Afterschool In Action:
Promoting Middle School Success Through Innovative Afterschool Programs

2014

MetLife Foundation

Afterschool Alliance

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The Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation are proud to celebrate the sixth and final round of the MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Awards. Since 2007, we have worked together to raise awareness of the innovative and exemplary work taking place in afterschool programs across the country. Awardees have ranged from a program that engages low-income middle schoolers in a digital technology-rich science and engineering curriculum to a dance program that makes a 10-year commitment to students, almost all of whom are low-income, and offers classes, workshops and family programs free of charge. We have seen the transformational power of these and other afterschool programs first hand, hearing from program staff, students and parents. We have been pleased to shine a well-deserved spotlight on these programs that are helping to meet the needs of young people during the pivotal middle school years and moving us closer to the goal of ensuring all children have access to quality afterschool programs.

METLIFE FOUNDATION AFTERSCHOOL INNOVATOR AWARD CATEGORIES

AFTERSCHOOL AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Programs that have intentionally and successfully incorporated elements from the Common Core State Standards to support student learning toward the Common Core standards, enhance learning opportunities for students, strengthen critical thinking skills and improve academic skills.

AFTERSCHOOL SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

Programs that have demonstrated success providing an environment that strengthens the self-confidence, perseverance and emotional well-being of children with disabilities and other special needs, giving them the tools to learn, play and succeed side-by-side with children of all abilities.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE AND SUPPORTED IN THE HOURS AFTER SCHOOL

Programs that have demonstrated providing a positive, encouraging and supportive environment that helps students feel safe, reduces problem behavior, and keeps kids engaged and excited about learning.

LOOKING AT THE DATA: AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS USING DATA TO BETTER SERVE STUDENTS

Programs that have demonstrated success improving their programming and ability to serve children in their community based on data collected by the program, data gathered from partners (e.g., schools, other afterschool programs, and community-based organizations), and/or program evaluation data prepared by outside entities.

Photo credit: AS220 Youth

INTRODUCTION

> *"Middle school is a pivotal time for young people. Afterschool programs are a proven strategy for putting them on the path to success; however, far too many middle school youth lack access to high-quality afterschool programs. MetLife Foundation is pleased to join the Afterschool Alliance in recognizing and sharing exemplary models of afterschool programs that help middle school youth catch up, keep up, and get ahead in school and life."*
>
> *-Dennis White, President and CEO, MetLife Foundation*

Close to a decade ago, the Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation came together with an idea for a national award competition to discover and share the promising practices of programs providing critical supports to children in the afterschool hours. We also wanted to bring needed attention to the challenges and opportunities facing children today. The idea stemmed from the knowledge that afterschool programs were making a positive impact on children, families and communities across the country.

Afterschool programs can help shape the lives of the students who participate. Students like Esaí, who shared his experience in The Wooden Floor, a 2012 MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award winner:

"I was only 11 years old when I joined The Wooden Floor—never imagining how much that decision would impact my life. Looking back, things could have turned out much differently for me.

"I've had my struggles as a teenager. I even stopped attending The Wooden Floor for a few months because I was unhappy about money issues at home. The income from my father's barbershop fell short. I wanted to work so I could be one less thing for my parents to worry about. The staff helped me get back on track by not letting me quit and always encouraging me to keep studying and applying myself. They believed in me.

"It also helped when my friend Robert, a graduate of The Wooden Floor, sent me his graduation picture from Rochester University. I looked at that picture with his cap and gown and I saw myself. I got back in the dance studio where I could see life from a different perspective.

"Dance helped me get to where I am today— graduating high school and on my way to college."

Esai's story is just one of millions of student stories that speak to the inspiration, guidance, compassion and dedication afterschool programs and their staff deliver to young people during a time when more than 15 million of them are alone and unsupervised after school.

Over the years, the MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Awards have tackled a wide variety of topics—ranging from struggles students face such as bullying and dropping out of school; to academic enrichment such as literacy support and science, technology, engineering and math learning opportunities; to community and family connections such as service learning and parent engagement. The awards have also focused on the specific programming and services provided to engage and support older youth, and, more recently, concentrated on needs of middle school students—students who are at an important time of transition and development. Each topic demonstrates the learning opportunities afterschool programs afford

students that complement their school day lessons, the activities that engage students and spark their interests, and the integral supports afterschool programs provide to students, schools and families. To date, the awards have highlighted the work of 31 programs in 18 states and 27 cities—from rural Parma, Idaho, to the Bronx, N.Y.

This past year, we issued a call to the afterschool field for effective, innovative afterschool programs serving middle school students and demonstrating success incorporating the Common Core State Standards in an intentional and explicit manner into their curriculum,

providing an inclusive and supportive environment to students with disabilities and other special needs, keeping students safe and supported, and using data to continuously improve program services.

School principals and teachers, afterschool program volunteers and staff, program alumni, parents, and afterschool program partners enthusiastically responded to our call. We received close to 450 nominations—the most in the history of the awards. A huge thank you to the external reviewers and the Afterschool Alliance staff whose difficult job it was to evaluate and critique each nomination, deliberate, and narrow down the nominations to 17 programs to be included in the issue brief series, and, from this group, select five programs to receive a MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award.

You will find in this year's compendium an in-depth profile on each award winner, describing the programs mission, goals and activities. The compendium also includes program's recommendations from award winners based on their experience.

Although we have seen an increase in the number of children in afterschool programs, there remains 15.1 million children alone and unsupervised after school, and there are parents of more than 18 million children who would enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available to them. It has been our hope through the MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Awards to demonstrate the innovative and effective work taking place in afterschool programs nationally and to encourage policy makers, funders and the public to take action and lend their voice and support to afterschool programs. There remain much more work to be done to reach the goal of quality afterschool programs for all children, but together we can turn this goal into a reality.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S METLIFE FOUNDATION AFTERSCHOOL INNOVATOR AWARD WINNERS:

Common Core State Standards:

Baltimore Urban Debate League
Baltimore, Maryland

Students with Disabilities and Other Special Needs:

Big Thought's Thriving Minds After-School Program
Dallas, Texas

Keeping Kids Safe and Supported:

AS220 Youth
Providence, Rhode Island

Hope Street Family Center – Youth Center
Los Angeles, California

Data Use to Improve Programming:

BUILD, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois

Since 2008, the Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation have worked together to locate and shine a spotlight on afterschool programs providing new and fresh approaches to help middle school students grow and thrive in all aspects of their lives. The awards have recognized the exemplary work of programs in a variety of areas over the course of its six rounds, from programs' work connecting schools and communities to increasing parent engagement to promoting health and wellness to keeping kids safe and supported in the hours after school. To date, the MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Awards have recognized 31 afterschool programs in 18 states and 27 cities across the country. Looking at the additional afterschool programs that have been included in MetLife Foundation issue briefs for their impressive work, more than 60 programs have been featured. In all, afterschool programs from 30 states, plus the District of Columbia, and 62 cities have been highlighted, illustrating the widespread impact of afterschool.
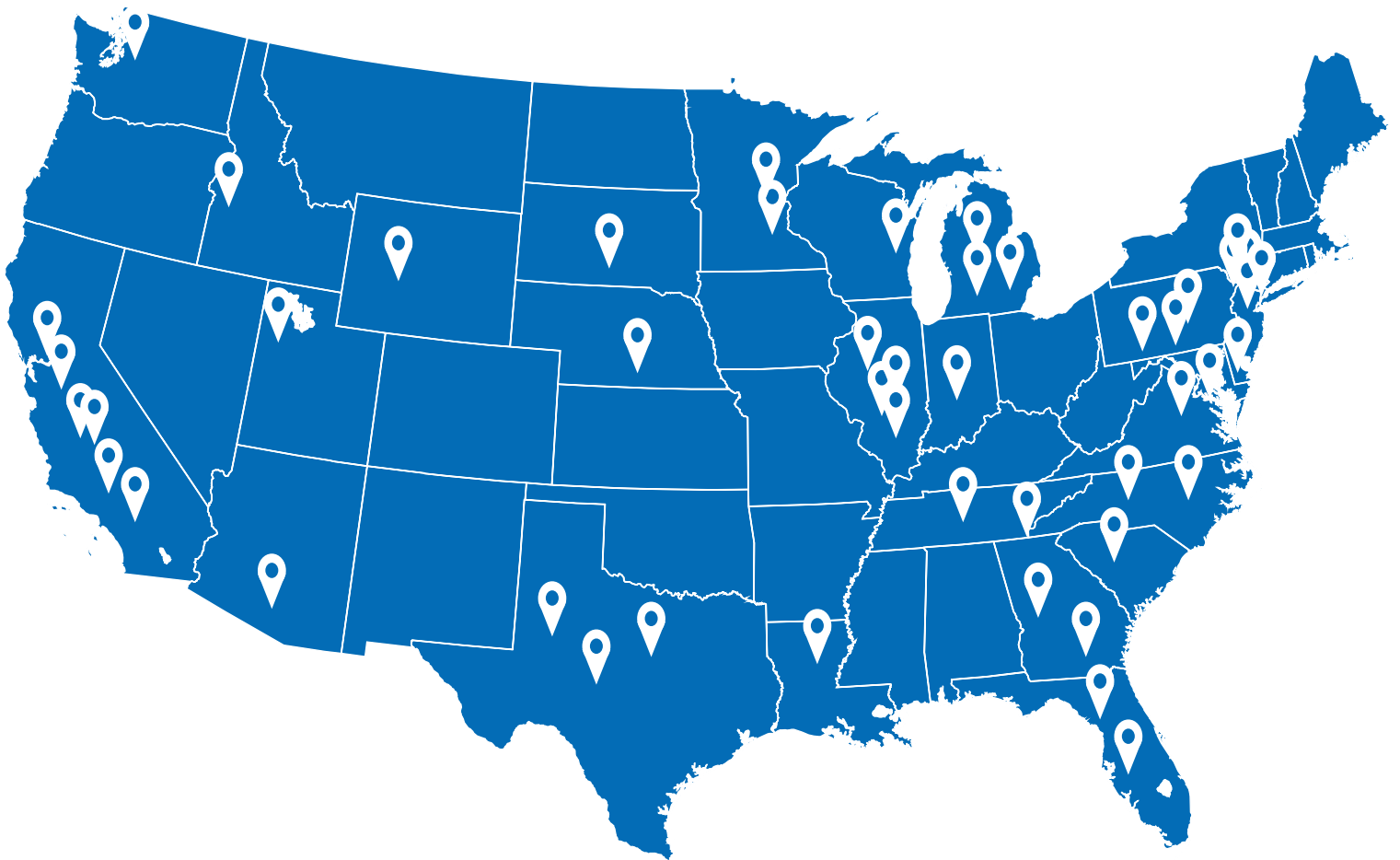
METLIFE AFTERSCHOOL INNOVATOR AWARD WINNERS

2014 METLIFE FOUNDATION WINNERS

AS220 Youth	Providence	R.I.
BUILD	Chicago	Ill.
Baltimore Urban Debate League Middle School Competitive Debate Program	Baltimore	Md.
Big Thought's Thriving Minds After-School	Dallas	Texas
Hope Street Family Center - Youth Center	Los Angeles	Calif.

2012 METLIFE FOUNDATION WINNERS

Green Energy Technologies in the City	East Lansing	Mich.
Kid Power, Inc.'s VeggieTime Project	Washington	D.C.
Latino Arts Strings & Mariachi Juvenil Program	Milwaukee	Wis.
Parma Learning Center	Parma	Idaho
Wooden Floor	Santa Ana	Calif.

2011 METLIFE FOUNDATION WINNERS

21st Century PASOS	Gettysburg	Pa.
America SCORES Chicago	Chicago	Ill.
Higher Achievement	Washington	D.C.
Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools	New Orleans	La.
Urban Arts/Project Phoenix	Oakland	Calif.

2010 METLIFE FOUNDATION WINNERS

The Bridge Project	Denver	Colo.
Cypress Hills/East New York Beacon	Brooklyn	N.Y.
Junior ACE Program	Sacramento	Calif.
Learning Through an Expanded Arts Program, Inc.	Bronx	N.Y.
San Antonio Youth Centers	San Antonio	Texas
The Science Club for Girls and C.E.L.L.S.	Cambridge	Mass.

2009 METLIFE FOUNDATION WINNERS

Ann Arbor Teen Center Neutral Zone	Ann Arbor	Mich.
Brigham and Women's Hospital's Student Success Jobs Program	Boston	Mass.
Challenging Horizons Program	Columbia	S.C.
Colorado MESA	Denver	Colo.
ICAN Peer Leadership Program	Chandler	Ariz.
RiverzEdge Arts Project	Providence	R.I.

2008 METLIFE FOUNDATION WINNERS

The After-School Corporation	New York	N.Y.
LA's BEST	Los Angeles	Calif.
Lincoln Community Learning Centers	Lincoln	Neb.
The Native Youth Club	Sioux Falls	S.D.

METLIFE AFTERSCHOOL INNOVATOR ISSUE BRIEF MENTIONS

Granger Turnaround Model at Castle Park Middle School	Chula Visa	Calif.
L.A.C.E.R. (Literacy, Arts, Culture, Education and Recreation) Afterschool Programs	Hollywood	Calif.
Nvision Afterschool Program	Los Angeles	Calif.
Woodcraft Rangers	Los Angeles	Calif.
Fremont Business Academy	Oakland	Calif.
Bridge the Gap College Prep's Afterschool Extended Learning Day Program	Marin City	Calif.
Popular Education and Enrichment for Refugees afterschool program	San Diego	Calif.
Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center's Afterschool Program	San Francisco	Calif.
THINK Together	Wildomar	Calif.
Unified Theater	Hartford	Conn.
Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program	Middletown	Conn.
New Britain YWCA STRIVE (Strength, Teamwork, Respect Individuals, Vision, Excellence) Youth Development Program	New Britain	Conn.
Youth Succeeding Under Pressure program	New Britain	Conn.
Sitar Arts Center	Washington	D.C.
High School Credit Recovery Program	Wilmington	Del.
School Health Interdisciplinary Program	Gainesville	Fla.
The Family Empowerment Program	Miami	Fla.
Raising Expectations	Atlanta	Ga.
ZONE 3	Doraville	Ga.
Spark Chicago	Chicago	Ill.
FUSE	Chicago	Ill.
Project Exploration/Sisters 4 Science	Chicago	Ill.
America SCORES	Chicago	Ill.
Child–Parent Center program	Chicago	Ill.
The Bellmont Middle School 21st CCLC program	Decatur	Ind.
MYTOWN (Multicultural Youth Tour of What's Now)	Boston	Mass.
The Food Project	Boston	Mass.
Project B.I.N.D. (Boston Inclusion Network for Disabilities)	Dorchester	Mass.
Girls Incorporated of Worcester	Worcester	Mass.
JA Academy	Worcester	Mass.
Wide Angle Youth Media	Baltimore	Md.
Baltimore Speaks Out!	Baltimore	Md.
Bully Me Not	Lansing	Mich.
ACES (Athletes Committed to Educating Students)	Minneapolis	Minn.
St. Paul Minnesota's 21st CCLC Pathways to Progress	St. Paul	Minn.
Citizen Schools North Carolina	Charlotte & Durham	N.C.
North Carolina's Young Scholars Program	Throughtout	N.C.
Carteret Arts & Sports Academy	Carteret	N.J.
Project PORTS	Cumberland County	N.J.
Family Dynamics Beacon Center Afterschool Program	Brooklyn	N.Y.
El Puente Beacon	Brooklyn	N.Y.
Brooklyn College Community Partnership	Brooklyn	N.Y.
Sunnyside Community Services Beacon Community Center	Sunnyside	N.Y.
The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families @ PS/MS 279	New York	N.Y.
Fresh Youth Initiatives	New York	N.Y.
Global Kids	New York	N.Y.
Lincoln Intermediate Unit Migrant Education Program	Chambersburg	Pa.
Generacion Diez	Adams County	Pa.
Oxford Stars	Oxford	Pa.
SquashSmarts	Philadelphia	Pa.
Ed Snider Youth Hockey Foundation	Philadelphia	Pa.
AfterZones	Providence	R.I.
Triple A (Academics, Athletics, Arts)	Tiverton	R.I.
Carolina Studios Music Technology program	Charleston	S.C.
Centerstone's Community Kitchen	Nashville	Tenn.
ClubGEN	Austin	Texas
YouthCity	Salt Lake City	Utah
Computers4Kids	Charlottesville	Va.
Kids Involved in Community Kindness	Hampton	Va.
YTECH Civic Voice Curriculum Programs	Seattle	Wash.
Teen Recreation Activities Program	Dubois	Wyo.

AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

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. For more information visit us at afterschoolalliance.org

METLIFE FOUNDATION

MetLife Foundation was created in 1976 to continue MetLife's long tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. Today, the Foundation is dedicated to advancing financial inclusion, committing $200 million over the next five years to help build a secure future for individuals and communities around the world. MetLife Foundation is affiliated to MetLife, Inc. To learn more about MetLife Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.
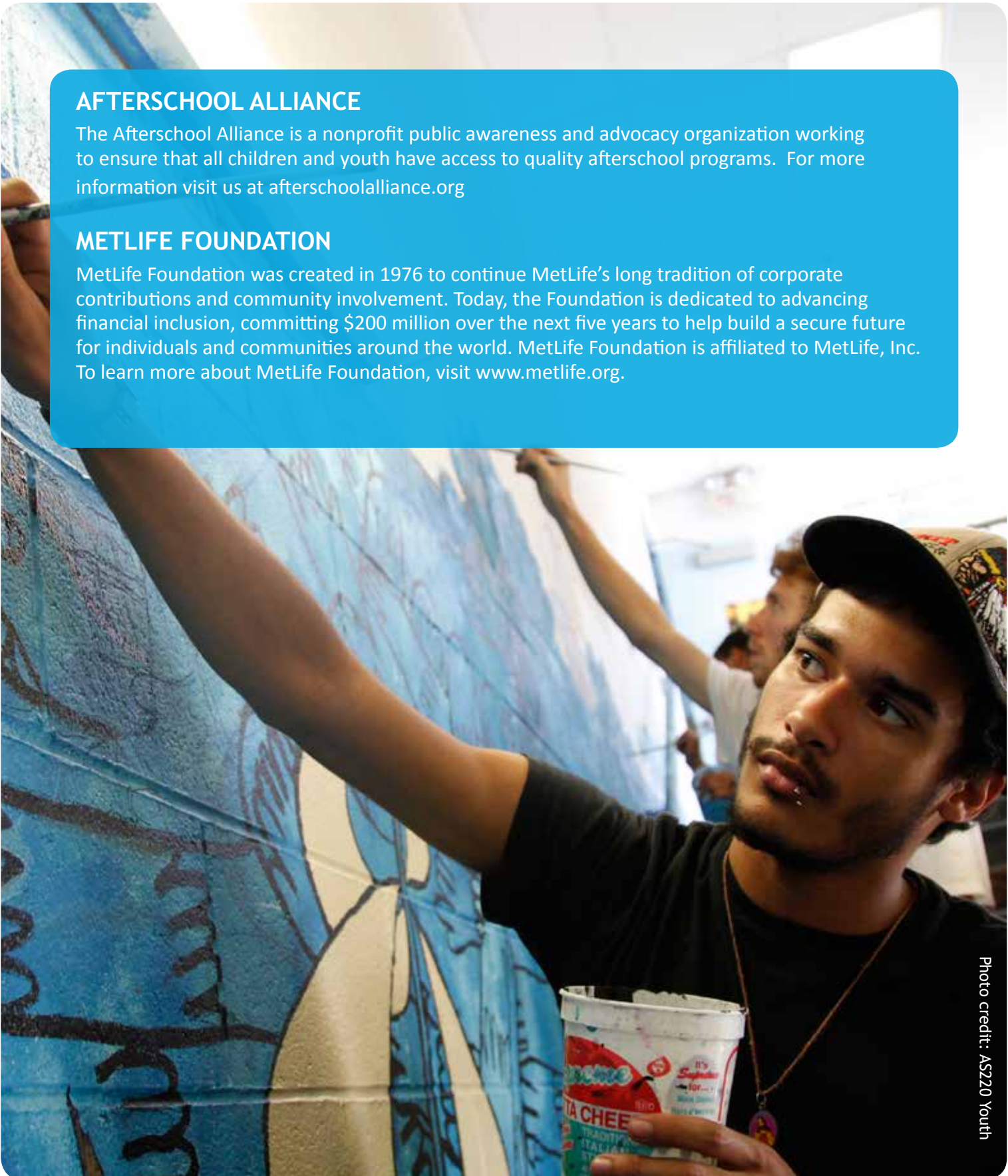
Photo credit: AS220 Youth

AFTERSCHOOL AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

2014 marks the 12th anniversary of No Child Left Behind—legislation aimed at making certain that esources for children, teachers and schools are allocated in a fair and equitable manner to help close the achievement gap and raise educational attainment nationwide. Yet, the recently released Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) scores for U.S.'s 15-year-old students raises the question: are students any more prepared to be successful college students, workers and citizens than they were 12 year ago? The PISA scores manifest the concerns that the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have been voicing since 2009—that more needs to be done to ensure that U.S. students are equipped with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in school and work, and to compete globally.

These concerns, supplemented by the belief that all states and all students should be held to the same high standards in order to best prepare them for college and careers, resulted in the development of the Common Core State Standards. The membership groups behind the Common Core—NGA and CCSSO—represent the governors and the state education superintendents in all 50 states. Thus far, 45 states have adopted the Common Core, with the majority of those states implementing the standards by this school year (2013-2014). As the Common Core State Standards begin entering more classrooms across the country, numerous surveys are highlighting the critical support still necessary to help accomplish the Common Core's goal of ensuring that all students leave high school armed with the knowledge and skills that will help them succeed in college, career and life. Afterschool programs can be—and in many
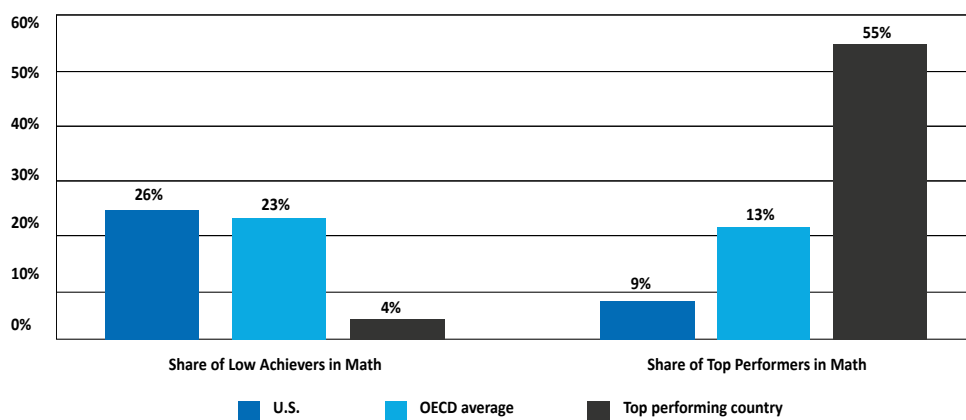
places, already are—an integral source of support for teachers, schools, children and parents. They are helping students develop the critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills that the Common Core emphasizes. Afterschool programs create engaging, fun, thoughtful and relevant learning experiences for children, allowing them to work on hands-on projects, delve deeper into content matter, collaborate with their peers, and develop perseverance and grit by focusing on the learning that takes place throughout projects, rather than solely on the end result. Working in partnership with schools and teachers, afterschool programs hold infinite potential to ensure all children are ready for college and the workforce, and have the competencies necessary to be successful, productive and engaged citizens.

How Do U.S. Students Measure Up Globally?

The latest release of PISA scores in December 2013 found that among the 34 OECD countries, the U.S. ranked 26th in math, 21st in science and 17th in reading.[1]* PISA, which administers rigorous international assessments to students in 65 countries across the world, allows countries to measure their own educational performance, compare differences in educational outcomes across countries, view differences in scores across their own country and evaluate the changes—

if any—in student performance over time. The latest PISA scores also revealed that the U.S. has a higher percentage of students performing at the lower levels of PISA's proficiency scale in math than the OECD average, as well as a smaller percentage of students performing at the highest level of PISA's proficiency scale compared to the OECD average. In reading and science, U.S. students fair slightly better, performing on par with the OECD average.
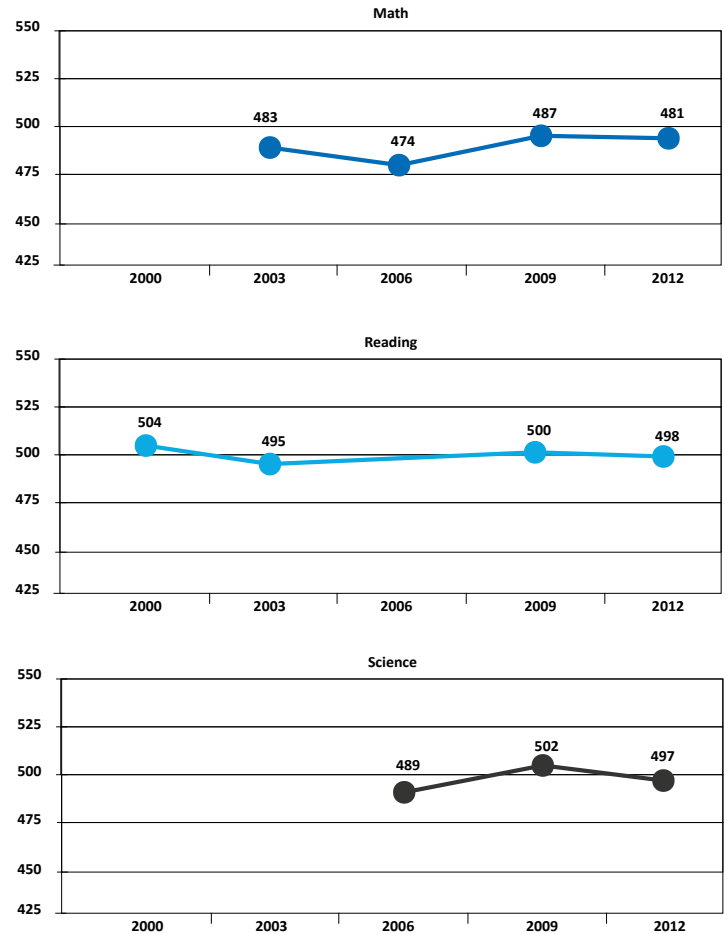
An additional significant finding from the PISA results is that there was no significant change in the reading, math and science scores for 15-year-old students in the United States.[2] Beginning with the first year where trends could be measured in each subject area, there has been no significant change in scores: in reading, there has been no significant change since 2000; in math, no significant change since 2003; and no significant change in science since 2006. Despite a continued emphasis on education reform and improving the education system in the U.S., the 2012 PISA scores demonstrate that much more work remains for the U.S. to remain globally competitive.

A Need for Greater Focus on 21st Century Skills

In the OECD's report on key findings from the 2012 PISA results, it stated:

> *"An implication of the findings is that much more focus is needed on 21st century skills—or higher-order activities—such as those involved in mathematical modeling (understanding real-world situations, transferring them into mathematical models, and interpreting mathematical results), without neglecting the basic skills needed for these activities."* [3]

U.S. PISA Scores

Math

[Chart showing Math scores from 2000–2012: 2003: 483, 2006: 474, 2009: 487, 2012: 481. Y-axis ranges from 425 to 550.]

Reading

[Chart showing Reading scores from 2000–2012: 2000: 504, 2003: 495, 2009: 500, 2012: 498. Y-axis ranges from 425 to 550.]

Science

[Chart showing Science scores from 2000–2012: 2006: 489, 2009: 502, 2012: 497. Y-axis ranges from 425 to 550.]

This statement echoes the call from parents and communities for a greater emphasis on critical thinking skills, problem solving skills and communication skills that can be applied across subject matter and throughout a child's school experience and in their future career experience. A 2013 PDK/Gallup poll on the public's attitudes toward public schools found that 80 percent of Americans strongly agree that schools should teach students critical thinking skills and 78 percent strongly agree that they should teach students communication skills.[4]

Employers also stand behind students learning these higher-order skills in school to create a well-prepared and competent workforce. A survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), conducted by Hart Research Associates in 2013, found that 93 percent of employers surveyed agree, "a candidate's demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major."[5]   More than 8 in 10 employers surveyed also agree that colleges should place more emphasis on critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills, the ability to analyze and solve complex problems, and the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing.

Employers also view these skills as becoming increasingly important over the course of time. The AACU survey found that almost all employers surveyed said their company/organization is asking employees to take on greater responsibilities and to use a broader set of skills (93 percent) while facing challenges today that are more complex than in the past (91 percent).[6]   Additionally, a 2012 American Management Association survey of close to 800 managers and executives found that 75 percent said that they believe 21st century skills and competencies (critical thinking, communication skills, collaboration/team building, and creativity and innovation) will become more important to their organizations in the next 3 to 5 years.[7] Just 1 percent said that they believed the skills will become less important.

What Are the Common Core State Standards and How Can they Help Better Prepare Students?

The findings detailed above—from PISA test scores to public opinion and employer demands—illustrate that more needs to be done to prepare U.S.'s students for

The average scores of 17 year old students on the Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress have aslo remained static through the years.

	READING	MATH
2012	306	287
2008	306	286
2004	307	285
1999	308	288

college and the workplace, as well as compete with their peers globally. The NGA Center for Best Practices and CCSSO worked together with a wide variety of stakeholders—such as teachers, school administrators, parents, education experts and policy makers—to develop standards in English language arts (ELA) and math that would build and bolster the skills and knowledge that students need to succeed in school, in work and in life.

The Common Core Basics

The primary goal of the Common Core State Standards is to ensure that students have the skills and knowledge they will need for their future success in college and career.[8]   To accomplish this goal, the Common Core has been designed as a set of uniform and consistent high standards in ELA and math. All states that adopt the standards will be guided by the same standards and set of expectations of students.[9]
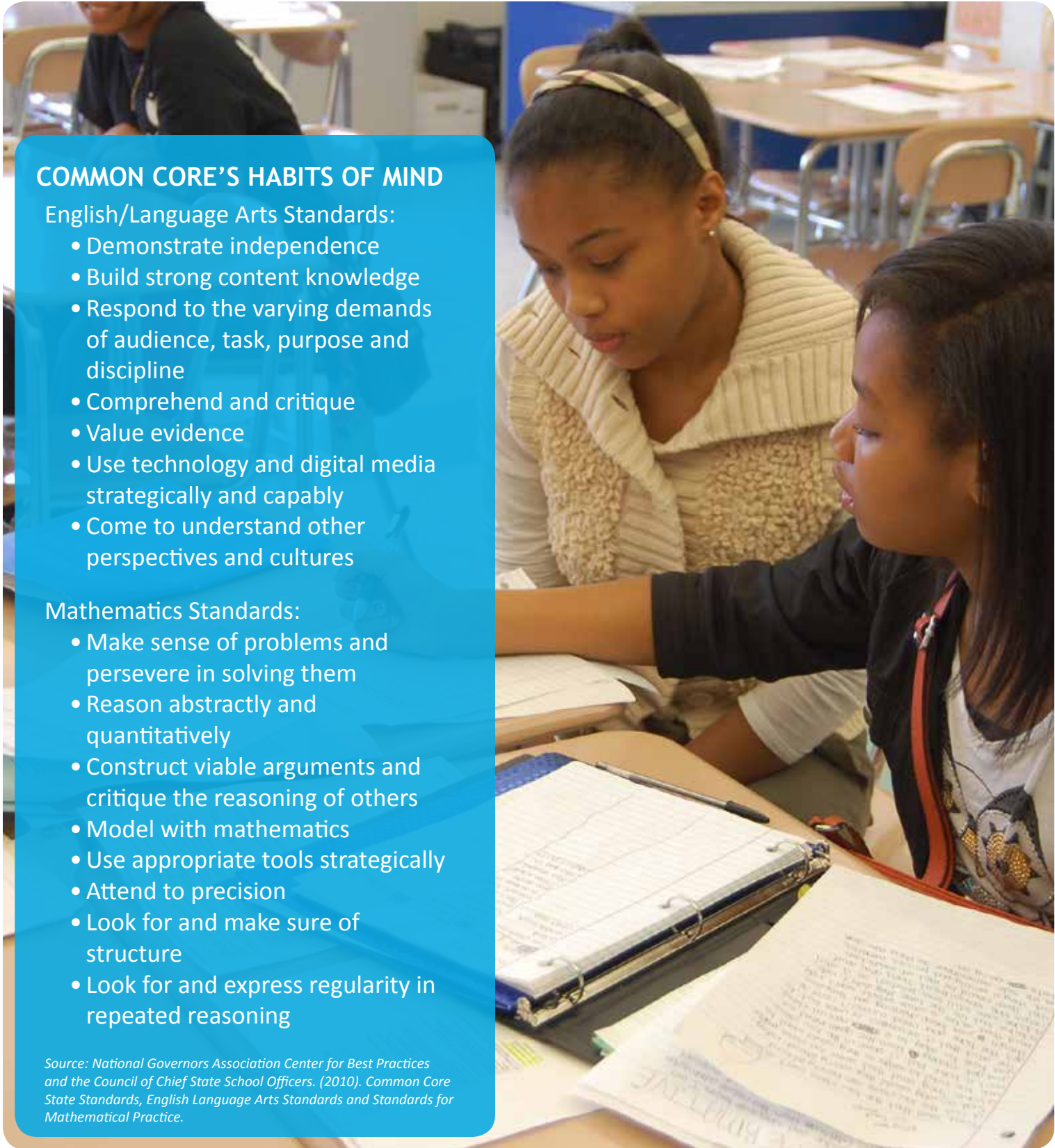
COMMON CORE'S HABITS OF MIND

English/Language Arts Standards:
- Demonstrate independence
- Build strong content knowledge
- Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline
- Comprehend and critique
- Value evidence
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably
- Come to understand other perspectives and cultures

Mathematics Standards:
- Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them
- Reason abstractly and quantitatively
- Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others
- Model with mathematics
- Use appropriate tools strategically
- Attend to precision
- Look for and make sure of structure
- Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning

> *"If our country is not just to compete, but also win in that global environment, we must continue to shake off the educational status quo and reinvigorate our schools and students with innovative ways of thinking, learning and doing. Put simply, the nation's future depends upon our willingness today to create a new educational framework, one that raises academic expectations of all children and provides them the skills, tools and resources needed to succeed."*
>
> *- William S. White, CEO and President, C.S. Mott Foundation*

What Common Core Supporters are Saying

A key argument in support of the Common Core is that it creates a clear set of expectations for students, parents and teachers across the country.[10] For example, proponents make the case that a student in California will be held to the same standards as a student in Florida, helping ensure that the quality of education is uniform across states. Along the same lines, if a family moves from Washington to Maine, both the student and the parents will know what skills and knowledge the student is expected to have mastery of and what skills and knowledge they will be developing before he or she steps into the new classroom.

Intertwined with proponents' argument that the Common Core creates a standardized set of expectations for students is that it also creates a standardized set of high and rigorous expectations for the skills and knowledge that students must learn. As written, the Common Core focuses on developing and deepening students' knowledge and skills—also referred to as "habits of mind"—that will provide the necessary foundation for students to succeed academically, in work

and in life.[11] All states participating in a 2013 Center on Education Policy survey agree that the Common Core is "more rigorous than the previous state standards" as well as agree that that the Common Core "will lead to improved student skills" in math and English language arts.[12] The standards do not focus on prescribing how teachers should deliver content, rather, they detail the skills and understanding students need to demonstrate by the end of each grade, with each grade-level standard building on the previous standard. [13]

Supporters of the Common Core also highlight that the standards are grounded in research, internationally benchmarked and based on a variety of sources—including academic articles, surveys of skills students will need when they enter college and/or join the workforce, standards from high-performing states, National Assessment of Education Progress frameworks for reading and writing, and Trends in International Mathematics and Science studies.[14]

Critiques of the Common Core

Concerns raised about the Common Core primarily revolve around implementation and cost.[15] Opponents of the Common Core are concerned with the standards' lack of pilot testing before their introduction into classrooms across the country, as well as the ambitious timeline to introduce the standards and associated assessments into schools. Of the 45 states that have adopted the Common Core States Standards—many of whom adopted them as early as 2010—more than 60 percent expect to implement the Common Core by the 2013-2014 school year.[16] Despite an aggressive timeline, a 2013 survey of states that have adopted the standards found that a majority have completed implementation plans for professional development (36%), curriculum guides or instructional materials (29%), or teacher-evaluation systems (29%).[17]

Additionally, the costs associated with the new assessments, as well as the implementation of the assessments and tying Common Core assessments to teacher and school accountability systems have been causes for concern.[18] A March 2013 American Federation of Teachers (AFT) survey of teachers found that 73 percent "worry that rushing into new assessments means that testing and test prep, not teaching and learning, will be the focus of implementation" and 83 percent favor "establish[ing] a moratorium on high-stakes consequences for students, teachers, and schools until the Common Core standards and related assessments are fully in use for one year."[19]
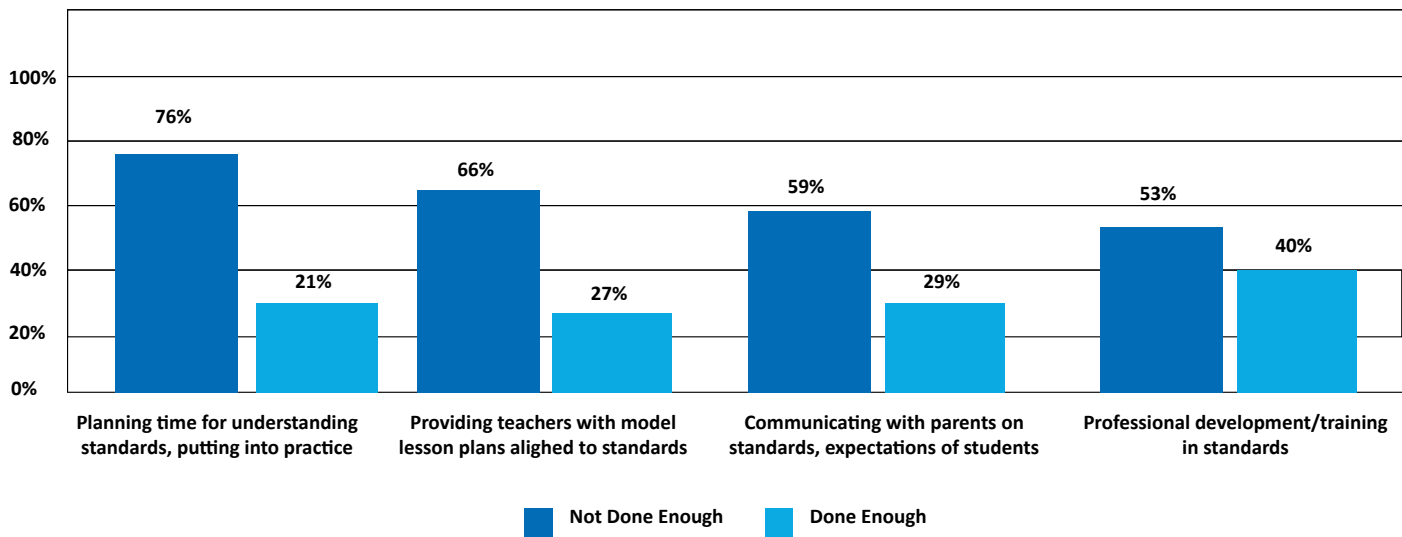
Is Everyone Ready for the Common Core?

Districts and schools across the country are preparing to implement the Common Core, providing professional development and training for teachers and educators through lectures, conferences, and collaborative training sessions with colleagues and professional learning communities. However, the same AFT survey found that overall, teachers did not feel fully prepared or supported to teach the Common Core.[20] Close to 2 out of 5 teachers

felt that their district was either "just somewhat" or "not prepared" to successfully implement the Common Core, more than three-quarters did not believe their district had done enough with regard to planning time for understanding the standards or putting the standards into practice, and more than half shared that they either had not received training on the Common Core or the training they received was inadequate.

Just as teachers believe that their districts can do more to help them prepare for the Common Core, they also believe that their districts should do more to help parents better understand what the Common Core is and what it means for their children. The AFT survey found that 59 percent of teachers surveyed said that their district had not done enough to communicate with parents on standards and expectations of students.[21] Teachers' observations seem to paint an accurate picture of the lack of familiarity parents, as well as the general public, have with the Common Core. PDK/Gallup's 2013 poll found that 62 percent of Americans have never heard of the Common Core. Of public school parents who had heard of the Common Core, close to 1 in 4 shared that they were not knowledgeable about the standards.[23]

Has your district done enough to prepare for the Common Core State Standards in the following areas:

Planning time for understanding standards, putting into practice: Not Done Enough 76%, Done Enough 21%
Providing teachers with model lesson plans alighed to standards: Not Done Enough 66%, Done Enough 27%
Communicating with parents on standards, expectations of students: Not Done Enough 59%, Done Enough 29%
Professional development/training in standards: Not Done Enough 53%, Done Enough 40%

Legend: Not Done Enough, Done Enough

How Afterschool Can Help

A shared view that becomes evident when reviewing both sides of the Common Core debate is that the standards—which are already being implemented in schools—are an approach to education that requires additional support for teachers, schools and school districts to ensure that all students will meet its high expectations. Afterschool programs—many of which already focus on engaging students in hands-on learning experiences and long-term projects that require students to ask questions, dive deeper into content, experiment with concepts and think critically about problems—are an ideal partner to support teachers and schools in their work with the Common Core State Standards.[24]

Out-of-school time is a fitting and opportune chance to incorporate the Common Core principles and further build the skills and knowledge expected of students. While there are strong examples of schools and expanded learning programs collaborating on implementing Common Core, there is great untapped potential for future collaboration to ensure that students succeed under Common Core. In a survey of school principals, while a significant majority integrated and aligned school day practices with the Common Core, just 27 percent said that they connected the Common Core work with expanded learning opportunities in their school, and 26 percent shared that they used expanded learning opportunities to support Common Core implementation.[25]

"Many afterschool and summer learning programs are well positioned to support learning practices and conditions that accelerate the 'habits of mind,' which represent the capacities and practices students should exhibit while learning the Common Core.."

- Taliah Givens, Former Program Director, Council of Chief State School Officers

The Afterschool Field Takes Charge

Statewide afterschool networks are playing a lead role in reaching out to schools and teachers and are finding ways to align afterschool programming with the school day. For instance, the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance hosted information sessions and presentations about the Common Core for Rhode Island afterschool programs, including discussions of the many ways afterschool programs' work currently aligns with the Common Core, and worked with the Rhode Island Department of Education on joint professional development with school day teachers and afterschool program providers on the Common Core.[26]

The New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition (NJSACC) launched Supporting Student Success (s3), a pilot program that provided 10 afterschool programs with individualized guidance and technical assistance to better understand the Common Core and determine how the standards relate to their programs. In addition to working with New Jersey afterschool programs, NJSACC worked with local schools and identified areas where the school and afterschool programs could collaborate and further integrate the Common Core into afterschool program activities.[27] In New York, the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) created a number of resources for afterschool program providers on the Common Core, including a document that outlines the various ways afterschool programs

can more intentionally align their curriculum with the Common Core.[28]

Afterschool Programs as an Ideal Space to Encourage Development of Habits of Mind

The afterschool field has long embraced an approach to learning that focuses on creating a highly engaging environment for students, and includes encouraging students to be active learners, to collaborate and communicate clearly with their peers, and to work in a low-stakes environment in which mistakes and failures are used as learning opportunities and as experiences to grow from and persevere through.[29] Afterschool programs across the country have already found ways to incorporate the Common Core in an intentional and explicit manner into their curriculum, providing extra support to schools and teachers in a variety of key ways:

Focusing on high-needs students and delivering additional attention to those who may struggle with their school-day lessons.

L.A.C.E.R. (Literacy, Arts, Culture, Education and Recreation) Afterschool Programs in Hollywood, California, provides critical, free academic, artistic, recreational and supportive services to approximately 2,000 at-risk middle school students—90 percent of whom qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program. L.A.C.E.R. students, 45 percent of whom are limited English proficient, are able to take part in the program's Word Wizard, a vocabulary game

"Zip codes might be great for sorting mail, but they should not determine the quality of a child's education or success in the future workforce...With common standards and assessments, students, parents, and teachers will have a clear, consistent understanding of the skills necessary for students to succeed after high school and compete with peers across the state line and across the ocean."

- Gov. Bob Wise, President, Alliance for Excellent Education

and competition that focuses on engaging and exciting kids about vocabulary, while simultaneously offering supplemental support in English language arts. Word Wizard does not focus solely on spelling, rather, students concentrate on learning the meaning of each word and mastering how to use words correctly in a sentence. L.A.C.E.R. also encourages their students to participate in writing and poetry workshops, essay writing contests, and a journal club to build on Word Wizard lessons and support overall academic success. Similar to the Common Core language standards, L.A.C.E.R. works to improve students' language comprehension, and help students understand the relationship between words and word context. During the 2012-2013 school year, more than 9 in 10 students participating in the Word Wizard program improved their English grades by at least one grade point, 67 percent improved their word definition scores and students receiving a D or F grade decreased by 61 percent.

Offering customized lessons and individual attention to students during the out-of-school hours.

Raising Expectations in Atlanta, Georgia, is a youth development and prevention organization that over the course of just one year provides at least 385 hours of mentoring and personal development support, 270 hours of tutoring and academic support, and close to three dozen home and school visits to children in 3rd through 8th grade through the program's Project D.R.E.A.M. (Developing Raised Expectations for

Adolescent Minds). The Academic Tutorial Academy is a focal point of Project D.R.E.A.M. and provides individualized academic support to students in the program—which includes academic learning plans and education goals specific to each student. Student report cards, teacher input, test scores and the program's own assessments of students are regularly evaluated and used to inform instruction for each student. Raising Expectations also employs a low student-teacher ratio of 2:1, giving much-needed personalized attention to students who come from low-income and underserved neighborhoods. Middle schoolers in Raising Expectations performed exceptionally well in English language arts, with more than 9 in 10 students meeting and/or exceeding expectations in reading and English language arts (95 percent and 91 percent, respectively). More than three-fourths of middle school students met and/or exceeded expectations in math. Additionally, during the 2012-2013 school year, 100 percent of Raising Expectations' seniors graduated from high school and 93 percent of graduates enrolled in college.

Focusing on supporting students' socio-emotional development and tying lessons to their personal interests.

Bridge the Gap College Prep's Afterschool Extended Learning Day Program (BTGCP) in Marin City, California, is located in a public housing development and provides comprehensive support to students from low-income families, many of whom struggle with food insecurity and housing instability. BTGCP works to engage their students and support their holistic development by tying academic enrichment to students' lives and their socio-emotional growth. In addition to basic academic skill-building in math and literacy, BTGCP connects academic lessons to students' personal narratives, community service opportunities and career exploration; focuses on group dynamics; promotes peer-to-peer teaching; and

exposes students to new and different environments, such as college campuses and cultural events. Similar to the Common Core's English language arts emphasis on actively taking part in conversations with peers, contributing clear and relevant information and ideas, analyzing and distilling ideas presented by others, and understanding other perspectives and cultures, BTGCP empowers their students by encouraging each student to share their stories, develops students' sense of self-awareness, and promotes tolerance and acceptance through group collaboration and listening. The program's student evaluation found that during the 2012-2013 school year approximately 40 percent of students in the program saw improvements in their GPA and all students who attended the program for the entire year demonstrated good behavior or improved behavior. Since the program began tracking their students in 2010, 100 percent of their students have graduated high school and 100 percent have been accepted into colleges or post-secondary institutions.

Using the challenge of competition and debate to build the habits of mind promoted by the Common Core.

The Baltimore Urban Debate League Middle School Competitive Debate Program (BUDL) in Baltimore, Maryland, prepares at-risk inner-city students for future success in college and career, serving more than 300 students in 17 low-income, urban public schools. Eighty-five percent of BUDL's students are low-income and one-fourth has special needs and/or disabilities. The afterschool program explicitly connects skills students develop in their debate program to the skills and habits of mind promoted by the Common Core, including critical thinking and valuing evidence. Leveraging the challenge and excitement of debate for students, BULD works with students to develop arguments for both sides of an issue, research evidence to support their positions, develop deep content knowledge of subject

matter, actively listen to the arguments presented by others, and evaluate and critique the merit of stances on subject matter. Middle school students in BUDL performed better on Maryland School Assessment tests than their peers who did not participate in the program. BUDL students' average reading score was 88 percent compared to 72 percent for non-participants and BUDL students' average math score was 79 percent compared to 62 percent for non-participating students. In 2012, 95 percent of BUDL's seniors attended college—35 percent were accepted into a 2-year college and 60 percent were accepted into a 4-year college.

Helping students get ahead of the curve and preparing them for the Next Generation Science Standards.

While the Common Core is limited to English language arts and math, the rationale behind Common Core has spurred the development of similar standards in other subject areas, such as the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). While the NGSS are newer and states are still planning implementation, there are afterschool programs that are already aligning their programming with the NGSS. For example, the **Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program (CPEP)** in Middletown, Connecticut, offers science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programming to approximately 1,500 students each year. Supporting the NGSS framework of standards of practice, the afterschool program encourages students to ask questions and define problems, develop models and test their theories, collect and organize data, draw conclusions, and communicate their findings and apply them to new situations. A CPEP evaluation of its program found a 60 percent increase in students indicating a desire to pursue a STEM career and 90 percent of students were accepted into a 2-year or 4-year college.

Conclusion

The Common Core is a frequent topic of conversation among educators, educational experts and policy makers. However, much more needs to be done to familiarize students and parents with the standards, and teachers and schools require additional supports to ensure they are able to raise student achievement to meet the standards of the Common Core. Expanded learning programs are a valuable space to foster academic and socio-emotional support for children and have much to offer students, teachers and families as the Common Core enters classrooms around the U.S.

Recognizing the importance of supporting a child academically, socially and emotionally, afterschool and summer learning programs have long valued a learning environment that reflects many of the themes emphasized by the Common Core, such as active learning, collaborative environments, projects that promote perseverance, and creative and critical thinking. Collaboration between schools and afterschool and summer programs will complement learning under the Common Core and can help prepare children for whatever their future may hold for them, and help them to thrive in all aspects of their life.

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK:
BALTIMORE URBAN DEBATE LEAGUE

Founded in 1999 as part of a national initiative by the Open Society Institute-Baltimore to bring debate to high school students living in urban areas, the Baltimore Urban Debate League (BUDL) has since expanded its reach, and currently works with elementary, middle and high school students in 30 schools across the city. BUDL first began as a high school debate program serving 80 students in eight high schools. After witnessing BUDL's successful high school competitive debate program, the Baltimore City Public School System asked BUDL to bring its program to public middle and elementary schools in 2004. Currently, BUDL serves more than 700 students across the city, including approximately 300 middle school students—85 percent of whom are African-American, 85 percent of whom qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program and a quarter of whom have special needs or disabilities—at 17 schools.

BUDL's mission is to use debate-based educational activities to help students become engaged learners, critical thinkers, leaders and advocates, preparing them for success in college and career. Coaches in each school work with their team in one hour sessions, two to five times a week during the school year. During each session, students take part in a wide-range of debate practice activities. Students research the topic they will be debating, find evidence to support their positions, share their findings with the group, and evaluate the merit and strength of the findings presented. They also take part in debate drills—practicing articulation, speaking clearly and speaking loudly. Teaching critical thinking and active listening are also key components of the program. Students read their speech in front of the group, and the group takes notes, asks questions about the speech and presents rebuttals. This cross examination helps students to think analytically about an argument, the points that may be made to dispute their case and additional evidence that will strengthen their case. Practice debates are also a part of BUDL sessions,

Program Name: Baltimore Urban Debate League – Middle School Competitive Debate Program

Category: Afterschool and the Common Core State Standards

Location: Baltimore, Md.

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 270

Year Started: 1999

Main Sources of Funding:

- Local Government
- School District
- Corporate Businesses
- Foundations
- Individual Donations

Recommendations for Other Programs:

- Be creative and open when thinking about programming, partnerships
- Develop and keep strong partnerships with schools
- Stay connected to the needs and interests of your students
- Be forward thinking and responsive to challenges and opportunities forecasted

Photo credit: Herman Farrer

developing students' familiarity and knowledge of the topic, helping with their presentation skills and building their self-confidence.

Recognizing that the skills and knowledge developed through debate naturally align with the Common Core State Standards, through a grant with the Baltimore City Public Schools in 2012, BUDL hired teachers familiar with the Common Core to finds ways to intentionally link the Common Core to their work. Now with program goals and skills aligned specifically to the Common Core, BUDL is providing professional development to teachers throughout Baltimore City Public Schools. BUDL staff works with classroom teachers to embed argumentation and debate skills into classrooms in a manner that will work in a classroom setting. In addition to helping students learn under the Common Core, this partnership with schools is helping to create a culture of debate, further engaging students in learning and helping them develop the critical thinking and analytical skills that will help them to succeed in and out of the classroom.

BUDL students are also able to participate in debate tournaments, workshops and special projects during the school year. Workshops include watching movies that spur debate and conversation to presentations from special speakers, such as high school and college debate champions and lawyers, to helping students prepare forms for college. BUDL students are also able to take field trips that relate

"At BUDL, our students see our program as a space where it's okay to be smart— where they don't have to hide who they are and what they think. Our students' voices are fundamental to our work and we strive to help them realize that their voices do matter. When students recognize the power that their ideas and opinions hold, they become more invested in their work, in their community and in their future."

- Pam Block Brier, CEO, Baltimore Urban Debate League

to their lessons. For example, in the first quarter of 2014, BUDL took their middle school students to the Maryland State House for the General Assembly's opening ceremony where students were able to ask questions of the legislators. As students move on to high school, they are able to take part in more advanced special projects. For example, BUDL's A-GAME program (Attendance & Grades Amplify My Excellence) addressed the difficulties students experience getting to and from school. Students worked with their schools to ascertain the various transportation issues and worked with the Maryland Transit Administration to share feedback and ideas.

The program also offers a six-day summer camp, where students are able to work with peers from schools across the city on the topics they will be covering during the upcoming school year. From Monday through Friday, students research their topic and practice arguments and debating. On the final Saturday, BUDL holds a debate tournament for students to make their case.

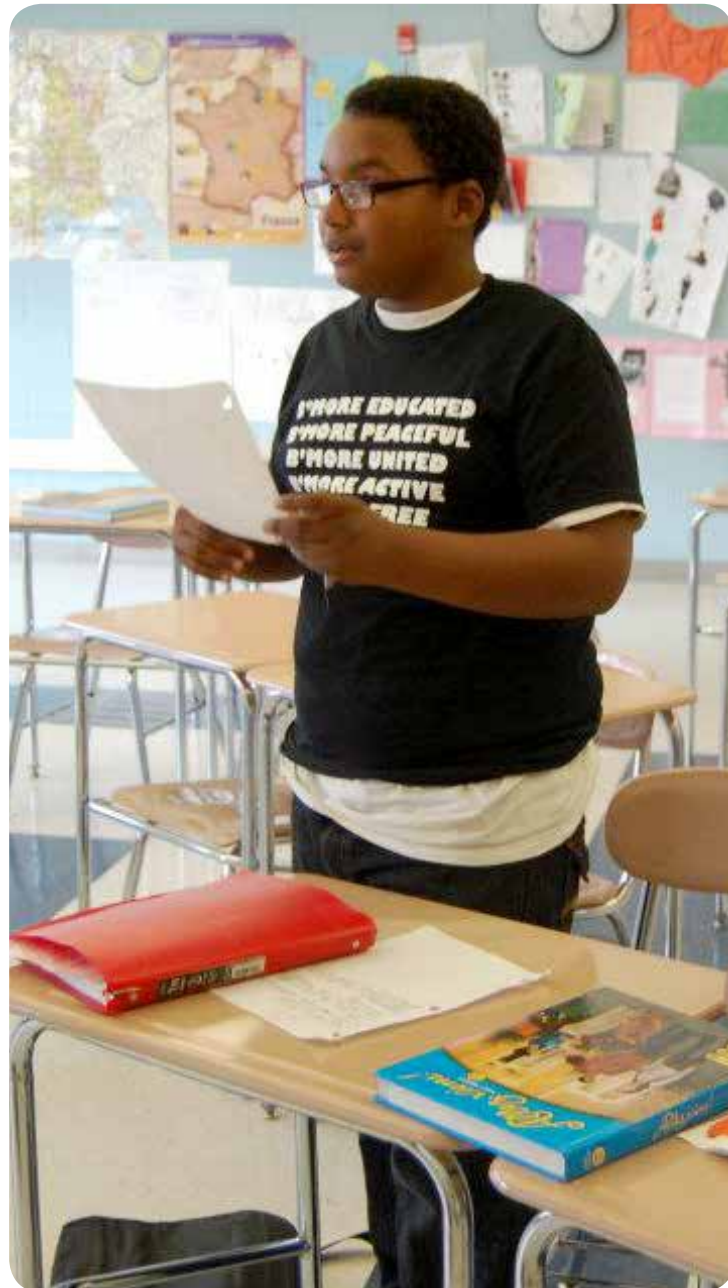A central aspect of the afterschool program is recognizing, respecting and raising up students' voices. Through debate, students are each able to develop their individual voice and realize that their opinions have value and are of consequence. BUDL students have shared with staff that at times they feel that when they are in school, no one listens to them. But, when they debate, their peers and adults hear their point and listen to what they have to say.

BUDL also shows students that their opinions are important by incorporating student feedback into programming. Students are able to propose topics to cover during the year and vote and select the final debate topics. During the 2013-2014 school year, students selected as their two topics: 1) lowering the voting age to 16 years of age and 2) Baltimore should install solar panels on all of its school buildings. The focus on student voice has led to a strong sense of community within the program. Many students who begin the program in elementary school continue taking part through middle and high school; of the two BUDL high school seniors who won the National Association for Urban Debate League's annual championship, one joined BUDL in elementary school and other joined in middle school.

Caring and engaging coaches are another aspect of BUDL that encourages student participation. With a coach to student ratio of 1:7, coaches work closely with students to support their development in debate and help them realize the power and importance of their opinions and voice. Ninety-five percent of BUDL staff are school day teachers, which allows students to seek their help in and out of school.

In 2012, 95 percent of BUDL seniors were accepted into a 2-year or 4-year college, a majority of whom joined the program in middle school. BUDL also reported that in 2012, middle school participants performed better on the MSA reading and math assessment tests than nonparticipants. Eighty-eight percent of BUDL students scored proficient in reading vs. 72 percent of nonparticipants, and 79 percent of BUDL students scored proficient in math vs. 62 percent of nonparticipants.

Looking toward the future, BUDL's goal remains the same—engaging as many students as possible in debate. However, they continue to explore different avenues to accomplish this goal. The program will use their MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award to provide additional training to BUDL debate coaches to continuously improve on ways to link debate skills to the Common Core State Standards, as well as promote the middle school debate program to increase the number of middle schoolers involved in debate.

AFTERSCHOOL SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

Based on the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics' most recent report, 13 percent of public school students—approximately 6.4 million students—were identified as having a disability or other special need and served by a federally supported special education program.[1]* Research shows that, compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities and other special needs face additional challenges as they move through school and into adulthood. For instance, during the 2010-2011 school year, just 63 percent of students with disabilities graduated from high school, compared to 78 percent of all students.[2] Additionally, the National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs found that while more than one-third of parents reported that their child's special needs never affected their ability to do things other children do, close to 2 out of 3 parents agreed that their child's daily activities were moderately or consistently affected.[3]

However, research also shows that when students with disabilities graduate from high school, their academic and career opportunities improve, and their means to live independently and satisfaction with their independence also improves. Inclusive learning environments—where students of all abilities can take part in meaningful learning experiences together—support positive growth and development, helping students of all abilities improve academically, socially and emotionally. Inclusive learning environments have the capacity to provide the supports necessary to help students of all abilities to stay engaged in school, do well in school and graduate from school. Although 95 percent of students with disabilities were enrolled in regular schools and approximately 6 in 10 spent the majority of the school day in inclusive classrooms, these students can greatly benefit from additional opportunities outside the school day to take part in academically enriching environments and learn alongside their peers without disabilities.[4]
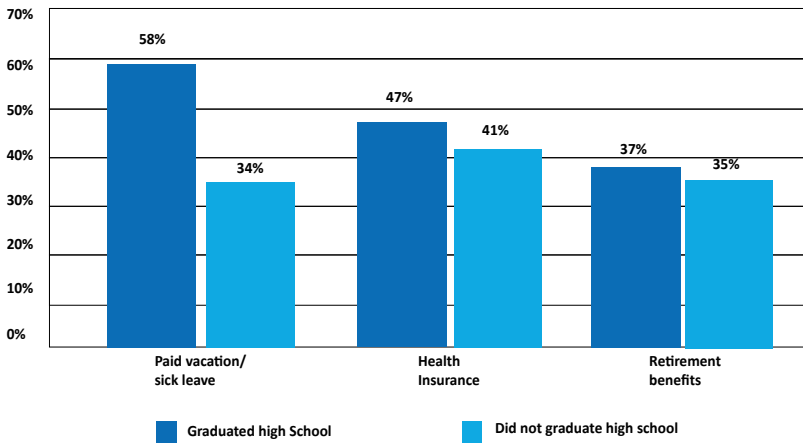
Afterschool programs can broaden students' horizons in an informal learning environment, where the focus can be on the experience and the activities, rather than the final result. They can also provide the extra support to help combat school disengagement and the risk factors associated with a student's decision to drop out of school, which can start in the middle school years.[5] These out-of-school opportunities, bringing together students with and without disabilities and other special needs, allow all students to understand and appreciate one another's differences and similarities, helping students gain the acceptance, confidence and strength to succeed in school, graduate from school, and thrive in their career and life.

The difference a high school diploma makes for students with disabilities and other special needs

Supporting the academic success of students with disabilities and other special needs is necessary to help them thrive in their adult lives. Even though students with disabilities hold enormous potential and have the capacity to be productive and independent citizens, overall, students with disabilities were less likely to attend a postsecondary school, earned less and were less likely to live independently than their peers without disabilities. The 10-year National Longitudinal Transition Study of outcomes of young people with disabilities—following them from high school into young adulthood, found that 60 percent of young people with disabilities had enrolled in a two-year or four-year college within eight years of leaving high school compared to 67 percent of young people without disabilities.[6] Young people with disabilities also earned an average of $10.40 per hour compared with $11.40 per hour for young people without disabilities. Additionally, 45 percent of young people with disabilities were living independently, compared to 59 percent of young people without disabilities.[7]

The Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau define children with special health care needs as, "Those who have or are at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally."

Employment Benefits

	Paid vacation/sick leave	Health Insurance	Retirement benefits
Graduated high School	58%	47%	37%
Did not graduate high school	34%	41%	35%

Graduating from high school is an important milestone for every student. It improves a person's ability to move on to higher education, find a job, and become an independent and successful adult.[8]   A full high school education also positively affects aspects of a young person's life outside of college and career. Students that graduate from high school are less likely to get in trouble with the law and more likely to become civically engaged.[9]   Completing high school is just as important an accomplishment for students with disabilities and other special needs as it is for all other students.

The longitudinal study found that students with disabilities who completed high school were more likely to enroll in a two-year or four-year college, have a job, and show financial independence than students with disabilities and other special needs who did not finish high school.[10]   The young people who graduated from high school were also less likely to have been engaged in criminal activity and more likely to be involved in their community.

- **Higher education**: The longitudinal study, released in 2011, reported that close to half of students with disabilities who graduated from high school enrolled in a four-year

college and 21 percent enrolled in a two-year college. Just 13 percent of students with disabilities who did not graduate from high school enrolled in a two-year college and less than 1 percent enrolled in a four-year college.[11]

- **Employment and independent living**: Examining employment, the longitudinal study found that more than half of young people with disabilities who had a high school degree were employed at the time of the interview, whereas 38 percent of young people with disabilities who had not finished high school were employed.[12]   Interestingly, those young people who had not finished high school earned slightly more per hour than those that did finish ($9.80 per hour vs. $9.50 per hour), however, they were also less likely to have benefits, such as paid vacation or sick leave, health insurance and retirement benefits.

Maintaining a checking account, a savings account and a credit card are forms of financial independence. Young people with disabilities and other special needs who graduated from high school were close to two times as likely to have a savings account and checking account as young people with disabilities and other special needs who did not graduate. They were also more likely

Students with disabilities who maintained a...

	Savings account	Checking account	Credit card
Graduated high School	49%	47%	32%
Did not graduate high school	25%	25%	19%
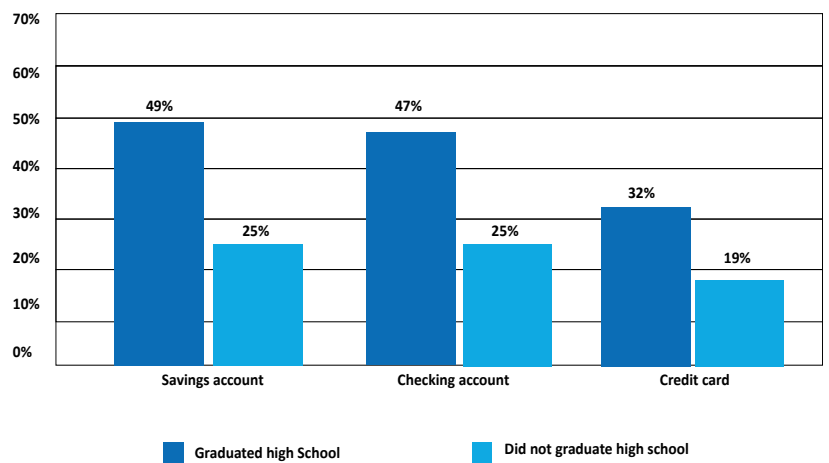
to have a credit card.[13]   Although surveyed young people with disabilities who had completed high school were slightly less likely to have lived on their own than those who had not graduated from high school (50 percent vs. 55 percent), they were much more likely to be satisfied with their independence (73 percent vs. 64 percent).[14]

- **Criminal activity and community involvement**: Young people with disabilities who did not graduate from high school were also more likely to have been arrested and have an encounter with the criminal justice system. Close to 60 percent of young people with disabilities and other special needs who did not complete high school had been arrested at least once, compared to 32 percent of students with disabilities and other special needs who had graduated from high school.[15] More than three-quarters of young people with disabilities who did not graduate from high school had been arrested, spent the night in jail, been on probation or parole, or were stopped by the police for an offense other than a traffic violation, whereas 51 percent of their peers who graduated from high school had been in the same situations.[16]

Differences were also seen when looking at community involvement. Close to half of young people with disabilities and other special needs who graduated from high school participated in a community group or lessons or classes outside of school, compared to less than one-third of their peers who did not finish high school. Sixty percent of young people with disabilities who finished high school were also registered to vote, compared to 48 percent of those who did not graduate.[17]

Bringing together students of all abilities to learn and grow side-by-side

A guide on inclusive practices emphasizes that inclusion is not merely creating a space where students with and without disabilities are brought together. Rather, inclusion is participation that is meaningful and the environment created promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance.[18]   Research has found that fully including students with disabilities and other special needs into classrooms and programs positively impacts their engagement, performance, attitude and behavior.[19]   Providing equal access to educational opportunities also helps students with disabilities and other special needs develop friendships and other life skills, such as social and communication skills.[20]   One such study found that in addition to a positive effect on the behavior of students with disabilities, there was no negative effect on the academic performance of students without disabilities.[21]

Studies have also found, and researchers agree, that both students with and without disabilities benefit from inclusive settings.[22]   For instance, one study

"The promise of inclusion is not a one-way offer of help to children with intellectual differences; it is instead a two-way offer to children with and without differences to learn how to live, work, and learn together in ways that elevate the aspirations, knowledge, and creativity of all."

- Timothy P. Shriver Chairman of the Board, Special Olympics

SELECTED QUOTES FROM UNIFIED THEATER'S STUDENTS, PARENTS & SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

"Unified Theater made me realize that everybody is equal and should get a chance to shine. People may not realize it, but people of all abilities are all very special, unique, and equal."

"[Unified Theater] gave my daughter her first experience with students of varying abilities and as a direct result she has planned a career in either occupational or speech therapy."

"The variety of diverse groups is wonderful to see. You can look at Unified Theater and feel the unity of our school."

found that a camp that brought together both students with disabilities and those without allowed students to appreciate one another for their similarities and differences.[23] A separate study found that bringing together students with and without disabilities created an environment to confront, challenge and reject stereotypes.[24]

Providing an inclusive learning environment: Afterschool programs supporting students of all abilities

Students with disabilities and other special needs can benefit from additional time spent in inclusive settings that can help them with their homework, develop new knowledge and skills, cultivate social skills, and build relationships. As evidenced above, compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities face their own set of challenges as they transition out of high school and into their adult lives. But, those students with disabilities who are able to graduate from high school are placed in a much better position to succeed than those who do not.

Along with inclusive settings during the regular school day, afterschool programs can provide the much-needed support middle school students with disabilities and other special needs require and help them to thrive alongside their peers without disabilities. Afterschool programs have the flexibility to provide an inclusive environment that allows students with disabilities and other special needs to learn and play next to students without disabilities, explore their interests, develop social and leadership skills and grow friendships.[25] Focusing on the middle school years, afterschool programs can address the risk factors that lead to students dropping out of school and give them the tools to successfully move through middle and high school. Across the country, afterschool programs are providing an inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and empowers students with disabilities and other special needs in a variety of ways:

Developing a student-led model that encourages students of all abilities to become leaders, instilling confidence and raising self-esteem.

Unified Theater is an afterschool program located in Hartford, Connecticut, whose mission is to foster inclusion and develop student leaders through the arts. The program was founded in 2004 by Micaela, a middle school student who believed that students of all abilities should be able to take part in and enjoy the benefits music and theater programs have to offer. Micaela's cousin—who was close to her age—was born with disabilities that limited her ability to walk and talk. The two shared a love for music, but Micaela was frustrated that she didn't see more students with disabilities in her music and theater programs. Today, with 30 percent of the program's students with a disability or special needs, Unified Theater continues to place inclusion and leadership development first.

Their youth-led model focuses on empowering students to be leaders, letting creativity rule and placing the spotlight on ability. Students learn playwriting, choreography and set design, as well as leadership skills necessary to produce a play, such as strong communication as well as money and project management. The program creates a culture of support, respect and inclusion. It teaches students what a truly inclusive environment looks like, how to place ability first and how to bring inclusion into the community. Students, parents and school administrators have positive feedback for the program. More than half of parents agreed that the program improved their child's home and school behavior. Students unanimously agreed that the program promoted tolerance in their

school and/or community, 88 percent of administrators agreed that the program is more inclusive than other programs in their school, and 100 percent of school administrators agreed that the program promoted tolerance in their school. More than 9 in 10 students agreed that the program improved their self-confidence (94 percent).

Offering a variety of activities that allows students of all abilities to explore various interests and take part in activities they may not have the chance to otherwise.

Located in Tiverton, Rhode Island, **Triple A (academics, athletics, arts)**, is an afterschool program at Tiverton Middle School (TMS) that partners with the Special Olympics, the local public library, the TMS Athletic Boosters Club and TMS TEMPO (the music program boosters) to provide TMS students a variety of activities. Serving more than 300 middle schoolers annually—a quarter of whom have a disability or special need—Triple A offers programming that has students of all abilities working side-by-side with one another. Tiverton Middle School, in conjunction with Bradley Hospital, also hosts the region's autism, behavior support and alternate assessment programs. This brings in students with disabilities and other special needs from communities around Tiverton to participate in Triple A.

> *"[Afterschool and summer learning programs] provide more natural environments where children with disabilities can experience joyful learning and develop genuine friendships with same-age peers without disabilities."*
>
> *- Kara N. Smith and Mary M. Shea, Kids Included Together*

Triple A leverages school and community partnerships to offer inclusive programming for students in Tiverton and the surrounding areas. Students in the program are able to take part in sports; arts; digital media; anti-bullying lessons; a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) club; literacy programs; and community service. For example, in collaboration with the Special Olympics, the program offers "Unified Basketball," a basketball program in which students with disabilities and other special needs team up with their non-disabled peers to play schools throughout Rhode Island. Another example is through a partnership with the local library: 14 times a year Triple A students, library staff, and parents all read the same book, talk through what the book's messages are, what each person gained from the book and are able to talk with the book's author through a Skype session. Local artists are also brought in to work with students on activities, including "Theater for Social Awareness," "Creating Characters Through Improvising," and "Dance Troupe and Vocal Performance." Triple A staff meet regularly with their partners to review program data to help determine how to improve activities, if new activities need to be added and budget for the upcoming years.

Valuing parent feedback to tailor programming to best support students.

Thriving Minds After-School is a program of Big Thought, a nonprofit organization in Dallas, Texas, that works with and coordinates more than 100 nonprofits providing afterschool and summer learning programs to students. Thriving Minds After-School also partners with the Dallas Independent School District and close to 100 artists, nonprofit organizations and volunteers. The program's primary objectives are to help students think critically, increase literacy expression and understanding, and improve students' social skills. Their Explorer Reading Club at

BIG THOUGHT'S THRIVING MINDS AFTER-SCHOOL BY THE NUMBERS

- **92** percent of students were promoted to the next grade

- **53** percent of students improved their grade in math

- **50** percent of students improved their grade in language arts

- **42** percent of students showed improved attendance

- **100** percent of principals agreed that Thriving Minds After-School Program helped students become college and career ready

Marsh Middle School has a strong parent engagement component, surveying families every year to determine what activities parents believe will most benefit their children. Serving more than 100 students—85 percent of whom qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program and 40 percent of whom have a disability or special needs—Thriving Minds After-School uses parent and student feedback to tailor programing. For instance, when parents and students expressed an interest in homework workshops, the program built in time for homework assistance.

The Explorer Reading Club began when Marsh Middle School's special education teacher saw that a number of his students attended the Thriving Minds After-School Program. Together, the special education teacher and the Thriving Minds After-School Program's site manager designed a program that focused on creating an interactive and social experience for students with disabilities and special needs that worked to support a student's academic and personal development. Students of all abilities in the program are brought together to discuss books they have read—critiquing story plots, characters and literary elements; sharing stories they have written; and providing feedback to one another in a respectful and supportive manner. An independent evaluation for the 2012-2013 school year found that 42 percent of students improved their school-day attendance, more than half improved their language arts grades and more than 9 in 10 were promoted to the next grade.

Eliminating barriers to participation, ensuring that students of all abilities are able to benefit from all that afterschool programs have to offer.

Project B.I.N.D. (Boston Inclusion Network for Disabilities) is dedicated to serving students with disabilities and other special needs in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and surrounding areas. The afterschool program offers a variety of activities for students, making individualized modifications in programming to ensure that students of all abilities are able to participate. Project B.I.N.D. students are able to take part in a wide range of programming—from academic enrichment to career services to physical activity to arts. Students can learn about song writing, audio production, and filmmaking; engage in job training activities; play on intramural team sports; draw and sculpt; and learn to play an instrument. Helping students to become strong and independent individuals is also central to the program. Students work on developing leadership skills and life skills, such as learning how to purchase a subway fare, ride the train and navigate the city.

With a mission to ensure that all children are able to "access life-enhancing afterschool programs," Project B.I.N.D. places an emphasis on reaching out to young people with special needs who may not otherwise be able to participate in an afterschool program. In addition to tailoring programs to serve all students interested in attending, Project B.I.N.D. also keeps program fees low—just five dollars per year—to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation. One hundred percent of the students in the program have special needs or a disability and all students also qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Helping more afterschool programs serve students with disabilities and other special needs

Creating a fully inclusive environment does not come without its challenges. Afterschool programs and their staff also need support and resources to effectively serve students of all abilities. A research report by Kids Included Together, an organization specializing in providing support to programs serving students with and without disabilities, concluded that staff members who received training and professional development were more confident and comfortable serving students of all abilities.[26] A survey of afterschool providers in New Jersey found similar results, where programs that had positive experiences including children with disabilities and other special needs had more professional development and experience with children with disabilities and other special needs.[27] Ongoing professional development, partnerships and positive reinforcement are supports necessary to build staff confidence, improve programming, and promote an accommodating and inclusive environment. Statewide afterschool networks are also providing support and guidance to afterschool programs regarding how best to fully include students of all abilities. For example, the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition's (NJSACC) NJ Afterschool Action—an online newsletter—featured "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in After School and Summer Programs," a document highlighting the legal responsibilities of afterschool programs, best practices and additional resources.[28]

Conclusion

Providing inclusive learning environments in and out of school gives students with disabilities and other special needs the opportunity to take part in activities that support their development, encourage perseverance and highlight their capabilities. Afterschool programs create a safe space where students of all abilities can learn and grow side-by-side, respecting and appreciating one another's similarities and differences. The flexible and adaptable nature of afterschool programs make them a valuable source of support for all students—including students with disabilities and other special needs—helping them reach their full potential in school, in work and in life.

Photo credit: Herman Farrer

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK:
BIG THOUGHT'S THRIVING MINDS AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Located in Dallas, Texas, Thriving Minds After-School Program is part of Big Thought, an organization that has worked for more than 25 years in Texas fostering partnerships between different sectors to develop creative learning experiences for students. Thriving Minds After-School started about 10 years ago as a 21st Century Community Learning Center offering academic enrichment programs. In 2006, the Thriving Minds After-School program came together with Big Thought to expand afterschool and summer learning opportunities for students throughout the Dallas area. Today, through Big Thought's coordination of more than 100 nonprofits providing afterschool and summer learning programs, Thriving Minds serves more than 115,000 children and families annually.

> *"Thriving Minds After-School Program hires staff with a genuine love of kids and a passion for working with all children. Our staff show our students the value of knowledge and encourage them to be life-long learners by connecting learning to their everyday lives, letting them choose their activities, and providing a safe space where they feel comfortable expressing who they are and exploring what their interests are."*
>
> *- Kristina Dove, Lead Community Site Manager at Marsh Middle School, Thriving Minds After-School Program*

The Thriving Minds After-School Program located at Thomas C. Marsh Middle School serves more than 100 students. Eighty-five percent of Thriving Minds' students qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program, and 60 percent are Latino. Forty percent of students have special needs or other disabilities. The program is open year-round and offers a variety of creative and project-based academically enriching activities, including theater and dance, debate, visual arts and leadership development. Students in Thriving Minds are exposed to Dallas' art and culture scene, visiting local museums such as the Perot Museum of Nature and Science—attending plays and operas, and going to the Fair Park—a culture and entertainment center in Dallas.

An independent evaluation for the 2012-2013 school year of Thriving Minds' students at Thomas C. Marsh Middle School found that:

- 42 percent improved theirs school-day attendance,
- 50 percent improved their language arts grades,
- 50 percent improved their social studies grades,
- 53 percent improved their math grades, and
- 92 percent were promoted to the next grade.

Partnerships are central to the program: partnerships with families, schools and the community. Family engagement is highly important, and the program employs a family engagement specialist that works on providing activities specifically for parents. For example, Thriving Minds helps parents earn their GED, offers workforce readiness workshops and holds Zumba classes. The program partners with the Dallas Concilio—an organization working to bridge the gap between parents and the educational system—to provide parents English language lessons. By offering activities and support specifically for parents, Thriving Minds

Program Name: Big Thought's Thriving Minds After-School Program

Category: Supporting Students with Special Needs and Other Disabilities After School

Location: Dallas, Texas

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 70

Year Started: 2006

Main Sources of Funding:

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers

- USDA Afterschool Snack, Meal and Summer Food Programs

- School District

- Corporate Businesses

- Foundations

- Individual Donations

Recommendations for Other Programs:

- Build a strong partnership base with your students' families, schools and the local community

- Strong partnerships do not happen overnight. It can be a long and extensive process, but once established, it will have been worth the time and effort involved

- Provide enrichment activities that look different than the school day—be creative and make learning tangible and fun for students

After-School encourages increased parent engagement and strengthens the program's relationship with their students' parents and increases the level of trust between the program and students' families. Parents are also invited to monthly celebrations at the program, where students share their work and are recognized for their progress.

Additionally, Thriving Minds promotes family engagement by incorporating parent input into their programming. Each year, parents are surveyed to determine what activities will most benefit their children. For example, when parents requested additional academic and homework assistance for their children, the program carved out specific time for students to receive homework help, and the Explorer Club made sure that their content aligned with the state requirements for reading and writing.

Thriving Minds meets regularly with the middle school principal and staff, the PTA and other school organizations to ensure open communication between the school and the afterschool program. School day staff are also contracted through the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) to teach at Thriving Minds. A survey of school principals found that they unanimously agreed that Thriving Minds helped students become college and career ready.

As a part of their focus on partnerships, Thriving Minds helps foster increased communication between their stakeholders. For example, the program holds parent workshops to help them navigate the school system and explain how they can communicate more effectively with schools. Thriving Minds brings in staff from Dallas ISD to help demystify the city's educational process for parents, as well as establishes a relationship between parents and the school district.

Community partnerships are also valuable to Thriving Minds. They work with more than 100 partners, including community-based organizations, religious organizations and businesses. Partners volunteer at the program, participate in events hosted by Thriving Minds and support Thriving Minds' programming. For instance, employees from business partners and local churches volunteered at Thriving Minds' health fair, and a professional folklorico dancer visited the program to teach students the art of folklorico dance. Thriving Minds students can learn to swim through the Dallas Park and Recreation Department or investigate the structure of plants at the Dallas Arboretum.

In addition to responsiveness to their students' families, Thriving Minds After-School Program is also responsive to the needs of their students. The Explorer Club was started when a Thomas C. Marsh Middle School special education instructor noticed that a number of his students attended Thriving Minds. Working with the Thriving Minds site manager, the two explored how activities offered by Thriving Minds could better serve students with special needs and other disabilities. Together, they designed a program that created an interactive, social experience for students with disabilities and special needs to support a student's academic and personal development.The Explorer Club's four primary objectives for its students' development include: increasing information and understanding, improving literary response and expression, developing critical analysis and evaluation skills, and experiencing and developing better social interactions with peers.

In the Explorer Club, students of all abilities are brought together to discuss books they have read—proposing arguments about characters and plot devices, discussing literary elements, and writing down their perceptions. Students share stories they have written and provide feedback to one another in a respectful and supportive manner. The club creates a supportive environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, helping them gain confidence in their ability to think critically and present their opinions. The sense of community developed between students with and without special needs or other disabilities establishes an inclusive environment that promotes understanding, belonging and acceptance.

The MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award will be used to improve technology offered at Thriving Minds After-School Program—including increasing access to online books and magazines and obtaining programs that gamify reading and literacy—as well as to help provide more educational field trips during the summer months.

KEEPING KIDS SAFE AND SUPPORTED IN THE HOURS AFTER SCHOOL

The gap in time between the ringing of the last school bell and when parents arrive home from work has long been a concern of families, law enforcement and community members due to the potential dangers and risky behaviors that take place after school. More than 15 million students—including approximately 3.7 million middle schoolers[1]—are alone and unsupervised between 3 and 6 p.m., the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex.[2] The hours after school when children are on their own are not just a time of risks, it is also a time of lost opportunities to help students grow and develop the skills and competencies to make positive life decisions that can lead to their future success.

Strong support and guidance are critical to middle schoolers during a life stage that shapes their trajectory into high school, college, career and beyond.[3] Afterschool programs are an environment where students can go to feel safe and find staff and mentors who they trust. They also offer a space where students can express their creativity, find their voice, learn how to deal with challenging situations, and better understand how the choices they make will impact their lives and the lives of those around them. Access to afterschool programs can help keep middle schoolers safe, keep them engaged in learning, and help them take advantage of their full potential as they navigate school, peers and their surroundings.

Navigating the Afterschool Hours

A study of working parents found that a significant number of parents are extremely worried about what their children are doing in the hours after school while they are still at work.[4] Authors of the study named this specific worry, "Parental Concern about After-School Time," or PCAST, and found that the indicators associated with parents having a higher risk for PCAST include having children who are often unsupervised and being more concerned about their child's behavioral and/or social issues.

Parents' concern for their children after school, especially if their children are alone and unsupervised during those hours, is not unwarranted. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) reports that the incidence of violent crimes committed by youth peaks in the hours immediately following the end of the school day, with close to 1 in 5 juvenile violent crimes taking place in the hours between 3 and 7 p.m.[5] Additionally, more than one-fifth of violent crimes involving youth as victims occurs during the same timeframe. OJJDP reports that, "the risk of violent juvenile victimization was 60 percent greater in the four hours after school than in the 8 p.m.-to-midnight period on non-school days."[6]

Violence and victimization are not the only factors that worry parents when thinking about their unsupervised children. Risky behaviors, such as substance abuse are additional concerns of parents. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)—a national survey monitoring health-risk behaviors among youth and young adults—tracks the activities of young people that are related to the top causes of illness, death and social problems in the U.S.: use of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs as well as sexual behaviors that can lead to unintended pregnancies.[7] The YRBSS found that in 2011, of the more than 25 million youth ages 12 to 17, more than 1 in 10 smoked a cigarette, more than 1 in 4 drank alcohol and approximately 1 in 5 used an illicit drug in the past year.[8] In a recent report, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) analyzed data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) and after combining NSDUH's 2010 and 2011 data, estimated that in the past year there

were approximately 7 million youth ages 12 to 17 who drank alcohol, close to 5 million youth who used an illicit drug and 3 million youth who smoked cigarettes.[9]

Examining when students first begin experimenting with cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and sex, the YRBSS found that approximately 1 in 5 students were younger than 13 years old when they first drank alcohol, 1 in 10 students smoked a whole cigarette for the first time before they were 13, 8 percent of students were younger than 13 years old when they first tried marijuana and 6 percent of students first had sex before they were 13 years old.[10] The behaviors that children in middle school and younger engage in are important because they can be telling of behaviors later on in life. A CDC's report on middle schoolers states that these behaviors—such as smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use—are, "frequently interrelated and are often established during youth and persist into adulthood."[11]

How Can Afterschool Programs Help?

A positive environment where students can build their social and emotional skills alongside adults who they trust—learning to work well with others and communicate effectively, understanding how to deal with challenging situations productively, and making sound and thoughtful decisions themselves—will help students gain the competencies that will serve them well as they move on through life.[12] A national survey of teachers found that close to 7 in 10 teachers believe social and emotional learning (SEL) are an important part of a middle schoolers' in-school experience. More than 9 in 10 teachers agree that teaching social and emotional skills will probably or definitely improve relationships among students and reduce bullying. An overwhelming majority of teachers also believe that a larger focus on SEL will have positive effects on students' school attendance and graduation, college preparation, workforce readiness and overall life success.[13] However, 3 in 10 teachers say that their school places too little emphasis on developing students' social and emotional skills. Overall, more than 80 percent of teachers surveyed report that time is the biggest challenge to providing SEL.

Out-of-school-time programs are not only a safe environment for students before school, after school, on weekends and during the summer months, they provide activities that can build off the lessons students learn during the school day, help children further explore their interests and have an outlet to express themselves, employ staff who fulfill the role of mentors, and offer an ecosystem of support that raises student confidence in their abilities and their future possibilities.

> "… The fight against crime should not start in the courtroom—it should start by providing our young, at-risk children with opportunities to grow, learn and make choices that keep them off the streets. After-school programs give students a secure and fun place to be, while providing academic support and developing social skills that help to nurture productive and involved citizens.
>
> …Investing in our children now is the best means of reducing future costs associated with prosecution and incarceration. Help us fight crime by fighting for our children."
>
> - Monroe County District Attorney Sandra Doorley

TAKING A LOOK AT MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' SCHOOL DAY EXPERIENCE

Unfortunately, the out-of-school hours are not the only time that middle school students are susceptible to victimization or taking part in risky behaviors. In 2011, close to 3 in 10 students from 12 to 18 years of age reported being bullied at school; 6th grade students had the highest percentage of reported bullying incidents (37 percent). Based on the Department of Education's "Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012," victimization rates at school for students ages 12-14 was 55 per 1,000 students, higher than the victimization rates at school for 15 to 18 year olds (44 per 1,000 students). Middle school students also reported being "afraid of attack or harm at school" at higher levels than 11th and 12th graders.

Robers, S., Kemp, J. and Truman, J. (2013). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from   http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013036.pdf.

A wealth of research confirms that afterschool programs' impact and influence has progressed beyond acting solely as a safe haven for youth in the community. Afterschool programs are helping students tackle challenging circumstances and avoid risky behaviors, teaching kids how to communicate effectively with their peers and interact positively with others, and encouraging them to believe in themselves—helping them develop fortitude and persevere through difficult situations they may face. Studies have found that benefits associated with students participating in afterschool programs include:

- **Decrease in criminal activity and risky behaviors:** Studies have found that students participating in quality afterschool programs are less likely to take part in criminal activities and risky behaviors than students not in the programs. A 2007 evaluation report found that children attending LA's BEST are 30 percent less likely to participate in criminal activities than their peers who do not attend the program.[14] Researchers estimate that for every dollar invested in the program, the city saves $2.50 in crime-related costs. A separate study looking at participants in Chicago's After School Matters program found that students in the program participated in risky behaviors such as selling drugs, using drugs and taking part in gang activity at a much lower rate than matched non-participants.[15]

- **Awareness of the dangers of risky behaviors**: An evaluation of New York City's Beacon Community Centers found that 77 percent of students agreed that the program taught them about the dangers of alcohol, drugs and other risky activities.[16]

- **Decrease in aggression and other problematic behaviors**: Afterschool programs have the ability to help students improve their behavior and avoid situations that negatively impact their academics and future aspirations. For instance, a study of

California's After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) found that students regularly participating in the program were less likely to be suspended than their peers who did not participate in the program.[17] An evaluation of After-School All-Stars in Chicago, Illinois, reported that participation in the program led to close to a 20 percent reduction in school suspensions.[18]

- **Improved social skills**: A number of evaluations have found that students participating in afterschool programs see improvements in their ability to interact with others. A study of New Hampshire's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) found that 97 percent of principals agreed that the afterschool program enhanced students' social skills and a study of Wisconsin's 21st CCLC programs found that more than half of regularly attending students improved their classroom behavior.[19]

- **Improved self-confidence**: A meta-analysis found that students participating in quality afterschool programs saw significant increases in their self-perception, self-confidence and self-esteem.[20]

- **Feeling safe**: Students in afterschool programs report feeling safe. For example, an evaluation of 21st CCLCs in Tennessee found that close to 9 in 10 students said that they felt at least somewhat safer as a result of attending their afterschool program.[21]

Quality afterschool programs have the ability to help students make positive, healthy life decisions. When students learn to think critically about choices they make in their lives, have a space where they feel safe and comfortable being themselves, and know they have adults in their life who they can turn to and trust, they have the supports and tools they need to learn, grow and do well in school, work and beyond.

Afterschool Programs Meeting the Needs of Students During the Out-of-School Hours

Middle school is a time of transition for students. It is a period in their lives when they experience mental, emotional and physical growth as they explore who they are and manage academic and peer pressures. Afterschool programs from New Britain, Connecticut, to Los Angeles, California, are working with middle school students and ascertaining how to best help them thrive in school and out, and teaching them how to navigate this time in their life. Finding ways to help address the specific needs of the middle schoolers in their community, programs are keeping students safe and supported in a variety of ways during the hours after school:

Targeting at-risk children in the community and developing a program that directly responds to the issues and challenges they face.

New Britain YWCA STRIVE (Strength, Teamwork, Respect Individuals, Vision, Excellence) Youth Development Program, located in New Britain, Connecticut, focuses on reaching middle school girls identified as at-risk by providing academic enrichment, health and wellness programming, and overall positive youth development. Stemming from research that identified a shortage of afterschool programs for middle schoolers in New Britain, New Britain YWCA STRIVE is currently the only afterschool program in the community specifically for middle school girls. Girls in the program are identified as at-risk based on their academic performance in school, school day absences, living in an area identified as underserved by the local Youth Initiative or living in a situation that would place them at-risk as identified by New Britain Community Service agencies.

New Britain YWCA STRIVE's primary goal is to build a sense of safety and security for girls in the program, of which 9 in 10 qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program. Employing staff who serve as female role models and work to build positive relationships with girls in the program, the free afterschool program aims to empower students, addressing topics such as peer pressure, leadership development, healthy relationships, body development and image, and overall health. Program surveys found that in 2013, 94 percent of parents surveyed agreed that New Britain YWCA STRIVE helped students develop life skills, confidence and resilience and 8 in 10 students surveyed shared that the program helped them to build self-confidence.

 "...I'm a big proponent of us having strong education systems everywhere and a strong proponent of afterschool programs. I think that's a time when a lot of our children are getting into trouble and are being recruited by gang members and thugs. If we can raise our community in terms of education and poverty issues, housing that's stable and safe, people having good jobs to support their families, then we can significantly reduce the problems of drugs and crimes in those areas."

- Judge Glenda Hatchett

Creating a program where students feel empowered and know their voice is respected and heard, encouraging and sustaining long-term engagement in the program.

AS220 Youth Studio, located in downtown Providence, Rhode Island, is an afterschool arts program open to students who attend the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP)—an alternative middle school for students at risk of dropping out of school—and have taken an AS220 Youth class offered at the UCAP. AS220 Youth reaches a number of the community's most disconnected youth; many program participants have been involved in the juvenile justice system, grew up in foster homes or group homes and live in poverty. Eighty-five percent of students in the program qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch program.

The program offers free courses in computer design, creative writing, dance, painting and drawing, guitar and piano, and photography Monday through Friday, 51 weeks out of the year. All students in the program create digital portfolios of their work, which includes an artist statement and resume, that help them realize the pathways to academic and professional opportunities that are created through various program activities. AS220 Youth places a significant emphasis on student voice in the program and takes a "membership model" approach, encouraging students to view themselves as artists and see the courses offered to them

"Growing up in New Britain can be tough (sic.) there are many factors that can distract a young person and guide them through the wrong path. The transition from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school can be rough on pre-teens and teens… The pressure to fit in for young people is very strong, especially for girls. During my middle school career, I found comfort in a wonderful program offered at the YWCA STRIVE…This program helped me blossom… STRIVE became my safe zone… STRIVE was more than a program. It was a sisterhood."

- YWCA STRIVE Program Alumnus

as opportunities to develop their skills and invest in their future. Student surveys are used to help determine classes offered and the program works to adapt programming based on student feedback. Through this approach, AS220 Youth cultivates commitment among their middle schoolers, working to sustain their student's participation through high school and beyond. Program evaluations found that more than 9 in 10 students in the program graduated from high school or received their GED. Almost all of students in the program shared that they feel more self-confident (99 percent).

Providing support that is culturally and linguistically sensitive to students and their families, helping connect them to school and the community.

The **Popular Education and Enrichment for Refugees (PEER)** afterschool program in San Diego, California, is a partnership between the International Rescue Committee and Monroe Clark Middle School. The program provides wraparound services addressing the educational, employment and legal needs of their refugee community in a manner that is sensitive to culture, language and family dynamics. Focused on meeting the needs unique to refugee youth, PEER assesses each student—100 percent of whom qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program and 100 percent of whom are limited English proficient—and develops

> *"By offering safe places for children after school, we can help keep our community safer…These programs also help kids succeed in school and provide jobs, as well as child care—all at a very small cost per student. Afterschool programs are a smart investment, especially in these difficult economic times. Because educators have to do more with fewer resources in the classroom, afterschool programs are more important than ever."*
>
> *- State Assemblymember Das Williams (D-Calif.)*

an individual academic service plan, allowing PEER staff to identify subject areas where students are struggling and provide additional support where necessary. Program staff also works with students to develop goals and action steps to go onto higher education and/or prepare for the workforce. In addition to academic support, the afterschool program immerses students in the community to facilitate a sense of belonging and comfort among students in their new environment, teaching them to navigate the San Diego transit system, taking them on field trips to the library and the San Diego Zoo, and working with them on a community garden.

Parent engagement is another key aspect of the program. PEER understands that helping parents settle into the community in turn supports students with their transition to the U.S. Serving as a resource for parents, the program connects them to social services and legal support, offers translators for school events and parent-teacher conferences, and provides transportation for families to school activities. The program's assessment for the 2012-2013 school year found that 88 percent of students in the program increased their standardized test scores and 74 percent increased their English language proficiency level.

Providing wraparound services to youth and their families that helps encourage parent engagement and offers support for medical, social and emotional issues children may be facing.

Established through a partnership between the California Hospital Medical Center (CHMC); the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); and residents living in the South Park neighborhood of downtown Los Angeles, California, the **Hope Street Family Center - Youth Center** is the only afterschool program in the area that provides academic enrichment, recreational activities, and medical and social services for middle school students and their families. The program serves a high needs population, with all students qualifying for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch program. Based on the Los Angeles Times' mapping project, South Park's violent crime rate is currently 26th out of Los Angeles' 272 neighborhoods.[22]

Additionally, a UCLA community assessment survey found that 40 percent of adults in the area have less than a ninth grade education and in 70 percent of households, Spanish is the primary language spoken. The program offers academic support and enrichment, group activities to help develop students' social and communication skills, sports, dance classes, and art workshops, as well as a focus on the whole family—helping encourage parent engagement and linking families to needed community supports. Staff make home visits to all families when students first enroll in the program and at the beginning of each year, helping families become more comfortable with staff and familiarizing them with the services available, as well as gaining a better sense of the needs of each family. The Youth Center employs social workers and psychologists who provide individual, group and family counseling, and help connect students and their parents to community services such as mental health services,

behavioral health practitioners, parenting and couples counselors, and legal support.

Conclusion

It is estimated that children spend as much at 80 percent of their time outside of school.[23] These hours out of school— particularly the hours of the day after school lets out and before parents return home from work—is a time when parents worry about what activities their child is taking part in. It is also a time when parents worry that their child is losing out on opportunities to learn more about themselves, better themselves and their communities, and become more confident in who they are and what they can accomplish. Day after day, afterschool programs are opening their doors and providing a practical solution to families and communities across the country—offering a safe space, caring mentors, youth-centered activities and individualized support to their students and their families. With a wide range of programs, activities, services and areas of focus, afterschool programs are able to meet the specific needs of their community and provide students with the supports they need to help them be happy, healthy, and successful in school, life and career.

"…I will fight for their [afterschool] programs because there are noticeable, positive outcomes when young children of working parents have the opportunity to participate in programs like these with other kids their own age in a structured, safe environment that offers enrichment and a supportive place play, do homework or just be kids. When Luisa and my children were growing up, we depended on afterschool programs because we were a working family, like many others."

- State Rep. Mitch Bolinsky (R-Conn.)

Photo credit: AS220 Youth

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK:
AS220 YOUTH

AS220 Youth provides its classes at three sites across Providence, R.I.: a juvenile detention center, an alternative middle school for students at risk of dropping out of school, and a downtown art studio. In 1998, Dr. Arlene Chorney, the principal at Rhode Island's juvenile detention center, invited artists and writers to the center to work with youth and engage them in the arts. Demian Yettaw, a Providence poet, and Bert Crenca, a local artist, began teaching poetry and drawing classes at the detention center. They observed that although the classes engaged youth in the arts, once they left the center, youth did not continue their artistic endeavors due to a lack of artistic opportunities. This recognition was the impetus behind AS220 Youth—an art studio that would provide a clear pathway and space for youth to continue to pursue their interest in art and develop their skills—working with the same teachers—once they left the detention center.

Today, AS220 Youth offers more than 24 courses, six days a week, 51 weeks out of the year to youth in their community who are in need of support. The program's downtown art studio offers an afterschool program that is open to students attending the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP)—an alternative middle school for students at risk of dropping out of school—and have taken an AS220 Youth class offered at UCAP. Eighty-five percent of students in the afterschool program qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program, 30 percent have special needs, 30 percent are limited English proficient and a number of the program's participants have been involved in the juvenile justice system.

All classes are free, and range from painting and drawing to dance to learning to play an instrument to computer design and creative writing. When AS220 Youth first began, it offered the same classes and instruction type to all students. Since then, the program has tailored their curriculum to the age, experience and specific needs of students. Each student is paired with an instructor and receives one-on-one guidance. Staff assist students with art projects and homework, as well as personal issues, such as helping students manage being teen mothers and working with students who are involved in a gang.

Program evaluations found positive outcomes for students who regularly participate in the program. More than 9 in 10 students in the program graduated from high school or received their GED. Almost all shared that they feel more self-confident (99 percent). The program also maintains strong ties with alumni; currently 40 percent of AS220 Youth staff are program alumni.

At the core of the program is the belief that participation in the arts is a lifelong investment. Classes are taught by local artists to show students that they can be successful as an artist. All students are treated as artists and encouraged to view themselves as artists. This "membership model"—showing students that they are artists—demonstrates to students that the courses offered to them are opportunities to develop their skills and invest in their future. Studio memberships can grow into six- year commitments.

Incorporating students' input into the program is a key component to helping students feel like true artists and feel a strong investment in AS220 Youth. Program staff facilitate classes, but include student input to empower students. For example, students are surveyed to decide what projects are offered during the summer, and student feedback is used to modify existing classes. Student art is displayed throughout the studio space contributing to students' sense of ownership of the space—students' murals cover the walls and recent student exhibits line the hallways. Strong student

Photo credit: Herman Farrer

engagement and ownership leads to a long-term commitment to the program.

During the summer months, AS220 Youth students go on field trips for entertainment—including to the beach and the movies—as well as field trips to build on their classes—such as to local art studios. In the summer, the program offers more open studio time, allowing kids to experiment in new art mediums and work on independent art projects. AS220 Youth also offers a summer employment program to both middle school and high school students. For example, one summer, with funding from the Department of Labor, AS220 Youth hired 52 students to work on various projects. One team, a mural crew, painted murals in the hallways of the state Department of Children, Youth and Families, where their work is seen and appreciated on a daily basis by their caseworkers, community members and policy makers. Another team with a photography focus created photo collages for the City of Baltimore that were used on city bus shelters. In addition to contributing to the city's public art space, the program also provided job skills training for their students, including interview preparation and practice.

Students are also encouraged to think about and prepare for a future in art as a part of AS220 Youth's emphasis that their students view themselves as artists. Digital portfolios—online portfolios documenting students' work, including a statement from each student on their

"AS220 Youth makes a long-term investment in our students. Staff invest time in building relationships at the start; when students face challenges, we leverage these relationships to keep them motivated, engaged, and moving forward. When students see that we take their commitment to our program seriously, they take their involvement seriously."

-Anne Kugler, Director, AS220 Youth

work and perspective as an artist and a resume—help students understand and appreciate how the skills they learn in the program connect to future professional opportunities. Additionally, the program helps students develop their portfolios and supports their overall growth as artists by taking the students out of town for a "portfolio day"—a day each fall where students bring their portfolios and receive feedback and advice from higher education admissions office staff. Students have traveled to Boston and Philadelphia to meet with admissions staff. In 2014 alone, students submitted their portfolios to colleges including the Rhode Island School of Design, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, the School of Visual Arts, Hampshire College and the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth.

AS220 Youth plans to expand on their work connecting their students to school and career pathways in the arts. They have started a small business incubator project, where they work with students to develop business plans and gain a better understanding of what is necessary for a successful business. The program is also engaging in conversations with schools regarding students gaining school credit for the skills developed and the work and projects completed in the afterschool program.

The MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award will help increase the number of students served by the program, upgrade sound engineering equipment and video editing equipment, purchase new computer

programs, and help fund AS220 Youth's biennial youth showcase that celebrates their students' work in front of an audience of parents, community members and program supporters.

Program Name: AS220 Youth

Category: Keeping Kids Safe and Supported in the Hours After School

Location: Providence, R.I.

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 60

Year Started: 1999

Main Sources of Funding:

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers

- Juvenile Justice Programs

- Department of Labor

- Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

- Foundations

- Private Donations

Recommendations for Other Programs:

- Value the ideas and opinions of your students—when you take what they say seriously, they will take the program seriously

- Create a space that is fun, positive and has a strong sense of community

- Empower your students by providing authentic opportunities for them to contribute to the program

- Know what your students need and be responsive to those needs

Photo credit: AS220 Youth

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK:
HOPE STREET FAMILY CENTER - YOUTH CENTER

Recognizing the critical need for educational, medical and social supports for students and their families in the South Park neighborhood of downtown Los Angeles, the California Hospital Medical Center (CHMC), University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and community residents joined together to create the Hope Street Family Center Youth Center in 1996. When the Hope Street Family Center first opened the doors of its Youth Center, it served as a safe space—providing homework help and recreational activities for 40 students. Today, the program—the only afterschool program in the area for middle school students—serves more than 300 youth, including 100 middle school students, and has recently moved into a larger space to help meet growing demand.

South Park is a low-income neighborhood, where more than 40 percent of families have a median income of $20,000 or less. It is one of the highest density areas in Los Angeles; approximately 80 percent of the population is Latino, and half of residents are immigrants. A community assessment survey conducted by UCLA found that 40 percent of the neighborhood's residents have less than a ninth grade education, and in more than 7 in 10 households, Spanish is the primary language. Based on the Los Angeles Times' mapping project, South Park currently ranks 26th in violent crime rates out of the city's 272 neighborhoods.[1]

The Hope Street Family Center's mission is to provide a comprehensive array of services in a central location to children and families in South

Park, focusing on the overall health, development and academic success of children in the community and providing a constructive outlet for children to avoid risky behaviors, such as gang involvement and criminal activities. All Youth Center students qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program. Ninety percent of students in the program are Latino and a quarter are limited English proficient. The program also works to strengthen the economic self-sufficiency and stability of families in the area. The Youth Center's service model is comprised of four main components: academic support and enrichment, positive peer and youth-adult relationships, parent-school engagement and family support.

Through their academic support and enrichment, the Youth Center provides homework assistance and tutoring, physical activities and arts activities. Youth Center students have access to a computer lab and library, sports teams—such as basketball and volleyball—Zumba and yoga classes, and a running club. Partnerships with various organizations in the surrounding communities allow the Youth Center to offer additional classes and activities. For example, students are matched with college students in UCLA's BruinCorps, receiving individual assistance in reading and English language arts; dance classes are offered through a partnership with the Los Angeles City Ballet; and students can take part in art workshops through a partnership with Free-Arts

"Middle school is a time when students become self-aware, trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. It's a critical time for them to have a strong support system that they can turn to and rely on. Their success isn't only determined by one factor—family or community or school—it is all of these things together, which is why the Hope Street Family Center Youth Center's focus is on connecting and coordinating these elements to create a holistic support system that can best help our students succeed."

*-Vickie Kropenske, Director, Hope Street Family Center*

and the Ford Theater. A recent program evaluation found that of the students receiving academic support, tutoring or homework assistance, approximately 7 in 10 showed significant improvements in their reading skills, measured by standardized evaluations or improved grades.

In the summer months, Youth Center students explore the city and are introduced to the arts and cultural activities, visiting places such as museums, the Los Angeles Central Public Library and summer concert performances at local parks. The program also takes students to the beach, which is less than 15 miles away, but many students have never been. Field trips to local colleges and hospitals—where students are able to interact with college and nursing students—expose them to the wide range of academic and career opportunities available to them.

Photo credit: Gary Leonard
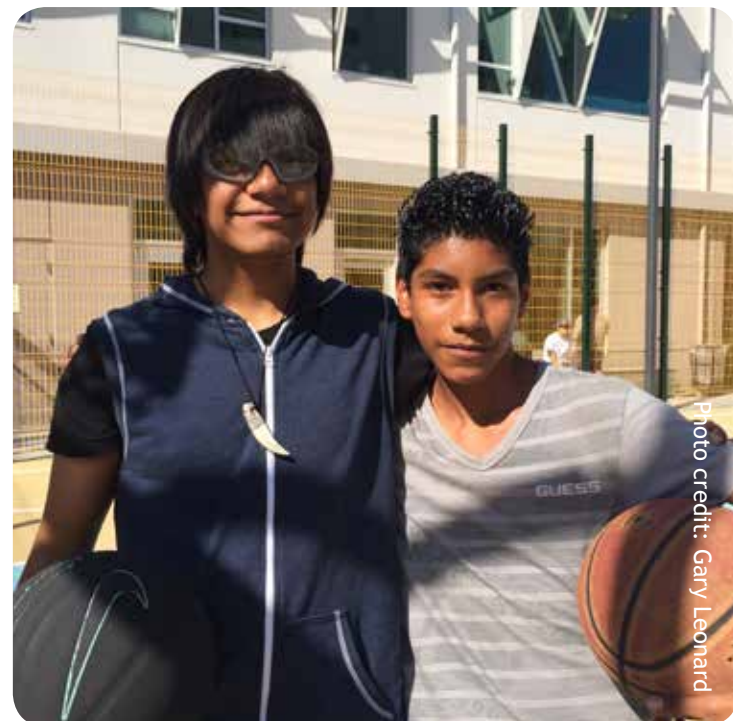
Program Name: Hope Street Family Center - Youth Center

Category: Keeping Kids Safe and Supported

Location: Los Angeles, Calif.

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 60

Year Started: 1996

Main Sources of Funding:

- Local Government

- Foundations

- Individual Donations

Recommendations for Other Programs:

- Hire staff that are invested and committed to the students in the program and the community

- Include a strong parent engagement component in the program. Incorporating parents' ideas and feedback into the program can help encourage their involvement

- Be intentional about programming— listen and respond to the needs of the community

In addition to the variety of activities the Youth Center offers to students, strong student-staff relationships help sustain student attendance and engagement in the program. Each day, staff members work in small groups with students to help with projects, serve as mentors and develop trust and a sense of safety among participants. Program staff value students' input and work to find various ways to include students' ideas in the afterschool program. For example, they incorporated student voice into the design of the program's new building space. Staff from the Museum of Contemporary Art visited the program to discuss design with students, and students worked in teams to build models of the new building space and create storyboards of what they wanted the space to look like. Program staff used the storyboards as inspiration to help choose design elements, such as organization of the space, color palette, lighting and furniture.

Photo credit: Gary Leonard

The Youth Center understands that a student's success is impacted by his or her family's well-being and, therefore, focuses on connecting families to the necessary supports, as well as engaging parents in their child's education. Located within a community wellness program, the Youth Center offers comprehensive support, including health care, mental health services and parenting classes. When students first join the Youth Center and at the start of each year, staff make home visits to introduce themselves to the parents and discuss the variety of services and supports Hope Street Family Center has to offer. Additionally, working with a large immigrant population and parents who primarily speak Spanish, the program offers ESL classes for parents and serves as a translator for parents during school conferences. The program also generates parent engagement by placing a high value on parent input. For example, the Youth Center incorporates parents' opinions into its staff hiring process. A parent representative sits in on interviews with potential staff

and provides input on whether the interviewee is a good fit for the program. This process has the additional benefit for parents who get to experience the interview process from an employer's perspective.

At the start, the Hope Street Family Center Youth Center opened to primarily serve as a safe place for children in the South Park community. Almost two decades later, the Youth Center is focused on providing individualized academic support to students, especially students most in need of help; positive adult mentorship; and wraparound services to families, many of whom are struggling economically. The Youth Center will use their MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award to increase the number of students it can accommodate, extend the program's hours of operation, expand programming offered during the summer months and during school breaks, and provide additional supports to families in the program.

1. Los Angeles Times. (2014). "Violent Crime." Retrieved from http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/violent-crime/neighborhood/list/.

LOOKING AT THE DATA: AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS USING DATA TO BETTER SERVE STUDENTS

"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."

- Carol McElvain, director, Afterschool and Expanded Learning, American Institutes for 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."[1]

In this statement, Dr. Deborah Lowe Vandell highlights two important and related points about afterschool. The first is the positive impact afterschool programs can have on the students they serve—impact on a student's academic performance, as well as socio-emotional development. The second is that the quality of an afterschool program is key to student outcomes, which is corroborated by findings from other studies of the afterschool field.

For instance, a meta-analysis by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) reviewed 68 afterschool program studies and compared afterschool programs that had an intentional program design grounded in evidence-based practices to those that did not.[2] The review found that students in the programs that employed the evidence-based practices saw significant gains in academic performance, school day attendance and positive behaviors. The same improvements were not seen among students in the other set of programs. A separate meta-analysis looking only at quality afterschool programs found that students regularly participating in the programs scored higher on standardized math tests, were less likely to demonstrate aggressive behavior, and used drugs and alcohol less compared to their non-participating peers.[3]

A program's structure, design and implementation all factor into its impact on the students it serves—an afterschool program that evaluates its programming and services is able to gain valuable information and learn how successfully it has implemented its activities and achieved the outcomes it set out to accomplish.[4] A clear vision and mission, collecting data on outcomes aligned with goals, assessing impact, and making adjustments and adding supports as necessary to start the cycle over again are all components of a continuous improvement loop that can help an afterschool program identify how to better meet the needs of their students, families and staff.

What can afterschool programs gain through data collection and evaluation?

Data—which include everything from survey feedback to attendance records to scores on tests of skills and knowledge gained—can serve as a valuable resource for afterschool programs, as well as their students and families. It is an indicator, or indicators, that programs can use to improve their understanding of how well their offerings are being implemented and what their impact is. It allows programs to identify what their strengths are and where changes need to be made.

Afterschool programs that collect data then have the opportunity to review and analyze their data, which in

turn can help a program determine if it is carrying out activities and services in the way that was intended. If the data do not meet the program's expectations, the information gathered can be used to determine necessary steps to address the issue. Alternatively, if it does correspond with what the program envisioned, the data can help programs see if those activities and services are helping them to accomplish their overarching goals, and if other adjustments can be made to better meet the needs of their staff, students and families.[5] For instance, a three-year study that looked at the impact of a continuous quality improvement system* found that afterschool programs implementing the system saw program instruction by staff improve, focus on the quality of instruction improve and a small positive effect on retaining short-term staff.[6]

Data collection also presents the opportunity for afterschool programs to develop and strengthen relationships with schools and school districts. For Kids Only Afterschool, an afterschool program in Massachusetts, worked closely to build and maintain a partnership with Everett Public Schools—communicating regularly with school day staff and sharing attendance and academic performance results.[7]

Additionally, data collection and analysis can help afterschool programs demonstrate to their community, potential funders and policy makers that they are making a difference in their students' lives—whether it is helping them aspire to attend college, building their self-confidence and leadership skills, or improving health and wellness. **Spark Chicago**, which is a part of the Spark Program with branches in six cities across the U.S., was launched in 2011 and served 63 students. In the course of two years, Spark Chicago more than doubled their enrollment numbers, serving more than 200 7th and 8th graders during the 2013-2014 school year. The program serves a high need group, more than 9 in 10 students in

the program qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program and more than 80 percent of students are African American. Spark Chicago employs a variety of evaluative methods to ascertain program data and qualitative feedback to improve its model. These methods include pre- and post-program surveys on a variety of aspects, like self-confidence, curiosity, and the ability to communicate effectively and ask for help; a data-sharing partnership with Chicago Public Schools; and tracking student attendance and mentor retention. Spark Chicago's most recent data show that 72 percent of their students reported learning how to communicate with adults and 81 percent stated that participating in the program made them more interested in learning new things. This sentiment was echoed in parent surveys, in which 77 percent of parents noted that Spark Chicago made their child more excited about learning. Spark Chicago also collects longitudinal data. It found that 92 percent of apprenticeship program alumni through the class of 2012 have completed high school.

What are the steps necessary to evaluate a program?

However, before afterschool programs dive into the evaluation process, it is important to start first with a clear understanding of what they want to accomplish, why they want to accomplish it, and how they will accomplish it. In her article "Using Research to Continuously Improve Afterschool Programs: Helping Student to Become 21st Century Lifelong Learners," Denise Huang, project director and senior researcher at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at the University of California, Los Angeles, outlined the quality indicators of afterschool programs under three categories: program structure, program content and program implementation.[8]

* The Youth Program Quality Intervention is a continuous improvement model that includes "quality assessment, improvement planning, coaching by site managers during staff instruction, and staff attendance at targeted trainings for instructional skill building."

Photo credit: Build, Inc.

WHAT TO MEASURE?

A unique quality and strength of afterschool programs is that they can be flexible. This means that they have the ability to tailor their services to the needs of their students and their community. Whether that means creating a community garden and teaching kids about healthful eating habits, providing opportunities to learn computer programming skills and work with professionals from the community, or helping kids learn to communicate effectively and feel more confident in expressing their thoughts and ideas.

The variety of supports and activities afterschool programs provide and the range of purposes afterschool programs fulfill also leads to various outcomes they can be interested in documenting. Afterschool programs can partner with schools to track outcomes such as school day attendance, classroom behavior, or performance in subjects such as reading and math. But, afterschool programs can also focus on other performance indicators, such as responsible decision making, effective communication skills, or ability to work in a team. The second set of skills is what the Forum for Youth Investment refers to as a "comparative advantage" for afterschool programs, that "represent a strategic niche," where afterschool programs can help students develop the 21st century skills that will prepare them for college and work.

Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., et. al. (2014). From Soft Skills to Hard Data: Measuring Youth Program Outcomes. The Forum for Youth Investment. Retrieved from http://forumfyi.org/files/soft_skills_ hard_data_0.pdf.

An afterschool program's structure includes a mission and vision statement that clearly outlines the program's goals, as well as a "theory of change" that helps drive the program toward the desired long-term goals.[9] Programs that have a strong understanding of their mission and vision for the future are able to develop the activities and services that align with their objectives and make progress toward achieving their goals. Just as important as program content is program implementation, which includes employing strong staff who have the ability to lead and run program activities, as well as develop positive relationships with students and families in the program. Also integral is having solid leadership in place that can provide direction, motivate staff and make sure staff are equipped with the tools and resources needed to carry out their duties; and forging sound relationships with students, families, schools and the community.

Once a program's quality indicators are defined, organized and executed, afterschool programs can take the next steps and determine what data should be collected in order to review how their program is running, observe interactions and relationships between staff and students, evaluate if their program is having the impact they envisioned, and determine if the program is moving toward the goals of the organization. Common elements of assessment tools measuring youth development program quality include examining the program's organization and curriculum structure; accessibility of activities; the program environment; and the relationship between program participants and program staff, including levels of engagement in activities, understanding and acceptance of expectations, and responses to students' behaviors.[10]

To help determine what to evaluate, the Harvard Family Research Project's afterschool program evaluation toolkit recommends that afterschool programs consider:[11]

- If the information collected aligns with the program's goals and content

- If the measures make sense in the context of the program's lifespan

- If the data are easily available and accessible

- If the data collected will be of use to the program or its stakeholders

Similarly, the document "From Good to Great: Using Data to Asses and Improve Quality" outlines nine tips for afterschool programs to follow to help progress from determining what high-quality program attributes they would like to focus on to the ability to evaluate the system overall.[12]

The **Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) Initiative** in California is an example of an afterschool program that used ongoing evaluation and improvement efforts to hone their goals and revise their curriculum, linking it to the new program focus, in order to better serve their students.[13] Staff training and professional development; program monitoring, including data collection and staff coaching; and data analysis made up CORAL's continuous improvement cycle. Once changes were implemented, the CORAL Initiative saw program quality improve, as well as gains in students' reading comprehension.

DATA-SHARING BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS: RULES OF THE FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT

Schools have rich sources of student data, such as attendance and academic performance records, that afterschool programs can use to better meet the needs of their students and align programming to build off of students' school day lessons. However, an obstacle to data-sharing between the two groups has been the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal law that protects a student's personally identifiable information, such as grades, behavior referrals, social security number and any other information unique to the student that could lead to the student's identification.

In January 2012, FERPA regulations were amended, to include two clarifications that are relevant to the afterschool field:

1. The definition of an "authorized representative" and an "education program" were broadened to include programs "principally engaged in the provision of education" and "any program that is administered by an educational agency or institution" and

2. The amendment stated that an educational authority can "enter into agreement for the purposes of research studies."

The Partnership for Children and Youth's issue brief on the changes to FERPA and data-sharing practices between schools and afterschool programs found that afterschool programs are able to partner with schools and access student data by "qualifying as an authorized representative of a contracted education program" and "conducting studies in partnership with schools." The issue brief also outlines various ways afterschool programs are able to work with schools within FERPA's requirements and successfully create data-sharing systems that allow programs to tailor their curriculum to the needs of their students, supporting students in the areas where they need it most.

Partnership for Children and Youth. "Data-Sharing: Federal Rules and Best Practices to Improve Out-of-School-Time Programs and Student Outcomes." Retrieved from http://www.partnerforchildren.org/storage/documents/downloads/after_school_downloads/ost_data-sharing_and_ferpa.pdf.

Using Data to Improve Programming

Data collection and use and improving program quality are so inextricably linked that funders, like The Wallace Foundation, see them as key to the future of afterschool providers and citywide systems.[14]

There are numerous examples of afterschool programs across the country that are using data to evaluate their programming, determining if they are successfully implementing their activities and if they have achieved the outcomes they hoped to accomplish. By collecting data and analyzing the results, programs are using their findings to fine-tune their offerings, provide staff with the support they need, and ensuring that the needs of their students are being met.

Collecting student information at multiple points and in various forms, as well as inputting the information regularly into an easily accessible platform, helps programs be more responsive to the needs of their students.

> *"We have just started [FUSE] but what I will say is that I've never seen a teacher and group of students so engaged in instruction in a therapeutic school setting…The biggest changes that I have seen so far are: (1) Teachers and students interact as partners in problem solving, (2) Students interact with other students as partners in problem solving, and (3) Students are engaged and excited about the class. [It] gets no better from my perspective."*
>
> *-Administrator, Special Needs School*

Developed by researchers at Northwestern University, **FUSE** provides an interest-driven learning experience to engage students across Chicago, Illinois, in science, engineering, arts and design, and mathematics. FUSE uses a leveling up model based on game design to create challenge sequences for their students in areas including robotics, electronics, graphic design, app development and fashion design. FUSE students' interests drive the development of challenge sequences. For example, a challenge sequence designing jewelry using a 3-D computer design tool and then constructing a prototype using a 3-D printer was created when the program discovered students were very interested in 3-D design and printing. Students can complete challenge sequences individually or in groups and have access to FUSE facilitators; scientists, engineers and university student mentors; peer mentors; and video tutorials to provide guidance and support. After finishing a level within the challenge sequence, students upload digital media artifacts to the FUSE website, where others in the program provide feedback. Student data—collected through FUSE's Web platform, in-person observations, video observations and surveys—is gathered on participation rates at each site, what challenges students participate in and how long each student spends on challenges. Data collected help FUSE recognize what challenge sequences are most appealing to students, what activities sustain student engagement and why, new challenge sequences that can be created, and how to better support the development and continuation of learning pathways.

Partnering with other institutions can help on various fronts regarding evaluation. Examples include partnering with a school district, which can give a program access to student data, and partnering with a university, which can help a program implement an evaluation.

Citizen Schools North Carolina serves students throughout Charlotte and Durham and is a part of Citizen Schools, a national nonprofit organization that partners with schools serving predominantly low-income students and students that are struggling academically. Developed to directly align with their program model, the Program Scorecard tracks both student and staff performance. Regarding student performance, the Program Scorecard includes metrics for student attendance, English language arts and math test scores and grades, 21st century skills, beliefs related to college and career preparation, and perceptions on self-efficacy. For staff, the Program Scorecard tracks staff instructional proficiency and apprenticeship quality. Both national and regional site staff have access to real-time dashboards for student data and Program Scorecard reports are available at the end of each semester. Each year, Program Scorecard targets are set; progress is measured; and annual results are compared to determine areas of improvement, areas in need of work and effectiveness of interventions. Through a partnership with North Carolina State University, researchers from the university conducted a quasi-experimental, matched comparison design study that tracked students participating in Citizen Schools from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District during the 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. Evaluations found that Citizen School students were absent from school less than students not in the program and 8th grade students in the program were more proficient in math and reading than their non-participating peers.

Employing evaluation tools that observe and measure various outcomes can lead a program to uncover a need they did not know existed.

BUILD—an in-school and afterschool program that provides mentorship, academic enrichment, and social and emotional support to at-risk and underserved youth in Chicago, Illinois, collects a variety of data to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of their students and staff. BUILD's tools and surveys include:

- Mutual Accountability Plan (MAP)—helps students develop short- and long-term goals, identify the steps necessary to reach each goal, and monitor and assess each benchmark that is reached.

- Group Activity Report—measures quantitative and qualitative data, recording the activities and progress toward achieving the program's outcomes.

- Youth Profile—tracks both students' positive and negative behaviors, such as improved grades, making progress on goals, substance use and behavioral problems.

- Youth Life Plan Self-Assessment and Reflection—asks students to evaluate their progress in the program.

- Health Assessment—collects students' height and weight, diet, and exercise habits.

- Youth Surveys—student surveys are given at the end of each program session, providing students the opportunity to share their opinions on activities, changes they would like to see and additional features they would like the program to incorporate.

The program implements strategic improvements based on the data collected and analyzed through their various tools and surveys. For example, when BUILD found that 10 percent of their students identified as LGBTQ and that 40 percent of students did not know if they had health insurance, they reallocated resources

that can be relevant to their programming. Therefore, it is critical that programs have a clear and focused set of goals, gather and synthesize data that are connected to those goals, and implement a continuous improvement cycle that uses the data in order to build on lessons learned and ensure that they are providing their students with the supports they need. Fortunately, more and more programs are recognizing the critical role of data and more resources and tools are becoming available to help programs put the data to use in order to best meet the needs of their students.

to develop and implement a new program aimed at addressing students' mental health, physical health and overall wellness. Program evaluations found that 93 percent of BUILD students were promoted to the next grade and 93 percent of BUILD seniors graduated from high school.

Conclusion

The afterschool field has made great gains in providing supports and an environment that helps their students succeed in school and beyond. Students are discovering an interest in science, gaining confidence in their speaking abilities, missing school less, connecting with caring adults and more when participating in quality afterschool programs. A distinctive benefit of afterschool programs is that their focus and scope of activities is wide-ranging—they are able to meet the unique needs of their community, which could be to offer a dance program in an area where arts have been scaled back during the regular school day or aligning programming with the Common Core State Standards to serve as an additional source of support for students, teachers and schools. The variety of focus areas also means that there are a number of measures—both inputs and outputs—

Photo credit: Build Inc.

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK:
BUILD

BUILD first began in 1969 as a gang intervention program serving 200 youth in one Chicago, Ill., community. BUILD has since grown to serve more than 3,000 children and youth year-round in nearly a dozen communities across Chicago. Although BUILD's reach has expanded, its mission remains the same—providing mentorship, academic enrichment, and social and emotional support to at-risk and underserved youth both in-school and out of school.

BUILD takes a three-pronged approach to engage and work with students—90 percent of whom are low-income, and more than half of whom are African-American and close to 40 percent Latino:

1. Prevention—offering in-school and out-of-school activities that provide academic help, physical activities, mentoring and leadership development;

2. Intervention—working with youth who have already been involved in the juvenile justice system; helping provide an alternative to detention and/or providing supports to help them develop the social and emotional skills to make positive decisions in their life; and

3. Building Futures—providing college and career preparation, youth leadership development, and physical and mental health supports.

"At BUILD, we strive to be intentional in our programming and responsive to the needs of our youth. It is imperative that programs capture what works, what doesn't and address any gaps. This is why we are committed to using data to improve and enhance our programming. There is incredible value in collecting data. Since utilizing such data, our programs have evolved to meet the ever-changing needs of our young people. This commitment to performance management will strengthen services and most importantly enhance impact on youth."

-Dr. Roslind Blasingame-Buford, Executive Director, BUILD

The program specifically targets students who are getting into trouble at school, skipping school and getting into trouble with the law. Working closely with more than 20 schools, BUILD receives referrals from schools regarding students who are most in need of additional guidance in- and out-of-school. BUILD has also developed relationships within the juvenile justice system, working with judges and police departments. For instance, if a youth is caught stealing merchandise from a store, BUILD staff are brought in to assess the student and find a way to involve him or her in the program. Street outreach is another effort BUILD staff employs to engage youth who hang out on the streets of Chicago, encouraging them to see what BUILD has to offer.

BUILD's afterschool programs are located in community-based settings—such as schools, parks and recreation centers, and churches—where students receive help with homework; are given healthful snacks and meals; have the opportunity to take part in sports, such as volleyball, basketball and soccer; and participate in workshops on life skills, character development, and healthful eating and healthful lifestyles. Students who have below a C grade point average in school receive one-on-one tutoring services.

The program places a strong emphasis on "pro-social" activities for students, where students work on positive decision-making, setting goals for themselves, and learning the value of the community and relationships they can form within the community. All students complete a Mutual Accountability Plan (MAP), a document that helps student develop short and long-term goals, identify the steps necessary to reach each goal, and monitor and assess each benchmark that is reached.

College preparation and job readiness are also a part of BUILD's program. The college prep programming begins with 7th graders in order to help them prepare for high school. BUILD understands the importance of making sure that students do not get lost in the transition from middle to high school, and therefore offers workshops such as "High School Survivor," where students learn tips on how to make it through high school. The program also takes middle schoolers on field trips to colleges, introducing them to what the college experience is and helping make the goal of attending college tangible and real.

Program evaluations found that 93 percent of BUILD students were promoted to the next grade and 93 percent of BUILD seniors graduated from high school. Looking at behavioral outcomes, during the 2012 fiscal year, 97 percent of BUILD students in the restorative justice initiative avoided returning to detention. In addition, there was a 59 percent decrease in the number of students exhibiting aggressive behavior and a 33 percent decrease in the number of students who were expelled from school.

During the summer months, BUILD provides a full day of programming for students, opening their doors at 9 a.m. and closing at 6 p.m. They offer weekly field trips,

cultural activities, recreational activities and community engagement opportunities. Summer field trips—which include outings to museums, the zoo and other places of interest around Chicago—are all tied to a learning activity. For example, during a trip exploring landmarks around the city, students were provided cameras to take pictures of statues, buildings, and other structures and spaces that they would later compose and write captions for and share with the group. Examples of cultural activities include African drum courses and dance expression classes. Recreational activities include a softball league, basketball, soccer and volleyball, and BUILD students have taken part in painting murals and community clean-ups as part of their community engagement.

BUILD also takes advantage of the summer to bring together students from different schools and neighborhoods across Chicago. This merging of students allows the program to address tensions and misconceptions students from these various communities may hold against one another. Staff tackle issues that may arise between students, such as gangs, territorial disputes, and lack of communication and trust.

The program's focus on collecting, analyzing and using data to improve programming helps ensure that the program is meeting the needs of their students and staff. In addition to MAP, BUILD employs a "Group Activity Report" that measures quantitative and qualitative data, recording the activities and progress toward achieving the program's outcomes and a "Youth Profile" that tracks both students' positive and negative behaviors, such as improved grades, making progress on goals, substance use and behavioral problems. The program also collects students' height and weight, diet and exercise habits through a "Health Assessment"

and asks students to evaluate their progress in the program through a "Youth Life Plan Self-Assessment and Reflection."

BUILD has implemented strategic improvements based on the data collected and analyzed through their various tools and surveys. For example, they reallocated resources to develop and implement a new program aimed at addressing students' mental health, physical health and overall wellness when they found that 10 percent of their students identified as LGBTQ and that 40 percent of students did not know if they had health insurance.

Strong student-staff relationships and the value placed on student input play a large part in BUILD's success with recruitment and retention of students. Regarding student-staff relationships, BUILD works to hire staff from the community, which can help youth feel a greater sense of connection to staff who understand where they come from. Hiring staff from the community also shows a positive life path to students. BUILD has staff that first became involved in the program as high school students, continued on as interns and later hired on full-time. Recognizing the importance of staff, BUILD invests in professional development, such as financing staff taking part in an eight-week advanced youth development certificate program and a 16-week youth practitioner development certificate training program. The program also surveys the staff to regularly identify trainings that will be the most useful to them.

Youth are given a voice in the program through a youth council, where they voice concerns about the program and provide feedback. Student surveys are also implemented at the end of each program session, asking students for their opinions on activities, what they would change and what additional features they would like to see.

BUILD will use their MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award to increase their capacity to serve at-risk youth in Chicago, such as investing in educational assistance for students, youth leadership development, and career exploration and development.

Program Name: BUILD, Inc.

Category: Afterschool and Data Utilization

Location: Chicago, Ill.

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 200

Year Started: 1973

Main Sources of Funding:

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Local Government
- Corporate Businesses
- Foundations
- Individual Donations

Recommendations for Other Programs:

- Focus on being data driven
- Value youth voices and work to incorporate youth input into programming
- Invest in the quality of program staff
- All staff positions are not the same—ensure that the expertise of staff align with the qualifications necessary for each staff position

AFTERSCHOOL AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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LOOKING AT THE DATA: AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS USING DATA TO BETTER SERVE STUDENTS

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