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## Literacy & Reading in Afterschool Programs

Many quality afterschool programs offer literacy and reading activities that provide significant benefits to youth. Research indicates that such activities can improve students' achievement in reading and language arts and foster their appreciation for reading as a lifelong hobby. In addition, literacy and reading activities are effective tools for involving family and community members in students' learning process.

### Increased Achievement in Literacy and Reading

Afterschool programs provide the additional time and one-on-one assistance that some youth need to master their reading skills. These quality research-based tutoring programs produce improvements in reading achievement and can lead to greater self-confidence in reading.<sup>1</sup>

- In a major study on preventing reading difficulties, the National Academy of Sciences found significant increases in reading achievement for students participating in programs that provided extra time in reading instruction by tutoring children individually.<sup>2</sup>
- In an evaluation of afterschool programs in the Philadelphia area supported by Foundations, Inc., the RAND Corporation found that fourth-graders in afterschool programs outperformed comparison students in reading and language arts.<sup>3</sup>

Afterschool programs are helping youth strengthen their literacy and reading skills.

- Students at Juarez High School in Chicago are learning the art of storytelling during the After School Matters program. The program stimulates literacy by allowing youth to work with professionals from the world of drama, storytelling and literature to read and create stories and learn about the technical elements of storytelling. Participants have the opportunity to read aloud, write and improvise stories to a variety of audiences.<sup>4</sup>
- The 4-H After-School Academic Program in Kansas City, Missouri, offers 160 youth opportunities to develop their reading skills and participate in entrepreneurial education activities in afterschool programs based at schools, public housing and faith-based organizations. For the literacy component, teen mentors lead youth through a curriculum created to increase participants' vocabulary, reading and comprehension skills and improve school competency test scores.<sup>5</sup>

## Fostering a Lifelong Interest in Reading

In order to become recreational and life-long readers, students need the opportunity to practice and develop their literacy skills in relaxed and enjoyable environments. Activities such as group discussions, storytelling, leisure reading, literacy games and other such reading-based interactions can foster youths' interest and motivation to read. Research shows that afterschool programs successfully provide such activities.

- In one study of afterschool programs, teachers said that one-third of participating children developed a greater interest in recreational reading and earned better grades.<sup>6</sup>
- Teachers in Manchester, New Hampshire, reported that 63% of students participating in the Y.O.U. afterschool program developed an interest in recreational reading.<sup>7</sup>
- The Katmai Boys & Girls Club started a Reading Club one afternoon a week in Naknek, Alaska. During the 45 minutes of Reading Club, students are read to by staff and volunteers and have the opportunity to read age-appropriate books to themselves. Students develop reading comprehension skills and are exposed to a “fun” reading experience which encourages a lifetime love of reading.<sup>8</sup>

## Making Connections with Adults

Experts say reading aloud to children is the single most important activity for their future success in reading, and that children model the reading and language behaviors of the adults in their lives. Moreover, adults who help children with reading and literacy skills also report increased confidence in their own skills. These mutual benefits, as well as the desire to foster family involvement in their children's education, lead many afterschool programs to provide intergenerational reading and literacy activities.

- The Lane Learning Centers Consortium in Lane County, Oregon, strives to make learning fun for youth and adults and has succeeded by offering reading activities that engage the whole family. One of its afterschool programs funded by a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grant planned an intergenerational library party where adults read with children, a storyteller performed, children wrote and read their own poetry and everyone participated in drama activities. Participating families commented very favorably on the event, and some adults admitted that the party was the first time they had been motivated to visit the library in years.<sup>9</sup>
- Four public elementary schools in Providence, Rhode Island, offer After School Reading Clinics after school to improve student literacy. The clinics aim to develop a system to monitor children's progress and provide teacher participants with professional development opportunities related to literacy.

*This is a win-win situation for both the children and for our teachers...Students receive personal teaching focused on their individual assessed need. At the same time, our teachers will have the opportunity to practice new techniques and strategies....*

— Sandy Rainone, Providence Schools literacy coordinator<sup>10</sup>

*Each of us has a duty to help our children achieve their full potential. By working together, we can shape the destiny of America's children with our hands and hearts. Children who are able to read will be ready to learn and ready to lead.*

-- First Lady Laura Bush, excerpted from the foreword of her educational initiatives *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn*

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, *Working for Children and Families: Safe and Smart After-School Programs* (Washington, D.C., April 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality Afterschool Learning Opportunities for America's Families* (Washington, D.C., September 2000).

<sup>4</sup> After School Matters, *After School Matters Online*, 6 Dec. 2001, <<http://asmonline.cps.k12.il.us/asm/asm.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Missouri 4-H, *4-H After-School Academic Program (ASAP)*, 6 Dec. 2001, <<http://www.mo4h.missouri.edu>>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, *Working for Children and Families*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Nienhuis, Eva, “Alaska (Archived), Local Events By Community: Naknek,” National Education Association, 7 Dec. 2001, <<http://www.nea.org/readacross/states.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> Data courtesy of U.S. Department of Education, July 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Providence Public School District, *After School Reading Clinics*, 11 Dec. 2001, <[http://www.providenceschools.org/reading\\_clinic.cfm](http://www.providenceschools.org/reading_clinic.cfm)>.