

Afterschool Innovations In Brief



In recent years, study after study has demonstrated that afterschool programs make a real difference for children, families and communities. The 6.5 million children who are benefiting from these programs offer powerful evidence of their value. Yet, millions of others have no afterschool programs available to them.

Right now, more than 14 million children are unsupervised after the school day ends. Our nation needs to expand afterschool programming so it is available to every child who needs it. The best way to realize growth is to educate leaders, funders, media and the public about the many benefits afterschool programs offer. This compendium pulls together both research and personal stories that demonstrate the wide range of outcomes affected by afterschool, illustrating how these programs help children, families and communities.

With support from MetLife Foundation, the Afterschool Alliance is proud to present this series of Issue Briefs examining critical issues facing children, schools and communities, and the vital role afterschool programs play in addressing these issues. The four briefs address: teacher recruitment and retention; connecting schools and communities; success in school and family involvement. The carefully selected topics have relevance and urgency, and relate directly to the Foundation's programs and priorities. Each brief combines statistics, comments from experts and community leaders and examples.

These briefs also draw on *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* series, conducted annually since 1984 to document and share the views of those closest to the classroom about important issues in education. Afterschool programs directly address some important Survey findings, for example:

- Afterschool provides a path to teacher recruitment and retention, offering hands-on experience and needed support.
 - *Twenty-eight percent of elementary school principals and 39 percent of secondary school principals expect shortages of qualified teachers to be a very serious problem in the near future. (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher 2004-2005: Transitions in the Role of Supportive Relationships)*
- Afterschool bridges the divide between schools and communities, connecting teachers, students, parents and community based organizations.

- *Forty-five percent of new principals expressed a lack of confidence in the adequacy of their preparation to work effectively with community members or organizations. (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher 2004-2005)*
- Afterschool supports and encourages family involvement in school, a critical need expressed by educators.
- *Thirty-nine percent of teachers give a fair or poor rating to their school for the availability and responsiveness of parents and 36 percent give a fair or poor rating for the amount of support for the school shown by the parents. (The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher 2007: The Homework Experience)*

Below is a brief summary of each of the four Issue Briefs. The full text of each is included in this compendium, and also can be found on the Afterschool Alliance website: http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_br.cfm.

Afterschool: A Powerful Path to Teacher Recruitment and Retention

The need for additional teachers across the country, and especially in high poverty areas, is well documented. Afterschool programs can serve as a valuable resource for recruitment and retention of public school teachers. Future teachers who come up through afterschool receive hands-on experience that coursework alone doesn't provide, and are better prepared for the realities of the classroom. Teachers and afterschool programs can share classrooms, materials and ideas, thus validating and supporting each other.

Afterschool: The Bridge Connecting Schools and Communities

Quality afterschool programs bring community based organizations, volunteers, teachers, mentors and other resources into the afterschool classroom. These partnerships strengthen not only programs but entire communities. Often times, afterschool programs serve as a hub of activity for children, youth, families and the broader community by offering an array of activities for people of all ages.

Afterschool Fosters Success in Schools

Afterschool programs use both traditional and innovative enrichment techniques to support student learning. Studies show that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores, as well as improved work habits, social skills and overall behavior.

Afterschool: Supporting Family Involvement in Schools

Studies show that family involvement in schools boosts student achievement. Further, evaluations consistently cite increased family involvement as a tangible benefit of afterschool. Afterschool programs can more easily facilitate interaction with parents by giving them the chance to meet with staff before or after the work day, and by hiring staff who may be less intimidating because they are community

members, students, or community based youth development workers. Parents who feel connected to afterschool programs become comfortable with the school, and are more likely to connect with teachers and staff who work with their children during the regular school day.

These four Issue Briefs examine just a few of the ways afterschool programs support our children, youth and families. Highlighting best practices and showcasing some of the many exemplary afterschool programs builds a powerful case that afterschool is vital for strong communities and healthy families.

MetLife Foundation supports education, health, civic and cultural programs throughout the United States. For more information about the Foundation and *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* visit www.metlife.org.

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.



www.afterschoolalliance.org

MetLife Foundation Afterschool Alert ISSUE BRIEF

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We need new strategies for attracting and keeping good teachers in our neediest schools.
--U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy (D. Mass.), January 8, 2007

Afterschool programs provide future teachers with essential classroom experience and valuable opportunities to try out different ways of teaching and learning. These programs give them the know-how to begin their careers prepared to educate and inspire our nation's young people.
--U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, (R-Wyo.), July, 2007

Afterschool: A Powerful Path to Teacher Recruitment and Retention

America's schools are facing a critical shortage of teachers just as student enrollments are rising and more rigorous assessments of student achievement are being implemented. The shortage is especially acute in hard-to-staff schools in urban and rural areas, as well as in high-demand subjects such as math, science, and bilingual and special education.

- More than one million teachers are nearing retirement age.¹
- One quarter of teachers say it is likely they will leave the profession in the next five years.²
- Twenty-eight percent of elementary school principals and 39 percent of secondary school principals expect shortages of qualified teachers to be a very serious problem in the near future.³
- Over the next decade, experts predict that we will need to hire more than two million new teachers.⁴

The issue is two-fold: teacher recruitment and teacher retention. There is a great deal of discussion about the need to recruit more young people into the teaching profession, but not enough focus on retaining quality teachers already in the classrooms. Turnover among new teachers is significant. Twenty percent of new hires leave the classroom within three years. In urban districts, close to 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession during their first five years.⁵

Each teacher who is recruited, trained, and lost costs districts up to \$50,000. Disruptions in teaching and learning and negative effects on morale are among other costs that can be even more devastating.⁶

Teaching credentials and coursework by themselves cannot prepare our teachers for today's classroom or ensure students' lifetime achievement. Afterschool programs offer future teachers hands-on experience that coursework doesn't provide. As a result, they enter the field with greater enthusiasm, greater value for the context in which good teachers and good teaching happens, and greater value for connecting children to schools, family and community.

Carla Sanger
President and CEO
LA's BEST

Afterschool programs are a valuable resource for teacher recruitment.

Afterschool can serve as a pipeline for new teachers in a variety of ways -- from introducing prospective educators to the teaching profession, to supporting and encouraging those already interested in the field.

- Afterschool teacher cadet programs offer qualified middle and high school students an introduction to the teaching profession. The programs identify and nurture students to be future teachers. The curriculum includes simulations and other hands-on activities designed to excite students about teaching. Michigan, North Carolina and South Carolina have successfully implemented afterschool teacher cadet programs and report increased student achievement and teacher recruitment.⁷
- Teaching Fellows is an academic assistance and enrichment program that recruits local college students already on a teaching career path and places them in area

It is so wonderful to see them mature and become highly trained professionals because of their work in afterschool. They have all said that they felt better prepared and less intimidated, because of the experience gained in working in our afterschool programs. I am quite sure there will be many more.

John Ervin, III
Director, Community Affairs
Modesto City Schools, CA

afterschool and enrichment programs. The program, which began in Fresno, California in 1996, has more than 200 teaching fellows in 40 schools. Participants partner with teachers and provide experiential standards-based education and enrichment for K-12 students. In return, they receive a stipend, ongoing training, and course credits. The program offers future teachers support, hands-on experience, and learning opportunities.⁸

- LA's BEST is a nationally recognized afterschool program that serves 26,000 children in 168 elementary schools across Los Angeles. Because of its size, scope and quality, LA's BEST serves as a powerful resource for teacher recruitment. Out of the 1,800 field staff, 42 percent plan to become teachers, and 34 percent are in college pursuing a degree in education and plan to teach. LA's BEST actively

recruits staff from the local community and more than 50 percent live in the neighborhood. As a result, children in the program are mentored and supported by a staff that is culturally and geographically close to them. Many of these children return as young adults to staff the programs: nine percent of staff are former LA's BEST students. In addition, each site has two part-time high school positions. LA's BEST students are offered a path to a teaching career that otherwise might not be visible to them. In an informal survey of 3rd through 6th graders, when asked what they wanted to be when they grow up, the most common answer was "teacher".^{9,10}

- According to Dan Diehl, an educational program consultant in Indiana, observations and involvement in afterschool programs are now a requirement at the University of Southern Indiana Teacher Education Department. "This will give future educators an opportunity to have more hands-on experience – thus helping them be better prepared to enter the classroom. We do know that we have hired a lot of our [afterschool program] site coordinators as teachers."

Other recruitment streams include:

- Afterschool programs where middle and high school students tutor younger students, serving as an early training ground for a career in teaching.

- Universities and colleges of education. Students can staff afterschool programs, allowing future teachers to learn innovative teaching methods, classroom management skills, and content enrichment. Using afterschool as a teaching laboratory can train teachers to deal with their students in smaller, less formal settings, giving them insight into building student-teacher relationships. Student teachers can be given the latitude to deliver content in fun and interesting ways, which is often difficult to do during the regular school day.¹¹
- Professional development opportunities tied to a career ladder for afterschool staff. Several states including California, Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey are pursuing this recruitment tool.¹²

Afterschool programs support teacher retention.

Retaining existing teachers is more challenging than training new ones. Since the early 1990s, the annual outflow of teachers has surpassed the annual influx by increasingly larger margins. Retirees account for only about 15 percent of those who leave the profession – either temporarily or permanently – each year.¹³ New teachers tend to leave the field because they feel overwhelmed by the expectations and scope of the job. Many say they feel isolated and unsupported in their classrooms, or that expectations are unclear.¹⁴ Afterschool programs can help prepare teachers for the realities of the profession, as well as support them once they enter the field.

- Afterschool programs can introduce prospective teachers to diverse student populations and at-risk students. Gaining experience with these students and their families can make future teachers aware of the challenges they will face in regular classrooms, and give them skills to effectively address those challenges.
- Afterschool programs offer important support to teachers by encouraging them to collaborate with their peers, and providing mentoring and professional development opportunities. Teachers report that the flexibility and creativity that they bring to an afterschool program directly transfers to their teaching during the regular school day.¹⁵
- The Winooski School District (WSD) in Vermont has implemented a successful afterschool program, AfterZone. Forty-six percent of the K-12 students and 35 percent of the teaching faculty participate. Teachers report that they are working together in new ways and building multidimensional relationships with the students and each other. Students have greater involvement in extracurricular learning, which translates into greater success during the regular school day. Through their involvement in the afterschool program, teachers perceive WSD schools as a place where they will be supported in developing innovative curricula and where opportunities for learning go beyond the regular school day.¹⁶

The principal and superintendent state that they use the [afterschool] program as a proving ground. I've had staff members at another site say that this was the best preparation they could possibly have had for their teaching careers. They saw a side of student life that teachers rarely see, as they had far more involvement with low income families than those in the regular day have.

Bricca Sweet, Alleghany County, SC

Using afterschool to train and recruit teachers can strengthen and enhance the link between school and afterschool.

Using afterschool as a platform for teacher recruitment and retention benefits the teaching profession, the afterschool field and most importantly, the students. Teachers who have come up

through afterschool, or who currently participate in afterschool, are keenly aware of its value and strive hard to solidify the bridge between the regular school day and afterschool. They support afterschool by sharing their classrooms and materials, and maintaining communication between the programs, which benefits students.

Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Richard Burr (R-NC), John Kerry (D-MA) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT), have introduced a bi-partisan bill as part of the reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The Teaching Fellows for Extended Learning and After-School Act of 2007 (T-FELAS) proposes a federal investment of \$600 million to establish a national service corps of 20,000 recent college graduates to teach in extended day and afterschool programs. For two years, teaching fellows would work during the regular school day with teachers in classrooms, and lead afterschool programs in the afternoon. The schools will coordinate with institutions of higher education to provide the fellows a baccalaureate or masters degree program in education.

Conclusion

The teacher shortage is serious and real, and comes at a time when the nation's educational system is at a crossroads. With the current emphasis on students' academic performance and job-readiness, it is imperative that schools find and retain dedicated, high-quality teachers. These teachers must be able to teach to the highest standards while navigating complex challenges previously unknown in the profession. Examples from the field show that afterschool programs can provide current and aspiring educators with hands-on experience that is invaluable in the classroom and critical to teacher and student success. Teachers who feel prepared and supported enter the classroom excited and encouraged, ready to inspire students and teach them the tools they need to succeed academically, socially and professionally. Through innovative programming and an eye towards professional support and development, afterschool is an ideal platform through which to recruit, retain, and support America's teachers.

¹ NEA: National Education Association. *Attracting and Keeping Quality Teachers*. <http://www.nea.org/teachershortage/index.html> Retrieved April 5, 2007.

² Ibid.

³ MetLife (2005). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*. Harris Interactive.

⁴ NEA: National Education Association. *Attracting and Keeping Quality Teachers*. <http://www.nea.org/teachershortage/index.html> Retrieved April 5, 2007.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Portner, H. (2005). Success for new teachers. *American School Board Journal*. <http://www.asbj.com/2005/10/1005ASBJportner.pdf>. Retrieved May 10, 2007.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://teach.csufresno.edu/B%20%20Programs/programssubtf.html> Retrieved April 12, 2007.

⁹ *Caught in the Act of Success*. LA's BEST Afterschool Enrichment Program Annual Report 2005-2006.

¹⁰ Mike Theodore, Jim Sussman, LA's BEST, personal communication, May 14, 2007.

¹¹ US Department of Education (1999) *Teacher Recruitment and Training in After-School Programs*. http://www.ed.gov/pubs/After_School_Programs/Teacher_Programs.html Retrieved April 5, 2007.

¹² National Institute on Out-of-School Time (2001), Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College. www.niost.org/publications/cross_cities_brief5.pdf Retrieved on April 12, 2007.

¹³ "Wanted: A National Teacher Supply Policy for Education" <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n33/v11n33.pdf>

¹⁴ NEA: National Education Association. *Attracting and Keeping Quality Teachers*. <http://www.nea.org/teachershortage/index.html> Retrieved April 5, 2007.

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¹⁶ Morehouse, H. *Evaluations to Watch. Measuring Change: Out-of-School Time Programs and School Culture*. HFRP, The Evaluation Exchange, XII (1&2), Fall 2006.



www.afterschoolalliance.org

MetLife Foundation Afterschool Alert ISSUE BRIEF

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The success of the program is in the partnerships. By leveraging school, community and family resources for a common goal, everyone benefits.

-- Mindy DiSalvo, DeKalb County School System, GA

Afterschool: The Bridge Connecting Schools and Communities

Current school reform efforts place a strong emphasis on strengthening schools so that every child can succeed academically. However, there's more to success than academics, and schools cannot be solely responsible for the education of students – all community players, including families, must work together to provide a total educational experience for youth. Regrettably, in too many neighborhoods there is a real disconnect between schools and their surrounding communities – especially in low-income areas where such partnerships may be needed the most, and during the afterschool hours – a time of day when they are needed the most.¹

Afterschool programs can play a vital role in reconnecting schools and communities. These programs help schools move beyond the constraints of the regular day and embrace the surrounding neighborhood, capitalizing on the resources, assets, and perspectives of organizations and individuals outside the school. Partnerships forged through afterschool offer students a way to achieve academically, socially, emotionally, vocationally, civically, and physically.² Successful afterschool programs recognize the importance of strong community connections and actively pursue them. The benefits of such collaboration are many and include:³

- greater relevance of curriculum for students
- increased student responsibility for learning
- improved linkages between school and community
- improved problem-solving, teaming, higher order thinking, time management, and other vital skills that benefit students' school achievement and workplace readiness
- expanded learning environments
- greater motivation of reluctant learners
- enhanced problem solving and conflict management skills
- reduced behavior and truancy problems

Bridging schools and communities benefits children and youth

Afterschool programs benefit youth by decreasing risk-taking behaviors and by developing interests and competencies that in turn support academic learning and achievement.⁴ In an evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers – afterschool programs receiving funding from the U.S. Department of Education -- participants in afterschool had:

- fewer absences and less tardiness

- higher grades
- higher rates of homework completion
- increased rates of parental involvement in school⁵

Some families can afford to enrich their children’s education with sports, academic tutors, private lessons and cultural activities, and can provide safe nurturing environments that give their children myriad ways to explore their interests. But some parents may have more limited options, including many of the 40 percent of families categorized as working poor or receiving public assistance.⁶ Many children in these families are among the 14 million K-12 youth responsible for taking care of themselves after school, and do not have the same access to enrichment activities.⁷

Research shows that community involvement can help afterschool programs close the achievement gap for students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.⁸ Further, afterschool programs that partner with neighborhood organizations are better suited to help families overcome barriers to participation in afterschool, such as transportation, lack of programming, and fees.

When community-based organizations and schools work together to develop afterschool programs, students are exposed to new and creative learning styles in informal, relaxed settings that allow them to further explore topics of interest and discover new passions that they may have previously known little about such as photography, journalism, martial arts, tennis, chess, or engineering. The informal setting gives them the courage to try new activities in non-threatening environment. As a result, their interest and motivation to participate are enhanced.⁹

Afterschool programs that involve community-based organizations have the unique ability to reach at-risk children and youth who are disenchanted with school, hard to reach, or may be isolated from their communities.¹⁰ Research on childhood resiliency, development, and prevention of high-risk behaviors confirms the importance of positively connecting youth to their communities.¹¹

Children and youth benefit when schools and families value community partners and engage them as resources. Further, youth learn about the importance of contributing to their communities, and are in turn appreciated by those communities. Community-based service learning programs provide young people with valuable real-life lessons that are hard to duplicate in the classroom. By participating in these programs young people have the opportunity to:

- learn citizenship, responsibility and discipline
- develop problem-solving skills
- enhance self esteem
- learn about new career options
- improve academic motivation, school attendance, and school performance
- prepare for future work¹²

Through Children’s Aid Society, we have a bridge to the parents and the community. Not only because of the services it provides to the children, but to the parents themselves: GED courses, computer courses. Parents know they can go into any of these [classes], and they know they will be accepted, they will be supported and there’s always a helping hand.
-- Regina Fusco, Assistant Principal of a Community School in partnership with the Children’s Aid Society, New York, NY.

Quality afterschool programs are linking schools and communities with clear benefits to children and youth.

- Citizen Schools operates a national network of apprenticeship programs for middle school students. By connecting adult volunteers to students in hands-on learning projects after school, the participants develop the academic and leadership skills they need to do well in school, get into college, and become leaders in their careers and in their communities.^{13,14}
- Peekskill, New York's Extended Day Program incorporates cultural, recreational and civic resources to complement classroom instruction. Funded in part with 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds, the students learn leadership skills by serving as docents at art museums or volunteers at the community health center. Students are provided many ways to explore their interests and display their talents through performances, exhibitions, poetry readings, and other venues. Students show significant academic progress and greater self-discipline.¹⁵
- Young Audiences, Inc. (YAI) is a nationwide not-for-profit arts-in-education organization. Through in-school, afterschool, summer and family programs, YAI offers artistic and educational development for public school students by bringing young people together with professional artists of all disciplines to learn, create and participate in the arts. YAI programs take place in schools, libraries, community centers, hospitals, camps and parks. The programs reach children who might not otherwise have access to the arts. Research shows a correlation between arts education and improvements in academic performance and standardized test scores, increases in student attendance, and decreases in school drop-out rates.¹⁶
- YMCAs and many other community-based organizations recognize that afterschool programs are an opportunity to promote healthy living. Through their Pioneering Healthier Communities program, the Milwaukee YMCA works intensively with children and parents to develop healthier habits and reduce "screen" time while raising awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle.¹⁷ This is particularly important since opportunities for physical activity are disappearing from schools, and fewer than one in three teens get an adequate amount of regular physical activity.¹⁸ Afterschool programs play a key role in the fight against childhood obesity and associated health issues by providing children and youth with healthy snacks, nutritional education, and a safe place to engage in physical activity.

Schools cannot be the only magic bullet for kids. They need to be healthy, they need to be in adequate housing, they need their emotional needs met, they need their nutritional needs met. And schools can do that only in partnership with other agencies.

-- Judith Johnson, Superintendent, Peekskill, New York

Benefits of afterschool extend beyond the classroom and into the community

Communities are facing 21st century challenges such as: a technology-driven economy that is creating new knowledge and literacy needs¹⁹, changing socio-economic and demographic trends, and the spread of crime, drugs, poverty and violence from cities to suburbs.²⁰ As a result, more communities are recognizing that partnering with schools strengthens the community at large. Community leaders and stakeholders, especially in urban areas, are looking for opportunities to help improve the academic, social and professional skills of students.²¹ The advantages of having educators and community builders working together are many, but collaboration can be

difficult. Some educators are not skilled at engaging parents and community members in the work to strengthen schools. For example, *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher 2004-2005 Survey: Transitions in the Role of Supportive Relationships*, found that teachers and principals identified their interactions with parents as a significant source of stress and anxiety, and 45 percent of new principals expressed a lack of confidence in the adequacy of their preparation to work effectively with community members or organizations.²² Afterschool can effectively link communities and schools.

The benefits of community involvement in education through afterschool are tangible and real.

- The community as a whole benefits from having well-rounded youth who are productive and responsible community members.
- Adults and community members are able to reconsider any negative stereotypes they have of youth when they have positive interactions with young people. They are then more likely to hold a positive view of young people, voice their support for afterschool, and play an active role by volunteering or mentoring.²³
- Young people gain valuable experiences when engaged in community service learning opportunities provided by afterschool programs.²⁴

Afterschool programs are a positive force in the community.

- The Fremont Business Academy in Oakland, California has afterschool programs that offer youth the opportunity to manage businesses for their communities, ranging from tax help to publishing local newspapers. The students first gather information from their community, and then spend the next three years working on the selected community improvement project.²⁵
- The Kids Involved in Community Kindness (KICK) in Hampton, Virginia, gives students the chance to identify a neighborhood problem, develop an action plan, and implement a project to make a difference in their neighborhood. Students engage in activities such as journal writing, Internet research, games, interviews, creative writing, and walking tours. They interact with key community leaders and learn about how laws and policies affect communities.²⁶
- The Native Youth Club in Sioux Falls, South Dakota embraces community involvement, which is a vital component of the program. Tribal elders teach students about Native American customs, while high school volunteers mentor younger students. Through the program, students have the opportunity to showcase Native American dances at local ethnic celebrations, and keep tribal traditions alive.²⁷

Conclusion

Afterschool programs are a solid bridge connecting schools and communities. Quality afterschool programs work with communities to connect children and youth with resources, community-based organizations, volunteers, and mentors. In many places, the afterschool program serves as a hub of activity for children, youth and families by offering an array of community activities. Partnerships between schools and community-based organizations support academic achievement not by mimicking schools, but by complementing the schools' academic focus with a more holistic approach. This relationship not only benefits the participating children and youth, but strengthens the programs, the schools, and the community at-large.

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Issue Brief No. 31

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After-school has moved to a place where there is a cohesive agenda for the field. The focus is on connecting the school day to after-school and preparing older kids for life and work.

---John Sanchez, Executive Director, East Side House Settlement, NY

Afterschool Fosters Success in School

In the current climate of increased academic assessments, the discussion of student success in school is frequently limited to academic achievement. However, data show that when examining student success, it is vital to include components such as social development and prevention of risky behaviors, as well as academic achievement. These outcomes form a comprehensive picture of student success and underscore the fact that student success outside of the classroom is an indelible piece of student success inside the classroom. Afterschool plays a critical role in this equation.

- A study released in October 2007, found that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores. More telling perhaps, was the finding that regular participation in afterschool is linked to significantly improved work habits, overall behavior and reduced behavior problems, thus facilitating academic improvements.¹
- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning reviewed data from 73 afterschool studies and concluded that afterschool programs employing evidence-based approaches to improving students' personal and social skills were consistently successful in producing multiple benefits for youth including improvements in children's personal, social and academic skills, as well as their self-esteem.²

These 21st Century Community Learning Center programs provide afterschool activities that support student learning. Annual performance reports on Wisconsin community learning centers show increased grades, improved school attendance, and decreased behavior problems for youth who attend these afterschool programs.

**--Elizabeth Burmaster
Wisconsin State
Superintendent**

Evaluators use a broad array of performance measures to assess scholastic achievement outcomes including homework completion, grades and standardized test scores. Academic outcomes that are linked to afterschool programs include:³

- Better attitudes toward school and higher educational aspirations
- Better performance in school as measured by achievement test scores and grades
- Higher school attendance
- Less disciplinary action

Afterschool programs positively impact youth in key areas.

Studies show that afterschool programs produce multiple benefits to youth's personal, social, and academic life. Youth who participate in afterschool improve in key areas that foster student success in school including social and emotional development and avoidance of risky behaviors.⁴

- Healthy social and emotional development is critical to success in school. Participant behavior, interpersonal skills, goal setting and leadership skills are hallmarks of a successful student. Positive youth development outcomes associated with afterschool programs are:⁵
 - Decreased behavioral problems
 - Improved social and communication skills
 - Improved relationships with others including peers, teachers and parents
 - Increased community involvement and broadened world view
 - Increased self-confidence and self-esteem

- Avoiding risky behaviors is critical to the well being and therefore the success of youth. Students who are dealing with issues of drug use, violence, or pregnancy out of the classroom have a difficult time succeeding in the classroom. Results from evaluations of programs that address prevention of risky behaviors show positive outcomes such as:⁶
 - Avoidance of drug and alcohol use
 - Decreased delinquency and violent behavior
 - Increased knowledge of safe sex and avoidance of sexual activity and pregnancy
 - Increased skills for coping with peer pressure

When I walk through the door at the [Boys & Girls] Club, I feel like I am hugged. The Club has taught me different realities in life, like how to say no to drugs, step up for what's right, never be afraid to express yourself to others, and that there is good in life.

**--Isaiah Buckanaga
8th Grader in the Boys & Girls Club of Leech Lake Area afterschool program
Cass Lake, Minnesota**

Afterschool improves school attendance and engagement in learning.

- Children in LA's BEST improved their regular school day attendance and reported higher aspirations regarding finishing school and going to college. Drop-out rates among LA's BEST students are 20 percent lower than the overall district drop-out rate.^{7,8}
- Sixty-five percent of former Citizen Schools 8th Grade Academy participants enrolled in high-quality high schools compared to 26 percent of matched nonparticipants. Ninety-two percent of high exposure participants were promoted on-time to the tenth grade compared to 81 percent of matched nonparticipants. This is critical, since earning promotion to tenth grade on time is a key predictor of high school graduation (i.e. preventing drop-out).⁹
- Youth in the Quantum Opportunities afterschool program were half as likely to drop out of high school and two and one half times more likely to go on to further education after high school than their peers.¹⁰

Afterschool improves test scores and grades.

- Active participants in programs offered by The After-School Corporation (TASC) were more likely to take and pass the Regents Math Sequential 1 exam by ninth grade than were nonparticipants. Thirty-two percent of active ninth grade participants took and passed the exam, compared to one percent of ninth grade nonparticipants. Fifty-two percent of active participants took and passed the Math Sequential 2 and 3 exams, compared to 15 percent of nonparticipants in the same grades.¹¹
- Participants in North Carolina’s Young Scholars Program with at least 280 hours in the program averaged double-digit increases annually for proficiency in both math and reading. Promotion rates rose by 38 percent. Furthermore, the number of Young Scholars receiving A’s and B’s increased an average of 38 percent, while the number receiving F’s decreased an average of 50 percent.¹²
- Active participants in the Boys and Girls Club of America increased their average grades by 11 percent from baseline to the 30-month measurement while comparison youth and noncomparison youth, over the same period, increased their average grades by .4 percent and .3 percent, respectively.¹³
- Participants of St. Paul Minnesota’s 21st CCLC Pathways to Progress program received better grades in English and Math than nonparticipants and more of the grades received by these students were satisfactory ones – a grade of C minus or better.¹⁴

The TASC program gives students enrichment opportunities, helps them build self-confidence and makes them feel more a part of the school community. I’m proud that my kids have access to museums, parks and other enrichments due to their participation in after-school.

**--Christina Tettonis,
Principal, P.S. 170
Brooklyn, NY**

Afterschool programs employ a range of techniques known to foster student success.

The After-school Corporation (TASC) currently supports more than 250 programs in New York, reaching more than 40,000 children and their families. TASC has been instrumental in identifying the elements critical to a quality afterschool program. Quality programs should include these components:¹⁵

- Operate at least three hours a day, every day school is in session
- Employ a full-time, paid site coordinator
- Provide a variety of activities connected to, but different from, the school day, including academic support, arts, sports, and community service
- Maintain a diverse staff of teachers, artists, college students, parents and other community members
- Maintain a low student-to-staff ratio (10:1 for elementary and middle schools)
- Provide a snack or supper
- Offer open enrollment

All TASC-supported programs incorporate these critical elements. Each site then integrates programming that is of most interest to the attendees, thus fostering student success.

- Children attending the New York Mission Society TASC afterschool program at PS 92 in Brooklyn learn how to cook, teaching them that preparing healthy food

can be fun, as well as teaching them how to measure ingredients and read and comprehend detailed directions.¹⁶

- Global Arts to Go provides elementary age children throughout New York City access to the arts and global and cultural literacy by traveling the world through music. Children study maps, create “passport” journals and do other activities that teach them geography, history, foreign language vocabulary and social studies.¹⁷
- The Discovering Community Initiative is a nationwide program designed to foster positive attitudes and strengthen the bonds between middle school students, teachers and the broader school community through various afterschool activities. Through participating in a wide range of endeavors such as discussions on community issues, recycling projects, homework clubs and giving book talks to younger students, students interact with the wider community and gain an understanding of their roles and responsibilities.¹⁸

Conclusion

When students feel connected, supported and safe, they are more likely to make healthy choices for themselves, including avoiding risky behaviors and staying in school. Afterschool programs provide children and youth not only with academic support, but a safe, nurturing environment that can help bolster social and emotional development, critical to academic success. Further, afterschool offers students vital enrichment activities that they might not otherwise have access to, such as art, music, world cultures and sports that can motivate and engage them during the regular school day, leading to improved academic performance and success.

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After school extended learning opportunities strengthen our students' chance of success. We know that increased parental involvement is a key variable in raising student achievement.

--Dr. Susan Gourley, Lincoln Public Schools Superintendent, Lincoln, Nebraska

Afterschool: Supporting Family Involvement in Schools

There is no debate about the fact that family involvement in schools boosts student achievement. Families and parents can support their children's schooling by volunteering, attending school functions and participating in parent-teacher conferences. They can become more involved by helping their children improve their schoolwork through encouragement, modeling desired behavior (such as reading for pleasure), monitoring and helping with homework, and actively tutoring their children at home.¹ Studies show that when parents and family members are involved in their children's school, children benefit, schools benefit, and families benefit.²

- Benefits to children are regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or parents' education level and include:^{3,4}
 - Higher grades and test scores;
 - Better attendance records and homework completion rates;
 - Higher graduation rates and higher postsecondary education enrollment;
 - Lower drop out rates;
 - Decrease in negative behaviors such as alcohol and drug use and violence;
 - Increase in positive attitudes and behaviors.
- Benefits to schools include:⁵
 - Better teacher morale and higher ratings of teachers by parents;
 - Better reputations of schools within the community;
 - Better performance of school programs that involve parents versus identical programs that do not include parents.
- Benefits to families include:⁶
 - Better connection between parents, children and communities;
 - Increase in support and services to families, including opportunities to improve family relationships;
 - Improved relationships between parents and children.

There is a correlation between the level of family involvement and student achievement—the more extensive the family involvement, the greater the impact on student achievement. Further, to produce long-lasting gains, parent and family involvement activities must be well-planned, inclusive, and comprehensive.⁷

Challenges to connecting schools and families

Although educators widely recognize the benefits of family involvement in schools, many are unable to effectively reach out to families. Time constraints, budgetary concerns, and other conflicts can prevent schools from engaging parents. Investigators have identified lack of planning and lack of mutual understanding as the two greatest barriers to effective parent involvement.⁸

Families too may face considerable barriers that inhibit their involvement in schools. Parents may be unable to take time away from work to participate in school functions or activities. They may feel culturally or economically isolated from their community and schools, and feel uncomfortable reaching out. They may not know how to get involved, or even if they should. Sometimes parents report feeling that schools ignore them and don't understand their concerns.⁹

Importantly, data show that both parents and teachers express dissatisfaction with the amount and quality of parent participation—illustrating the critical need to improve connections between school and home. *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher 2007: The Homework Experience* found that 24 percent of parents report their school does not do a good job of encouraging parental involvement in educational areas. Twenty eight percent of parents are dissatisfied with the frequency of contact they have with their child's school, while 15 percent feel awkward or reluctant about approaching a teacher to talk about their child. Teachers report similar feelings of dissatisfaction: 39 percent give a fair or poor rating to their school for the availability and responsiveness of parents and 36 percent give a fair or poor rating for the amount of support for the school shown by the parents.¹⁰

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher 2004-2005 Survey: Transitions in the Role of Supportive Relationships found that teachers and principals identified their interactions with parents as a significant source of stress and anxiety.¹¹

The research shows that students are better off in after-school programs linked to their school activities and where their families are involved and engaged with what they are learning and how they are spending their afternoons.

**--Milton J. Little, Jr.,
President, United Way of
Metropolitan Atlanta**

Afterschool programs are a natural way to link families and schools

Afterschool programs provide parents and schools the perfect venue to overcome these barriers to participation. Research shows that parent involvement in afterschool programs provides the same benefits to children, families and programs as parent involvement in the regular school day.¹² Afterschool programs present a gateway into the school for many parents who do not otherwise feel connected to their children's school.

There are several reasons why afterschool programs, by their nature, can more easily initiate interactions with parents. For example: afterschool staff has the ability to meet with parents before or after the work day; afterschool staff, many of whom are community members,

students or community-based youth development workers, can be less intimidating to parents. Parents who feel connected to their afterschool program are far more likely to then connect with teachers and staff from the regular day.

While family involvement in afterschool provides the same benefits to children, families, and programs as family involvement in the school, afterschool is in the unique position to offer families additional support and services that are not possible otherwise. Afterschool programs are in the unique position to:¹³

- Provide parents with referrals to local agencies or organizations for assistance or information;
- Provide referrals to families for other social services;
- Provide specific support to families, either through parent counseling or parent support groups;
- Provide support to families struggling with social and emotional problems through the inclusion of preventative service programs;
- Program sites in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants can develop services and activities specifically tailored to those new residents;
- Send food home with children for families.

Examples of afterschool programs that offer children and families support and services and encourage parental engagement:

- Beacon Centers are a nationwide network of school-based community centers offering afterschool programs and extended programming for youth and families in the evenings, on weekends, and during the summer. In Philadelphia, Beacon Centers operate in 18 underutilized public schools in low-income areas. Beacon Centers serve as a community resource, providing support and services to parents, senior citizens, and other community members. Collaboration is key for Beacon Centers as they build a continuum of integrated support and programs that meets the needs and interests of children and families in the community.^{14,15}
- 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.”¹⁶
- The Whitefoord Community Program in southeast Atlanta, Georgia, takes a holistic approach in supporting the educational efforts of children and families in the community. The organization provides a bridge between home and school with programs that increase the potential of children succeeding in school. The Whitefoord Community Program offers beyond school hour programs including After School Enrichment, Summer Reading, Bike Rite and the Intel Computer Clubhouse, all of which provide opportunities for children to reinforce and expand their learning experiences. Additionally, GED classes, adult literacy, job readiness programs, computer classes and regular community activities are available.¹⁷

When families are involved in their children's learning, both at home and at school, their children do better in school. Afterschool programs help families feel welcomed, valued, and connected to school and afterschool staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

--Leslie Cushman, President, Georgia PTA

Afterschool programs can employ many different strategies to encourage parent participation:¹⁸

- Support families by focusing on family, consider the concerns and needs of the families and children served, and solicit family input;
- Communicate and build trusting relationships by communicating frequently and in positive ways, being there for families and providing leadership opportunities for families;
- Create an environment that welcomes families. Hire and develop family-focused staff by hiring staff who share parents' experiences and background and/or designating a staff member to liaison with parents;
- Build linkages across individuals and organizations, such as collaborating with local organizations, offering to act as a liaison between families and schools, and helping parents develop skills to advocate for themselves and their children at school.

Afterschool programs are implementing these strategies and connecting with families:

- Generacion Diez is an afterschool program in Pennsylvania that connects Latino families with afterschool programming, social services and the school community. The program provides appealing, culturally relevant services for the community, which is made up primarily of Mexican immigrants. The program employs home visits by Latina social workers to establish linkages between families and schools and provide parents with information about the school system and strategies for promoting school success at home. The program also provides social services to families experiencing poverty, illness, abuse and other stresses.
- The Child–Parent Center (CPC) program in Chicago is a community-based program that provides comprehensive educational and family support services to economically and educationally disadvantaged children. The program provides a half-day preschool, a half-day or all-day kindergarten, and an all-day service in the primary grades. Parental involvement is an underpinning of the program. Parent involvement can be in the form of acting as a classroom aide, accompanying field trips, using the parent-resource room, participating in reading groups with other parents, or taking trips to the library with teachers or children. CPC also sponsors continuing education courses for parents.^{19,20}
- The Lincoln Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Lincoln, Nebraska provide support and services to children, families, and neighborhoods through collaborative partnerships using local schools as the hub of service. These centers provide safe, supervised before and after school programs, weekend and summer enrichment programs, and many other supportive services for citizens of all ages. The CLC initiative is grounded in the belief that relationships and collaborations are the cornerstones that create positive change. CLC partners believe that life-long learning is a shared responsibility of the community's residents. The program is an innovative approach designed to link the community, neighborhoods, schools, and people of all ages, backgrounds and walks of life to improve student learning, and create strong families and healthy neighborhoods.²¹

Conclusion

Studies show that the majority of parents want to be involved in their children's education, but many face barriers that prevent them from doing so. And although educators identify parental

involvement as a best practice, schools often don't have the resources or the time to reach out to families who may be reluctant to participate. Afterschool can offer parents a comfortable, flexible setting in which to engage with their children and become involved in their education. Parents enjoy activities that offer a chance to socialize and discuss concerns with other parents and staff. Afterschool programs are also an important forum for identifying and providing resources and services that strengthen families. Creating a program that reflects the ideas and desires of the parents involved leads to program improvements, increased attendance, and greater parental investment.

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