highly-promoted innovations for which the research evidence is mixed and inconclusive—for instance, value-added teacher compensation.

To recap, little is working well in the U.S. school system for those students who will form the majority of our nation's population within the foreseeable future. Better standards will help, if accompanied by high quality assessments (still an unknown), innovative technology, better teacher training, recruiting of highly qualified teachers, and the like. If the U.S. is to begin to regain its leadership in STEM and in intellectual performance, we must use tools available to us now that fit the purposes we have.

Looking at effective reforms that can be quickly adopted, one obvious strategy is to extend time on task, when the "task" is multifaceted learning of content, 21st century skills, social behaviors, and higher personal and academic aspirations—and not merely more focused, uninspiring instruction on narrow, shallow skills. These multifaceted learning goals can be readily embodied in well-designed afterschool programs.

Independent studies of almost two decades have documented, for example, a set of noteworthy findings for students in the LA's BEST afterschool program. There are similar findings, as well, from quality afterschool programs in California's statewide afterschool initiative and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. These programs have the

virtue of point-of-contact operation, ability to adapt rapidly to changing requirements, and the important, but sometime less valued, feature of bringing joy to learning in an exciting, collaborative way. Importantly, these efforts cannot be seen as discretionary. They are essential to a strategy to bring American children back to levels of accomplishment demanded by the future. The following list provides credible research findings that may exceed the evidence base of many other government-supported interventions in two key areas:

Academic Impact

- *Improved test scores (Goldschmidt, Huang, & Chinen, 2007; Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, & Baker, 2000; Huang, Leon, Harven, La Torre, & Mostafavi, 2009; Huang, Leon, & La Torre, 2011; Huang, Leon, La Torre, & Mostafavi, 2008)*
- *Improved school grades (Huang et al., 2011)*
- *Improved school attendance (Huang et al., 2011)*
- *Increased engagement in learning (Huang et al., 2007a; Huang et al., 2000)*
- *Lower dropout rates (Huang, Kim, Marshall, & Perez, 2005)*

Social, Safety, and Family Impacts

- *Provided students safety in dangerous areas (Huang et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2007b)*
- *Strengthened feelings of security by families (Huang et al., 2000)*
- *Bridged the language gap between non-English speaking parents and the school (Huang et al., 2007b)*
- *Improved self-efficacy (Huang et al., 2004)*
- *Made healthier choices in food groups selection and food portions (Huang et al., 2008)*
- *Reduced juvenile crime (Goldschmidt et al., 2007)*
- *Formed productive learner adult relationships (mentors) (Huang et al., 2007a; Huang et al., 2000; Huang et al., 2007b)*

Conclusion

In short, can we name any other reform with this empirical track record and low cost?

Disturbingly, it seems that just as we are learning significantly more from initiatives in the U.S. and abroad about how to maximize and expand learning through engaging afterschool and summer learning opportunities, there are attempts in some states and communities to replace some of these programs with considerably less well-researched alternatives, including some programs and strategies with demonstrably poor results.

Many of these alternatives also appear to be more costly because they do not deploy a collaborative model of school-community-family partnerships. A growing body of evidence suggests that more successful afterschool approaches employ partnerships and collaboration as a core organizing principle. This means, moreover, that that these programs can also be built out, where there is interest, to become more comprehensive community schools, community learning centers, or full-service schools. This simply makes good sense as well, given evidence of their success.

Quality afterschool and summer learning programs have a positive, significant effect on a number of very important aspects of student learning and 21st century skill development. They should be an essential part of the nation's education improvement agenda. Local school districts, municipalities, states, and the federal government should provide the necessary resources to enable more young people to have quality afterschool and summer learning through a collaborative model of school-community-family partnerships.

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Eva L. Baker is a distinguished professor in UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies; director of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST); and president of the World Education Research Association. As a congressionally appointed member of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing, Baker was chair of the National Research Council Board on Testing and Assessment from 2000 to 2004. She is also a former president of the American Educational Research Association (2006–2007) and was co-chair of the committee to revise the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999). Baker is presently involved in the design of technologically sophisticated testing and evaluation systems of assessment in learning environments for both military and civilian education.

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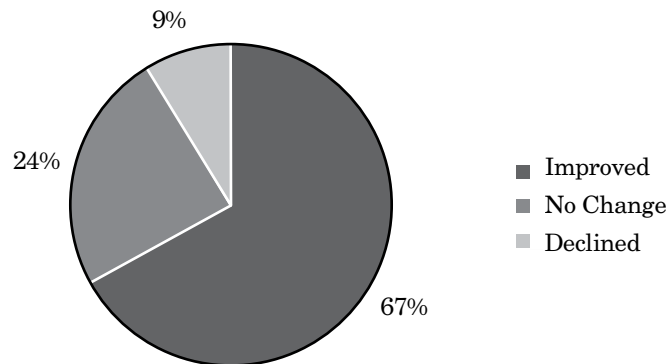
Quality Afterschool Programs Supported by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Are Part of the Equation for Education Success in Wisconsin

Each year the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) recognizes schools with low socioeconomic student populations that achieve high rates of proficiency on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) with the Wisconsin School of Recognition award. Many of the schools served by 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs have gone on to receive this prestigious acknowledgement of high achieving school environments, aided by the support the afterschool program provides. This illustrates the importance of the enriched learning environments afterschool programs provide students, particularly students in need of additional learning opportunities.

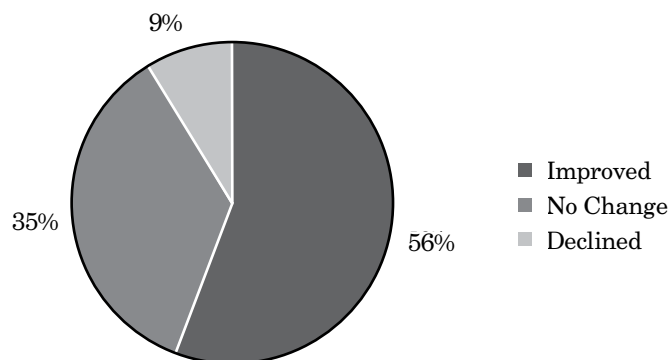
During the 2009–10 school year, 21st Century Community Learning Centers in Wisconsin served over 47,219 youth attending 188 high-poverty schools. These programs provide academic support and enrichment in core subject areas, such as mathematics and reading, as well as a wide array of youth development opportunities that are otherwise limited during regular school hours. Examples of activities include, but are not limited to, recreation (88%), science (88%), arts (85%), cultural studies (82%), technology (60%), tutoring (46%), leadership development (37%), drug prevention (33%), mentoring (19%), and much more. On average, Wisconsin programs added 495 hours of activities, an equivalent of 74 school days to students' learning time.

Annual performance data revealed that among regular attendees at 21st Century Community Learning Centers, 67% improved their academic performance (see Figure 1), and 62% increased their classroom participation (as reported by teachers). Teachers also reported that many more students were motivated to learn (see Figure 2).

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Figure 1. Improvement in academic performance.



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Figure 2. Improvement in coming to school motivated to learn.



Clearly, students who are engaged in learning hold more promise for success in and outside of the school day. However, these programs do not do it on their own.

In 2009–10, there were 968 community-based partners that contributed to the success of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. In addition to services, these partners contributed over \$3.4 million to support programs. This support is all that much more important as these 21st Community Learning Centers face uncertain future funding and our public schools are challenged to do more with less. Schools in Wisconsin provide some of the best educational experiences in the country, and yet the academic gap is still too wide.

It is for these reasons that our agency will not choose to pursue flexibility for the alternative use of 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds and instead commit ourselves to strengthening the afterschool programs. With the support of high quality

learning opportunities before, during, and after school, youth can realize their potential with the skills to be successful 21st century citizens.

Our students continue to learn well beyond the time limits of the school day and year. Supporting and encouraging them to reach their full academic potential requires us to consider additional avenues for providing instructional opportunities. High quality afterschool, before-school, and summer programs will help us achieve the goal of having all children graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary success in college and careers.

Annual performance data revealed that among regular attendees at 21st Century Community Learning Centers, 67% improved their academic performance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Evers was elected Wisconsin state superintendent of public instruction in April 2009. He began his career in 1976 as a classroom educator and has served Wisconsin students, parents, and citizens as an education leader at every level—principal, school district administrator, Cooperative Educational Service Agencies administrator and deputy state superintendent—before his election to the state’s highest educational post. Evers earned his bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in educational administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Milwaukee Students Find a Space to Grow in Boys & Girls Clubs

When the school day ends in the city of Milwaukee, thousands of students flock to the 38 local Boys & Girls Clubs for a range of learning opportunities that take them out into the community and deeper into their studies. Milwaukee struggles with some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy, academic underachievement, and childhood poverty rates in the country, but thanks to the Club’s focus on academics, members of all ages are seeing important improvements.

For example, the SPARK Early Literacy Initiative, a U.S. Department of Education—Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund recipient program, helps students through grade 3 with their reading proficiency. A UW-Madison randomized-control design study has demonstrated that regularly attending participants demonstrate 35% more literacy growth on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Meanwhile, the Stein Scholars program helps high schoolers meet the academic demands for graduation and college admission and provides scholarship support for more than 45 graduates annually.

Working with more than 200 organizations in the community, the clubs offer a wide range of other learning opportunities for members—from on-the-job training through the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board to civic engagement projects where members help to beautify their neighborhoods and promote safety in the community.

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Afterschool Program Quality and Student Outcomes: Reflections on Positive Key Findings on Learning and Development From Recent Research

In my years researching the effects of afterschool programs on children's social and academic outcomes, I have observed the power that high quality programs can have on the learning and development of young people. This paper provides some reflections on selected research from my own study of the field in recent years, which has been deeply informed by that of many others. Since my first study of afterschool programs conducted more than 25 years ago (Vandell & Corasaniti, 1988), I am heartened by the growth in our understanding of the effects of out-of school time from a virtually unstudied area to abundant and solid evidence on the positive impacts of high quality programs. Whether they are called afterschool, expanded learning opportunities, out-of-school time, or something else, we know from research that these types of opportunities can lead to positive outcomes for children and youth, as well as families, communities, and schools (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2011; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009).

As the nomenclature in the field has evolved, so too have my own research lens and lines of inquiry. Through my investigations over the years, I have developed some beliefs about the implications of what we have learned for policy, which I share at the end of this paper. In my estimation, based on years of examination, *high quality* expanded learning programs are essential to the learning process because they provide young people with opportunities to relate to their world in new ways. Strong programs foster an orientation of being open to novel experiences, of being interested in others and the world, of being inquisitive and creative, and, ultimately, of becoming lifelong learners (Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Shernoff & Vandell, 2008). As I see it, we have before us today unprecedented opportunities to ensure all expanded learning programs make a difference for children and youth (Vandell, 2012).

A Robust and Growing Research Base and Enhanced Measures of Effectiveness

Continued investment in research and evaluation in the expanded learning field has resulted not only in a robust research base but also in the development of reliable and valid measures of program effectiveness and impact that can be used effectively by practitioners and researchers to improve program quality (Vandell, 2011 September). Assessment tools are being created and refined by the academic and research community, as well as from within the growing local, state, and national infrastructure that promotes and supports high quality afterschool and summer programs.

These instruments can be used by expanded learning programs to assess such factors as program quality and attendance; staff beliefs, attitudes, education, and training; staffing patterns, including recruitment and retention; and student performance in specific domains and skills, such as behavior and academic achievement.

The measures my colleagues and I developed for the California Afterschool Outcome Measures Project are examples of the kinds of psychometrically reliable and valid instruments available that assess student outcomes in the areas of skill development and positive behavior change (Vandell, O'Cadiz, Hall, & Karsh, 2012). The set of surveys, which can be administered online, is designed to be completed by students, program staff, and classroom teachers. Student surveys assess areas such as social competencies with peers, task persistence, work habits, and reductions in misconduct. Surveys completed by program staff and classroom teachers include measures of child behavior with other children, social skills with peers, task persistence, and work habits. With these data, programs are able to study changes in their students' behaviors across the school year and to compare these changes to those found in other programs across the state.

In addition, students are able to use the Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox to report the quality of their experiences at the programs in three key areas—the quality of their interactions with program staff, quality of interactions with peers at the program, and their interest and engagement in program activities—again using well-established instruments with strong psychometric properties. Programs can then use these aggregated reports to assess how they are doing from the perspective of the youth who attend their program.

Continued investment in research and evaluation in the expanded learning field has resulted not only in a robust research base but also in the development of reliable and valid measures of program effectiveness and impact that can be used effectively by practitioners and researchers to improve program quality.

The Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox is now being used at more than 1,000 afterschool program sites in California, with plans to double the number of sites using the measures in the next 2 years. It will be important to see if the Afterschool Outcome Measures Online Toolbox can be used by program sites to improve student experiences (and student outcomes).

Of course, valid and reliable measures for researchers and practitioners alike are fundamental to being able to draw conclusions about the quality and outcomes of expanded learning programs. Some of the skills and knowledge that many afterschool programs are designed to promote are, in fact, complex to assess, and research in the field is limited by the inability to use experimental design to identify causal relationships. However, the instruments, approaches, and statistical models currently available do provide us with the ability to make substantive assertions about the correlations between program quality and outcomes for students.

Program Quality and Student Outcomes—Academic, Social, and Behavioral

My recent research, including the Study of Promising After-School Programs (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007), the Longitudinal Study of Program Quality (Pierce, Bolt, & Vandell, 2010), and the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (Li & Vandell, 2013; Auger, Pierce, & Vandell, 2013; Lee & Vandell, 2013) reinforces previous studies that the breadth, quality, intensity, and duration of expanded learning programs make a difference in both short-term and enduring effects on student academic, social, and behavioral outcomes (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2009; Vandell, 2012). Based on the evidence, following are key characteristics of high quality expanded learning programs:

- *foster positive relationships between program participants and staff,*
- *build positive relationships among program participants,*
- *offer a blend of academic and developmental skill-building activities,*
- *promote high levels of student engagement,*
- *maintain an orientation toward mastery of knowledge and skills, and*
- *provide appropriate levels of structure as well as opportunities for autonomy and choice (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).*

Other recent studies reveal that positive staff–child relations are important for both academic and socio-behavioral growth. Reading and math grades are associated with positive relationships between program staff and participants, and supportive interactions with nonparental adults are important for facilitating child adjustment. In addition, when dosage is high (that is, students attend expanded learning programs frequently and regularly), research shows that expanded learning programs can be a significant factor in fostering positive academic and social outcomes (Pierce, Bolt, & Vandell, 2010).

Other investigations (Auger, Pierce, & Vandell, 2013; Li & Vandell, 2013; Pierce, Bolt, & Vandell, 2010) that I have conducted with colleagues reinforce the finding that the availability of a diverse array of structured, age-appropriate activities is positively associated with student math grades and classroom work habits, particularly at the elementary level. As students get older and seek more autonomy in their out-of-school activities, research tells us that greater flexibility in programming becomes more important (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007).

Some of my research sheds light on the types of activities in expanded learning programs that correlate with various student outcomes. For example, students who participate in the arts have been found to have greater self-efficacy and achievement orientation, as evidenced by their increased time doing English homework and reading for pleasure (Li & Vandell, 2013; Vandell, Pierce, & Karsh, 2011). Additionally, participation in sports seems to be associated with better work habits, self-efficacy, school attachment, and achievement orientation (Vandell, Pierce, & Karsh, 2011).

Social and behavioral outcomes. There is substantial evidence from the current body of research that expanded learning programs promote positive social and behavioral outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010). High quality expanded learning opportunities are linked to gains in social skills with peers, increased pro-social behavior, and reductions in aggression, misconduct (e.g., skipping school, getting into fights), and illegal substance use (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). These opportunities also demonstrate promise because they have been shown to increase student engagement, intrinsic motivation, concentrated effort, and positive states of mind (Larson, 2000; Shernoff & Vandell, 2008). These findings are significant because the social and emotional outcomes that are fostered through high quality afterschool programs lay the psychological groundwork for the kinds of cognitive processes that are required for mastery of academic content knowledge and skills to apply that knowledge.

Academic outcomes. We know from research that engagement in activities that are both fun and that require focus helps develop the competencies needed for academic learning, including concentration, intrinsic reward, and motivation (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007; 2008). For example, in the Study of Promising After-School Programs, students who regularly attended high quality programs demonstrated significant gains in standardized mathematics test scores as well as self-reported work habits (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007). This study and other recent research provide a solid basis for three core assertions that should be used to continue to advance the field:

- *Expanding learning programs show promising evidence for helping to close the achievement gap.*
- *High quality afterschool programs have positive long-term effects on school attendance and task persistence.*
- *Expanded learning opportunities have positive cumulative effects on student grades and academic work habits (Vandell, 2011 February).*

Implications for Policy

One of the drivers behind my work is a strong belief that the interdependence of research, practice, and policy is key to increasing positive outcomes for children and youth. As I noted in the opening section of this paper, my research over the years has led me to form some conclusions about the research-practice-policy dynamic. Based on these, I offer the following implications of my research and that of others for practice and policy:

- *Practitioners already have access to reliable and valid measures that can be used to assess program quality.*
- *A next step is to expand awareness in the field of these measures and to increase capacity to use these data to improve program quality and to monitor improvements in youth outcomes.*
- *Practitioners can combine and compare research findings from across studies to determine the factors that fit best with their program contexts and characteristics.*
- *Policy makers must heed the evidence that high quality programs with sufficient dosage have positive impacts on student behavior and academic performance.*
- *Policy makers must set the stage for longitudinal data systems that enable the tracking of program, staff, and student indicators over time.*
- *Policy makers must provide sufficient resources for expanded learning programs to offer both academic activities, such as homework help, as well as enrichment activities, such as sports and arts, that ultimately help students improve academic performance (Vandell, 2010; Shernoff & Vandell, 2008).*

Conclusion

Over the years, I have had the great honor to interact with a wide array of students, practitioners and educators, parents, policy makers, and other researchers in the field of expanded learning. As I reflect on the research and consider its implications for future work, I am encouraged by the growing awareness of the importance of out-of-school time as a critical educational context and by the extent and caliber of the research that is being conducted by scholars in the U.S. and elsewhere.

As we move forward together in this effort, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and other key stakeholders, such as funders and technical assistance providers, must continue to intersect intentionally to ensure our efforts are aligned and that they inform the efforts of others. We have come a long way in having a growing body of research and evaluation evidence that quality afterschool programs work and make a positive difference. We also know a lot about improving quality. So at the local, state, and federal levels, it is time for us to find the will, energy, and resources to expand quality afterschool programs in the many schools and communities that need and want them—not in another 10 years, but now. In so doing, we will truly be able to leverage the power of expanded learning for student and community success.

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Fifteen Years of Evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers: A Driver for Program Quality and Capacity in the Field

The agreement by key congressional and administration leaders to significantly increase funding of the landmark federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers legislation between 1997 and 2001 was a powerful signal that afterschool programs and activities were worth significant public investment as part of the nation's efforts to educate and prepare its children for future success. At the same time, the legislation's evaluation requirements and the subsequent emphasis on "scientifically based research" in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) made it clear that these newly funded programs had to be accountable and prove their public value.

These challenges, including their accompanying performance management and accountability requirements, were powerful drivers for taking data and evaluation seriously in a new field. Addressing these challenges was also a shared priority of the innovative public and private partnership begun in 1998 between the United States Department of Education and the C. S. Mott Foundation. The Foundation's leadership, along with the significant national opportunity that the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative afforded for continuing support for afterschool and expanded learning opportunities for children and youth, leveraged subsequent philanthropic investment in evaluation. Without these strategic foundation investments, the afterschool field would not be in the strong position it is in today.

So what has all of this investment in evaluation helped the field achieve in the past 15 years? In 1997 there existed little by way of evaluation of afterschool programs. Since then, the federal investment in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, along with strategic evaluation investments by others, has built afterschool into a maturing field with demonstrated public value on an array of commonly valued youth outcomes. In this commentary, I offer a brief scan of the state of afterschool evaluation to suggest that the field is, in fact, maturing and has met the evaluation

challenge. Quality afterschool programs that are well designed can positively impact areas on which they focus. I also suggest that the field's evolving research and evaluation agenda holds important lessons for other fields.

For me, a mature field in the 21st century positions evaluation and performance management not only to show it delivers valuable public outcomes for youth but also to ensure it can *continue* to attain and be accountable for these outcomes. With respect to the position and role of evaluation, a maturing field has three distinct features: practitioners with a commitment to using information to support continuous improvement, innovation, and accountability; a substantial, high quality, and nuanced

research and evaluation base from which to learn and to show the public the value of high quality programs; and a deepening research- and practice-based understanding of how to build the quality programs and activities that continue to deliver their promised outcomes.

The Harvard Family Research Project has been tracking and synthesizing the results of afterschool evaluations for over a decade. We developed and maintain a national database of afterschool program evaluations for the field (www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/ost-database-bibliography). Both the number and quality of the studies in the database and our understanding of the evolution of afterschool evaluation underscore how important the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has and continues to be, not only in funding programs but also in creating and shaping the knowledge base for the afterschool field that can be used by school, community, and afterschool leaders, as well as public and nonprofit funders.

The evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs got off to a rocky start with a federally funded and premature outcome evaluation reporting

mixed results in 2003. It was used by some at the federal level to attempt to reduce funding for the program by half; but fortunately, as other evidence was documented and the serious concerns about how this early evaluation was conducted became known, support in Congress and the administration was retained. By being conducted early on in the field's development, despite the study's flaws and because of the reaction of researchers suggesting problems with the study, the process actually helped clarify the role of evaluation and position it to be useful in developing this growing field, hence my assertion that it was premature. In particular, it suggested some programs were effective while others were not, thereby putting a critical and early emphasis not only on assessing outcomes but on understanding program goals and implementation and on determining the factors and conditions necessary to deliver quality and effective services (Evaluation Exchange, 2002).

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has created incentives for evaluating afterschool programs and has therefore shaped afterschool evaluation in a number of ways. It has funded and stimulated programs to conduct evaluation, reflected

Because the 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding does not support any one model or approach to afterschool programs and activities, the initiative has stimulated the evaluation of a wide array of program models and approaches operating in diverse communities and conditions.

in the fact that at least a third of the programs in our database of afterschool programs call themselves 21st Century Community Learning Centers or indicate they receive some of their funding from this source. Because the 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding does not support any one model or approach to afterschool programs and activities, the initiative has stimulated the evaluation of a wide array of program models and approaches operating in diverse communities and conditions.

This decision not to fund a particular approach turns out to have been a wise one, not least because studies show that participation and engagement in afterschool depend on children and youth having choices among programs and access to diverse activities. The large number of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs and their diversity have also attracted applied developmental researchers using afterschool programs as sites for studying where youth learn and what engages them in learning, thereby enriching the knowledge base of the field (Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005; Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005; Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010).

Multiyear funding support from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative allows local program sites to test new and creative approaches and incorporate successful ones into their programming (see HFRP 21st Century Community Learning Centers Research Updates, 2010, 2012). Multiyear program support also allows flagship leaders in the afterschool field, such as the large, multiprogram, citywide organizations that serve large numbers of children and youth (for example, TASC in New York City and LA's BEST), to attract evaluation support and develop a longer-term evaluation strategy. Their ongoing series of evaluations and partnerships with evaluators are important for the field because they address key questions about the professional training, organizational supports, and other elements of infrastructure and program quality that lead to positive outcomes (HFRP 21st Century Community Learning Centers Bibliography, 2010; Reisner et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2007).

At this point, with federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers and philanthropic support, the afterschool field has a large number of evaluations meeting the criteria NCLB set in 2001 for scientifically based research in education. There are many small, single-site evaluations, as well as large, multi-site evaluations, conducted by a growing national cadre of investigators who are using both experimental and quasi-experimental research designs to assess program outcomes. Having this large set of studies enables meta-analytic syntheses that examine outcomes across an array of programs and that tease out the success factors that enable positive ones (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). There is also growing convergence across multiple studies on the success factors and elements of quality programs (Little, Weimer, & Weiss, 2008). The afterschool field is in a strong position because it can make evidence-based claims about its public value on an array of commonly valued youth outcomes, such

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as improved attendance, grades, homework completion, classroom participation, behavior and—depending on the focus—achievement and performance. These programs also contribute to an array of positive developmental outcomes, including socio-emotional skills and healthy behaviors that support learning, and they prevent a number of problem behaviors that are detrimental to school and life success (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008).

Equally important, the afterschool field is benefitting from a steady flow of increasingly nuanced evaluations that have been providing information to address seven key questions that are critically important if it is to continue to grow and provide high quality services. I offer the questions here to invite others into a conversation about what the learning agenda for the field should contain and prioritize:

1. *What works for whom, when, where, and why?*
2. *What doesn't work?*
3. *What are the elements of high quality programs and activities?*
4. *How do the elements work together to achieve the desired youth outcomes?*
5. *What internal program organizational and leadership characteristics and processes are necessary to develop and maintain quality services?*
6. *What policy, funding, and infrastructure supports are necessary for high quality at scale?*
7. *How can and do afterschool programs fit together with schools, digital media, and other learning supports to offer coordinated, accessible, and seamless opportunities?*

Many of the studies addressing the first three questions and some addressing number 4 are available in our searchable database and have been included in meta-analyses and key syntheses of the state of knowledge in the afterschool field (Lauer et al., 2006; Little, Weimer, & Weiss, 2008; Granger, 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010). There are fewer research studies and evaluations to address questions 5 through 7. I suggest they are a priority for further research investment in the field and that addressing them will require the kinds of ethnographic and mixed methods work in the following examples.

Hirsch, Deutsch, and DuBois's recent work (2011) exemplifies an important effort to understand the organizational dimension of service quality—an effort that is also being repeated in research across other education and human services domains (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Glisson, 2007; Duggan, 2012; Douglass, 2011). Hirsch (2011) and his colleagues' ethnographic work on three comprehensive afterschool centers examines how multiple organizational characteristics and processes like leadership, a strong focus on positive youth development, organizational climate, staff development and supervision, connections to family and community, and organizational learning all fit

together and interact to create quality services that, in turn, move the needle on youth outcomes in a significantly positive direction. Their work is pathbreaking for the field in that it assembles the pieces that other studies have shown are important for quality services and shows how they all work together to create quality youth experiences.

The landscape of learning is rapidly changing, with more use of digital media and a growing emphasis on anywhere, anytime learning, both in and out of school. In this regard, another important new strand of work is being conducted by developmental researchers and ethnographers studying where and how youth use and learn with digital media. Both Baron's (2006) work on self-initiated learning and Ito and colleagues' (2009) studies of how youth use digital media, for example, highlight how youth are seeking opportunities to build important skills across learning environments, as well as how learning in school can lead to learning in afterschool and vice versa. It suggests that youth are actually ahead of institutions in seeking and connecting learning opportunities in and out of school and that they could both help make and benefit from greater connections.

Strategic investments in evaluation research over the past 15 years have yielded significant evidence that 21st Century Community Learning Centers and high quality programs that serve children and youth during the nonschool hours are essential for preparing young people for the future. It also shows what is essential to deliver high quality services that contribute to better learning and developmental outcomes for youth. In 15 years, the afterschool field has built a substantial research and evaluation literature that is serving as a driver for more high quality programs and opportunities around the country. It is also a model for how to invest in research and evaluation for those seeking to invest in building the knowledge base in other new service fields. That said—and as important as the knowledge we already have today is—we have work to do as a field to investigate and uncover findings about more complex aspects of this field from an organizational and systems perspective. The next frontier, in fact, includes more sophisticated research that studies expanded learning opportunities, including the perspective of children and youth themselves, and that reveals optimal ways to support learning processes, program capacity and scalability, and systemic infrastructure building. As this commentary suggests, the afterschool field is “on it.”

Strategic investments in evaluation research over the past 15 years have yielded significant evidence that 21st Century Community Learning Centers and high quality programs that serve children and youth during the nonschool hours are essential for preparing young people for the future.

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Afterschool Programs That Follow Evidence-Based Practices to Promote Social and Emotional Development Are Effective

The purpose of this brief is to summarize the findings from our research review, which indicated that afterschool programs that follow four evidence-based practices are successful in promoting young people's personal and social development (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). While a number of afterschool programs need to change and improve, others have positively improved multiple dimensions of student learning and development. For this reason, the findings from various outcome studies on afterschool programs have led commentators to emphasize that a main focus in research should now primarily be to understand the factors that distinguish *effective* from *ineffective* programs in order to guide future policy and practice (Granger, 2010).

For example, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is an important large-scale funding stream for afterschool and summer learning in high-poverty schools and neighborhoods across America. Because the Community Learning Centers initiative allows for local design and variation, it should not be surprising that program results vary. Nor should it be surprising that early studies, conducted before the field was informed about promising and evidence-based practices and design, found mixed results. For instance, the large-scale evaluations of the outcomes of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs serving elementary (James-Burdumy et al., 2005) or middle school students (Dynarski et al., 2004), that is centers that received federal funding through No Child Left Behind legislation, have generated controversy and led to questions regarding the wisdom of federal funding for afterschool programs. These early evaluations failed to detect any significant gains in achievement tests scores, although there were some gains in secondary outcomes such as parental involvement in school and student commitment to work. However,

So the question should be not whether [these opportunities] should be offered, but rather what research-based design elements should be included to make them and other afterschool programs like them more successful.

researchers have noted several methodological problems in these evaluations that involve the lack of initial group equivalence, high attrition among respondents, low levels of student attendance, and the possible nonrepresentativeness of evaluated programs (Kane, 2004; Mahoney & Zigler, 2006).

There is also the critical issue of treating programs collectively as though they provided the same uniform set of services when this is clearly not the case. While some of these 21st Century Community Learning Centers provided students with intensive small-group instruction or individual tutoring, which has been shown to be an effective approach (Lauer et al., 2006), others provided relatively unstructured homework time, which is not likely to be successful. It is precisely because afterschool programs vary in form, structure, and specific goals that they should be carefully evaluated along these dimensions. There is no question that many young people and their families need and want expanded opportunities such as those funded by the 21st Century Community

Learning Centers initiative. So the question should be not whether they should be offered, but rather what research-based design elements should be included to make them and other afterschool programs like them more successful.

Our review included 68 studies in which those attending an afterschool program that had the specific goal of fostering personal and social development were compared to nonparticipating control youth. We did not review programs that focused exclusively on academic achievement. The reviewed programs were drawn from across the country; they operated in urban and rural areas and served school-aged youth between 5 and 18 years old.

We hypothesized that effective programs would use evidence-based practices for enhancing young people's personal and social skills. We were able to identify four practices used in some afterschool programs, but not in others. These four evidence-based practices formed the acronym SAFE and are explained further in our full research report. In brief, our procedures identified whether or not program staff used a step-by-step training approach (S), emphasized active forms of learning by having youth practice new skills (A), focused specific time and attention on skill development (F), and were explicit in defining the skills they were attempting to promote (E). Each of these practices has a strong research base in many skill training studies of youth. The afterschool programs that followed all four recommended practices were called SAFE programs (N = 41) and those that did not were called Other programs (N = 27).

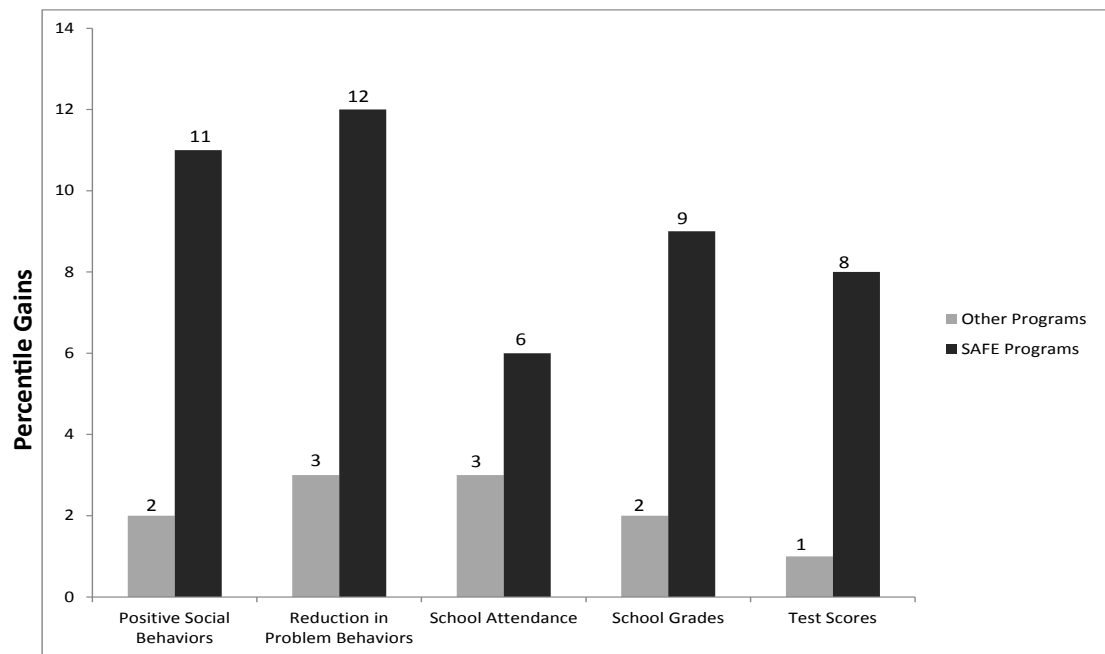
Our findings were clear-cut. SAFE programs were associated with significant improvements in self-perception, school bonding and positive social behaviors; significant reductions in conduct problems and drug use; and significant increases in achievement test scores, grades, and school attendance. The group of Other programs failed to yield significant improvements on any of these outcomes. Table 1 contains the mean effect sizes achieved on these outcomes by SAFE and Other programs.

Table 1. Mean effect sizes on different outcomes for participants in SAFE and Other afterschool programs.

Outcomes	Effect Size	
	Other Programs	SAFE Programs
Drug Use	.03	.16
Positive Social Behaviors	.06	.29
Reduction in Problem Behaviors	.08	.30
School Attendance	.07	.14
School Bonding	.03	.25
School Grades	.05	.22
Self-Perceptions	.13	.37
Academic Achievement (Test Scores)	.02	.20

Note: All of the outcomes associated with SAFE programs but none of the outcomes for Other programs were statistically significant.

Figure 1. Average percentile gains on selected outcomes for participants in SAFE and Other afterschool programs.



Another way to portray how much of a difference in outcomes is associated with SAFE programs is by calculating an improvement index (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). The improvement index is a percentile figure that suggests how much change the average youth would demonstrate depending on whether they participate in a SAFE or Other type of program. These percentiles are presented in Figure 1 for some notable outcomes from our review. For example, on average, youth could gain 8 percentiles in standardized test scores, show an increase of 11 percentiles in positive social behaviors (e.g., cooperation, helping others), and show a reduction of 12 percentiles in problem behaviors (e.g., aggression, noncompliance) if they were in a SAFE program. In contrast, participants in Other programs would show very minimal and statistically nonsignificant percentile improvements in each of these categories.

Are such percentile gains worthwhile to participating youth? Of course, it would be preferable if the SAFE program outcomes were higher, but the outcomes for SAFE programs are comparable to those obtained by many other successful youth programs that have been carefully evaluated. For example, in terms of increasing positive social behaviors, reducing problem behaviors and promoting academic achievement, the outcomes for SAFE programs are similar to those achieved by many effective school-based programs designed to improve student academic performance or social adjustment (see Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). In other words, afterschool programs that follow evidence-based skill training practices are part of the array of worthwhile interventions for youth. Our findings also suggest the possibility of aligning effective interventions during the school day with those occurring after school to maximize the benefits for participating youth.

... policy and funding should be focused on assisting more afterschool programs to develop evidence-based practices that are associated with better outcomes.

The practical implications of our findings are that policy and funding should be focused on assisting more afterschool programs to develop evidence-based practices that are associated with better outcomes. As others have noted, quality matters in afterschool programs, just as it matters in other types of youth services (Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Carefully done evaluations can help us understand how quality is manifested in afterschool programs that vary in their structural and operational characteristics and in relation to different participant outcomes. With the knowledge that we now have, we should spend time and energy developing strategies, supports, policies, and funding to expand SAFE afterschool and summer learning programs through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative and similar initiatives where they are needed across America rather than continue to argue whether they make a positive difference.

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Carol McElvain

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American Institutes for Research

Building on What We Have Learned About Quality in Expanded Learning and Afterschool Programs: Working Toward the Development of a Quality Indicator System

For almost a decade and half, my colleagues and I at the American Institutes for Research (AIR)¹ (and our predecessor organizations, Learning Point Associates and NCREL) have watched the expanded learning community grow and develop in many positive ways, both its day-to-day practice as well as in its knowledge of what works well and of how to measure what works, particularly in relation to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. The significant growth in the number, sophistication, and strength of 21st Century Community Learning Centers since 1997 has been quite remarkable: from 10 schools in 1997 to almost 11,000 afterschool and summer learning programs in schools and community centers in every state in 2012–13. These programs are now broadening and deepening learning for almost 1.7 million students, engaging over a quarter-million parents, and coordinating 40,000 school-community partnerships that provide a variety of important academic supports and enriched learning opportunities through afterschool and summer programs.

During this time period, a number of local and state expanded learning initiatives were also launched, and those already underway experienced dramatic growth. Local efforts sprang up nationwide, including on the East Coast, such efforts as the Providence Afterschool Alliance (PASA) and The After School Corporation (TASC) in New York; in the heartland, such efforts as After School Matters in Chicago and STRIVE in Cincinnati; and on the West Coast, such efforts as LA's BEST in Los Angeles and the Partnership for Children and Youth in the Bay Area of Northern California.

1. The author would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of her colleagues at AIR toward the development of this work and their input on this article, particularly Neil Naftzger, Deborah Moroney, Jaime Singer, and Fausto López. Any errors or misstatements are the author's. We are also grateful for the work of Charles Smith and the Weikart Center for Youth Development at the Forum for Youth Investment.

State efforts also were initiated and refined, including in California, which has the largest state effort, the Afterschool Education and Safety (ASES) program based on Proposition 49.

As with any growth, it has not happened without a certain amount of initial growing pains and with significant opportunities to learn and improve. As a training partner in the original incarnation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, continuing on with the development of professional development materials and trainings, including *Beyond the Bell: A Toolkit to Create Quality Afterschool Programs* (Kaplan, McElvain, & Walter, 2005), and in other work supporting the program and its operation, my colleagues and I have had the privilege of a close view of the positive changes and growth in program development and measurement. It is worth stepping back a minute to think back about the magnitude of the growth in and learnings from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers with an eye toward encouraging and supporting further developments in the field in the years ahead.

While the ultimate goal of educational support programs like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is increased student achievement and student success, such growth is not possible in isolation and is dependent on critical supporting factors.

While the ultimate goal of educational support programs like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is increased student achievement and student success, such growth is not possible in isolation and is dependent on critical supporting factors. This is where a high quality expanded learning program after school and during the summer can play a pivotal role. Focusing on the end-game of test scores at the end of the school year in just a few subjects in isolation has sometimes left key actors, who either work in or are responsible for programs, in a quandary. Reports about year-end test scores and other outcome measures are often received after the program year has ended. Yet this information is critically needed when the programs are actually operating in order to make key decisions regarding how programs might best serve students and build their improvement efforts.

Studies are clear that high quality afterschool programs structured in a variety of ways bring many positive outcomes for students, including achievement in terms of test scores (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010). Furthermore, for almost 10 years, the Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS) has been collecting annual data on all 21st Century Community Learning Centers across the nation, working through their respective state departments of education. More recently several state education departments (for example, those in Texas and New Jersey) have expanded upon the federal PPICS system to collect and analyze more data on the Centers in their states. In these data, teachers report that regular program participants tend to show improved homework completion, class participation, attendance, classroom behaviors, English and math classroom grades, and reading and math achievement scores, with those students who have higher program attendance showing the greatest improvement (Naftzger, Vinson, Manzeske, & Gibbs, 2011; American Institutes for Research, 2012).

This recent knowledge that high quality afterschool programs work and make a positive difference is indeed a “game changer.” This means that we should spend much less time arguing about whether quality afterschool programs work and much more time on working to ensure that all programs are effective and to make high quality programs more accessible and scalable.

While empirical research investigating the impact of program quality on youth outcomes is still emerging, it is now generally agreed that in conjunction with youth characteristics, community context, and youth participation, higher levels of program quality promote many robust outcomes, including

- *active youth engagement,*
- *higher attendance in school,*
- *better school grades,*
- *positive social behaviors,*
- *improved homework completion and class participation, and*
- *fewer disciplinary issues to disrupt their learning.*

These are all building blocks to improvement of student achievement (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005; Black, Doolittle, Zhu, Unterman, & Grossman, 2008; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Granger, 2008; Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Snow, & Martin-Glenn, 2006; Vandell, Shumow, & Posner, 2005). Further, many of these outcomes can be measured during the time the afterschool program is operating, so that adjustments can be made both in the school-day program and in the afterschool program to try to improve them.

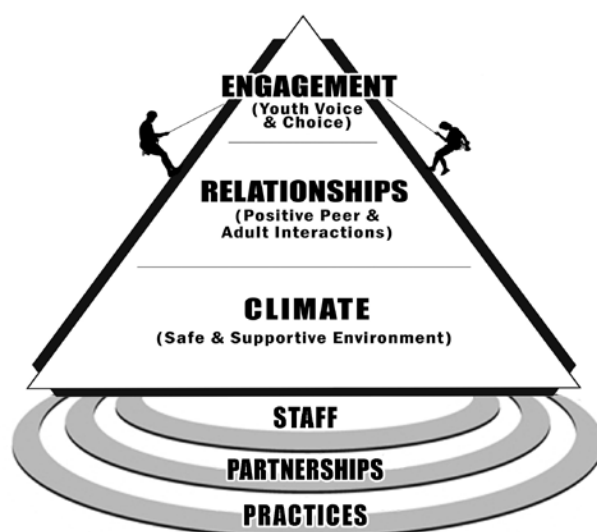
Our hope is that, in the near future, the field will devote itself and its resources to pursuing the development of consistent measures of these interim indicators of program quality to help programs see where their critical levers of change are to promote high quality programming, both in organization and direct program-level supports.

Other articles in this compendium will focus on what those studies have found, but this article will focus on what the development of a robust program quality indicator system might be able to measure and demonstrate to those who might support the expansion of high quality expanded learning programs afterschool and summers. What we are increasingly trying to accomplish is to provide more real-time indicators and information to the educators and community organizations working in afterschool and summer programs so they can adjust, change, and improve opportunities and

In these data, teachers report that regular program participants tend to show improved homework completion, class participation, attendance, classroom behaviors, English and math classroom grades, and reading and math achievement scores, with those students who have higher program attendance showing the greatest improvement.

programming, as appropriate, at the time they are actually operating and not after the fact. This system builds on the research, evaluation, and quality assessment work that has developed over the past decade and puts it in a context that is both actionable and measurable, with short- and long-term outcomes. It also creates the opportunity for any participant in the delivery of services to see how they play a part in creating positive outcomes.

Based on the Weikart Center's approach to program point of service quality (Smith, Peck, Denault, Blazeovski, & Akiva, 2010), we use the following frame to suggest that organizational processes (such as those described in *Beyond the Bell*) are integral for delivery of those services:



The critical point underlying a quality indicator system is that quality indicators focus primarily on *quality implementation* while the program is functioning as opposed to reviewing end-of-the-year information received after the program year has ended. The idea here is to help centers engage with data related to the adoption of quality practices and approaches, help identify strengths and weaknesses relative to these areas, and focus staff reflection on those areas where there are opportunities for growth and further development from a practice standpoint. Based on the research we have seen, we believe that better implementation from a quality perspective will better support the achievement of desired youth outcomes.

It is important to recognize that the development of a quality indicator system is not meant to duplicate or replace existing efforts. We recognize that many states and programs have developed or adopted quality assessment processes that are also reflective of the research on program quality, as well as local context. In contrast, the quality indicator system we are developing is intended to integrate the multiple efforts in place toward achieving high-quality programs that are appropriately reflective of context and best practice. Creating a quality indicator system is intended to emulate the quality improvement practices used in other education and business sectors and is directed toward the end of putting in place best practices that support positive youth outcomes and student success, including achievement.

Quality indicators have a benefit that is twofold. First, they support the integration of continuous quality improvement practices, data collection efforts, and responsibility toward aligning with industry-defined quality standards. Secondly, quality indicators describe valuable data on program processes and support quality practices at the point of service that are purported to promote positive youth outcomes. This information is critical to assessing the relationship between program quality and youth outcomes. The great benefit of a quality indicator system is that it helps develop both formative and summative evaluation and affords the opportunity to use data gathered in ways that are meaningful for program leaders, staff, and participants.

Quality indicators should meet the following criteria:

- *Represent promising, evidenced-based practices that are relevant to the local context and the goals and principles of the program*
- *Be informed by multiple data sources (e.g., PPICS, surveys)*
- *Allow program leaders and staff to make data-driven decisions and provide tools for collaboration and reflection related to organizational processes and program practice*
- *Help programs leaders and staff strive toward alignment with local and national systems of program quality (e.g., state- or organization-developed program quality standards)*
- *Help programs move towards practices that ultimately support positive youth outcomes*

A quality indicator system has multiple practical elements, including staff and leadership surveys, aligned resources for building program quality (i.e., planning tools), optional components of technical assistance (e.g., technical assistance on using data to drive program development), and the quality indicators themselves: staff, partnerships, and practices. Under each domain, there are multiple elements, as indicated in the following figure:

Indicator Domain	Indicator Element
Staff	Staff Recruitment and Retention
	Staff Professional Development
	Opportunities for Staff Reflection and Improvement
Partnerships	School Partnerships
	Community Partnerships
	Family Partnerships
	Youth as Partners
Practices	Practices That Support Implementation Quality
	Academic Skill Building Practices
	Youth Development Practices
	Family Engagement Practices
	Quality Improvement Practices

Programs need a quality framework and a related set of indicators to support high quality programming within all contexts of program operations.

Critical in this understanding is that high quality programming is comprised of both program-level interactions and the organization of the program itself. Program-level interactions are the ways direct program staff work with their participants. They include elements such as how staff structure activities, the variety of activities they provide, how staff talk to students or provide leadership or develop opportunities for them, and how engaged children are in the activities in which they participate. Organizational elements are comprised of the overarching structure, including the program and its management. Program elements include such things as the adoption of a quality framework; evaluation and monitoring; the process for selecting staff; program partnerships and relationships with families, the schools with which they work, and other stakeholders in the community. Management context elements include opportunities for staff professional development, ongoing staff supervision, and program monitoring and evaluation.

Programs need a quality framework and a related set of indicators to support high quality programming within all contexts of program operations. Developing a system that provides timely, interpretable, and actionable data regarding how programs are functioning from a quality perspective guides ongoing quality improvement efforts. This also gives programs the time and support they need to use data to drive toward higher-quality-related decision making.

The initial goals of a quality indicator system would focus on both short- and longer-term outcomes. Critical to that process is the combination of self-assessment and other data measures to give a better picture to programs and staff about where they are and where they want to head. Implementing a reflective self-assessment process would first raise program awareness of organizational quality indicators, and would also provide a base understanding of how well a program is implementing quality indicators. The self-assessment process is a strategy that is more likely to engage program staff and management in identifying training and professional development needs.

Longer-term goals of a quality indicator system include the following:

- *Programs will see, over time, how they can use the self-assessment process and the data they have developed from ongoing assessment of point-of-service quality to help programs develop yearly quality improvement plans.*
- *Programs receive ongoing support through training and professional development areas targeted for program improvement and in making data driven program decisions.*
- *Programs gain experience and knowledge in using evaluation to inform an ongoing cycle of quality improvement;*
- *Student growth on short term and long term goals are measured to evaluate program impacts.*

Conclusion

Over more than a decade, the expanded learning field has learned and accomplished a great deal. It is now generally agreed that as a result of higher levels of program quality in afterschool and summer learning programs, we are increasingly seeing significant positive and student outcomes. Because of these learnings and positive developments, building a system of program quality indicators is the next logical developmental step in application of what we, as a field, have learned. These indicators have been identified in conjunction with the many implementation studies and evaluations of effective expanded learning programs, as well as from the research and literature spanning multiple fields, including youth development, conditions for effective learning, and effective classroom practices.

Now is the time—and the opportunity is ripe—to use these many learnings to enhance the extensive expanded learning infrastructure for afterschool and summer learning programs that is already in place in just about every state and to strengthen the professional practice of the tens of thousands of individuals who work in them, from schools and from other child- and youth-serving organizations, in just about every community across America.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carol McElvain leads afterschool and expanded learning work at the American Institutes for Research. She provides national leadership on matters of quality, particularly as it relates to school improvement efforts and speaks at numerous conferences and workshops. She is co-author of the seminal afterschool resource *Beyond the Bell: A Toolkit for Creating High Quality Afterschool Programs* and has served as a local school board member.

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Gary Huggins

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The Promise of Summer Learning

Summer vacation from school is a long-cherished American tradition, associated with images of freedom, relaxation, play, and imagination. But for many low-income youth, summer is actually a time of boredom and atrophy, when academic skills slide and basic needs fulfilled during the school year may not be met. Important knowledge gained during the year is likely to be forgotten, and children also may be left on their own during the day because their parents cannot afford to pay for their basic supervision, much less the engaging learning opportunities, camp activities, and vacations that middle-class children typically take for granted when school is out. In addition, many neighborhoods and communities lack accessible summer learning opportunities.

Most children, regardless of socioeconomic status, lose 2 months of grade-level equivalency in math computational skills each summer (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996). In addition, low-income children lose more than 2 months in reading achievement, while middle-income peers make slight gains in reading (Cooper et al.). This learning gap widens over time, research from Johns Hopkins University shows, so that by ninth grade, summer learning accounts for two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading between low-income students and their middle-income peers. The same students most affected by summer learning loss were also more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to attend college (Alexander, Entwistle, & Olson, 2007).

Summer learning loss means that, all across our country, teachers must spend a good part of the first 2 months of school on review. In a 2012 survey of 500 teachers in summer learning programs in 15 cities, 66% said it typically takes them at least 3 - 4 weeks to reteach the previous year's skills at the beginning of a new school year. Another 24% said reteaching takes them 5 - 6 weeks. (National Summer Learning Association [NSLA], 2012c).

Until all children in a given classroom are offered the same kinds of summer learning experiences, these reteaching estimates are likely to persist. That translates into millions of dollars in public education funding wasted each year.

Ignoring the summer months also wastes incredible opportunities for innovation in instructional approaches and curriculum development during a season that offers great flexibility for students and teachers to pilot new learning models. With the arrival of the Common Core State Standards, school districts will need to harness not only the extra time summer provides but also this space for innovations that can help all students meet higher targets.

Recent research from the RAND Corporation has demonstrated that high quality, engaging, low- or no-cost summer learning programs can prevent summer learning loss and even boost student achievement (McCombs et al., 2011). Voluntary, mandatory, and home-based summer programs all were found to have positive effects, and the benefits endured for 2 years after a student engaged in a summer program.

In order for programs to produce these benefits, they must be of high quality. Research indicates that certain program characteristics are associated with achievement gains. Important quality indicators include the following:

- *Regular student attendance*
- *Individualized instruction*
- *Smaller class sizes*
- *Parent involvement*
- *High quality instructors*
- *Alignment of school year and summer curricula*
- *Inclusion of content beyond remediation*
- *Tracking of effectiveness (McCoombs et al., 2011)*

In recent years, some large school districts have started innovative summer learning programs that are adopting more of these characteristics of quality and transforming the remedial summer school model of the past. This kind of sea change is taking place even in the nation's largest school district. After attending a citywide forum on summer learning in 2011, Dennis M. Walcott, chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, and Jeanne B. Mullgray, commissioner of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, joined forces with the Fund for Public Schools to implement the first-ever coordinated summer learning initiative in New York City involving both the schools and community-based organizations. The initiative, called

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Summer Quest, provided more than 1,000 children with small-group reading and math instruction, project-based learning, enrichment activities, and field trips through full-day programs.

As part of NSLA's New Vision for Summer School Network, now 24 district members strong and growing, districts like New York City are sharing best practices and learning together with high quality community partners about how to provide summer learning that is both academically challenging and highly engaging for more students. These initiatives often blend public funds from sources such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative and Title I with private philanthropic support and strategic use of partner resources to operate.

One increasing focus for summer learning is on the middle grades, when students are especially vulnerable to achievement dips and other off-track indicators (Bottoms, 2010; NSLA, 2012b). Since 2011, NSLA's Smarter Summers project has brought together nonprofit providers with school district partners and local intermediaries to provide 20,000 slots for middle-school summer learning and build summer learning systems in 10 cities nationally. Beginning in 2012, NSLA funded an additional five school districts—Houston, Oakland, Pittsburgh, Providence, and Duval County (Jacksonville, Florida)—to expand their middle grades summer learning programs.

In addition to providing summer learning opportunities, these initiatives also are providing information about the cost of summer learning loss and the benefits of summer learning programs.

Along with data on reteaching skills after summer break, survey results from 2012 included the following:

- *Students in these programs not only avoided summer learning loss, but built on their skills. Rising sixth graders showed as much as 5.5 months' growth in grade level equivalency skills in reading during summer 2012.*
- *Among teachers surveyed, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that the professional development they received during the summer would help improve their school year practices. Ninety-three percent said that teaching in the summer learning program enabled them to build more personal relationships with students, and 88% said summer learning is an important part of the overall plan to support student success in school (NSLA, 2012c).*

In its visits to dozens of summer learning programs each year, NSLA documents numerous effective practices and promising program models. The annual Excellence in Summer Learning Award recognizes some of the best of those programs serving low-income children at little or no cost to their families.

NSLA's Smarter Summers project has brought together nonprofit providers with school district partners and local intermediaries to provide 20,000 slots for middle-school summer learning and build summer learning systems in 10 cities nationally.

2012 Excellence in Summer Learning Award Winners

Fun in the Sun Initiative (FITS). Drawing on an array of community partners, United Way of Santa Barbara County's Fun in the Sun Initiative (FITS) serves 250 young people ages 7–18 for 7 weeks each summer. The FITS program is designed for participants willing to make a multisummer commitment and offers a daily emphasis on reading and writing. Afternoon enrichment opportunities include activities in science, technology, engineering, arts, math, service learning, and field trips. In 2011, 82% of participants showed gains of 2.1 grade levels in reading comprehension, phonics, and vocabulary skills, according to tests administered at the beginning and end of the program (NSLA, 2012a).

Summer Advantage. In 2012, Summer Advantage in Indianapolis worked with an initiative called Journey World, a program of the Girl Scouts of America (GSA). Scholars took over a “sim city” by being assigned specific functions in the community such as city government, media, commerce, banking, the culinary arts, and a host of other careers. GSA shared learning resources with Summer Advantage students so they could study the careers they would take on in the simulation. These activities were just part of the 2012 Summer Advantage program, in which scholars gained an average of 2.1 months in reading and 4.1 months in math (NSLA, 2012a).

LiFE Sports Camp. Operated through a partnership between the Ohio State University Department of Athletics and the College of Social Work, the free LiFE Sports Camp serves 600 Columbus, Ohio, youth ages 9–15 for 4 weeks each summer, focusing on teaching participants vital life skills and social competence through sports. During the culminating LiFE Sports Olympics, young people develop a team name, team banner, advertisements, posters, family invitations, and radio announcements for the Olympics. In addition, the youth work together to assign roles to their team during the Olympics. In 2011, 74% of the participants reported that they were interested in going to college because of LiFE Sports (NSLA, 2012c).

Conclusion

As part of a multiyear evaluation commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, RAND researchers have been studying the challenges and best practices associated with the work of six school districts that have committed to offering summer learning programs to large numbers of struggling elementary students (Augustine, 2012). Based on early lessons from this work, researchers recommend interested school and community groups consider the following approaches for successful summer learning:

- *Commit to having a summer program by the end of December, with early planning sustained through regular meetings.*
- *Develop a teacher selection process that encourages effective, motivated teachers to work in the program.*
- *During teacher training, provide teachers with the curriculum and with opportunities to practice instructional techniques such as mock run-throughs of the lessons.*
- *Consider enrichment activities and field trips that can help build skills and background knowledge and provide students “camp-like” experiences similar to higher-income peers.*

- *Recruit students early, publicizing the goals of the program clearly to students and parents and establishing clear attendance expectations.*
- *Consider ways to maximize academic time on task in the program. (Augustine)*

Effective summer learning programs have followed diverse models for success, but they have in common a focus on continuous planning and assessment and on seizing the summer setting and culture as a means to helping students acquire and retain skills while keeping them engaged. They demonstrate the promise of summer learning, often with community partners, to help educators and young people achieve performance targets and ignite a passion for learning that can last all year.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Huggins is chief executive officer of the National Summer Learning Association. Huggins has more than 15 years of experience in leading education and environmental policy organizations and served as executive director of the Aspen Institute's Commission on No Child Left Behind, a bipartisan effort to identify and build support for improvements in federal education policy to spur academic achievement and close achievement gaps, for nearly 5 years.

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Engaging Families in Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs: A Review of the Research

Engaging families in afterschool and summer learning is a critical component of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Many other expanded learning opportunities and afterschool programs also place a premium on involving families. Research shows that when families are engaged, student outcomes, such as attendance, behavior, and achievement, improve. This article opens with a definition of family engagement in afterschool and then presents a research-based rationale for why family engagement is an essential component of afterschool and summer learning programs.

What Is Family Engagement in Afterschool?

Family engagement in afterschool includes activities for and with family members that are implemented on-site, where afterschool programs are actually located. It also includes additional and important activities and behaviors that happen outside of afterschool programs that influence children's development and learning within the program, such as encouraging a student's participation, helping students make informed choices about programming, discussing a child's progress with program staff, reinforcing skills from the program at home, and being an advocate for and/or leader in the program.

Families are critical partners in the recruitment and retention efforts of afterschool and summer learning programs.

What Are the Benefits of Family Engagement?

When afterschool programs reach out to and engage families, everyone stands to benefit—students, family members, programs, communities, and even schools. Family engagement can accomplish three specific objectives:

- 1. Support improved participation in afterschool programs.** Families are critical partners in the recruitment and retention efforts of afterschool and summer learning programs. They are often a program's best ambassadors, not only in encouraging their children to participate but also in reaching out to other families to help them understand the importance of participation in afterschool programming (Lauver & Little, 2005). Once students are enrolled, family engagement can also be a factor in sustaining participation.
 - *A study of youth participation in over 600 summer and afterschool programs run by New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development showed that programs with a paid or volunteer parent liaison had higher levels of youth attendance and retention, especially for high school and community-based programs. Furthermore, the intensity of communication with families—such as holding meetings, sending materials home, and having phone conversations—was also positively associated with youth attendance rates (Pearson, Russell, & Reisner, 2007; Russell, Mielke, & Reisner, 2008).*
 - *A recent study of afterschool participation among older youth in almost 200 programs across six cities found that programs that retained at least 50% of their middle- and high-school-age participants for at least 12 months appeared to use a greater variety of parent engagement techniques than programs with lower sustained participation rates (Deschenes et al., 2010).*
 - *Evaluations of Texas programs funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative note that students who had at least one adult family member participating with them in center activities were involved in more activities than students with no family members participating. Further, the data show that once they do participate, adult family members return to participate again at a very high rate (Texas Education Agency, 2007).*
- 2. Benefit afterschool participants themselves.** When afterschool programs are intentional about their family engagement strategies, then program participants tend to exhibit better outcomes.
 - *A study of 96 school-based afterschool programs supported by the After-School Corporation (TASC) identified connections between program staff and families as one of the shared features of high-performing programs. Efforts to engage families (including hiring a parent coordinator and communicating regularly with families at pick-up time) were some of the most common features among the 10 programs whose participants had the highest academic performance (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2006).*

- *The Massachusetts After-School Research Study examined quality characteristics via observations and surveys in 78 afterschool programs across the state, including some funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. It found that communication with families during pick-up and drop-off time was associated with more positive youth relations with afterschool program staff and better family and community support for the program (Intercultural Center for Research in Education & National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2005).*
- *Afterschool programs that engage families can influence student attendance and engagement in school. For example, a quasi-experimental evaluation of New York City's Chinatown YMCA 21st Century Community Learning Centers family program found that students whose families participated in the program had higher attendance rates in school than those in a comparison group (Bennett, 2004).*

3. Positively affect family engagement with learning at school and at home.

Family engagement in afterschool programs can be leveraged to improve family engagement in learning in and out of school. Specifically, studies have found that family engagement in afterschool programs can lead to greater involvement in school events, increased assistance with homework, and more encouragement for reading.

- *A 2-year quasi-experimental evaluation of the Generacion Diez (G-10) program, which provides afterschool support to Latino students and their families, found that by the end of the second year of the program, parents of children with higher attendance rates in the G-10 program reported significant increases in the quality and quantity of parent-teacher contact as well as engagement in their children's school activities (Riggs & Medina, 2005).*

Core Principles of Family Engagement

Family engagement is a *shared responsibility* in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.

Family engagement is *continuous across a child's life* and entails enduring commitment even though parental roles evolve as children mature into young adulthood.

Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the *multiple settings where children learn*—at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in afterschool and summer programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

For more on defining family engagement, visit the Harvard Family Research Project website: <http://hfrp.org/family-involvement>.

- *The national evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative found that participating parents also helped their children with homework more and asked their children about class more than nonparticipating families (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).*
- *Family engagement in afterschool programs can also support more positive parent–child relationships at home. A review of nonexperimental afterschool and summer program evaluations examining family involvement found that parents who volunteer with programs report feeling closer to their children (Harris & Wimer, 2004).*

The research is clear that afterschool and summer programs, as the bridge between home and school, are well positioned to influence families' engagement in their child's education.

Research shows that meaningful family engagement is associated with improvements in key student outcomes, including attendance, behavior, and achievement. Determining whether there is a causal relationship, however, will require additional research. Is increased family focus on their child's academic performance during the school day a result of specific strategies that afterschool and summer learning programs employ, or are families of children in afterschool simply more inclined to participate in their child's education? Both are important.

Regardless, the research is clear that afterschool and summer programs, as the bridge between home and school, are well positioned to influence families' engagement in their child's education. Therefore, as more and more local, state, and federal efforts to expand learning after school and in summer emerge, it is critical

that these efforts include a strong family engagement component. Indeed, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative already includes annual reporting on family involvement, sending a strong signal to programs that family engagement is important. Moving forward, all afterschool and summer programs, whether supported by local, state, or other federal funding streams, should include a robust plan for implementing and monitoring family engagement as a necessary component of effective afterschool programs.

Bridging Schools and Families

The Greenwood Shalom afterschool program is located in a predominantly black and Latino neighborhood in Boston. The program provides homework support, computer instruction, arts and crafts, and literacy lessons. At the end of the day, everyone gathers for sharing and reflection. Parents are commonly seen lingering to talk with staff and report feeling comfortable and welcome. As one parent said, "Even if I have a problem at home, I can go and talk to them." (Kakli, Kreider, & Little, 2006).

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The Value of Partnerships in Afterschool and Summer Learning: A National Case Study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers¹

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, funded by the United States Department of Education, supports community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during nonschool hours for children, and particularly for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2003). While the initiative was first enacted as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1994, it remained minimally funded until 1998. Congress rapidly increased appropriations for the initiative from 1998 through 2002; and with the exception of modest increases in funding from 2007 to 2009, funding levels have been maintained at a little less than \$1.2 billion since then. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 (No Child Left Behind), the administration of 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds—as a federal discretionary program—was transferred to state education agencies.

The most recent reauthorization of this initiative incorporates the latest thinking regarding the importance of strong, diverse community partnerships to maximize the impact of federal investments, especially in expanding learning in afterschool and summers. Many state education agencies now require local 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs to collaborate with community partners in order to receive funding. A growing number of state afterschool networks are helping to advance school, community, and family partnerships to provide more learning opportunities, time, and resources.

1. This article is part of a series of technical assistance resources on financing and sustaining out-of-school-time and community initiatives developed by The Finance Project with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. These tools and resources are intended to assist policy makers, program developers, and community leaders in developing financing and sustainability strategies to support effective initiatives.

Currently, there are almost 11,000 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs across the nation (Profile and Performance Information Collection System, 2012).² Most of these programs have cultivated robust partnerships with a diverse set of community partners, including colleges and universities, youth development organizations, libraries, museums, city parks departments, faith-based organizations, schools, and many more community-based for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Partnerships have strengthened local programs by supporting afterschool and summer programs in ways that are unique and meaningful to their own community.

The Finance Project staff has worked extensively with 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees, national stakeholder groups, and state education agencies to understand the factors that lead to the long-term sustainability of these programs. Not surprisingly, programs that are supported by strong and diverse community partnerships are more likely to sustain themselves over the long term. This article explores these partnerships more deeply in an effort to

- *illustrate how states have used the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative to engage a diverse set of partners to leverage and sustain local programs;*
- *highlight innovative partnership approaches in Florida, Oregon, Vermont, and Wisconsin; and*
- *identify cross-cutting themes and trends to understand the value of partnerships in leveraging the federal investment in 21st Century Community Learning Centers.*

Using Partnerships to Leverage Resources

The U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative strongly encourage local grantees to establish partnerships with other local organizations and agencies. State afterschool networks also encourage and facilitate such partnerships, and many state education agencies formally require that 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees partner with at least one other organization in order to qualify for state funding. For example, Florida's 2012–13 Request for Proposals requires applicants to identify current public/private partnerships that were or will be used to develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain the centers (Florida Dept. of Education, 2012). The focus on partnerships by the U.S. Department of Education, the building of statewide infrastructures by state afterschool networks, and state mandates have resulted in an unduplicated count of 44,621 21st Century Community Learning Centers partnerships across the nation in 2010—an average of 9 partnerships per local program (Afterschool Alliance, 2012).

2. According to the PPICS website (<http://ppics.learningpt.org/ppicsnet/public/default.aspx>), "The purpose of this system is to collect basic information about 21st CCLC programs across the United States. PPICS was created in 2003 at the commission of the US Department of Education (ED). The system was built to help ED track 21st CCLC programming following the transition from federal to state administration, which took place in 2001. Each year, PPICS is used to collect program data from some 3,000 21st CCLC grants covering close to 9,000 centers serving 1.5 million student attendees."

Types of Partnerships

Local partnerships allow each local program to leverage a variety of community resources. As reported in the national Profile and Performance Information Collection System for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative (Afterschool Alliance, 2012), partnerships provide support for seven major contribution types:

- *evaluation services;*
- *fundraising;*
- *programming or activity related services;*
- *goods;*
- *volunteer staffing;*
- *paid staffing; and*
- *other contributions.*

Most partnerships provide services in more than one domain. Nearly 36% of these partners provide programming or activity-related services, followed by goods (20%) and volunteer staffing (14%). Of the 44,621 partners reported by grantees in 2010, most are community-based organizations or nonprofits (28%). The second largest partner type, at 27% of all partnerships, falls within the “other” category, which includes units of city or county government, regional/intermediate education agencies, health-based organizations, libraries, museums, parks and recreation districts, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, schools/agencies, and private schools.

Monetary Value of Partnerships

The Profile and Performance Information Collection System also asks grantees to place a monetary value on their partnerships. In 2010, grantees reported that partners contributed over \$230,000,000 across the 3,450 grants they supported. Further, over the past 5 years, partners have contributed over \$1 billion to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers programming. (See also the article in this book “School-Community Learning Partnerships: An Essential to Expanded Learning Success” by Priscilla Little.)

Some states, like Wisconsin, produce an annual report of the impact of their 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative statewide. In its 2009–10 report, that state valued the donations (in-kind and monetary) of 968 partner organizations statewide at \$3.4 million—a contribution of \$3,512, on average, per partner (Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, 2011). In addition to having a real financial value in terms of services provided, partners often contribute other highly valued resources and supports to the children and youth served by local programs. Partners can reinforce the importance of learning, provide personalized attention to struggling students, broaden children’s learning experiences through sponsoring field trips and other off-site activities, and fill in critical gaps in services.

Promising State Practices

Though the vast majority of 21st Century Community Learning Centers partnerships are with community-based organizations or nonprofits, the breadth of partnerships varies among communities and states. State leaders have reported that partnerships across many domains are key to the success of programs in their states.

The types of partnerships formed and the benefits they generate for children and youth served are typically different for programs located in rural areas versus those in large localities.

In Wisconsin, where partnerships are a required grant/program component, “nontraditional” partners have proven to be very important for smaller cities and rural communities to enrich afterschool programs. These nontraditional partners include businesses and individuals that do not necessarily have an immediate connection to youth. For example, at the San Juan Diego Middle School, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has a partnership with a local trucking company. This company supports the afterschool program by providing older students with industry specific, skill-building supports such as a curriculum unit to teach map-reading skills using a GPS.

Vermont has also reported that the partnerships developed in their smaller localities are unique. Over one-third of the schools in Vermont have fewer than 100 students. In some cases partners for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs based at these schools are not organizations, but individuals. In one community, a dogsled racer works with students, while in another, an individual who is a program partner teaches students how to make baskets—both are unique activities in their community’s fabric and way of life. One Vermont leader stated she feels that the many individual partners’ in-kind contributions are most likely seriously underestimated by grantees when entering this data into the Profile and Performance Information Collection System. She also noted that an important component of these partnerships, especially in smaller communities, is the relationship-building that takes place, for example, at town meetings, where personal relationships and stories about the impact on individual or groups students of local 21st Community Learning Centers programs are often shared.

On a larger scale, Oregon is using VISTA volunteers at the state level to teach 21st Century Community Learning Centers program staff about different types of partnerships. VISTA volunteers have noted that program directors have many different definitions and examples of partnerships. The volunteers have worked to help program staff understand the difference between a robust partnership and a fee-for-service relationship. In Fall City, Oregon, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program awarded a small (\$4,000 per year) contract to the local arts council to fund two artists to work with students in their program twice weekly. Over time, the relationship has strengthened as both the program and the Arts Council saw value and results from the partnership. Now, while the initial contract remains, the Arts Council provides two staff members as an in-kind contribution to the program.

In Florida, partnerships are a required component of local programs. Many programs across the state have formed partnerships that capitalize on the abundance of local natural resources; for example, programs might include a focus on marine life or on caverns found within a state park. Another innovative practice in Florida includes partnerships between programs and local businesses and industries. For example, in Fort Lauderdale, the Space Explorers Program partners with the Kennedy Space Center, while the Zoo Explorers Program partners with the local zoo. As another innovative example, one high school principal formed partnerships with local businesses during the after school hours to offer jobs to the students within the context of his school's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. State leaders are promoting this concept and exploring other ways to keep older youth actively engaged in programs in light of the many demands on youths' time in the afterschool hours.

Considerations for the Future

Over the past 10 years, millions of elementary and secondary students who have participated in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs have benefitted in myriad ways from the wide range of partnerships available in communities across the country. State departments of education, local community organizations, schools, and state afterschool networks have played a key role in the growth of these robust partnerships. While the comprehensive national data set containing the details, types, and financial impacts of these partnerships is not publicly available on an up-to-date basis, a limited review of data sets supplied by programs, as well as data obtained from interviews with key informants, provides a foundation for understanding the landscape of partnerships and their non-monetary benefits.

The data on partnerships and state examples highlighted in this article are an important first step in maximizing 21st Century Community Learning Centers federal funding and sustaining afterschool programs in schools and communities. Many state leaders and local community, school, and afterschool stakeholders are setting clear expectations for the types and number of partnerships that grantees are expected to develop. There are several things states can do to increase and strengthen partnerships:

- *Offer meaningful incentives to the organizations that partner with 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees and other similar afterschool and summer programs that have meaningful school-community partnerships. Incentives might include state income tax deductions for private sector partners, bonus funding to appropriate nonprofit partners, or transportation allotments for programs meeting quality standards.*
- *Provide training and technical assistance regarding best practices in partnership development and sustainability tailored for various settings (e.g., urban, towns, rural) and for various types of potential partnerships (e.g., nonprofits, small or large businesses, colleges, hospitals, city and county governmental agencies).*
- *Create statewide or local award programs for outstanding partnership efforts in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs and similar afterschool and summer programs, perhaps working with Chambers of Commerce, United Ways, state 21st Century Community Learning Centers offices, and state afterschool networks.*

- *Provide more specific definitions regarding what constitutes a partnership versus a contractual relationship and take into account the contribution of time and other resources by individuals and organizations to provide a fuller understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and successes.*

One of the most successful aspects of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has been the focus on leveraging community partners to provide experiences that youth might not otherwise be able to access through the school day or in a school-based afterschool program that merely extends the school day. In the future, it is important that federal, state, and local leaders involved in these programs expand knowledge about how to build successful community-school-family partnerships in order to improve the quality of opportunities provided to participating students. Also it is important to improve how programs quantify the return-on-investment of these robust and varied partnerships in order to illuminate how the federal government's relatively modest investment in afterschool programs has been more than matched by the talent, supplies, volunteers, space, and general support of school-community partnerships.

In summary, clearly the inclusion of strong partnership provisions in most 21st Century Community Learning Centers has added valuable learning resources and improved the quality of the opportunities provided to students in their afterschool and summer programs.

For More Information

See <http://www.financeproject.org/>

Selected resources on the financing and sustainability of afterschool programs include the following:

Cutting Costs, Keeping Quality: Financing Strategies for Youth Programs in a Difficult Economy by Jennifer Holland and Shawn Stelow Griffin, The Finance Project, 2012. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FinancingStrategiesToolkit.pdf>

Making the Match: Finding Funding for After School Education and Safety Programs by Kate Sandel, Cheryl Hayes, Brittany Anuszkiewicz, Carol Cohen and Sharon Deich, The Finance Project, August 2007. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/MakingTheMatch.pdf>

Forming Partnerships to Meet the Administrative Needs of Youth-Serving Organizations by Torey Silloway and Lori Connors-Tadros, The Finance Project, January 2011. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/FormingAdminPartnership.pdf>

A Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Out-of-School Time and Community School Initiatives by Sharon Deich, The Finance Project, January 2001. <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/ostpartnershipguide.pdf>

Sustaining 21st Century Community Learning Centers: What Works for Programs and How Policymakers Can Help by Amanda Szekely and Heather Clapp Padgett, The Finance Project, September 2006. http://76.12.61.196/publications/sustaining_21cclc.pdf

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Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE): Achieving Positive Results and Preparing Texas Students for College and the Workforce

The Texas Afterschool Centers on Education (ACE) program is one of the largest statewide afterschool programs in the country, serving over 180,000 students at nearly 1,000 sites. The ACE program is administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and is funded through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative of the U.S. Department of Education.

A recent evaluation of the ACE-21st Century Community Learning Centers¹ found the following when program participants were compared to nonparticipants:

- *ACE program participation for students in grades 9–10 was associated with higher scores in reading/English language arts and mathematics on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).*
- *ACE program participants in grades 6–12 had fewer disciplinary incidents than nonparticipating students.*
- *Participation of students in grades 4–11 was associated with fewer school day absences.*
- *ACE participants in grades 7–11 who attended 30 days or more and participants in grades 4–5 and 7–11 attending 60 days or more had an increased likelihood of grade promotion. For high school students attending 60 days or more, there was a 97% chance of being promoted to the next grade level.*

1. TEA released updated evaluation results in the 4th quarter of 2012. For access to those findings please see http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=2908&menu_id=949.

When comparing high attenders (students who attended 60 days or more) and low attenders (students who attended 30–59 days) in ACE programs, participants in grades 4–12 attending 60 days or more of programming had higher levels of TAKS scores in reading/English language arts and mathematics, fewer disciplinary incidents, fewer school day absences, and an enhanced likelihood (23–40%) of grade promotion.

The evaluation also revealed the following:

- *Program quality matters. Centers implementing higher-quality practices were correlated with greater reductions in disciplinary referrals and higher rates of grade promotion than programs less apt to implement these practices.*
- *Connections with other organizations and agencies within the community greatly enhance afterschool centers programming options.*

ACE Program Background

The federal funding that currently supports ACE actually began in 1994 as small, federally operated pilot program created under the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative grew strategically and significantly, such that in 2002 the initiative was transferred to the states to lead and coordinate.

Texas wisely used this transfer to establish the ACE program in 2002. Since 2008, ACE has evolved significantly in the wake of a major strategic overhaul that year that was designed to revamp its quality and identity and strengthen its focus. What follows are the resulting strategies and actions that were undertaken to develop a much stronger statewide infrastructure and support system for high standards and continuous improvement of afterschool learning across the state.

Program quality *matters*. Centers implementing higher-quality practices were correlated with greater reductions in disciplinary referrals and higher rates of grade promotion than programs less apt to implement these practices.

Needs Assessment as a Driver of Strategic Changes and Improvements

The overall goal of the ACE program is to have all students graduate from high school prepared for college and the workforce. To achieve this goal, ACE's objectives are to improve academic performance, attendance, behavior, promotion rates, and graduation rates.

It is important to highlight here that the ACE program evaluation finding cited earlier in this article reveals that TEA is making significant progress towards achieving these five objectives. The restructuring and reform efforts described below have created the conditions for achieving success.

After establishing a common goal and set of objectives for the ACE program through the initial phase of the strategic planning effort, TEA began to restructure the program to provide program staff the tools and resources needed to develop a sustainable afterschool program. In collaboration with its program enhancement and quality assurance contractor, Edvance Research, Inc., TEA conducted a comprehensive review of program processes and procedures, as well as a needs assessment with grantee and center leaders. Based on this combined information, TEA implemented many significant changes in the program.

Through the needs assessment, TEA learned that many grantees had never been formally trained in project management, data and financial management, or human resources. TEA knew that to restructure the program, it was critical that grantees be properly trained, given the necessary resources and tools, and held accountable for managing their resources effectively and meeting performance measures. Regardless of the grant size or geographical locations, each grantee would be held to the same statewide standards, yielding a consistent set of performance expectations.

Stronger Local Programming Through More Rigorous Requirements and New Tools

As of 2008, TEA required a full-time project director for each local ACE grantee and full-time site coordinators for each center included in the grant. (Note: ACE grantees may operate multiple sites or centers.) By 2011, a family engagement specialist position was added to the list of required position for grantees. These positions are critical to the success of the local centers.

Yet, having these individuals physically present was not enough. In partnership with TEA, Edvance developed training tools and resources focused on assisting grantees in

- *meeting state and federal grant requirements,*
- *providing timely and accurate reporting to TEA,*
- *implementing appropriate fiscal controls, and*
- *conducting an external evaluation.*

To implement these tools and resources successfully, TEA worked with Edvance to develop a well-defined “blueprint” for program implementation. This blueprint was intended to help grantees and prospective grant applicants understand ACE program requirements and provide links to useful tools and information about best practices. The blueprint contains five categories of activities and program requirements:

- 1.** Planning
- 2.** Resourcing
- 3.** Implementing
- 4.** Managing
- 5.** Enduring

To support the implementation of the blueprint, TEA created an assessment system to track the status of each grantee's compliance with federal and state requirements and research-based practices. The assessment system includes a self-assessment tool that is completed by each grantee in the fall, a desk review of the grantee's approved grant application along with annual program reports submitted to TEA, and site visits.

TEA provides regional technical assistance consultants to support all ACE grantees, including

- *conducting the annual ACE program assessment (described above) to determine needs for technical assistance based on grant requirements and research based best practices,*
- *providing ongoing technical assistance based on need, and*
- *conducting monthly data and spending analyses.*

Additionally, ACE program staff have an array of online tools available to them via a learning portal that houses webinars, podcasts, and tutorials.

Through the implementation of these new monitoring and technical assistance processes, ACE students, parents, and communities have benefited through an increased retention of project directors; improved grant spending; and on-time, accurate data reporting.

The Future of ACE

The ACE program continues to identify opportunities to assist students in achieving academic success, particularly with a newly developed statewide standardized assessment that is aligned to the state's college and career ready standards. TEA is focusing on ways to improve planning, partnerships, evaluation results, training tools, and other quality-enhancement resources—and these efforts are reaping important benefits for students. In fact, the recently released ACE evaluation results (2012) found that implementing higher-quality practices is correlated, for example, with greater reductions in disciplinary referrals and higher rates of grade promotion than programs that are less apt to implement these practices (Naftzger et al., 2012).

Through the implementation of these new monitoring and technical assistance processes, ACE students, parents, and communities have benefited through an increased retention of project directors; improved grant spending; and on-time, accurate data reporting.

... connections with other organizations and agencies within the community greatly enhance afterschool centers programming options ...

Expanding Partnerships

TEA encourages grantees and project directors to seek out potential partnerships with local organizations and businesses. The recent ACE evaluation (2012) found that connections with other organizations and agencies within the community greatly enhance afterschool centers programming options (Naftzger et al., 2012).

One recent major initiative was to increase family engagement activities within the local ACE programs. ACE partnered with Skillpoint Alliance, a nonprofit organization that creates partnerships between industry, education, and the community that support the life success of individual students while meeting employers' needs for a qualified

workforce. In a demonstration project, ACE offered 10 scholarship opportunities to interested parents of afterschool students in the Bastrop area to apply and participate in Skillpoint Alliance's Gateway Health Care program to be trained as certified nurse aides. Nine family members of ACE students graduated from the 3-week program in the spring of 2012, and five graduates received jobs within 1 week of passing their state exam. This project not only engaged parents in the program but also provided them the opportunity to advance their own careers and the economic outlook for their families.

Use of Evaluation Data and Information for Continuous Improvement

As mandated by the federal statute, TEA must conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of its programs and activities funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. Also, individual grantees must conduct a local/independent evaluation of their programs to assess progress toward achieving TEA's goal and objectives.

The current statewide evaluation, *Statewide Assessment of 21st CCLC Programs: Innovative Strategies, Student Behaviors, & Student Success*, was awarded to the American Institutes for Research. The focus of the evaluation is twofold:

- *Assess the local ACE program operations, student participation, and student achievement outcomes.*
- *Identify and describe innovative strategies and approaches implemented by successful centers.*

Preliminary evaluation findings have guided TEA in the ongoing development of program guidelines, goals, allowable activities, and other related programmatic decisions.

In 2010, TEA enhanced the independent evaluation requirements for local ACE grantees. These evaluations guide the type and level of support provided by each regional technical assistance center, as well as assist grantees to further refine and improve their programs.

While TEA reviews these evaluations on an annual basis, the technical assistant providers monitor the status of the evaluation process monthly and assist grantees with any issues that surface to ensure an annual evaluation is completed.

Tailoring Training and Resources to Meet Local Needs

The statewide and local ACE grantee evaluations also assist in identifying training needs. Based on these findings, TEA and Edvance have structured training efforts to focus on such areas as intentional programming, needs assessment, and family engagement. The delivery of these training sessions have been designed to incorporate a blended learning approach, allowing grantees, project directors, and site coordinators the opportunity to learn in face-to-face, online, and self-paced environments.

One of the ACE grantees, Taylor Independent School District, has embraced intentional programming training. Taylor's site coordinators participated in both the pilot training and a full 2-day training. Since the training, the coordinators have been meeting weekly to develop activities based on student voice and academic need. Each activity is designed around achieving a "SMART" goal (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) for increasing student performance. Coordinators have engaged in discussions across sites and grade levels to develop activities that are aligned with the school day and that are both rigorous and engaging.

Texas ACE grantees are also focused on offering more STEM activities. At the 2012 federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers Summer Institute, five Texas grantees were featured as part of the STEM Showcase. Grantees from Austin, Fort Worth, Manor, Taylor, and the University of Texas at Tyler Ingenuity Center demonstrated activities related to career exploration, robotics, gaming, and integrating the arts to move from STEM to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math). These grantees have developed partnerships with community-based programs, including local Parks and Wildlife, Girlstart, and local entrepreneur groups, to give students more hands-on opportunities to increase their knowledge of and interest in STEM careers.

Conclusion

The Afterschool Centers on Education Program—the Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers program—has had a substantial positive impact on the student performance of hundreds of thousands of students across Texas over the past few years. Through these expanded learning opportunities provided after school and during the summer in almost 1,000 sites across the state, TEA is making significant strides toward accomplishing its goal for all Texas students to graduate high school prepared for college and the workforce. TEA has used strategic planning, evaluation, and various other tools and strategies to strengthen and enhance the Afterschool Centers on Education Program, yielding solid and demonstrable student results.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kristin Nafziger is a founding partner of Edvance Research, Inc. and serves as executive vice president for emerging practices. In this position she is responsible for identifying and keeping educators informed about new evidence-based programs and practices that show promising results. As part of her role at Edvance, Nafziger leads the technical assistance and quality assurance project for the Texas Education Agency to support the ACE program. Edvance Research is a women and minority, employee-owned firm headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, with offices in Austin, Texas (www.edvanceresearch.com).

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Improving Results and Expanding Learning: Using Research and Evaluation to Inform Practice in New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program in New Jersey is offering expanded learning opportunities to thousands of students, with significant and positive results. The program aims to assist children who attend low-performing schools in high-poverty areas to attain the skills needed to meet the state's content standards (www.state.nj.us/education/21cclc).

Currently, nearly 17,000 youth are participating in these important learning opportunities in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs at more than 122 sites across the state. The state's program goals call for a well-aligned, engaging, and individualized expansion of learning time beyond the school day that provide

- *remedial education activities to increase students' college and career readiness;*
- *a broad array of creative activities (art, music, dance, recreation, and cultural activities) that complement the school day and equalize enrichment opportunities;*
- *family literacy and other activities that assist families in becoming full partners in the education of their children; and*
- *support services that target social, emotional, and character development to deter problem behaviors.*

Since the inception of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDE) has promoted program quality and continuous improvement by applying promising practices described in the emerging body of research on expanded learning programs and other research on teaching and learning. New Jersey's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program embeds many of the recommendations highlighted by the Institute of Education Sciences in a seminal publication, *Structuring Out-of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement: A Practice Guide* (Beckett et al., 2009). Going beyond the federal requirements, New Jersey's program requirements have evolved to support college and career readiness and to embed the components of successful expanded learning opportunities. Of equal importance in informing programmatic decisions is state-level information provided by the state's program evaluator.

New Jersey significantly modified its program in 2010 to require many of the strategies that the NJDE had been promoting in recent years and that put into practice the latest research on expanded learning.

This redesign conveys the expectation that local programs would incorporate five major elements:

1. Aligning the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program with school-day learning to provide more time for youth to practice skills and expand knowledge.

The state's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs are expected to link their activities to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and the Common Core State Standards. Further, they are expected to document these links with the school day through lesson plans, progress reports, and regularly scheduled meetings. Activities are designed to assist youth with the development of skills as well as content knowledge. Centers must focus on one of the following themes: science, technology, math, and engineering (STEM); civic engagement; career awareness and exploration; or visual and performing arts.

To support the alignment with the school day, programs are expected to have regularly scheduled communication and intentional planning between school day and center staff. Each program designates a regular school-day staff person at each school site to coordinate communication with the afterschool program to help them support school needs. Afterschool program staff participate in school meetings and committees, such as professional learning communities and school improvement teams.

Certified teachers are required for academic remediation activities in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. Local programs coordinate with their affiliated schools to identify appropriate staff for the center and hire classroom teachers who demonstrate success during the school day to continue to build a positive relationship.

21st Century Community Learning Centers programs link professional development to identified, school-based goals and learning objectives and conduct joint training for both school-day and afterschool staff on relevant topics, such as how children and youth learn and develop, how to establish appropriate learning environments, and how to deliver crosscurricular content.

2. **Developing the capacity of staff and promoting networking.** New Jersey's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs are expected to build relationships with school day staff through joint professional development opportunities between school-day/district and center staff. This joint professional development provides a forum for staff to learn about each other's assets while acquiring a common professional language, learning the same instructional strategies and techniques, and gaining new information about programs and approaches being implemented.

New Jersey's programs are also participating in action research to self-evaluate and continuously improve their programs using research-based practices. This strategy provides the opportunity for job-embedded professional development through a community of practice. The strategy also promotes more intentional and frequent interaction between the evaluator and program staff to assess the effectiveness of the practices being implemented.

3. **Maximizing student engagement and attendance.** New Jersey's programs operate at least 3 hours per day, 5 days per week, during the school year and at least 4 hours per day, 4 days per week, for 4 weeks in the summer to engage youth in additional learning opportunities and reduce summer learning loss. The required theme-based programming establishes relevance and interest through cross-content integration of information and skills. It also roots experiences in the real-world and promotes multisession involvement.

To address the challenge of enticing youth to attend regularly, local programs are required to provide transportation, offer engaging learning experiences, create a youth-centered environment, and use guided-inquiry to increase opportunities for experiential learning, problem solving, self-direction, creativity, exploration, and expression.

Aligning the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program With the School Day and Maximizing Student Engagement

Golden Gate, Inc. has partnered with the Woodlynne School District to implement a civic engagement curriculum theme. Using lessons in American history and journal writing, students gain an appreciation of the history of the United States and connect what they have learned to the map project. The program is also designed to enhance language arts, reading, and comprehension skills and to provide a "fun" way of learning history.

Developing the Capacity of Staff and Promoting Networking

The **Foundation for Educational Administration** conducted joint professional development for Jersey City school day and afterschool staff to increase understanding and support implementation of the Common Core State Standards in their 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. This training facilitated productive reflection and exchange on how the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program could support the school day lessons.

Student voice is critical to student engagement. To include youth intentionally in the design of learning experiences that are relevant and interesting to them, programs are expected to have a student council that meets at least bimonthly.

4. **Establishing partnerships and focusing on sustainability.** Each of New Jersey's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs is expected to create and maintain a set of partnerships that produce tangible resources that directly benefit participants. To assist programs in meeting this expectation, the centers are required to maintain a stakeholder advisory board comprised of partners, collaborators, the evaluator, parents, a youth representative, and other interested parties that meets at least quarterly. The advisory board offers guidance in the areas of program planning, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability.

The NJDE collaborates with NJSACC-New Jersey's Afterschool Network to provide training and technical assistance to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs and other potential grantees. These professional development opportunities have focused on promoting partnership building and program sustainability, among other research-based strategies that support quality afterschool programs statewide. Together NJDE and NJSACC developed the NJ Celebrates Afterschool Toolkit to help programs conduct open house events for parents, community members, and potential partners to increase awareness of the program's offerings and benefits.

5. **Promoting family engagement.** The program's advisory board includes parent representation. Also, programs are expected to provide parents with an opportunity to provide input on all facets of the program, inform parents of participants' progress, and formally invite parents to attend program events. Also, local programs are required to provide adult family members of participating students with opportunities to participate in an array of literacy activities.

Assessing Program Performance and Using Data for Continuous Quality Improvement

Using the state-level goals and objectives that are prescribed by the NJDE, local 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs establish their own performance indicators. They contract with independent evaluators to conduct local evaluations to measure progress toward the achievement of goals, objectives, and indicators. The local evaluation gauges the impact of the program on participating students and families, including student attendance, student engagement during the school day and during the afterschool program, parental involvement, and skills acquired by parents.

NJDE has contracted with American Institutes of Research to conduct a state-level evaluation of its 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. Positive findings in the evaluation of the 2009-10 programs noted in Table 1 include the following:

- *Students who attended the center for 70 days or more during the school year performed better on state assessments in mathematics compared to similar students who did not participate in the center.*

- *Students with higher attendance in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs showed greater improvement in teacher-reported student motivation, attentiveness, pro-social behaviors, and homework completion/quality.*
- *Students who participated in the program for multiple years performed better on state assessments in reading and mathematics.*

.....
 Table 1. Positive student outcomes linked to 21st Century Community Learning Centers program participation.

Outcome Type	Predictor Used	Observed Effect Size	Significance Level
<i>Teacher-Reported Changes (Teacher Survey)</i>			
In terms of being attentive	Number of 21st CCLC days attended	+ .019* points (0-100 scale) per day	p < 0.1 (Significant)
In terms of behaving well	Number of 21st CCLC days attended	+ .017* points (0-100 scale) per day	p < 0.05 (Significant)
In terms of improving homework	Number of 21st CCLC days attended	+ .034* points (0-100 scale) per day	p < 0.05 (Significant)
<i>State Assessment Changes</i>			
Mathematics	Attending 21st CCLC at least 70 Days	+ 6.32% SD***	p < 0.01 (Significant)
Mathematics	Number of continuous years in the 21st CCLC program	+ 12.7% SD	p < 0.01 (Significant)
Reading	Number of continuous years in the 21st CCLC program	+ 10.7% SD	p < 0.01 (Significant)
* Unstandardized coefficient ** To better assess outcomes, teacher survey items were converted to Rasch scale scores. Note that the observed correlation may not be linear. *** "SD" stands for Standard Deviation.			

Naftzger, N., Vinson, D., Manzeske, D., and Gibbs, C. (2011). *New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) impact report 2009–10*. Naperville, IL: American Institutes for Research.

Leading Indicator System to Make Further Advancements in Quality and Achievement

One of the goals of the statewide evaluation is to provide 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees with feedback about their performance in the areas of program design and delivery. NJDE is therefore working with American Institutes of Research on the development of a *leading indicator* system to enhance its understanding of the impact of the New Jersey 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

The focus of the leading indicator system is on quality implementation that has potential to *lead to* positive youth outcomes, rather than just focusing on assessing the achievement of youth outcomes *after* the program year is completed. This system innovation will continue to keep New Jersey's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs and other interested afterschool and summer learning programs in the state moving forward.

Conclusion

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers in New Jersey are providing critical learning opportunities tied to important education goals to thousands of young people across the state. Independent evaluations of the impact of local programs show they are making a positive difference in student achievement and teacher-reported student motivation, attentiveness, pro-social behaviors, and homework completion/quality.

These improved student outcomes did not happen by accident. The NJDE, along with local school and statewide and community partners, have worked diligently on five improvement strategies. New efforts to make future advances are under way, utilizing the latest research on quality and outcome improvement.

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Strategies Used to Improve Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers

"When a 21st Century program is done right, it is often the very best thing in a child's life." This credo, oft-repeated in Florida, clearly defines the importance of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers to our nation's school children. Florida is working hard to make this belief a reality for 80,000 young people and their families in hundreds of sites across the state.

The success of 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and the afterschool and summer programs they fund, does not happen by accident across a state. They need to have three critical components:

- *Inspired programming*
- *Well-structured and diverse program offerings*
- *Results-oriented focus*

Inspired Programming

The key to the success of Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers is *inspired programming*. There is a major emphasis on providing students with fun, hands-on, engaged learning experiences that are tied to the regular school day. The effectiveness of Florida's programs depends on these four simple elements:

- *Fun: Students should find the experience interesting and enjoyable.*
- *Hands-on: Students should physically participate in activities.*
- *Engaged learning: Students should be mentally involved in activities.*
- *Tie-in: Connecting afterschool activities to regular school day lessons makes activities relevant and more memorable.*

Two simple concepts have been consistently emphasized during professional development sessions with grantees:

1. “Teaching within the margins” was born out of the common frustration of school-day teachers who, *due to constraints of the school day, were rarely able to engage in the hands-on learning activities suggested in the margins of their textbooks.* By encouraging grantees to seek out teacher editions of classroom textbooks and identify these extension activities, “teaching within the margins” ties 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool programs to the regular day with fun activities that students enjoy. This additional exposure to information helps them learn more about the subject matter.
2. All program activities must have an academic component. Grantees are asked to design activities that intentionally relate to academic principles. If the activity is playing basketball, for example, then students are learning statistics. If students have an opportunity to work with animals, they should identify biological

principles. If students build robots, they do so with the goal of solving tasks and practicing engineering concepts. The state’s grantees recognize that although it takes more time to create quality, daily lesson plans in an afterschool program, in the end students embrace these meaningful experiences, thus learning more and enjoying the program more.

These community-based partners include Boys and Girls Clubs, local YMCAs, churches and faith-based coalitions, cities unaffiliated with school districts, and other organizations that have decided to become stakeholders and active participants in the academic and personal welfare of some of Florida’s most needy children.

Well-Structured, Diverse Programming

Florida’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers are among the most well-structured and programmatically diverse out-of-school programs for students attending Title I, school-wide program-eligible schools. Part of that structure includes minimum time requirements set by the state. Every 21st Century Community Learning Centers program in Florida must offer services for 36 weeks and a minimum of 12 hours per week. This requirement provides students with ample opportunities to engage in math, reading, and science enrichment, as well as a wide array of fine arts education, physical recreation, character building, service learning, tutoring, entrepreneurial education, and other personal enrichment activities not always available during the regular school day.

Florida’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers also recognize that *communities* are at the core of successful programs. Half of the state’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs are operated by community- or faith-based organizations that make a point of reaching out to the surrounding community to procure business partnerships, expertise in enrichment areas, and best practice recommendations. These community-based partners include Boys and Girls Clubs, local YMCAs, churches and faith-based coalitions, cities unaffiliated with school districts, and other organizations that have decided to become stakeholders and active participants in the academic and personal welfare of some of Florida’s most needy children.

Results-Oriented Focus

To enhance accountability and data-driven best practices, Florida uses extensive data tracking and monitoring procedures. Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program requires all subgrantees to submit monthly attendance numbers to the Florida Department of Education, and the Department plans site visits, program monitoring, and technical assistance accordingly. State leadership uses this information, as well as the requisite data collected through the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS), to ensure that programs operate as intended.

Data collected through PPICS demonstrates the continuing success of Florida's programs. In the 2007–08 program year, 78% of regularly participating 21st Century Community Learning Centers students statewide either maintained or showed growth in math, and 79% maintained or showed growth in reading, as determined by report card grades. Furthermore, 75% of Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers students demonstrated improvement in submitting homework on time—a crucial skill needed for academic success in the regular school day (Learning Points Associates, 2009).

While these numbers represent the entire state, exemplary programs boast even greater achievements, especially when compared to peers from the same school who did not attend afterschool programs. For example, one program met all of its academic objectives in the 2010–11 program year when, on average, 84% of attending middle school students maintained or demonstrated improvement in math, 94% in language arts, and 85% in science. These students attend schools in which peers perform at 59% proficiency in math, 62% in reading, and 40% in science on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, demonstrating the need for focused and engaged attention to academics in afterschool (Silver & Albert, 2011).

The fun, hands-on academic enrichment activities in Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, planned and taught by certified teachers, clearly affect these scores. Moreover, studies show that students who regularly attend afterschool programs improve their regular school-day attendance and participation (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.); For example, PPICS data shows that 80% of students demonstrated an increase in class participation in the 2007–08 school year (Learning Point Associates, 2009). Because students must be present in the regular school day in order to participate in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, they absorb more lessons that are later reinforced after school. This additional time in the classroom—learning with peers and from a certified teacher—also positively affects student achievement and relationships.

Half of the state's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs are operated by community- or faith-based organizations that make a point of reaching out to the surrounding community to procure business partnerships, expertise in enrichment areas, and best practice recommendations.

Strategies and Expectations for a Successful Statewide Program

The state of Florida employs the following strategies and expectations to support the efforts of local school and community groups to provide inspired programming, deliver well-structured and diverse program offerings and activities, and focus on the following results:

- *Strong professional development*
- *Student investment and engagement*
- *Effective evaluation of grant objectives*
- *Partnership development and advocacy*

Strong Professional Development

Excellent afterschool programs depend largely on the talents and abilities of staff and leaders. Program leadership must employ staff who will be able to develop positive relationships with afterschool participants of all ages and grade levels. Strong professional development makes program staff aware of the impact of their decisions, the way they think about the program and participants, and how they handle challenges. Excellent professional development is based on the established needs of administrators, teachers, and other staff and should involve training in programmatic curricula, student safety, and youth development principles.

In addition, all of Florida's subgrantees are required to send at least three representatives to the annual Florida Afterschool Conference. During this weeklong event, project directors, site coordinators, and teachers are given opportunities to visit a 21st Century Community Learning Centers site, attend professional development sessions, learn more about state requirements and procedures, and present best practices and ideas at roundtables hosted by program staff.

Student Investment and Engagement

While individuals who are committed to and engaged with the program are essential for its success, without effective student investment, some programs become just another drop-in afterschool care service. Evidence suggests a correlation between frequent attendance in structured afterschool programs and positive outcomes in and out of school (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.). Based on 21st Century Community Learning Centers program surveys, students who participate in structured, engaging afterschool programs attend school more regularly and improve behavior and academic achievement (Learning Point Associates, 2009). Providing free, exceptional opportunities to improve academic achievement undoubtedly encourages parents to send their children to 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. However,

Strong professional development makes program staff aware of the impact of their decisions, the way they think about the program and participants, and how they handle challenges.

the best way to ensure student investment is to provide fun, hands-on, high-interest activities taught by concerned, informed, and engaging adults who are passionate about the success of their students.

Effective Evaluation of Grant Objectives

A strong evaluation plan helps ensure that 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs make continuous progress towards achieving proposed objectives for participating students and parents. Program evaluation plans should be built from well-developed program objectives, should carefully select performance indicators and outcome measures, and should focus on maximizing student academic progress and personal development. Afterschool programs should not only use the evaluation tools to collect data and measure the effectiveness of the program, but focus on evaluation as a tool of self-improvement. In Florida, programs are required to assess progress toward grant objectives twice a year. They must also demonstrate programmatic changes based on the results of such evaluations. Therefore, formative assessments are used to improve current program activities and strategies, while summative assessments inform the construction of continuation applications and help tailor next year's program.

Program evaluation plans should be built from well-developed program objectives, should carefully select performance indicators and outcome measures, and should focus on maximizing student academic progress and personal development.

A Winning Formula for Engaging Students and Improving Lives

What would it be like to go around the world in 60 days? Students attending Midway Safe Harbor find out by using their math skills to calculate costs and exchange rates and then by researching the culture of each of the countries. This is Midway's formula: an hour of academics and an hour of enrichment centered on the same theme. And in 2010–11, the majority—68% of regular program participants or more—either improved or maintained their grades in reading and math.

Midway Safe Harbor, in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Central Florida, brings a community struggling with high poverty and crime together to provide safe, enriching learning opportunities for kids. The program, located in Sanford, Florida, transforms school lessons into highly engaging activities, making sure that the students are not only getting the academic knowledge the school district says they need but are also getting the kinds of learning opportunities they themselves want. For example, programs available to younger students focus on improving literacy while older students have access to credit retrieval courses, helping them graduate on time.

Partnership Development and Advocacy

As more attention is focused on the needs of youth development, community leaders, policymakers, and practitioners are finding ways to increase support for more afterschool programs of a higher caliber. Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers work closely with statewide advocacy organizations like the Florida Afterschool Network and the Florida After School Alliance to develop afterschool quality standards, promote and provide professional development for afterschool staff, and advocate on behalf of afterschool students.

The Florida Afterschool Conference is just one example of the need for and potential impact of community partners on a statewide level. The convention is a joint venture organized by the Florida After School Alliance and 21st Century Community Learning Centers state leadership and is sponsored by afterschool advocates throughout Florida, including the Florida After School Alliance, the Florida Afterschool Network, the Florida Alliance of the Boys & Girls Clubs, and county-based afterschool advocacy organizations.

These relationships—coupled with the other strategies and practices outlined in this report—have helped to make sure that 20% of Florida's children attend afterschool programs. While this rate is impressive, especially considering the national rate is estimated at 15%, the Afterschool Alliance (2011) notes that “state leaders can do much more to ensure that Florida's youth have the benefit of access to quality afterschool offerings as demand continues to grow in the state”.

Conclusion

Afterschool time can be a valuable tool in augmenting the education of our nation's children. Inspired by a commitment to fun, hands-on, engaged learning; enabled by multiple community partnerships; and driven by results-oriented accountability, Florida's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs continue to thrive and enrich the lives of more than 80,000 children and families throughout the state. Florida's next step—and perhaps the next step for 21st Century Community Learning Centers nationwide—must be to encourage state and national leaders to see the excellent practice and promise of expanded learning and afterschool programs, to advocate for afterschool opportunities, and to help ensure that more children can receive the high quality out-of-school programming already practiced at Florida's sites.

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Lani Lingo has been the director of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program at the Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Family and Community Outreach, since 2006. During her tenure as state director, Ms. Lingo has championed the inclusion of STEM and now STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) initiatives, the integration of academic subjects, and project- or problem-based learning in afterschool programs.

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Working Together: How a County Government and a School District Joined to Provide All Middle Schools Engaging, Safe, and Effective Afterschool Learning Opportunities

In Fairfax County, Virginia, the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and the Fairfax County government (FC) have taken the initiative to establish and fund afterschool opportunities for middle school students. This investment and partnership expanded a 2-day afterschool program in some schools to a 5-day program in all 26 FCPS middle schools. Now in its 6th year, the program has generated improvements in academics, behavior, relationships, and school and community connectedness, with an average weekly attendance of over 19,000 students.

Demonstrated Need

The middle school afterschool program was introduced in 2001 when the Fairfax Partnership for Youth (FPY), a local public-private partnership serving as an intermediary, helped establish a mini-grant process to fund afterschool activities. Seed money was provided by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and local school-community coalitions provided matching funds and programming support.

That same year, the results of a countywide youth survey indicated that 57% of respondents spent time at a friend's house without an adult present, 34% spent time at least once a week when no parents were present, and 50% hung out at a mall or in a parking lot three or more times a month. Respondents reported lower-than-average neighborhood attachment and connectedness toward school (Development Research and Programs, 2001).

In response to these survey results, the Fairfax County-Falls Church Community Services Board established a partnership with FCPS and FPY. Using funds from a 3-year Virginia State Incentive Grant, the board adapted selected evidence-based prevention programs to an afterschool environment and provided training for staff. At the same time, FPY received two capacity-building grants from the Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention and formed the Fairfax County After-School Network to increase community awareness of and support for expanded afterschool opportunities.

By spring 2004, all the middle schools were receiving mini-grants to sponsor afterschool activities at least 2 days a week. These activities were a mix of primarily academic support and enrichment and prevention-based programming. Average weekly attendance was about 3,000 students.

During this period, Fairfax County experienced a marked increase in youth gang activity. With more than 100 gangs operating in the county, middle school youth were increasingly recruited to join gangs, with disengaged, immigrant youth most at risk. The documented lack of adult-supervised activities for middle school youth was apparent, and at nearly every Gang Prevention Task Force Forum held throughout the county, the number one prevention initiative discussed was the need to expand middle school afterschool programs.

In fall 2004, the school board invested nearly \$1 million in afterschool programs and formed an Office of After-School Programs (OASP). A year later, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors earmarked over \$3 million to implement a 3-year expansion of afterschool programming to 5 days a week in all 26 middle schools. A school-county collaborative partnership was developed between OASP and the Department of Community and Recreational Services—now Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS)—to implement this initiative; the time frame for full implementation was one year.

Coordination Is Key

Since the end of the 2006–07 school year, all middle schools have had a comprehensive, 5-day afterschool program in place with a full-time afterschool program specialist on site. The afterschool specialist plans, develops, and implements afterschool activities and schedules all community use of the school buildings and grounds. The specialist is a 12-month school employee and is part of the school's administrative team. This structure facilitates a strong link between afterschool and in-school activities and programs—one of the keys to the success of this initiative.

Afterschool programs cannot meet the needs of students, schools, families, and communities, nor are positive outcomes achievable, unless program leaders are strategic and intentional in both design and implementation. Fairfax program leaders took that approach very early in the process by utilizing a theory of change guided by an extensive logic model. Starting with the unique school-county partnership that drove this initiative, the logic model itself summarizes the key elements of the program, articulates outcomes, determines how those outcomes can be measured, and makes the links between the program elements and desired outcomes.

Each middle school develops and implements its own budget and program based on a planning process in which (a) needs are initially identified, (b) specific programs and activities are selected to address those needs, (c) outcomes are aligned to the goals, and (d) performance measures are established for assessment. As the needs of each school are different, the goals, program activities, and outcomes also differ. Each afterschool program must address the four key strategies that stem from the logic model: academic support and enrichment; social skills and youth development; physical, health, and recreation support; and family and community involvement. Each afterschool activity is linked to one of these strategies and, in turn, is aligned with one or more of the school division's student achievement goals: academics, essential life skills, and responsibility to the community, thereby linking all activities to the school day.

The 2011–12 school year marks the 6th year of the 5-day afterschool program, which runs from regular dismissal times until as late as 6:00 p.m. in 26 middle schools. An additional middle school provides a 3-day afterschool program. FCPS provides late bus transportation 3 days per week, and there is parent pick up all 5 days. The program is free and open to all middle school students.

The FCPS-FC afterschool program helps students meet local and state academic standards and offers students a broad array of enrichment activities. Each middle school has outreach efforts in place to recruit underserved and underrepresented students into academic enrichment activities. Counselors, classroom teachers, and afterschool staff work collaboratively to identify students who may be struggling academically or socially and then recruit and encourage those students to participate in academic support programs and other activities.

FCPS-FC has received a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant that supports two middle schools. Local resources support the afterschool program at these schools, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds support a summer school initiative. Additionally, a number of ethnically diverse community partners provide student and parent support and a parent literacy program at these schools. With the exception of the summer program and community partnership base, there is almost no difference between the afterschool activities at the 21st Century Community Learning Centers sites and the other middle schools.

This prevention-based afterschool initiative was implemented with a fully integrated evaluation model and outcomes measures. Program outcomes are examined through multiple measures: planned and unplanned site observations; quarterly progress reports that include process measures, as well as correlations between dosage in afterschool and changes in grades, absenteeism, and discipline referrals; student, teacher, staff, and parent surveys; and academic and behavioral data. Correlations among these multiple measures are investigated to obtain a more complete picture of the impact of the program.

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Major Outcomes

What have been some of the key outcomes and benefits of the FCPS-FC Middle School After-School Program?

- *Increased academic performance. Between the 2005–06 and 2010–11 school years, there was a 54% reduction in the percent of Ds and Fs in core subjects—English, math, science, and social studies (Fairfax County Public Schools[FCPS], 2011b). Of those students who received one or more Fs in a core subject, 72% attended less than 30 days of afterschool (FCPS, 2011c).*
- *Increased classroom participation. 79% of classroom teachers agree or strongly agree that classroom participation of afterschool participants has improved (FCPS, 2010).*
- *Improved homework completion rates. 72 percent of classroom teachers agree or strongly agree that homework completion rates of afterschool participants have improved (FCPS, 2010).*
- *Improved student behavior. 73 percent of classroom teachers agree or strongly agree that the classroom behavior of afterschool participants has improved (FCPS, 2010). Of those students who received a behavior infraction, 73 percent attended less than 30 days of afterschool (FCPS, 2011c).*
- *Better peer relations, emotional adjustment. 83 percent of parents agree or strongly agree that their child seems happier or less-stressed since attending afterschool (FCPS, 2011a).*
- *Better attitudes towards school. 84 percent of parents agree or strongly agree that their child has a better attitude towards school (FCPS, 2011a).*
- *Reduced gang crime. There has been a 32 percent drop in youth gang activity between 2006 and 2008 as afterschool attendance doubled (Fairfax County Coordinating Council on Gang Prevention, 2007).*

Conclusion

Much of the success of this initiative can be attributed to the strong collaborative partnership between school, school district, and county government staff charged with developing and implementing this effort. Other strategies that have been integral to its success include

- *conducting youth surveys and needs assessments,*
- *having a structural base and action plan in place and ready to go when resources became available,*
- *designating site directors as full-time staff and part of the school's administrative team,*
- *linking local school and community needs to afterschool activities and outcomes,*
- *having teachers and administrators who saw the needs within their school that could be met by afterschool,*
- *incorporating afterschool as an integral part of the school day without replicating the school day,*

- *leveraging existing financial commitments and personnel,*
- *having the support and leadership of school principals, and*
- *being accountable.*

The afterschool program is a key element in the efforts of the school division and the county to improve academic performance, develop healthy and successful youth, and combat gangs. The program is not intended to be regarded simply as child care or as a mere extension of the school day. On the contrary, it provides each participating youth with greater opportunities to form relationships with caring adults; to contribute to the community; to acquire new skills in a supportive environment; to be safe and secure; to form healthy relationships with peers; and to develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to thrive in the workplaces and communities of the 21st century.

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Community-Based Afterschool and Summer Arts Education Programs: Positive Impact on Youth and Community Development

Community-based arts education programs can have a significant and positive impact on participating youth—and on overall community development. Typically delivered after school, over the weekend, and during the summer, such programs should be regarded by community, state, and federal leaders as an effective tool for responding to 21st century educational and civic challenges.

Like other forms of out-of-school-time programming, the value of community-based youth arts programs is often assessed against measures used to gauge school success—for example, participants' test scores, school attendance, graduation rates, or progress in mathematics and literacy development. These measures are important, and research finds a positive relationship between participation in afterschool and summer community arts programs and these types of outcomes (Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998).

In this article, however, we focus on the impact of community-based arts programs on youth development and community development—two other key areas of outcomes highlighted in research and best practice in community arts. We do this for two reasons. First, we believe that these impacts often mediate or help to explain some of the impacts seen on school-related indicators—that is, that positive development and an opportunity to have a meaningful impact in one's community are key to engagement and success in school, life, and work. Second, youth and community development are important domains of impact in their own right and are essential for addressing civic challenges of the 21st century—a century in which communities are increasingly diverse and in which educational, racial, and socio-economic inequality persist.

For this article, we weave together evidence from research—in particular, the body of studies in the new arts education research clearinghouse, ArtsEdSearch (www.artsedsearch.org)—with evidence from best practice at the Destiny Arts Center in Oakland, California (Destiny). The latter, we present from the perspective of Destiny’s executive director (Cristy Johnston Limón), one of its youth leaders (Tilly Reclosado), and a researcher who conducted a study at the organization (Lauren Stevenson). Destiny provides dance, theater, and martial arts instruction to youth ages 3–18, intentionally serving some of the most chronically underserved young people in Oakland, as well as middle-income and affluent families seeking exposure to culturally and socio-economically plural communities. Young people come to Destiny’s center in North Oakland for classes after school, on weekends, and during the summer, and Destiny sends instructors to teach in afterschool programs in over 45 public schools in the East Bay.

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Youth Development

Describing Destiny’s impact from her perspective as a youth participant, Tilly Reclosado says, “At Destiny I got to work with choreographers, write a script, learn lines and act, all whilst building a family in a safe community outside of my home. Destiny taught me to be more aware—of myself, of the people and world around me, and of all things artistic. Creating and performing a show enlightened me on the significance of hard work, planning ahead, and thinking on my feet.” Reclosado’s words echo the research on community youth arts programs, which finds that such programs are not only effective

Qualities of Community Youth Arts Programs That Promote Positive Youth Development

- **Youth-centered.** Effective community youth arts programs respect young people as artists and support them in cultivating their own artistic voice.
- **Knowledge-centered.** In community arts programs, young people develop knowledge in an art form and knowledge about themselves, their communities, and ideas they wish to express in their artwork.
- **Assessment-centered.** The arts involve cycles of planning, practice, and performance and opportunities to make learning visible.
- **Community-centered.** Effective arts programs forge a sense of community among participants that facilitates the risk-taking and self-expression required in artistic endeavors.

at fostering young people's artistic development but also their cognitive, social, and personal growth. The arts learning environment that these programs offer embodies the qualities that youth development scholars (McLaughlin, 2000; Eccles & Gootman, 2002) find are key for effective youth development programs (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). They are, following the phrasing of youth development expert Milbrey McLaughlin (2000) and cognitive scientists at the National Academy of Sciences (Bransford, Brown, & Cockings, 1999), youth-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered.

Research has identified a range of youth development outcomes associated with participation in community youth arts programs. These include skills and capacities prized in the Common Core and by leaders wishing to prepare students for life and work in the 21st century, including persistence, leadership, and collaboration (Weinstein, 2010, Kang Song & Gammel, 2011), creative thinking (Heath & Roach, 1999, Hui & Lau, 2006); problem solving (Rostan, 2010); agency (Stevenson, 2011), motivation (Catterall & Chapleau, 1999; Rostan, 2010), and empathy (Catterall & Chapleau, 1999).

Not surprisingly, given the centrality of self-discovery and self-expression to artistic practice, research also finds that community youth arts programs help young people develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-awareness (Heath & Roach, 1999; Stevenson, 2011); and the ability to self-regulate and express emotions (Ross, 2000; Stevenson, 2011). Reclosado underscores the importance of this set of outcomes in her experience at Destiny. "The act of transforming myself into a character," she says of her training in theater in particular, "made me much more aware of myself and the emotions I feel. I find that I analyze the way I feel and try to find out why I feel that way. I feel more in control of myself when I can understand what I am feeling and the reasons behind it."

Due to the collaborative nature of the artistic practice at Destiny, as participating youth become more capable of self-awareness and self-expression, they also become more visible to and more aware of one another and forge connections across lines of social difference that divide them in their schools and neighborhoods (Stevenson, 2011).

Importantly, research finds that the positive development that young people experience in community arts programs is related to success in other areas of their lives. Youth who participate in such programs, for example, are less likely than their peers to engage in delinquent and violent behavior (Respress & Lufti, 2006) or exhibit behavioral and emotional problems (Wright et al., 2006), and they are more likely to participate in school leadership and have better attendance and higher academic achievement (Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998).

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Community Development

In research at Destiny, Stevenson (2011) found that participating young people extended Destiny's impact to their surrounding community in two ways. First, having experienced personal growth by learning about themselves, one another, and social issues addressed in their performances, Destiny youth "walked differently in the world" (Stevenson, 2011, p. 126). They related to the world with more awareness, openness, confidence, and understanding, and in doing so, had positive effects on their families, schools, and communities. Second, she found that Destiny youth had impact through their performances, which sparked audience members to think differently about their own lives, learn something that would change the way they treat other people, want to take action to make their community a better place, and learn something about people of a different racial and/or ethnic background from their own. In these ways, Stevenson found that Destiny's impact "scales radially" (Stevenson, 2011, p. 130)—participating young people create waves of positive impact that ripple outward into their surrounding communities.

As the executive director at Destiny, Cristy Johnston Limón intentionally leverages young people's involvement in Destiny programs to engage their families and facilitate community development in Oakland. "By engaging young people in meaningful ways," she says, "youth arts organizations enjoy a powerful entry point to serve entire families and their communities." Destiny provides opportunities for parents and family members to work together on performances, projects, and fundraisers.

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Similar to what youth experience at Destiny, Johnston-Limon finds that parents forge new relationships; address issues of class, race, privilege, and social change; learn about themselves and others; and ultimately alter the way they interact with individuals who are different. In this way, Destiny provides an avenue for residents concerned about young people's health and well-being to reinvent their community in line with the values of interconnectedness, social responsibility, and care. As cities like Oakland struggle to rebuild once vibrant and bustling neighborhoods and commercial hubs, cultural organizations like Destiny can help address disinvestment, build audiences, and become mechanisms for rebuilding a sense of place and connection.

Research supports the idea that youth arts organizations can be effective resources for community development. Studies find, for example, that participation in the arts in the teen years relates to greater community involvement, volunteerism, and political participation in adulthood (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 2009; Heath & Roach, 1999). Studies also find that a high percentage of young people who engage in the arts commit to their local community as adults, contributing to its economic and civic growth and participating in and patronizing the arts (Heath & Roach, 1999; Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011).

Providing in-school and afterschool enrichment programs in 45 public schools in the California East Bay—some supported by funding from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative—Destiny also helps schools strengthen their connection with the communities they serve. Instructors bring to the school programs the community-centered culture in which they are steeped at Destiny. At the end of each semester, Destiny also hosts a community event bringing together students from the different school programs. These events provide an opportunity for students to become visible in their communities and to develop a sense of connection across neighborhoods and schools.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Local and state policymakers should regard community-based youth arts programs as a key tool for responding to 21st century educational and civic challenges. We offer the following recommendations to support such programs and ensure their sustainability and accessibility to large numbers of community youth.

- *Local policymakers can work with state legislators to create and market incentives for artists to live and work in blighted neighborhoods (for example, live/work zoning, tax breaks, special-use districts, and enterprise zones) and strengthen blight ordinances that incentivize the creative use of commercial spaces.*
- *By working with local and regional arts commissions and councils, municipal governments can fund and create programs that foster partnerships between arts organizations, schools, and artists. Such programs can engage youth arts organizations in creating and exhibiting art that then engages the broader community in reusing and revitalizing underutilized urban spaces, including, for example, placing art in vacant storefronts, participating in mural design programs, and supporting other public art projects and events.*
- *Municipalities should invest in the creation of cultural spaces and youth arts organizations as resources for positive youth development and as community “hubs” where youth and their families can contribute to creating thriving communities and serve as meeting places for creative and cultural exchange (e.g., Hub San Francisco, Hub Berkeley¹).*
- *Community leaders should leverage the effective community engagement and youth development strategies that youth arts organizations employ to address issues of public safety and gang and gun violence. Youth arts organizations can serve socio-economically diverse populations, offer a variety of entry points that attract broad audiences providing opportunities to create cross-cultural and intergenerational links, and help break down barriers that create tensions that ultimately lead to violence.*

1. For more information, see <http://bayarea.the-hub.net>.

- *State legislators have an opportunity to bolster funding for arts enrichment programs during the school day and in afterschool and summer learning programs that effectively partner with local arts and youth development organizations that specialize in creative engagement. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, for example, legislators established a set-aside for arts funding in the schools. Similar state and federal initiatives provide critical funding to ensure the next generation has the skill set necessary to thrive in the creative economy and modern workforce.*

For More Information

ArtsEdSearch (www.artsedsearch.org) is the nation's one-stop shop for research and policy related to arts education. The national Arts Education Partnership developed ArtsEdSearch as a resource for policymakers and education leaders to better understand and articulate the role that arts education can play in preparing students to succeed in the changing contexts of the 21st century. ArtsEdSearch currently includes summaries of close to 200 research studies, syntheses of the major findings of these studies, and implications of the collected research for educational policy.

Websites

Destiny Arts Center; www.destinyarts.org

Arts Education Partnership; www.aep-arts.org

ArtsEdSearch; www.artsedsearch.org

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Tilly Reclosado grew up in Oakland, and started taking classes at Destiny Arts when she was 5 years old. She has attended several Bay Area public and charter schools and became an active member (dancer, writer, actor, and performer) of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company in high school. From student to teacher, Reclosado now serves as an assistant instructor in hip-hop classes at Destiny's main site. She is also now attending San Francisco State University.

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