Afterschool In Action:
How Innovative Afterschool Programs Address Critical Issues Facing Middle School Youth

March 2012

School Alignment · Bullying · Literacy · Service-Learning

Afterschool Alliance

MetLife Foundation

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs.

More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 to carry on MetLife's longstanding tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. The Foundation is committed to building a secure future for individuals and communities worldwide. Through programs focusing on empowering older adults, preparing young people and building livable communities, MetLife Foundation increases access and opportunities for people of all ages. Since it was established, MetLife Foundation has made more than $500 million in grants and $75 million in program related investments.

For more information visit www.metlife.org.

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**

Over the last four years, the Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation have worked together to identify exemplary, and often lesser-known afterschool programs across the nation. For the past two years, efforts have focused on finding innovative afterschool programs serving middle school students. This focus was developed to address the need for new and innovative ways to engage adolescents during a crucial juncture in their lives, when they are still developing as both students and individuals.

Whereas high school students are understood as teenagers with a desire for more independence and advanced learning and elementary schoolers are recognized as budding learners requiring a nurturing environment, middle schoolers are caught somewhere in between. They are growing in independence yet still not fully mature enough to make all decisions for themselves. They are ardent and curious students but also have divergent interests that are difficult to grasp in the classroom. Some middle schoolers are mature for their age and ready for the transition to high school, while others still yearn for the comfort of elementary school. The question beckons: How do you deal with a population of students who are rapidly growing as individuals but are still unsure of their identity among peers and their strengths in the classroom?

In 2011, we attempted to answer this question by identifying afterschool programs that are successfully engaging middle school students and toeing the line between providing a safe, nurturing environment while also affording youth a space to explore new interests and drive their own learning. The Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation accomplished this through a competitive awards program that attracted more than 300 nominations from programs nationwide. With the help of external reviewers, the pool of nominees was narrowed down to 20 programs to be featured in issue briefs. Five of those programs were then selected as MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovators. This year, each of the MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovators received a $10,000 award to sustain and expand their work.

Research has shown that the 1.4 million children in grades 6-8 who benefit from afterschool programs can show both true learning gains in the classroom and developmental gains that will help them in their transition to high school. However, right now, more than 3.7 million middle school children are unsupervised after the school day ends, leaving them without that additional time to learn and grow. While there are many excellent afterschool programs out there, they are strapped for resources and unable to serve the millions of middle schoolers who want and need access to them.

This compelling need for more afterschool resources is precisely why the Afterschool Alliance and MetLife Foundation seek to identify more and more high quality afterschool programs serving middle school youth. We know that the best way to realize the growth needed to ensure that all children have access to afterschool is to educate leaders, funders, media and the public about the many benefits afterschool programs offer. This compendium features research and promising programs that demonstrate a wide range of outcomes supported by afterschool, illustrating how afterschool programs help middle school youth, families and communities.

The four issue briefs featured in this publication address: the importance of aligning afterschool with the school day; bullying awareness and prevention; service-learning opportunities; and literacy education. Each brief combines relevant statistics, comments from experts and community leaders, and examples of outstanding afterschool programs.

In addition, this year's publication includes in-depth case studies of the five programs selected as 2011 MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award winners:

- **Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools** - New Orleans, LA
- **Higher Achievement** -Washington, D.C.
- **Urban Arts/Project Phoenix** - Oakland, CA
- **21st Century PASOS** - Gettysburg, PA
- **America SCORES** - Chicago, IL

It is our hope that these case studies will help other programs across the country learn from each program's achievements and apply the lessons learned by these Innovators in their own programs. As a result, we hope that more and more middle school youth are able to successfully transition to high school and ultimately to higher learning opportunities and successful careers.

MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award Categories

Aligning with the School Day

Afterschool programs that are aligned with the school-day curriculum can support student learning and attack the achievement gap by offering additional supports to struggling students that complement and reinforce learning that takes place in the classroom in new and exciting ways.

Supporting Literacy

While the definition of literacy continues to expand to encompass more fields, reading and writing still stand as two of the most important pillars in every child's education. Low-income students across the U.S. are falling behind in basic literacy skills due to unequal opportunities to learn both at home and in the classroom. Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to fill those opportunity gaps and support the acquisition of reading and writing skills among underserved youth to help them build a brighter future.

Addressing Bullying

Bullying is a dangerous behavior that can have potentially damaging effects on both bullies and victims for many years. In order to stop it, a concerted effort is needed from the entire community. In partnership with schools, parents and the wider community, afterschool programs can help produce more emboldened students to know how to respnd appropriately to bullying thereby promoting a bully-free environment in which all students can learn and grow.

Providing Service-Learning Opportunities

Studies have shown that adolescents who volunteer are less likely to use drugs and more likely to succeed academically, while also developing a strong work ethic. With these benefits in mind, it seems imperative that youth become involved in volunteering at an early age in order to develop an understanding of its importance for the future. Creating a corps of compassionate future leaders will ensure that the disadvantaged and downtrodden will continue to have a voice and a helping hand when they are in need.

MetLife Foundation Afterschool Innovator Award Winners

Aligning Afterschool with the School Day for Middle School:

Higher Achievement focuses on closing the opportunity gap for middle school youth in at-risk communities, showering them with academic opportunities that include academic mentors, an accelerated, hands-on curriculum aligned with the school day and top high school placement. Higher Achievement scholars show exemplary gains: on average, scholars who complete the program see their GPA increase at least one point, graduate with a B average and improve school attendance.

Urban Arts/Project Phoenix focuses on enhancing learning for Oakland's immigrant population. In the program, academic mentors meet with grade-level teachers monthly to identify struggling students and grade-level-specific routines and procedures that mentors can implement to help those students. Urban Arts/Project Phoenix provides intervention in mathematics, aiding school-day teachers who lack the time to address all of the students' needs. The program also helps participants improve their English skills by giving them an opportunity to practice speaking in a more open and relaxed environment.

Addressing Middle School Bullying:

21st Century PASOS serves rural Adams County, PA. Eligible participants are current or former Migrant Education students and English Language Learners – a mostly Latino population that is at risk of underperforming on state standardized reading and math assessments. The Bully Situation, a website and video series depicting real-life school bullying, was produced by a group of seventh- and eighth-graders in 21st Century PASOS. The project grew out of concern among teachers and students about bullying during the school day and afterschool hours. The students hope to expand the project by performing live skits in local schools and community locations while producing additional videos for the website, and adding new features like an online anti-bullying chatroom, question and answer section and Facebook connectivity.

Providing Opportunities for Service-Learning for Middle School Students:

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools is a citywide program with students from 15 public schools who focus on identifying and advancing systemic changes that are needed to make the school system first-rate. Following an intensive six-week summer session, the program continues throughout the academic year with five action committees: oil-free schools/architecture, food justice, garden, restorative justice and digital media. Working with professionals, students have convinced school officials to take actions such as repairing 350 substandard bathrooms, installing hand-washing sinks in new cafeterias and adding garden plots to future school designs.

Supporting Literacy for Middle School Students:

America SCORES Chicago serves families in the city's low-income West Side neighborhoods by offering free afterschool programming that combines soccer, creative writing and community service. Each middle school program consists of a boys' team and a girls' team, which are open to students without try-outs. Guided by a soccer coach and a writing coach, the teams work together on the field, in the classroom and in the community, with students emerging as poet-athletes attuned to both their own skills and creativity as well as social concerns such as sexual harassment, gang violence and healthy living.

Afterschool In Action:
Inside Higher Achievement

Higher Achievement was founded in 1975 by Greg Gannon, a teacher at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C. Gannon believed the program would address a serious and underappreciated community problem: the gap in opportunity between his Gonzaga students and youth in the housing project across the street from the school. He founded Higher Achievement to create learning opportunities for underserved youth, so they could have equal access to success, both in school and beyond. Higher Achievement incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in 1985, and in 1999 it reorganized as an outcomes-based model for high-level academic achievement during out-of-school time. In 2006, with grants from Atlantic Philanthropies, the Jack Kent Cooke and the William T. Grant Foundations, Higher Achievement launched the first longitudinal, randomized study of an out-of-school time program. Results from the study prompted additional investments in Higher Achievement's expansion. In 2009, Higher Achievement opened achievement centers in Baltimore, MD, followed by centers in Richmond, VA, in 2011.

Over the past 35 years, Higher Achievement has worked with more than 10,000 youth. On average, 95 percent of Higher Achievement scholars advance to top academic high schools and 93 percent go on to college. Scholars who complete the program, on average, improve their GPA at least one letter grade, graduate with a B average, show improved attendance and demonstrate improved attitudes and behaviors toward their peers, adults and their own learning.

Today, the program stands as not only one of the most successful afterschool and summer programs in Washington, D.C., but also one of the most rigorous afterschool programs in the country. Higher Achievement's program is grounded in research and driven by data–the organization has embarked on rigorous internal and external evaluations that measure academic and non-academic outcomes. In October 2011, Higher Achievement became one of the first out-of-school-time oranizations able to provide proven results with the release of a groundbreaking longitudinal, independent evaluation showing the intensive year-round program had a significant impact on youth's reading and math standardized test scores. Among the findings:

- The longstanding Higher Achievement model is making a difference in the academic lives of motivated, at-risk students who could easily fall through the cracks.

- Higher Achievement regularly engages parents, with 64 percent of parents of children attending the program confirming at their first-year follow up that they spoke to Higher Achievement staff about their child's progress at least once a month.

The program runs year round, with both an afterschool and summer component. Offered for 40 hours per week for six weeks, Summer Academy offers students a chance to get prepared for the coming school year while preventing the always dangerous summer learning loss. During the school year, Higher Achievement's Afterschool Academy meets each Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30-8:00 p.m. At Afterschool Academy, scholars complete their homework in a supervised study hall with support from teachers and volunteers from 3:30-5:00 p.m. After homework is completed, scholars have dinner provided by Higher Achievement and the opportunity to take part in a wide range of electives including capoeira, sports and foreign language learning. Afterward, scholars and their volunteer mentors gather together for a community meeting that reinforces the culture of learning present throughout the program. Each scholar is matched with three mentors per week, with whom they work in small groups to dive into math, literature or a seminar topic such as Kitchen Sink Science or journalism. Mentors receive intense training and instructional techniques and access Higher Achievement's standards-aligned curriculum through the organization's website. In addition to regular day activities, scholars have the chance to go on field trips during the school year and in the summer that expose them to college and career opportunities, including a 3-day trip to some of the country's most prestigious universities.

While certainly well-organized and intentional, the program also shines because of the breadth of academic activities it offers its students, including enrichment activities, supportive competitions, strong academic programming, access to caring adults and exposure to career and college opportunities. The program also attributes its success to giving scholars a voice in their learning. By allowing students the opportunity to direct programming and offering a multitude of academic benefits for scholars, the program has built extremely high demand with long waiting lists. This allows Higher Achievement to find students that are both in need of additional support but also willing and eager to learn, making for a strong network of students strongly devoted to the program and their own academic goals. With an aligned curriculum, motivated participants and focus on the future, Higher Achievement stands as a program poised to help close the achievement gap in Washington, D.C. As the program expands to other communities throughout the Mid-Atlantic, even more middle schoolers will be able to enjoy the vast academic, social and emotional benefits of being a Higher Achievement scholar.

Higher Achievement

Category: Aligning with the School day

Location of the Program: Washington, D.C.

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 700

Year Started: 1975

Main Sources of Funding:
- Historically, Higher Achievement's funding was provided largely by private foundations. Recognizing the importance of ensuring sustainability, Higher Achievement has purposefully diversified its funding to include government funding (as a 21st Century Community Learning Center), corporate support, major gifts and special events such as the annual Going Places! benefit.

Recommendations for Other Programs:
- Create a network of adults including mentors, school day teachers and administrators, and parents who are all devoted to ensuring success for students.
- Program staff should be in constant communication with scholars' classroom teachers and school principals, serving as a resource to those important stakeholders. Staff partake in classroom observations, attend parent-teacher conferences and help with a host of school events.
- Commit to using data and evaluation – internal or external sources – to improve program quality.

"Higher Achievement is committed to supporting middle school student learning during out-of-school time through small group, academic instruction after school and during the summer. Higher Achievement creates unique, grade-level curricula aligned with district curriculum standards to ensure that learning during out-of-school time complements and aligns with learning happening during the school day."

- Richard Tagle, CEO of Higher Achievement

Aligning Afterschool with the Regular School Day: The Perfect Complement

The academic achievement gap between low-income minority students and more well-off white children is a well-documented issue that has troubled education professionals for decades. While over time great strides have been made in shrinking the academic disparity between these groups, more recently that progress has slowed. A multitude of studies show that a wide gap remains between low-income minority students and those more well-off in terms of both academic achievement and the number of high school drop outs.[1]

Additionally, while gains have been seen at the elementary school level over the last 17 years, by the time children reach eighth grade that progress seems to disappear,[2] meaning the issue has become even more significant in the middle grades. Disparagingly, the achievement gap among middle school students persists today despite the best efforts of both school-day educators and afterschool, before-school and summer learning program providers. While schools are doing their best to provide specialized instruction for struggling students and expanded learning programs continue to target those most in need with stimulating and engaging enrichment opportunities, more needs to be done among America's most disadvantaged communities to ensure that children are receiving a comprehensive education to catch up with their peers.

Afterschool programs that are aligned with the school-day curriculum can support student learning and attack the achievement gap by offering additional supports to struggling students that complement and reinforce learning that takes place in the classroom in new and exciting ways. Collaboration and alignment among schools, expanded learning programs and the greater community offers students the opportunity to enjoy a complementary learning environment where they can truly thrive. Many afterschool programs are seeing the need for this type of learning and have taken steps to align their content with that offered during school to ensure youth participants have ample opportunity to reinforce and practice the skills they need to succeed.

Not Enough Time: How Afterschool Can Help

There is no denying that American students need more time to learn, but it is also important that children are learning in a variety of ways that build upon each other so that each child has a chance to succeed at something that truly sparks their interest. Although afterschool programs are rightly praised for a more informal structure that is responsive to student interests and passions, many programs have done excellent work in aligning their curricula and content with the traditional school day. Afterschool is at its best when it complements and coordinates with – but does not replicate – the learning that occurs during the formal school day. In this relationship with regular school time, afterschool can provide a host of unique opportunities for students to succeed and remain engaged in school-day learning. Several aspects of afterschool provide advantages for students that are more difficult to offer during the regular school day:

- Flexible schedules, providing the time and space to offer in-depth learning projects
- Low student-to-instructor ratios
- More flexibility for field trips and learning outside the classroom
- Informal learning environments that encourage active participation
- Greater access to parents because programs often extend into the early evening
- A diverse group of workers who can connect with youth in new and meaningful ways[3]
- Community partners that can address specific needs of children and fill gaps in enrichment

Instead of filling their out-of-school hours with idleness and risky behaviors, through afterschool and summer learning opportunities students can continue to expand upon the knowledge gained at school in innovative ways. In this way, afterschool programs can be a strong partner with schools to increase academic outcomes, reinforce learning and promote confidence among all students involved.

Afterschool Is Already Supporting Academics

Afterschool programs across the country have supported students' school-day learning in a multitude of ways, from spurring attendance and reducing truancy to improving test scores and promoting engagement. Encouraging attendance is one of the most noticeable benefits that afterschool programs can provide to teachers and principals. By offering exciting programming that engages students' varied interests in the afterschool space, programs keep kids interested in learning. Children begin to see the link between what they are learning during school and in their afterschool programs and understand that in order to fully enjoy afterschool, they have to attend school as well.

- Chapin Hall's study of Chicago's AfterSchool Matters program found that students who participated in the program missed fewer days of school than their classmates and that students who participated most frequently failed fewer core academic courses (English, math, science and social studies).[4]
- A five-phase evaluation of the Citizen Schools program found that former participants of the 8th Grade Academy consistently continued to attend school more often through ninth, 10th and 11th grade compared to a group of matched nonparticipants.[5]

Additionally, the reinforced learning environment provided by afterschool programs offers teachers an ally in improving test results among students. Programs that engage school-day teachers to discover the most pressing needs of students can have a great effect on standardized test scores and grades. Afterschool programs have proven to be a powerful resource for academic enhancement.

- On an annual basis, attendance at math-focused Texas 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) sessions significantly increased the likelihood that students would pass the math portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills examination.[6]

- Teachers of students participating in Wisconsin 21st CCLC programs reported that 69 percent of regular program attendees increased their academic performance. Two in five regular attendees increased their grades in math (40 percent) and language arts (42 percent) from the first grading period to the end of the school year. In addition, teachers also reported that 44 percent of 21st CCLC program attendees improved in attending class regularly.[7]
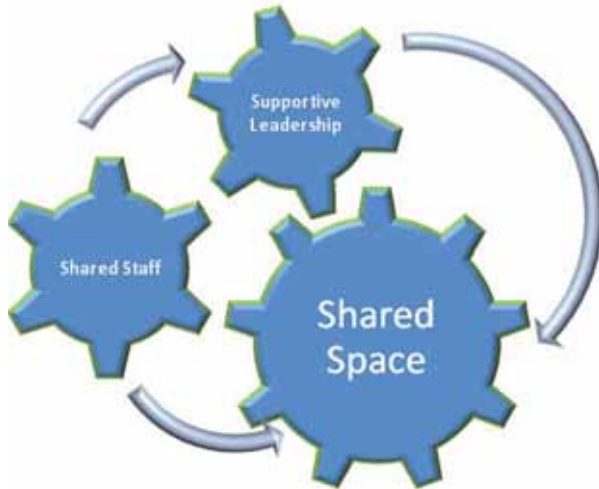
Importance of School Support

While afterschool programs certainly hold their own in promoting increased engagement in learning, in school-afterschool partnerships, the programs are only as strong as the schools with which they are aligned. It is crucial that schools provide the supports necessary to allow their students to grow in the afterschool space by offering programs access to classroom space, materials, student records and teachers as guides to honing their curriculum. During his time as superintendant of Roselle, New Jersey Public Schools, Elnardo Webster commented that "expanded learning is a secret weapon in instruction." This was reflected in his work to expand enrichment before and after school and during the summer in Roselle, where the city's students showed great academic progress under his tenure.[8] In the case of Roselle Public Schools, it is apparent that school administrators such as principals and superintendants can be the key links to expand learning and helping students achieve to meet state and national academic standards. There are a number of important benefits that schools can provide afterschool programs as partners in teaching:

Shared Space

- By sharing both learning space and materials, such as textbooks and recreational equipment, with schools, afterschool programs can better link the fun enrichment activities occurring once the school day ends with math, science, reading and social skills taught in the classroom.

- Just as afterschool programs can help keep children engaged in school, schools can aid afterschool programs in recruiting new participants. Holding an afterschool program inside an actual school provides a direct link for children to participate and eliminates barriers such as transportation and time gaps between learning.

Supportive Leadership

- This is arguably the strongest factor in creating a linkage and positive

outcomes for students.[9] Principals, superintendants and other school leaders can aid afterschool programs by helping to leverage local resources, assisting in alignment with school standards, offering access to student records and grades and enabling school personnel to work as afterschool staff.

Shared Staff

- School-day teachers who offer services to afterschool programs can help ensure that children are receiving the additional support that they need. The expertise of teachers who know their students best leads to increased curriculum alignment, improved school-afterschool communication and better student-teacher relationships. In fact, the first 21st CCLC program national evaluation showed that middle school teachers in particular felt their classroom teaching skills and relationships with students improved after being involved in afterschool programming.[10]

Alignment: Varying Strategies, One Goal

The evidence base for the academic, social and emotional benefits of afterschool-school partnerships for middle schoolers is growing, but there remains a wide disparity in views on exactly how afterschool and school -day learning should be aligned. Linking with the school day can take the form of homework help, tutoring or reinforcing school day lessons.[11] Every school is different and every afterschool program has a unique way of providing enrichment, so aligning strategies will vary from program to program and school to school. However, quality strategies share common key elements concerning how to align afterschool with the regular school day which can be utilized by all middle school programs looking to begin a complementary learning system with a nearby school:

1. *Use the school to identify staff* [12] *– The luckiest programs are able to employ actual teachers who are dedicated to promoting learning even after a full day's work. This strategy allows for the most visible school day connection for students and allows teachers to get more one-on-one time with the students that need the most help. In addition, teachers can foster relationships and develop new teaching styles in the afterschool space. While employing teachers after school or in the summer is not always an option for programs, they can still coordinate with teachers to offer periodic training or mentoring to afterschool staff, providing an unparalleled opportunity for staff to learn the ins and outs of a regular school day.*

The Bellmont Middle School 21st CCLC program in Decatur, Indiana, provides expanded learning for students who are struggling to achieve at school in basic reading and math skills. The program utilizes teacher recommendations for students who are having trouble achieving and sustaining academic gains in reading and math. The fifth through eighth-grade program at Bellmont includes time for students to complete homework and to participate in reading and math enrichment. During homework time, students are grouped with grade level peers and teachers so that they can focus on grade level assignments and use peer collaboration to deepen their understanding of the curriculum. Using data from school day results, students are later grouped together by reading and math proficiency during enrichment activities, which change each day of the week. All activities are taught by the Bellmont Middle School certified teaching faculty, giving students the opportunity to form extended relationships with their teachers. This staffing arrangement also allows the teachers to quickly identify the learning strengths and deficits of each student, so that they can provide individualized intervention strategies during the afterschool homework help and remediation activities. The program's great success in enhancing learning for students can be attributed to both the frequent and ongoing daily communication between classroom and afterschool teachers and its access to the school's physical and technological resources.

2. *Engage parents and community partners – It is essential that community*

partners are engaged in student learning.[13] Creating a complementary learning environment that utilizes parents as a resource in connecting school and afterschool education and employs community partners to offer additional support ensures that learning continues even when children are not in the classroom.

Woodcraft Ranger's successful **Nvision Afterschool Program** serves 5,000 middle schoolers annually at 15 public middle schools in low-income areas throughout Los Angeles County, California. The program operates on school campuses five days a week, from dismissal until 6 p.m., beginning with a 45-minute homework clinic.   Staff help students complete assignments, practice good study habits and hone their skills, using feedback gained from teachers. Next, youth transition to special interest activities or "clubs." The wide range of club themes are designed to support classroom learning, while sparking students' imaginations so that they become and remain involved over time. The program engages the wider community by allowing students, school personnel and parents to select the specific club offerings at each individual school. Additionally, Nvision employs both a site coordinator and a teacher liaison (certified teacher) at each campus. This team facilitates productive working relationships between school and Nvision staff to coordinate their teaching content and methods and trains Nvision Club Leaders to provide effective academic assistance. Site coordinators and teacher liaisons meet with principals to confirm that the programs are working in tandem. The spirit of collaboration between school personnel and Nvision staff inspires all involved to embrace their mutual mission of giving all students their best chance for academic success.

3. *Identify and perpetuate the schools' goals, objectives and culture after school – With the enactment of No Child Left Behind legislation, schools have become more focused than ever on standardized testing results. While afterschool programs are recognized as distinct enrichment environments, it is important for programs to keep state and local school curriculum standards in mind during program planning. This will strengthen the ties between program goals and school teaching objectives and lead to a more seamless transition in learning for students. Furthermore, afterschool programs can innovatively address skills such as note taking and organization that will help students be prepared for school.[14]*

Higher Achievement in Washington, D.C., is committed to closing the opportunity gap for underserved middle school youth, launching them to success in both school and life. The Higher Achievement model showers children with academic opportunities: academic mentors; an accelerated, hands-on curriculum aligned with the school day; university stays; academic contests; and top high school placement. After a six-week summer academy to ensure year-round learning, starting in September until May each Higher Achievement scholar gets homework help and academic enrichment from three academic mentors. These mentors commit their time spent in the afterschool space to the scholar's academic and personal growth. Center staff are in frequent contact with the scholar's school- day teachers to identify the best way to support each scholar during the out-of-school time hours. Additionally, staff members team with parents, classroom teachers and mentors to create Scholar Achievement Plans for each student, which set measurable goals for the scholar to attain during the school year. All parties have a voice in crafting the Achievement Plan and a role in executing the plan. Despite the downward academic trend prevalent during middle school, Higher Achievement scholars show exemplary gains: on average, scholars who complete the program increase their GPA at least one grade point, graduate with a B average, improve school attendance and attend a top-choice high school.

4. *Employ an academic liaison[15] – To facilitate the coordination of curricula, an afterschool staffer assigned to identify the specific needs of middle schoolers can ensure that the afterschool program is conscious of the education priorities and standards within schools.[16]*

THINK Together's afterschool program at David A. Brown Middle School in Wildomar, California, prides itself on its ability to develop and maintain strong partnerships with the school district to align its content with the instructional day. The program's successful alignment hinges on the work of the afterschool site coordinator. The site coordinator at Brown Middle School attends regular data inquiry team meetings at the school that include structured discussion about curriculum and assessment outcomes. As a result, the site coordinator is better able to identify the academic needs of all program participants, gain "fluency" in the myriad of commonly used academic terms, become familiar with core day curriculum and pacing guides, and learn effective teaching strategies. The site coordinator has developed innovative programs such as their own Academic Decathlon, which students used to learn the content on the California State Test. Additionally, program staff has addressed homework help in fun and inventive ways by creating games and activities, like a giant class Scrabble board made out of shower curtains, which support the grade-appropriate state standards and provide a fun way to align learning.

5. *Maintain open communication with school staff – Quality afterschool programs offer school and afterschool staff time to work together to develop relationships in order to get the most out of students in each learning space. Though schedule conflicts can make communication difficult, strategies such as holding regular meetings between staff and teachers, attending school conferences and parent meetings and offering teachers' input in afterschool learning can facilitate a discussion on alignment.[17] In order to avoid an environment in which school-day teachers are upset by the use of their classroom space after school, invite them to visit the program and encourage them to take part in program activities or promote them during the school day and voice any concerns they may have to avoid misunderstandings.[18]*

Urban Arts/Project Phoenix is an afterschool program based at Urban Promise Academy in Oakland, California, designed to enhance the learning of Oakland's immigrant population. In the program, afterschool academic mentors meet with grade level teachers once a month to identify struggling students and grade level-specific routines and procedures that academic mentors can later implement. Project Phoenix uses California Standardized Test scores from the previous school year to identify students in need of specialized intervention. While daytime teachers provide structured English language arts intervention for struggling students, Project Phoenix provides academic intervention in mathematics, aiding school-day teachers who simply lack the time to address all of the students' needs. Academic mentors are provided with quarterly reports from teachers detailing the achievement of their students on district math benchmarks and adjust instruction accordingly. In addition to improving math skills, the program focuses on improving participants' English speaking skills by providing an opportunity to practice speaking in a more open and relaxed environment. Urban Arts staffers and school- day teachers are working together to ensure that Oakland's immigrant population receives the full complementary education they deserve.

6. *Support shared data[19] – Transparency between schools and afterschool programs is essential to all alignment partnerships. Sharing tests scores, grades, behavior reports and other important student information between learning environments facilitates instruction and enhances student outcomes.*

The AfterZone is a citywide afterschool system created by the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and its community partners in Providence, Rhode Island. The AfterZone serves 1,800 middle school youth annually with hands-on, experiential learning that promotes healthy social, emotional and academic development. Instead of simply filling gaps in service, the AfterZone knits together a network of partners from the public and private sectors, including the city, school department, community providers and local nonprofit and business organizations. The AfterZone builds on the community's strengths and assets by enlisting organizations and individuals

who have a strong commitment to serving youth in order to build a coordinated schedule of programming that maximizes opportunities for youth to explore their interests. In addition to its various programmatic partnerships, PASA has reached a watershed development with the School District: the creation of a data sharing agreement. This agreement signifies a new level of trust between the school department and its community partners, and enables PASA and its partners to work together with the district to closely monitor characteristics of its AfterZone participants, including attendance, academics and other indicators of success.

Conclusion

It is certainly no easy task to align afterschool and school-day curricula. Afterschool programs across the country face issues such as lack of teacher and principal support, lack of funding to hire additional staff to coordinate with the school day and lack of access to student's school day data.[20] Despite these barriers, afterschool programs of all sizes and types have made great strides in linking afterschool and school-day learning to reinforce and support the social, emotional and academic benefits that children receive in the classroom. Aligning afterschool and school-day learning can be a valuable weapon in the nation's education arsenal, combining the invaluable knowledge and instruction gained during the school day with the more flexible enrichment environment of afterschool. With this combined effort, which includes support from the entire community surrounding them, hopefully low-income students can receive the help they need to succeed in school, and perhaps soon the notion of any gap in educational opportunities or achievement will be forgotten.

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Afterschool In Action:
Inside Urban Arts/Project Phoenix

The Urban Arts/Project Phoenix Program in Oakland, CA, which serves Oakland's Urban Promise Academy, is really two afterschool programs in one. The Urban Arts portion provides enrichment opportunities for the program's middle school students while Project Phoenix focuses on academic support and intervention. During Urban Arts, young people participate in physical fitness activities, graffiti art classes, outdoor education and a host of other enrichment courses. In Project Phoenix, students are provided with comprehensive and individualized academic support from staff, volunteers and teen tutors including homework help, college and career preparedness, and help with core academic subjects.

The program is extremely attuned to aligning its curriculum with the regular school day. As the most highly attended middle school afterschool program in the Oakland Unified School District, the program works because it shares goals with the school it serves and fills the gaps in academics and enrichment that cannot be addressed during the regular school day. The program stresses communication as a key to its healthy relationship with the Urban Promise Academy. Additionally, the afterschool staff is heavily involved in the school day. They attend regular Urban Promise Academy leadership meetings, participate in the school's family conferences, and help chaperone school functions and field trips, including backpacking and camping excursions. The program director at Urban Arts also provides professional development for school day teachers to educate them on the importance of youth development. Additionally, biographies of each Urban Arts staff member are disseminated to school staff each year to get them better acquainted with the program. Perhaps most importantly, Urban Arts students create and hold assemblies for the entire Urban Promise Academy, helping to add to their school's culture. The school's principal is especially grateful for this service, as Urban Arts' assemblies are the only ones held at the school for the entire year.

Urban Arts started in 2005 as an afterschool program that was a bit disorganized, with weak classroom management and a lack of consistency in enrichment. When community organization Oakland Leaf took over the program in 2006, it began to form into the successful afterschool program it is today with a high quality staff, growing number of participants and increasingly diverse array of enrichment activities. Recent data illustrates how the program has grown in effectiveness. Students who regularly attend the Urban Arts/Project Phoenix afterschool program exhibit higher school day attendance, are suspended less and achieve higher test scores than their non-participating peers. For the future, the program hopes to broaden its literacy curriculum and better address the needs of its English Language Learner population. In the present, Urban Arts/Project Phoenix is helping the Urban Promise Academy thrive; in 2009, it was recognized as one of Oakland's most improved schools on the California Standards Test, posting double-digit gains in both math and English. As the program continues to grow, with more than 100 students participating regularly, its symbiotic relationship with the Urban Promise Academy will surely pay even greater dividends for future Oakland middle schoolers.

Urban Arts/Project Phoenix

Category: Aligning with the School day

Location of the Program: Oakland, CA

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 110

Year Started: 2005

Main Sources of Funding:
- City funding
- ASES
- Individual donors and foundations

Recommendations for Other Programs:
- Maintain communication with regular school staff.
- Partake in school meetings and help train school and afterschool staff.

"We all have the same objective: for the students to be successful… Not only do we regularly meet with regular school day staff to talk about individual students and what needs they might have, but our afterschool staff is also a part of the leadership of the school. They attend leadership team meetings that the school has and help guide the direction and strategy of the school."

- Mirella Rangel, Executive Director of Oakland Leaf and Urban Arts/Project Phoenix

Afterschool: A Strategy for Addressing and Preventing Middle School Bullying

Bullying, commonly defined as hostile behavior involving an imbalance of power between victim and aggressor,[1] is one of the greatest dangers facing middle school youth in schools across the U.S. Several highly-publicized incidents, including extreme forms of teasing, physical beatings and even bully-induced suicides, have raised the national profile of bullying in recent years. Yet, as President Obama noted early this year in a video released by the White House, "This isn't an issue that makes headlines every day, but it affects every single young person in our country." Middle school students – who are undergoing physical, social and emotional transitions – are particularly vulnerable to teasing and intimidation, making the middle school years crucial to promoting healthy youth development. Schools have been working hard to eradicate bullying from classrooms and hallways during the day, but unfortunately, many of these incidents occur when children are outside of the supervision control of teachers and school administrators.[2] Simply stated, schools are doing well to reduce bullying incidents, but they need help to address this all-important issue.

Afterschool programs that provide access to caring adults and offer a more informal environment that is distinct from the school day allow children to feel safe from peer pressure, build confidence and learn how to deal with bullies. Beneficial programs across the country are aiding in the fight against bullying and teaching children that aggressive and detrimental behaviors are not something to be taken lightly. During his aforementioned address, the president went on to note that, "For a long time, bullying was treated as an unavoidable part of growing up, but more and more, we're seeing how harmful it can be for our kids – especially when it follows them from their school to their phone to their computer screen." Afterschool programs, with their unique position as a less formal and more open learning environment, can provide middle school youth with the knowledge and attitudes necessary to combat bullying both in school and online, leading to healthy youth development and a happier generation of students.

The Facts: Bullying in Middle School

The statistics on the rate of bullying in this country are sobering – especially for middle schoolers. Bullying has been identified as a major concern for schools across the country,[3] and sixth, seventh and eighth graders represent the students with the highest corresponding rates of both general bullying and physical injury as a result of bullying.[4] Bullying's omnipresence among U.S. schools cannot be overstated:

- The National Youth Violence Resource Center reports that 30 percent of U.S. children have reported being involved in bullying as a bully, victim or both.[5]
- Bullying tends to peak in late childhood/early adolescence, making prevention efforts in middle school integral to stemming future emotional damage.[6]
- Approximately 10 percent of children report being bullied on a consistent basis in school.[7]
- In 2007, students reported the following forms of bullying as most common in school:
    1. being made fun of (21%);
    2. being the object of rumors (18%);
    3. being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on (11%).[8]

As bullying persists, children and families are left struggling to ward off this dangerous distraction to both learning and healthy childhood development, and

a new form of bullying has made prevention efforts by schools alone that much more difficult.

Cyberbullying: The New Medium

Cyberbullying is a developing form of bullying that tends to peak between the end of middle school and the beginning of high school. It occurs through the use of technology – such as computers, cell phones and other electronic devices – and can come in many forms such as hurtful text messages, spreading rumors on social networking websites or creating content online that makes fun of others.[9] Cyberbullying is particularly dangerous among middle school students who are savvy enough to navigate online content but not mature enough to understand cyberbullying's potentially damaging implications:

- In a Clemson University study of nearly 4,000 middle school students, 11 percent had been electronically bullied and four percent had electronically bullied someone else at least once in the previous two months.[10]
- One study found that 14 percent of children in grades 6-10 reported being bullied online in the past two months, and that boys tended to be the aggressors in cyberbullying situations more often than girls.[11]
- Like other forms of bullying, cyberbullying tends to peak in grades 7 and 8; however, cyberbullying is distinct from verbal, social and physical bullying in that it has no link to the number of friends a victim possesses.[12]

With more than 17 million children aged 12-17 using the Internet,[13] teaching them how to surf the Web responsibly is extremely important to make sure that children are not intimated or harassed online.

The Social and Emotional Dangers of Bullying

The short- and long-term consequences of bullying can be detrimental for both the victim and the bully. A number of studies prove that when it comes to acts

Most Common Forms of Bullying Reported in 2007
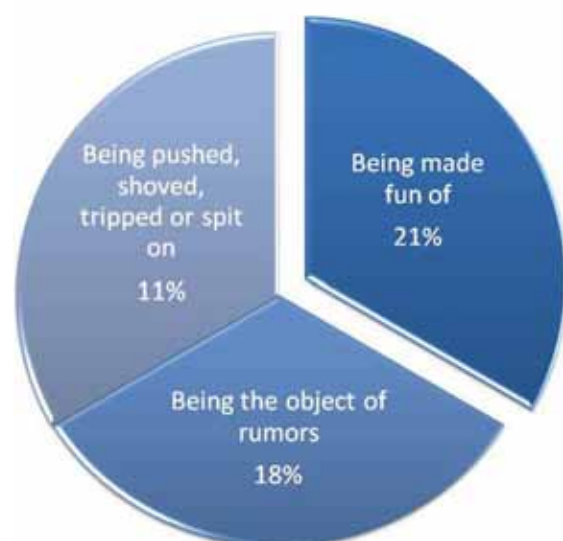
of violence, exclusion and intimidation of a peer, every party involved is at risk:

- As bullies go through adolescence, they are more likely to suffer problems such as delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, and dropping out of school.[14]
- Both bullies and victims have been found to be more depressed than students who are not involved in bullying.[15]
- Sixty percent of boys who bullied others in middle school had a criminal conviction by age 24.[16]
- Children and youth who are bullied are more likely to be depressed, lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem and think about suicide.[17]
- Bullying creates a climate of fear and disrespect in schools and has a harmful impact on student learning.[18]
- Adults who recalled being bullied in their youth were three times more likely to have suicidal thoughts or inclinations.[19]
- Children who were bullied in the past are more likely to lash out violently. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.[20]

Unfortunately, to date, despite their best efforts, school-based anti-bullying programs alone have not shown evidence of strong results.[21] Therefore, it is integral that community partners come together to offer innovative anti-bullying programs in which children can take part before school, after school and during the summer so they have a chance to develop healthy behaviors and learn how to deal with bullies.

How Afterschool Can Help

While offering children a more open environment in which to express their feelings regarding relationships with peers both inside and outside of school, afterschool programs also offer a host of other benefits that improve children's self-concepts, behavior and ability to deal with bullies. The research shows that afterschool programs keep kids safe, have a positive impact on self-concept and decision making, and help improve behavior in school:

- A Public/Private Ventures evaluation of the CORAL initiative in California found that 9 in 10 program participants reported feeling safe at the afterschool program.[22]

- The Promising Programs evaluation found that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to "reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students," including "significant reductions in aggressive behaviors with peers" and "reductions in misconduct."[23]

- Researchers at Fordham University found that participants in the YMCA of Greater New York Virtual Y programs demonstrated statistically significant and moderate-to-large improvements in task motivation, frustration tolerance, learning skills, acting out, peer social skills, assertive social skills, shyness/anxiety and on the overall behavior scale.[24]

With these benefits in mind, afterschool programs can be a key part of the bullying solution in a school or community in several capacities:[25] One obvious benefit is that afterschool offers a flexible space for one-on-one mentoring without the potential limitations imposed by school calendars or a stringent focus on academics.[26] Beyond mentoring, several innovative afterschool programs are proving the powerful effects that afterschool can have in promoting positive social interaction among students in middle school.

1. *Afterschool programs help promote a sense of community among students. By tying together school and afterschool and offering an open venue for communication with like-minded students, programs help ensure that students develop a strong network of friends so that healthy relationships carry on throughout each portion of a student's life.*

Bully Me Not in Lansing, MI, is an anti-bullying afterschool program designed to meet the unique needs of refugee middle school youth. The program tailors the anti-bullying curriculum to address students' unique language levels and cultural backgrounds. Bully Me Not teaches strategies for coping with bullying, techniques for managing anger and tools for locating trusting adults and other individuals to help with bullying situations. All lessons are designed to engage students with one another to build teamwork skills while learning about anti-bullying tactics. The afterschool program serves children from Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand, Iraq, Somali, Tanzania, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia and addresses the negative effects of bullying on self-confidence and how to respond to a bully. Activities for each lesson, ranging from art therapy to group discussions, are designed to engage students actively in their learning and encourage peer interaction and teamwork.

2. *Afterschool programs help encourage pro-social behaviors among middle schoolers. Offering opportunities for altruistic acts such as community service cultivates empathy, improves self-esteem and promotes positive attitudes.*

The main goals of **Girls Incorporated** of Worcester, MA, are to promote positive self-concept among the area's young women and create opportunities for them to succeed in the future. The program's "Dear World: Voices of

"Within the last ten years, bullying has reached beyond the physical walls of our classrooms through the increased use of technology, making it ever more difficult to detect. Email, text messages, chat rooms and websites have provided a quick and often anonymous means of cyberbullying. In national surveys of 10 to 17-year-olds, twice as many youth indicated that they had been victims and perpetrators of online bullying in 2005 compared to 1999."

- Todd Platts (PA)
U.S. House of Representatives

Worcester Girls," an expressive arts and anti-bullying project, empowers girls ages 11-15 to explore the socially challenging issues in their lives through theater. With the support of trained mentors and experienced group facilitators, the girls perform anti-bullying productions on stage, providing them with the opportunity to educate themselves and the community on issues of violence, intimidation and social exclusion to promote healthy relationships. The program engages middle school girls as important agents of change by developing their self-confidence and helping them promote a dialogue about violence prevention in their greater community.

3. *Afterschool allows children to develop leadership skills. Empowering children with the opportunity to develop in leadership positions in afterschool affords them the confidence to stand up to victimization.*

The Bullying Situation is a project created by students at the **21st Century PASOS** program at Bermudian Springs Middle School in Gettysburg, PA. Seventh and eighth grade students in the program created a website and video series depicting real-life school bullying to educate others in the community. After students reported an increase in bullying incidents at their school, program participants began role-playing exercises to show how to properly address bullies. As student interest in the exercises grew, they began taking the lead in videotaping and narrating these sessions to help spread the word on proper anti-bullying tactics. Students have benefited from the experience not only socially, but also by learning technology and acting skills, and by being part of something "big." Seeing their videos online and knowing they can be accessed by anyone worldwide via the Internet has given the students an

enormous sense of accomplishment.

4. *Afterschool programs can help keep parents and the greater community aware of any bullying that may be occurring before, during or after school, ensuring that awareness and learning can persist at outside of the classroom.*

The El Puente Beacon program at MS 50 offers structured programming and comprehensive support services for elementary and middle school students and their families in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. The program engages youth through a curriculum of positive youth development, academic enrichment, and parent and community involvement. A primary example of the innovativeness of El Puente Beacon is the development of the Beacon B-boy/B-girl dance squad, No Control, which uses dance as a medium to communicate the effects of bullying in school. The group performs its anti-bully-themed routine and then facilitates workshops to create a dialogue about bullying and how it should be handled. Through its unique use of break dancing, the youth of No Control spread the message about the negative effects of bullying, empowering their peers, parents, school administrators and community members to work together to combat the problem of bullying in their schools.

Conclusion

Bullying is a dangerous behavior that can have potentially damaging effects on both bullies and victims for many years. In order to stop it, a concerted effort is needed from the entire community, not just schools, parents and students. Afterschool programs can provide that link to community partners who can bring in new voices to embolden children to stand up to bullies. Programs also let children become leaders on the issue, enlightening the community on challenges facing middle school youth and showing other students how bullying can be stopped at their school. While engaging middle school youth in constructive learning activities, afterschool offers a safe space for participants to voice their concerns and develop healthy behaviors and relationships with other students. The hands-on and student-driven nature of afterschool programs allows middle schoolers to confide in caring mentors while also developing leadership skills to build confidence and improve their self-concept. In partnership with schools, parents and the wider community, afterschool can help produce more emboldened students that know how to stand up to bullies, thereby promoting a bully-free environment in which all students can learn and grow.

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"We know that the hurt and pain from bullying lasts long after the bullying itself takes place. Students involved in bullying are more likely to struggle in school, use drugs and alcohol, and have physical and mental health issues that can linger well into adulthood."

- Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
Department of Health and Human Services

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Afterschool In Action: Inside 21st Century PASOS

The 21st Century PASOS afterschool program in Gettysburg, PA is a unique program that blends English Language Learning, academic enrichment and an innovative bullying prevention curriculum to form an invaluable learning environment for its mostly rural and migrant population of students. PASOS combines its 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) with its Migrant Education Program to offer a program that is both academically beneficial for all students and attuned to the unique needs of children from immigrant families. It takes place four days per week from 2:30-5:00 p.m. and offers transportation, which is key in a rural area, alleviating a major burden for working parents. Each day, one hour of the program is devoted to homework help, while the rest of the afternoon consists of a variety of enrichment activities including culinary arts, physical activity, jewelry making, dance, arts, and cultural learning. Additionally, the program runs occasional weekend and holiday field trips for its mostly low-income youth population, where students participate in a variety of educational and recreational experiences to help build camaraderie and confidence. Finally, the program offers a summer component, which runs from 8:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. for four weeks and reflects the values taught during the school year.

The 21st Century PASOS program grew out of a community need. When the county's middle schoolers who did not qualify for the Migrant Education Program were still struggling with language and cultural barriers, the program expanded using federal 21st CCLC funding, creating a program that was open to additional at-risk students. The program is voluntary so retention can be an issue for some 21st Century PASOS students; however, the program's flexibility is appreciated by students who can participate in school activities like sports during parts of the week but still have a safe place to learn after school on other days. The program keeps middle schoolers coming back by offering a blend of academics and fun, and nowhere is this better exemplified than in their bullying prevention project. In response to seeing too much verbal bullying in the program and during the school day, program staff offered students the chance to utilize video equipment to videotape role plays of bullying situations. The use of technology was the original hook to get students involved in the project, but the student-driven learning provided the strongest benefits. Not only did students address bullying head on and offer tips to their fellow students on how to deal with bullies, but they also gained a new skill and more confidence in themselves as English speakers and students.

In addition to 21st Century PASOS' bullying prevention curriculum, the program also boasts some impressive outcomes:

- 80 percent of participants improve or maintain satisfactory progress in homework completion.

- 72 percent demonstrate improvement in or maintain satisfactory class participation.

- 74 percent improve or maintain satisfactory school attendance.

One final key to the program's success is the use of local college students to help staff the program. Most important, all of the key staff is bilingual, offering students valuable access to role models and strong mentors who help to build their confidence. With the program's proven benefits, numerous enrichment offerings and passionate staff, 21st Century PASOS is a precious resource in the Gettysburg community, helping foster relationships between schools and families, and promoting character development and leadership in students.

21st Century PASOS

Category: Addressing and Preventing Bullying for Middle Schoolers

Location of the Program: Gettyburg, PA

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 60

Year Started: 2008

Main Source of Funding:
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Recommendations for Other Programs:
- Use students as leaders, and staff as mentors/guides/role models.
- Conduct home visits, if possible to relay positive information to parents as well as to resolve conduct or attendance issues.
- Survey kids to find out what they want to learn, and gear both ongoing activities and special events toward the students' expressed interests.
- Seek out and grow effective partnerships by finding resources in the community – particularly partners who want to serve or connect with your student population.
- Ensure that instruction, activities and interactions are culturally and linguistically appropriate and respectful.

"Our students are tackling a critical issue, one that is relevant to their daily lives. They bring to the surface some real bullying situations, from a teenager's perspective. We look forward to expanding The Bully Situation project and spreading the message more widely, with our students leading the way."

- Christine Miller, Program Coordinator
21st Century PASOS

Service-Learning in Afterschool: Helping Students Grow and Communites Prosper

More than 1 in 4 eighth grade students in the U.S. volunteer each year, and the benefits of these altruistic acts stretch far beyond their immediate impacts on students' communities.[1] Studies have shown that adolescents who volunteer are less likely to use drugs[2] and more likely to succeed academically, while also developing a strong work ethic for the future.[3] With these benefits in mind, it seems imperative that youth become involved in volunteering at an early age in order to develop an understanding of its importance for the future. Creating a corps of compassionate leaders for the future will ensure that the disadvantaged and downtrodden will continue to have a voice and a helping hand when they are in need. As awareness of the disparity between the world's most wealthy citizens and its least fortunate has grown recently, so too has the understanding that an act of service — whether it's volunteering at a local foodbank or developing a campaign to aid the hungry in Somalia — can go a long way in reducing inequity and promoting global prosperity. Youth are the future torchbearers for these causes, and so engaging children of all ages in volunteering, and more importantly, allowing them to create their own service projects, is vital to the betterment of their communities, country and the world at large.

Children in middle school are particularly well-positioned, as both ardent learners with curious imaginations and able-minded young leaders, to grow immensely from volunteering and developing service projects. However, too often it is difficult for students to find service-learning opportunities within the school day. Uniquely positioned as a learning space that is separate from— yet connected to—the school day, afterschool programs can impart important lessons about service to middle school youth while also tying in school day lessons. The combination of service-learning and afterschool offers benefits not only to students' surrounding communities, but also to their own academic and social development. With the help of afterschool mentors, middle school students can take their volunteering to the next level. They can go from volunteers to active service-learners. In the afterschool space, middle schoolers are afforded the guidance and flexibility to become true agents of change in their community while also becoming more socially conscious leaders for the future.

Community Service vs. Service-Learning

As stated above, community service in all forms has great benefits for those who get involved. However service-learning, which incorporates meaningful community service with learning objectives and reflections,[4] has potentially even more powerful advantages for middle school youth. The differences between community service and service-learning lie primarily in the focus on direct learning objectives in service-learning, but with various definitions for both terms, there are a number of key ways in which they differ:

Service-Learning

- Includes an academic component
- Allows youth to plan their own service projects with group discussions and brainstorming sessions
- Focuses on learning about broader social issues outside the scope of the project
- Includes reflection on the project goals and outcomes through discussions, writing or presentations
- Example: Students in a middle school environmental science program help preserve the natural habitat of animals living in a nearby forest

Community Service

- Typically does not have an academic focus
- Usually planned by adults or a party other than those participating
- Learning occurs but is not intentional[5]
- Reflection is not an essential focus
- Example: Students take part in community-wide park clean up event developed by the mayor's office[6]

While both types of service are extremely valuable to students and the community at large, service-learning offers students the ability to truly learn and grow from their experiences and offers them the opportunity to directly create positive change with projects they conceptualize and carry out.

Benefits of Service-Learning

With its blend of enhanced social awareness and supplemental academic enrichment, service-learning can offer students a multitude of varied

> "Service-learning allows students to apply classroom content and problem-solving skills to identified community or school needs. This not only enhances the community, but provides a powerful learning experience for our young people."
>
> *- David Price (NC)*
> *U.S. House of Representatives*

benefits. Not only does it present an enhanced and more practical understanding of school day lessons, but it also provides opportunities for students to grow socially and emotionally.[7] When middle schoolers learn through hands-on service-learning projects that they have developed themselves, the potential for learning and development is limitless:

Academic Gains

- More than two thirds of students in a Flint, MI, service-learning program reported that their participation helped them understand what they were learning in school and improved their academic achievement.[8]
- Michigan service-learning students in grades 7-12 reported more engagement and more effort in English/language arts classes than nonparticipants.[9]
- Sixth grade service-learning participants in New Hampshire demonstrated significant gains in achievement scores on state assessments compared to their own performance before participating in service-learning.[10]
- One study found that involvement in service can contribute to lessening the achievement gap, with low-income students who serve doing better academically than students who do not serve.[11]

Social and Emotional Impacts

- In a study of sixth, seventh and eighth-graders, students with

substantial hours of service-learning, including reflection and a high degree of motivation, significantly increased their self-concept concerning helping others and maintained their commitment to class work at a higher rate than those with less service-learning participation.[12]

- A study of Wisconsin service-learning project participants found that middle school students reported lower rates of certain risk behaviors, higher levels of leadership and ability to resist danger, higher levels of positive peer influence, higher rates of homework and school engagement, higher interpersonal competence, and increased involvement in service to others.[13]

- Compared to their peers, young adults who participated in K-12 service-learning were more likely to discuss politics or community issues and vote in an election year; more politically and socially connected to their communities, both as leaders and role models; and more active members of society.[14]

How Afterschool Programs are Promoting Service-Learning

Currently service-learning takes place in only 32 percent of public schools across the U.S.[15] With more and more time being devoted to core academic subjects and a stronger focus on standardized testing in recent years, enrichment activities, including service-learning opportunities, have become less prevalent in school day learning. Therefore, afterschool programs have become more important than ever as providers of enrichment that is linked with, but separate from, the school day. Afterschool is perfectly positioned to fulfill middle schooler's service-learning needs and to develop better students now and stronger service advocates for the future. There are a number of innovative ways that afterschool programs across the country are providing service-learning for middle school students:

1. *Afterschool programs can offer mentors to guide middle schoolers in developing service-learning projects for their communities. When students see role models act as social change agents, they are inspired to dedicate their learning to service.*

YouthCity in Salt Lake City, UT, offers project-based service-learning opportunities for middle-school age youth in which college students serve as mentors to help participants shape and develop their service-learning projects. YouthCity partners with Westminster College to develop mutually beneficial service-learning experiences for the youth and undergraduate and graduate students. The volunteer mentors from Westminster College offer positive role models for the middle-school-age youth. With their help, middle schoolers have developed public awareness messages addressing air pollution; demonstrated the impact of pollution on the ecology, biodiversity, and water quality of Liberty Lake; and volunteered to plant, care for and harvest produce they have grown themselves. YouthCity provides middle-school-age youth a variety of service-learning opportunities that integrate community service with instruction, offer enriching learning opportunities, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen the greater Salt Lake City community.

2. *A dedication to developing skills and enhancing knowledge is at the crux of service-learning. Afterschool programs offer the flexibility for students to take to the streets to enact fully-informed service projects that truly get to the heart of community needs while also imparting important skills that can help them in the future.*

Baltimore Speaks Out! (BSO) in Maryland is a media literacy and production program in which middle school students create videos about issues relevant to their lives and communities. This model of service-learning promotes 21st-century thinking, makes young people aware of issues impacting their communities, builds teamwork and media literacy skills, and encourages young people to become active citizens. At Baltimore Speaks Out!, students work as a team to create a media project to help solve or create awareness about an important issue in their community. Students identify issues that are personally important them, providing for projects that truly reflect each student's personality and passions. Past projects have focused on school bullying, gang activity, the impacts of gentrification, pollution and police surveillance. In the course of creating the projects, students engage in critical discussions, conduct online research, interview community members or relevant stakeholders, do reflective writing exercises and determine how to communicate their findings in an engaging way through media. One of the most unique and vital parts of the BSO program is that it allows youth to explore their personal connections to the community issues they are examining, and with this, youth develop a passion for social justice that they never knew existed.

3. *Afterschool programs allow students to become leaders, providing a space where youth development is essential to helping the program grow and where youth voices are not only heard, but also utilized in the advancement of program goals.*

Fresh Youth Initiatives in New York, NY, provides at-risk youth with opportunities to connect with their community and to become concerned, active citizens. The program's service-learning model helps middle schoolers to develop the skills, values and resiliency they will need to overcome barriers to success in the future. Fresh Youth Initiatives is a comprehensive program that offers homework help and recreational activities while also dedicating time to service projects each day. The program's projects include a wide range of activities, from volunteering at a food pantry to graffiti clean-up. The most important aspect of each activity comes at the conclusion when participants reflect and are offered time to draw connections between their work and their ability to be social change agents. The program directly benefits more than 2,000 community members and provides over 10,000 hours of community service each program year. By eighth grade, Fresh Youth Initiatives participants are encouraged to work with program staff to identify needs in the community and design their own service project. In this way, they learn first-hand about the importance of positive social change and they take on increasing responsibility in responding to issues.

4. *The afterschool space presents youth with an unparalleled opportunity to plan, discuss and reflect on their service-learning goals and outcomes. When youth succeed in carrying out a service to their community that is linked with school day lessons, they are afforded unequaled self-confidence and respect as educated social change agents in their community.*

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools in Louisiana is an afterschool program consisting of a network of middle school students "rethinking" their schools and contributing to their community. The program includes youth from 15 New Orleans public schools and focuses on identifying changes necessary to improving schools in their community. The program includes five student action committees: Oil-Free Schools/Architecture, Food Justice/School Gardens, Restorative Justice, Documentary Photography and Digital Media. Each committee is dedicated to analyzing each issue and conceptualizing and carrying out a plan to fix it. The program is uniquely youth-driven. Students identify the issues that matter to them and then staffers connect them with professionals—such as chefs, artists, media experts or architects—to develop creative solutions. Since 2006, Rethink youth have successfully convinced school officials to repair 350 substandard bathrooms; install sinks for hand washing in all new school cafeterias; add garden plots to all future school designs; and serve significantly more fresh food. Additionally, students have spoken at conferences across the country and have earned a reputation as a group that gets things done in New Orleans. In support of the program, Superintendent Paul Vallas noted, "A lot of people come to us with problems, but not very many come with solutions. The Rethinkers come to me with solutions and I have no choice but to listen to them."

Conclusion

Pairing service with academic enrichment can support youth success in many ways. Middle schoolers in particular can benefit greatly from the improved self-confidence and learning gains afforded by service-learning opportunities. Afterschool programs interested in providing service -learning for students must be mindful of the important blend of providing community service opportunities along with an academic component. Whereas community service activities allow youth to develop and apply their skills and knowledge to real-life situations and enhance their ability to become productive, contributing adult citizens, including an academic component by allowing youth to lead the service project ties youth development goals to actual gains in the classroom. All of this leads to better students and a brighter future, and highlights an example of how afterschool benefits children, schools and their communities.

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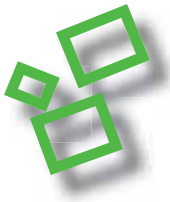
Afterschool In Action:
Inside Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools is a truly unique and innovative program. The program began in 2006 as a summer learning program in response to the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina on local schools and communities. After losing their houses, leaving the city and going to new schools away from home, students in the program, who are known as "rethinkers," met with community organizers, artists, architects, media experts and educators and shared their vision for the future of New Orleans schools at a news conference. Following the success of that news conference and the realization that they could make a real change in their community, the rethinkers decided to continue to meet during the school year to make sure that student voices were at the forefront as New Orleans made plans to rebuild its school system. Since 2006, Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools has grown to include a six-week summer program, year-round committees and afterschool clubs in six public schools.

The program's major component is its six-week summer learning program in which children create artwork, tell stories, meet experts and go on field trips to educate themselves about issues affecting their community. At the end of the summer, the rethinkers create a list of recommendations for change and share their solutions with school officials at a big news conference. During the school year, the rethinkers continue their crusade for service by exploring new issues - such as nutrition and restorative justice - plan to address those issues and then implement change. Past rethinker efforts include getting healthier foods into the cafeteria for lunch and creating a community garden. Additionally, during the school year, the rethinkers travel to other schools across New Orleans and give presentations to students on how they can become social change agents in their schools.

At its core, Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools is a solution-focused, service-learning program that puts the students in the driver's seat. The rethinkers choose the issues that they want to address and become the community's strongest voice for school reform. In the end, the program instills a confidence in its participants, giving them a sense of value and affording them a chance to transform both their communities and themselves. The program is still fairly new and is growing each year, as more middle schoolers get involved, tackling increasingly complex social issues. The rethinkers have gained praise across New Orleans for their productive, well-thought out projects and now have the ears of politicians and community leaders who are excited to hear what this ambitious group of change agents will come up with next.

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools

Category: Offering Service-Learning Opportunities to Middle Schoolers

Location of the Program: New Orleans, LA

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 20

Year Started: 2006

**Main Sources of Funding**:
- Individual donors and foundations

Recommendations for Other Programs:
- Give young people a voice in school reform.
- Create a forum where youth are heard and respected in their community.

"Kids Rethink really created this idea of shared power and shared leadership, and I think that's what allows the rethinkers to do such meaningful work because as they're working to transform the school system, they're also transforming themselves."

- Mallory Falk, Communications Director at Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools
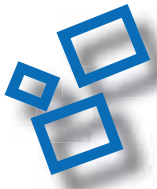
Literacy in Afterschool: An Essential Building Block for Learning and Development

Literacy in its traditional sense has always been linked to reading and writing; however, the list of subjects associated with the term literacy has become much more expansive in recent years. No longer does literacy simply refer to the comprehension of the written word. In the 21st century, literacy connotes an intense knowledge of any particular field of interest. Those who are STEM-literate are particularly apt at understanding the worlds of science, technology, engineering and math, while those who maintain financial literacy are able to manage their personal investments and savings. In the same way that literacy's meaning has expanded in recent years, so too has the push to broaden academic experiences beyond simple comprehension and vocabulary. The new global, high-tech marketplace demands intense creativity and thinking that goes beyond basic learning skills and propels students to a fuller understanding of society. However, despite the growing importance of 21st century skills such as critical thinking and global awareness, the ability to comprehend written text is still an essential building block to learning and development. Even as doors are being opened for more well-off students to expand their minds beyond reading, writing and arithmetic, many students continue to struggle to develop a strong command of written text not only in elementary and middle school, but also into their high school and even adult years. At its core, literacy is the use of written information to function in society, attain goals and develop knowledge.[1] Without this tool, a student will almost inevitably struggle with other forms of learning. Whether solving a complex word problem or learning about the Revolutionary War, literacy is an absolute necessity to furthering learning and development.

Middle school stands as a particularly important time to intervene and ensure that children are on the right track toward proficient literacy. Although reading and writing abilities are first developed in elementary school, sixth graders who failed math or English/reading have only a 10 to 20 percent chance of graduating high school on time.[2] Therefore, intervention during the middle school years is critical, and children who have fallen behind by the end of elementary school need more help to catch up. Afterschool programs across the country are helping to close the reading achievement gap to ensure that all children are prepared to tackle more complex subject matter as they advance to high school and beyond.

Literacy by the Numbers: A Lot of Work Needed to Catch Up

The achievement gap in the United States is a well-documented issue that pervades every aspect of society, and one of its essential cogs is the disconnect in reading and writing achievement between low-income children and those from more affluent backgrounds. By comparison, children from low-income families start off at an immense disadvantage in terms of literacy development:

- First graders from lower-income families have a vocabulary half the size of children from higher-income families.
- By age 3, children in low-income homes will have heard one-third as many words as children in middle- and high-income homes (10 million versus 30 million words).
- The literacy gap between racial/ethnic groups is wide – while 41 percent of White and 42 percent of Asian-American fourth graders score at or above the "proficient" level, just 13 percent of African-American, 16 percent of Hispanic-American and 18 percent of American Indian fourth graders do.[3]
- Seventy-five percent of students with literacy problems in the third grade will still experience literacy difficulties in the ninth grade.[4]

Once these students advance on to adulthood, the numbers become even more disconcerting:

- A 2002 study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that 21-23 percent of adult Americans were not "able to locate information in text," could not "make low-level inferences using printed materials," and were unable to "integrate easily identifiable pieces of information." Additionally, the study showed that more than 40 percent of U.S. adults in the lowest level on the literacy scale were living in poverty.[5]
- Eleven million adults nationwide were deemed non-literate in English in a 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.[6]

In light of these statistics, it is apparent that early intervention is necessary to

Fourth Graders At or Above 'Proficient' Level by Racial/ Ethnic Group
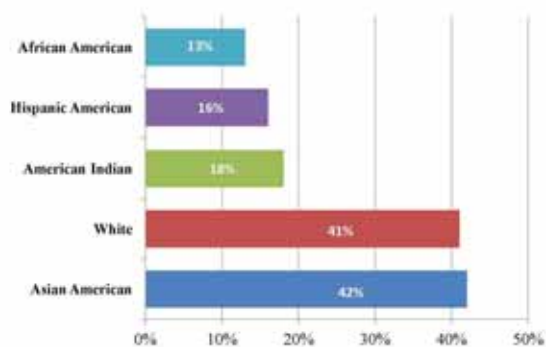
ensure that children start on the right track toward healthy literacy development. However, the statistics also show that once students fall off the path to literacy, it is extremely difficult to get back on, leading to high rates of adult illiteracy that can have damaging effects on the individual and the future of our economy. Studies have shown that between 10 and 15 percent of children with serious reading problems will drop out of high school, and about half of youth with criminal records or with a history of substance abuse have reading problems.[7] With this, the adolescent years have taken on new importance of late as a time to reverse the reading losses low-income children suffer in elementary school so that they can succeed as adults.

There is growing research showing that adolescents may be able to develop stronger literacy if they are able to read more liberally, with materials they select and in the medium they most prefer: the Internet. Research also suggests that the time spent outside of school in enrichment programs and clubs can infuse reading into subjects and hobbies that youth actually enjoy, therefore leading to development in the classroom.[8] With this in mind, afterschool programs are an excellent conduit to bridge middle schoolers' interests and passions with literacy development.

Innovative Literacy Learning in Afterschool

In general, studies on afterschool have shown stronger gains in math in comparison to reading and language arts; however some programs have shown significant gains in increasing literacy and related skills, and programs across the country are offering innovative solutions to promoting literacy engagement afterschool.

- In an evaluation of New Jersey After 3 participants, teachers reported

that over three-quarters of program participants were at or above grade level in their ability to draw conclusions, spell, identify the main idea of a reading passage and communicate orally.[9]

- A Yale University study of afterschool participation found that children who were in the highest category of afterschool program attendance had significantly higher reading achievement than children in all other care arrangements.[10]
- A Public/Private Ventures evaluation of the Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) project, an eight-year, $58 million afterschool initiative of the James Irvine Foundation, concluded that the five-city program's tightly focused literacy programming three to four days a week produced "pronounced gains in achievement for a range of students." The reading gains were greatest for participating youth who were two or more grade levels behind at the time of the first assessment.[11]

As can be seen in the statistics, afterschool programs can have a range of important benefits for children's literacy development, and innovative programs across the country are proving that afterschool and literacy learning can be a powerful combination.

Afterschool programs can create a community of support that encourages reading and writing in school, at home and in social settings, offering children the opportunity to strengthen themselves as readers, writers and communicators.[12]

ACES (Athletes Committed to Educating Students) in Minneapolis, MN, is focused on reducing the achievement gap by providing innovative literacy enrichment to its participants. Data prove the program's significant effects on reading gains: During the 2009-2010 school year, ACES students were 30 percent more likely than non-participants to gain one year or more of reading growth. In addition, ACES has served the Minneapolis community for 16 years, creating ongoing access and sustained participation opportunities. ACES program curriculum has strong ties to school day learning. Students learn in classrooms of ten or fewer, with a 1:4 staff-to-student ratio, providing individualized instruction in partnership with school day teachers and principals to truly coordinate the school day and afterschool. This creates a strong community of learning for the students which assists in their literacy development. Throughout their work, ACES connects with families, teachers, administrators and other community groups to create holistic supports for students' literacy development. ACES students have achieved outstanding gains in reading because of dedicated staff and a whole child approach that allows children to change their mentality on literacy and succeed in school.

Some of the best afterschool programs encourage enhanced literacy by helping children to see how and why reading and writing might be useful and relevant to their lives and futures. In this, reading and writing transcend their status as schoolwork and instead become an avenue for self-discovery and community exploration.[13]

America SCORES Chicago delivers high-quality, comprehensive afterschool programming to students and families in Chicago's low-income West Side neighborhoods. The program employs a unique, three-pronged combination of soccer (physical fitness components and nutrition workshops), creative writing (spoken word, hip-hop and poetry training aligned with national literacy standards for educators) and community service to inspire program participants to be engaged students, lead healthy lives and become agents of change in their community. Each school program consists of two teams of 20 sixth through eighth grade students—one boys' team and one girls' team. These teams work together in the classroom, on the field and in the community, guided by a writing coach and a soccer coach. America SCORES' "Writing for the Community" curriculum introduces various modes of expression, from letter writing to creating flyers, all drawing upon previous lessons in poetry and creative writing. Weekly meetings are centered on student-directed service projects addressing neighborhood issues identified and explored by the students

themselves. Poet-athletes learn to recognize the assets available to them in the community and learn firsthand their power to impact what they see. Through service projects, students are given the means to convert educational theory to concrete actions, helping cement learned concepts as well as develop critical thinking, real-life problem solving and a sense of social responsibility. The program provides the ideal balance of academics and enrichment that keeps kids engaged in learning and on the path to literacy.

Connecting writing with other art forms can be a very powerful way to make literacy relevant to all students and connect all forms of expression with language development.[14]

Carteret Arts & Sports Academy (CASA) in Carteret, NJ, places a heavy emphasis on the use of arts education as a catalyst for student academic

"Literacy skills are fundamental to a good education, a successful career and a highly-skilled, competitive workforce. Yet, more than 60 percent of our nation's high school seniors currently read below the proficient level."

*- **John Yarmuth (KY)**
U.S. House of Representatives*

achievement and individual learning. The goal of the program is to deliver high-quality literacy enrichment for students while also fostering positive character development, overall academic achievement, physical and artistic development and a higher degree of community and parental involvement. CASA's focus on literacy evolved from an intense look at the needs of the surrounding community. Once it was discovered that 40 percent of students in the community were not proficient in English language arts, CASA developed CREATE (Carteret Readers Exploring Art Through Expression). Through this innovative program, guest authors and artists are brought in to work with the children to visualize and create various types of works of art based on books that the participants have read. By innovatively addressing community needs and utilizing community partners to connect other art forms to reading, CASA is helping students in Cartaret develop healthy reading habits that will help them succeed in the future.

Afterschool programs can utilize reading and writing as a way for children to reflect on their family and culture and explore the links between their heritage and the customs and cultures of others in their community by providing access to mentors and community partners.[15]

Oxford Stars in Oxford, PA, offers afterschool and summer programming that provides academic enrichment and social support for middle school English Language Learners (ELLs) and Long-Term English Learners (LTELs). Primarily Latino immigrants, these students tend to struggle in school, score in the non-proficient ranges on standardized tests, drop out of school, and fail to graduate high school on time. Oxford Stars has been successfully building a bridge between the Oxford School District and the growing Latino population within the Oxford community since its inception. The program seeks to support English language development for immigrant students as they work on acquiring grade-level standards in reading, math and science while also connecting participating immigrant youth and their families to necessary community resources and organizations to help spur healthy youth development. In addition, Oxford Stars offers a chance for students to learn from mentors and guest speakers from the community who have real-life work experiences they can share with students to encourage them to learn and grow. The power of the program lies in its ability to provide individualized reading and ELL instruction that meets the unique needs of Oxford's growing immigrant population.

Conclusion

While literacy's definition continues to expand to encompass more fields, reading and writing still stand as two of the most important pillars in every child's education. Low-income students across the U.S. are falling behind in basic literacy skills due to unequal opportunities to learn both at home and in the classroom. Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to fill those opportunity gaps and support the acquisition of reading and writing skills among underserved youth to help them build a brighter future. Intervention during the middle school years is vital to overturn losses that occur in elementary school and give children who have fallen behind a second chance to get back on track to successful literacy development. All in all, more time to learn in an afterschool program that provides innovative literacy enrichment opportunities can be a great avenue for middle school students to make academic advances in the classroom and developmental advances in life.

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Afterschool In Action:
Inside America SCORES Chicago

America SCORES is a national program started in 1994 by a public school teacher in Washington, D.C. The model of combining soccer with creative expression spread to cities across the country, and in 2000 America SCORES Chicago opened its doors. America SCORES Chicago began partnering with schools in North Lawndale, a neighborhood with limited exposure to soccer, but with profound need for quality afterschool options. America SCORES Chicago staff developed strong relationships with partner schools, solidifying its presence in the community and gaining a reputation as a reliable, high-quality partner.

America SCORES Chicago began with approximately 120 third through fifth grade students, but has grown to serve more than 1,700 Kindergarten through eighth grade students in 10 schools in three West Side communities. During the fall season, middle school poet-athletes meet with writing coaches two days per week for creative expression and writing workshops and two days per week for soccer with soccer coaches. On Fridays, they assemble for program-wide game days. During the spring season, the program shifts from creative expression to service-learning when teams use the voice they developed in the fall to create and implement a student-led service project that benefits their community. In addition to its traditional afterschool model, America SCORES Chicago runs summer programs and intersession programs that keep students physically active and engaged in literacy during school breaks.

America SCORES uses soccer as the "hook" to get students excited, involved and engaged throughout the season. Using the teamwork lessons learned in soccer, America SCORES coaches transfer that camaraderie into the classroom to create a supportive environment in which students can find their voice through poetry and writing. Finally, poet-athletes use their voices to build character and promote change in their communities. The America SCORES writing curricula have been shown to improve performance in language arts and combat growing illiteracy rates among underserved youth; students perform 14 percent higher on standardized tests than non-participant peers, and 88 percent of parents see students reading more on their own.

America SCORES Chicago's soccer and writing coaching staff is made up of members of the school community, primarily teachers, who understand the importance of engaging learning opportunities at these under-resourced schools. The coaching staff - both soccer and writing - are paid, trained and supported by America SCORES staff. Volunteers serve as assistant coaches, game day helpers and special event support. By compensating coaches and obligating them to attend trainings, America SCORES ensures commitment from the coaching staff and program quality.

America SCORES is devoted to and passionate about serving the communities in Chicago's West Side, and it truly shows in their commitment to bettering literacy in the area. With the important mix of leadership; positive team peer pressure and fun, interactive content, the program is able to provide children with an enjoyable experience while they also develop vital skills for their future. With a "whole child" approach to youth development, America SCORES Chicago is showing the immense benefits that a program can have on a child's confidence, a school's academics and a community's well-being.

America SCORES Chicago

Category: Promoting Literacy for Middle School Students

Location of the Program: Chicago, IL

Number of Middle Schoolers Served Per Day: 240

Year Started: 2000

Main Sources of Funding:
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers, state and city funds
- Private foundations
- Corporations and individuals
- Special events (e.g. Corporate Soccer Tournament)

Recommendations for Other Programs:
- Practice what you teach: the three core values of America SCORES are teamwork, leadership and commitment. Chicago strives to implement these at all levels of the organization.
- Learn from your failures, but be proud of your successes.
- Survey writing and soccer coaches to learn how to improve their coaching abilities and classroom techniques.
- Constantly strive to improve and never settle for less than best.

"We use soccer as the 'hook.' It's our rule that the kids can't play in game day if they don't go to writing practice, so of course they won't miss it. The next thing you know, they're having a good time, and they're better writers and better readers."

- Amy Vondra-Stark, Executive Director of America SCORES Chicago