

How afterschool,  
summer and expanded  
learning time programs  
can provide the  
engaged learning kids  
need to succeed.

# Principles of Effective Expanded Learning Programs:

## A Vision Built on the Afterschool Approach

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Afterschool Alliance

# Effective expanded learning programs help students succeed in school and in life.

Expanded learning opportunities are inclusive of before-school, afterschool, summer learning, and extended day or expanded learning time (ELT) programs. Decades of research documenting the outcomes of afterschool and summer programs reveal a core set of key principles that are essential to yielding the best results. Aligning the spectrum of expanded learning opportunities with these principles will ensure quality and consistency across all programs. This document can be used as a guideline at the local, state and federal levels to guide expanded learning policy.



## The Fifth Quarter

The Cincinnati Public School District taps some 60 community partners to work with schools to deliver enrichment activities during the “fifth quarter.” The four-week, full-day extension of the school year, known as the Fifth Quarter, provides these opportunities for elementary students in need of academic improvement.

Each afternoon, students take part in a variety of interactive activities that help them become more engaged in learning. Community partners provide experiences not typically available during the traditional school year, such as art, music, service learning, leadership development and technology projects.

Afterschool programs offered after the Fifth Quarter “school day” are aligned with the program, as many educators work in both. The Fifth Quarter is supported by a blend of public and private sources, including federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds.

## 1. School-Community Partnerships

Strong partnerships between community organizations and schools are at the core of successful expanded learning programs. These partnerships should be characterized by alignment of goals and services, effective lines of communication, and data and resource sharing. Meaningful, active collaboration increases programs’ likelihood of success, maximizes the use of community resources and fosters creative learning solutions. Well-aligned expanded learning programs assist students in meeting standards in core subjects, providing a broad array of enrichment activities that reinforce and complement the regular academic programs of the school.

## 2. Engaged Learning

Expanded learning programs engage young people because they make learning meaningful and relevant. Activities tap in to a young person’s interest, sparking their imagination and igniting a fire within. They engage youth initially by providing choice and voice over what is offered, and maintain engagement through positive relationships with adults and peers and hands-on learning experiences that might involve science, math, physical activity, music or arts. They may also provide opportunities for mentoring, tutoring, internships, apprenticeships, individualized learning, college and career exploration, or even jobs. This wide body of services complements, rather than replicates, lessons taught during the school day.

## 3. Family Engagement

Effective expanded learning programs should offer parental input and choice and also encourage family engagement. Working parents need a safe place for their children to be during the hours they are still at work, but some parents also appreciate an expanded learning option that either affords them more

**“The Fifth Quarter demonstrates the power of partnerships to respond to a school system’s needs, in this case, moving Cincinnati’s students beyond the traditional school year to succeed.”**

*- Coalition for Community Schools*

family time after the traditional school day or allows them to enroll their children in other activities during the week. In addition, several characteristics of expanded learning programs make it easier for working parents to interact with instructors – the later end time, the lack of transportation, the diversity of staffing and the informal nature of programming among them. A wide body of research points to active parent involvement in their child’s education as a key factor in student success, and community-based organizations partnering with schools on expanded learning can often help facilitate that involvement. Expanded learning programs that provide safe environments for children to learn, offer parental choice and facilitate communication are crucial to parents, schools and most of all students.



## 4. Intentional Programming

Explicit goals and intentionally designed activities that align with those goals are critical to the success of expanded learning programs. In addition, successful programs must also engage participants in meaningful ways and meet their developmental and academic needs. For instance, an expanded learning program's goals might address improving specific social skills, building on school day learning or engaging youth in solving community problems. Based on the goals and the needs of participants, activities are developed that intentionally address those goals in a developmentally and academically appropriate way.

## 5. Diverse, Prepared Staff

Successful expanded learning programs ensure that the staffing ratios, qualifications, ongoing professional development and overall diversity of staff are closely linked to program goals and activities. In most instances, staffing involves a combination of both in-school staff and community partners who can help meet both the academic and developmental needs while also serving as mentors for participants. The blending of teachers and non-teachers allows for a wide range of expertise and a breadth of adult perspectives that can help youth feel comfortable learning and exploring and ultimately contribute to their success. As programming is implemented, appropriate staff to participant ratios, staff qualifications/expertise and professional development needs must all be taken into consideration.

**“In my 38 years as a professional educator, the ACE Program was one of the most powerful programs to influence the present efforts and future decisions of school-age children.”**

*- Frank Hagen, retired Principal  
St. Michael's High School  
Easton, MD*

## Expanding STEM Learning

The hands-on learning approach of quality expanded learning programs offers a natural platform for building interest in, and understanding of, science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Partners ranging from universities to science museums to STEM professionals make these programs a success. Below are a few outstanding examples.

**ACE Mentor Program** pairs middle- and high school students with local mentors in architecture, construction and engineering (ACE) fields to work on a design project.

**90%** of youth enroll in post-secondary institutions  
**66%** go on to study related

**99%** of youth graduate from high school

**89%** go on to college

**41%** study related fields

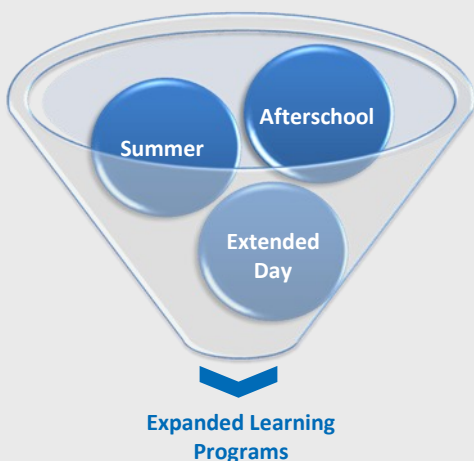
**FIRST Youth Program**  
*For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST)* provides leagues for youth ages K-12 to compete in robotics competitions.

**95%** have graduated or are on track to graduate from high school

**60%** of 4-year college students study related fields

**Project Exploration** provides out-of-school-time programs for youth to explore science through a strong mentor

## Expanded Learning Defined



The spectrum of expanded learning programs includes before-school, afterschool, summer, and extended day or expanded learning time (ELT) programs. The typical afterschool or summer learning program involves schools and community partners and offers a wide variety of hands-on, engaging learning typically run until 5

or 6 p.m., most days of the week, and summer programs run six hours a day for six weeks. For both, families choose whether or not to participate, although some students are encouraged to participate. Extended day or ELT programs—adding time to the school day, week or year—are the newest, and therefore least researched, model of expanded learning. A number of approaches are being tested. Grounding these programs in the best practices of proven afterschool and summer programs will provide the greatest likelihood of success. At a minimum, these programs should engage students in their own education by providing hands-on, experiential learning opportunities that build on—but do not replicate—learning that happens during the school day.





## 6. Participation & Access

Studies show that frequency and duration of participation in expanded learning programs matter; the more kids participate, the more likely they are to show academic gains. However, participation should not be mandatory; allowing children and youth access to programming that is age-appropriate, meaningful and relevant to them is key. When children choose and direct their enrichment experiences, they become more ardent learners and stronger leaders. Youth involvement through input, choice and feedback on expanded learning experiences is critical, and ensuring that programs meet the needs of both students and their working parents can help ensure regular and meaningful participation.

## 7. Safety, Health & Wellness

Adequate space, supervision, and security are necessary for young people to have the comfort and freedom to focus

solely on the task at hand. Additionally, the best programs provide opportunities for exercise and access to nutritious meals and snacks that otherwise might be unavailable. Studies have shown that improving a student's physical well-being can build higher self-esteem, leading kids to participate with greater frequency and confidence.

## 8. Ongoing Assessment & Improvement

Programs that employ sound data collection and management practices focused on continuous improvement have the most success in establishing and maintaining quality services. Frequent assessment (both informal and formal) and regular evaluation (both internal and external) are ingredients needed to refine and sustain expanded learning programs. Sustainable funding and sound fiscal management are needed to ensure long-lasting success.



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### Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs. It is committed to expanding learning opportunities that complement the school day and give kids the hands-on, engaged learning they need to succeed.