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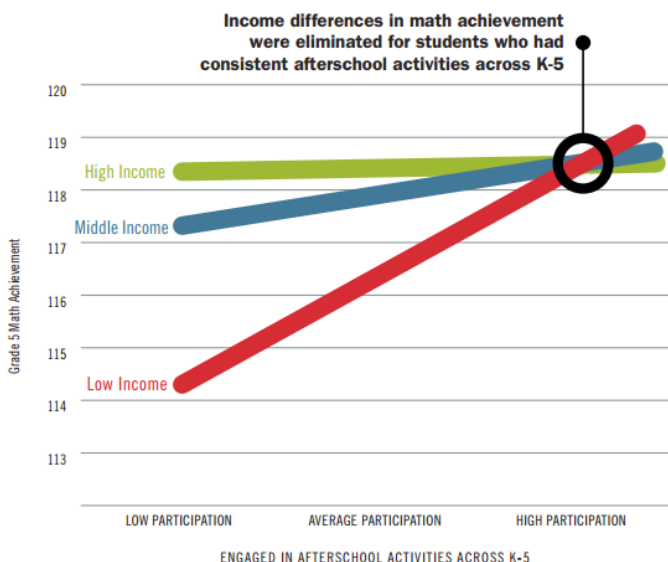
BUILDING COLLABORATIONS TO SUPPORT EXPANDED LEARNING

Importance of Collaboration

A recent survey of Rhode Island parents conducted by United Way of Rhode Island found that a majority of parents in the state are satisfied with the education that their children receive in school. However, 91 percent of parents also said that school was not enough, and to provide a full educational experience, afterschool programs and other supports were essential.¹ In this era of ever-shrinking budgets, collaborations between schools and afterschool programs not only make sense financially, but can dramatically improve student outcomes.

Many afterschool programs already collaborate with a diverse range of community partners who have a genuine interest in the well-being of youth and the communities they serve. Local libraries, museums, businesses, and universities all provide valuable space, resources, and expertise, which allow afterschool programs to diversify their programming and reach more youth. There is a real opportunity to include schools in that list of collaborators, and doing so will undoubtedly connect what happens during the school day to what happens in out-of-school time for children and youth.

Afterschool Participation Narrows the Math Achievement Gap¹



1. Pierce, K. M., Auger, A. and Vandell, D. L. (April, 2013). *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Consistency and Intensity of Structured Activities During Elementary School*. Unpublished paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Seattle, WA.

Afterschool Is a Real Solution Linked to Closing the Gap

SUMMARY OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

- Participation in afterschool programs increases student engagement and achievement.
- Benefits to students are even greater when afterschool programs align their programs to learning happening in the school day.
- The Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative, Expanded Learning Opportunities, Full Service Community Schools, and 21st Community Learning Centers provide great examples of how schools and afterschool have collaborated for the benefit of youth.
- There is an increasing need for policy and additional resources that support collaborative efforts.

The Case for Collaboration

Both schools and afterschool programs seek to provide youth with experiences and skills to reach their full potential, yet fundamental differences between the two often create barriers for collaboration. When schools and afterschool programs come together using their unique strengths, they can ensure a complementary array of learning and developmental opportunities that span the day and the year, and can even follow children from early childhood through high school.⁷

There is growing evidence that for children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, the traditional school day is no longer sufficient to combat the achievement gap. In 2012, Rhode Island NECAP scores showed that 55% of low-income fourth graders scored at or above the proficient level, compared with 83% of upper-income fourth graders.⁸ The achievement gap in part can be attributed to a disparate access to enrichment activities outside of the school day. Research shows that all children lose an average of 2.6 months of grade-level equivalency in math skills over the summer when they are not engaged in learning. In reading, middle-class children make gains over the summer, while low-income children fall behind.⁹ Students need more time to learn, but it is important that schools create different learning opportunities and environments for students,¹⁰ such as the Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative, which extends learning into the summer time by engaging youth in community-centered and service learning experiences.

Afterschool programs, previously regarded as mere add-ons to the end of the school day, can become essential to a school's strategy to improve student achievement and engagement. For example, ELOs for Credit, which provide an opportunity to obtain credit outside of the traditional school day, was one of the key strategies utilized by Central Falls High School to increase its graduation rate from 52% in 2010 to 70% in 2012.¹¹ Additionally, researchers found in the Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study that afterschool programs with strong relationships with principals and teachers had greater success improving youth's homework completion, effort, positive behavior, and initiative.¹² School and afterschool collaborations that embed experiential learning into the school day and offer expanded learning afterschool and in the summertime have great benefits for both partners, and most importantly, for the students they serve.¹³

EXAMPLES

Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative (HSLI)

The HSLI brings together community-based educators and school-day educators to co-create and co-deliver hands-on, enriching, and exciting summer learning curriculum for children across Rhode Island with remarkable results. Even after extensive training and planning, the success of the programs often relies greatly on each team's commitment to collaboration and continual improvement. In 2012, no students from HSLI showed summer learning loss from the beginning to the end of summer. In fact, 46% of students made gains in math, and 16% made gains in literacy. In two years, the HSLI has grown to 16 programs in 11 communities, currently serving over 1,400 youth across the state.²

Expanded Learning Opportunities for Credit (ELOs for Credit)

Since 2008, ELOs for Credit have allowed over 400 high school students from Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Providence to pursue learning opportunities outside of the traditional school day for credit. Students explore their interests and passions through hands-on learning delivered by a community partner. While students drive their own learning, the community mentor, a teacher mentor, and each student all collaborate to design learning objectives, scaffold ELO activities, and demonstrate mastery of the ELO topic.³

Full Service Community Schools (FSCS)

Full Service Community Schools (FSCS) are based on a collaboration between schools and community partners to provide a place for the community to come together during and outside the school day to solve problems and create innovative paths to success for students, teachers, and families.⁴ Pleasant View Elementary School, a FSCS located in Providence, has successfully collaborated with Providence YMCA Youth Services, Dorcas Place, and Family Service of Rhode Island to improve health and education outcomes for its students. In the 2012 NECAP, the school experienced a 14% increase in writing proficiency in their fifth grade class and also made substantial gains in math and reading.⁵

Providence After School Alliance (PASA) AfterZone

The AfterZone is an innovative citywide expanded-learning system coordinated by the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and Providence Public Schools. In collaboration with 70 community-based organizations, the AfterZone provides year-long programming for seven core middle schools. A key component of the AfterZone is its coordinated schedule and transportation, allowing parents and students to select from a wide range of AfterZone programs, such as Rocket Science, Martial Arts Club, and Latin Dance.⁶

Benefits of Collaboration

- + Increased access to experiential and hands-on learning opportunities that are not available during the traditional school day because of the time it takes to dive deeper into an activity.
- + More opportunities for youth to build essential skills that prepare them for success in college and careers, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration.¹⁴
- + Improved student outcomes, through aligned learning experiences that reinforce and provide context for curriculum concepts.
- + Improved student engagement in school, increased attendance, and fewer behavioral issues.¹⁵
- + Holistic family engagement strategies for youth, utilizing afterschool programs as an additional support and a natural link between families and schools.¹⁶
- + Increased sustainability and ability to leverage new resources, such as shared space, staff, funding, and data.



Linking school, afterschool, and summer learning programs is a powerful way to support learning and address achievement gap issues.¹⁷

—Dr. Heather Weiss,
Harvard Family Research Project

21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS (CCLC)

A STRONG EXAMPLE OF COLLABORATION

In Rhode Island, the 21st CCLC initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to afterschool learning. Funding seeks to increase student achievement and build capacity for family engagement in areas of high poverty. In collaboration with schools, CCLC programs provide a variety of services and opportunities for students in a supportive and engaging environment, including academic tutoring, enrichment, sports, family engagement, and career exploration/college access.¹⁸ The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct an evaluation of 21st CCLC program for the 2011-2012 school year. Here are some important findings of the report:

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

\$5,348,665

FY13 federal funding (down from \$5,643,199 in 2012)

12,388

Youth served for at least one day of programming, of which 37% were regular attendees

56

Centers across the state, 93% of which were school-based, and 79% of which offered summer programming

11

Hours of programming (on average) offered by centers per week

STUDENT IMPACT

- + **Positive impact on reading achievement** on state assessments for students who attended 21st CCLC programming for 30 days or more
- + **Fewer unexcused absences** for students who attended for 30 or 60 or more days than those who did not attend
- + **Fewer disciplinary incidents** among participants than non-participants

Source: American Institute for Research. (2013). *Rhode Island 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Evaluation.*

Overcoming Challenges to Collaboration

Given a shared investment in improving outcomes for youth, why are school and afterschool collaborations so limited? Successful collaboration takes significant time, resources, and commitment from both partners and requires schools and afterschool to renegotiate their traditional goals and approaches to find common ground and a shared vision. While 21st CCLC funding has spurred some effective collaborative efforts in Rhode Island, it has been insufficient to support the level of coordination needed to create community systems of collaboration.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards presents an opportunity for schools to partner with the OST field to create experiences that allow students to apply their learning and develop important “habits of mind,” such as persistence, adaptability, and problem-solving.¹⁹ With increas-

ing support from superintendents and principals, who at the national level have challenged its members to “build a new day for learning,”²⁰ now is the time to build systems that support school-afterschool partnerships, such as PASA’s AfterZone.

Collaboration begins through informal relationship building and increasing afterschool and school-day communication. However, strong leadership is necessary to build a sustainable collaborative environment. Principals and afterschool leaders need to work together to create more opportunities for collaboration, such as joint training and planning time that pushes school-day professionals and afterschool providers to learn about and discover promising practices from both worlds. It is through these opportunities that a shared vision for learning and developmental goals can be developed for the entire school community.

“PLEASANT VIEW DOESN’T HAVE BARRIERS; RATHER, WE HAVE INVESTED PARTNERS, DEDICATED TEACHERS, AND INVOLVED PARENTS. TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION TAKES COLLABORATION.”²¹

—Dr. Gara Field, Principal
Pleasant View Elementary School

Policy Recommendations

1. Continued federal funding at current levels for programs that support collaboration, such as 21st CCLC and Full Service Community Schools.
2. Guidance from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) on the importance of school and afterschool partnerships, and on the use of Title I and Title III funding for afterschool programming.
3. Funding organizations should offer meaningful incentives for schools and community partners to create collaborations.
4. Increased opportunities for joint training and technical assistance for schools and afterschool that promotes collaborative planning and the sharing of promising practices.

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