March 2021

Evidence-based Considerations for
COVID-19 Reopening and Recovery Planning:
Afterschool Coordination Systems
to Support Afterschool Programming

Afterschool programs can play meaningful and important roles in helping young people recover from the damaging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and in promoting educational equity. In this document, we share evidence-based guidance focused on the value of coordinated citywide systems to support high-quality afterschool. It is important to note that these recommendations are not the only pathway to achieve outcomes. Some of these findings may need to be adapted to hybrid and post-COVID contexts. *An annotated bibliography of research on afterschool systems and research-based implementation tools funded by The Wallace Foundation is included at the end of this document.* All of the resources mentioned can be downloaded for free at www.wallacefoundation.org.

Afterschool programs offer children opportunities for developmental relationships and rich experiences that combine action and reflection; together, these help children develop their own set of critical skills, attitudes, and behaviors.[1] Afterschool programs also provide a safe, supervised place for children during the hours when many parents or caregivers are at work.[2] Municipalities often have a wide range of afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) providers, and many have established afterschool "systems" that serve as coordinating entities to reduce fragmentation, redundancy, and inefficiency and to increase OST access and quality, especially for those in marginalized communities.[3] Coordinated systems can improve access by addressing common barriers, such as transportation, convenience, affordability, and number of available slots.[4] Our research suggests three components of effective afterschool systems are crucial – a coordinating entity, a common data system, and quality standards or framework – backed by support from municipal leadership.[5] During the pandemic, some systems set up hubs for student learning.

Coordinating entity
Coordinating entities play multiple roles, such as coordinating afterschool provision, facilitating the development of quality standards, providing professional development, establishing community-wide data systems, and measuring success, as well as advocating for supportive policies. A coordinating entity may be a youth-serving organization (such as United Way or YMCA), the mayor's office or a public agency, the school system, a community foundation, a regional or state youth-serving network, or a network of local partners. A review of 15 afterschool systems concluded that while "there is no 'right' governance model," effective governance approaches clearly define who is responsible for leadership, oversight, and day-to-day operations. A system may change its coordinating entity over time because "governance of an afterschool system should continue to reflect the community's needs and context."[6]

Implementation Options
- Districts should consider partnering with and leveraging municipal afterschool systems to ensure equitable access to high-quality programs for all young people
- Districts should consider leveraging the work of existing statewide afterschool networks, which play a large role in coordination in some cities[7]

Common data system
A key function of most afterschool systems is to develop and maintain a data system, which allows the afterschool system to collect, analyze, and apply data to accomplish its goals. City afterschool systems typically seek data about program supply and demand, characteristics of participating youth, program quality, and program effects on youth.[8]

Implementation Options
- Recognize that building the capacity to use data is not an easy or a straightforward process and requires time, patience, persistence, and flexibility[9]
- Consider starting small with a limited set of goals for data collection and use, and/or a limited set of providers piloting a new data system, with plans to scale up gradually[10]

Quality standards
Quality is uneven across and even within afterschool programs.[11] Having quality standards or a framework can help to build consensus among providers about program quality, inform planning, identify priority areas for professional development, measure program improvement, and make funding decisions. It can also help address a broad range of program facets, including instructional practices (sometimes referred to as "point-of-service" quality), manager policies and practices, curriculum content, and attendance. Investing in quality afterschool systems can have measurable payoffs for young people: a study of Providence Afterschool Alliance's AfterZones found "strikingly higher school attendance" after one school year, with participants having more positive attitudes about community resources, better social skills, stronger feelings of connection to school, and better school attendance than peers who did not attend programs.[12]

Implementation Options
- Before starting quality improvement efforts, involve program providers and stakeholders in deciding what quality means to them
- Foster a shared understanding of quality as well as its importance[13]

Committed city leadership
A 2013 study on city systems found that commitment by city leaders was advantageous for afterschool coordination.[14] High or moderate commitment was associated with stable or increased funding as well as use of a common data system and/or having quality standards/framework. In more than half the cities in the study, active city leaders/appointees participated at steering or advisory committee meetings, supported the coordinating entity or its board, and/or were liaisons between the coordinating entity and other community partners.

Implementation Options
- Communicate about programs with key leaders and enroll them as champions
- Consider engaging a wide range of stakeholders who could support system efforts, such as program providers, government leaders, private funders, higher education, and others

About The Wallace Foundation

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is a non-partisan independent endowed philanthropy working nationally to answer important questions that, if solved, could help strengthen practices and policies within a field. Our mission is to foster equity and improvements in learning and enrichment for young people, and in the arts for everyone.

We hope this document will be helpful to afterschool programs, community leaders, states, districts, schools, and others as they reopen and recover from the pandemic. We believe this to be a critical moment for evidence-based guidance in order to support students, teachers, principals, out-of-school-time providers, education systems, and youth development organizations in creating and supporting high-quality learning and development opportunities for young people, and particularly for those who are most marginalized and face the greatest adversity.

More information can be found at www.wallacefoundation.org.

[1] Jenny Nagaoka, Camille A. Farrington, Stacy B. Ehrlich, and Ryan D. Heath, *Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework,* The University of Chicago Consortium for on Chicago School Research, 2015.

[2] Ruth Neild, Sandra Wilson and Wendy McClanahan. *Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act,* Research for Action, 2019.

[3] Susan J. Bodilly, Jennifer Sloan McCombs *, et al.*, *Hours of Opportunity: Lessons from Five Cities on Building Systems to Improve Afterschool, Summer, and Other Out-of-School-Time Programs*, RAND Corporation, 2010.

[4] Bodilly, McCombs, *, et al.*, 2010.

[5] Linda Simkin, Ivan Charner, *et al.*, *Is Citywide Coordination Going Nationwide?,* FHI 360, 2013.

[6] Neild*, et al.*, 2019.

[7] Simkin, Charner*, et al.*, 2013.

[8] Julie Spielberger, Jennifer Axelrod, Denali Dasgupta, Christine Cerven, Angeline Spain, Amelia Kohm, Nicholas Mader, *Connecting the Dots: Data Use in Afterschool Systems,* Chapin Hall, University of Chicago, 2016.

[9] Spielberger, *et al.*, 2016.

[10] Spielberger, *et al.*, 2016.

[11] Nicole Yolalem, Elizabeth Devaney, Charles Smith, Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, *Building Citywide Systems for Quality: A Guide and Case Studies for Afterschool Leaders,* The Forum for Youth Investment, 2012.

[12] Tina J. Kauh, AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providences Afterschool System, Public/Private Ventures, 2011.

[13] Daniel Browne, *Growing Together, Learning Together: What Cities Have Discovered About Building Afterschool Systems,* The Wallace Foundation, 2015.

[14] Simkin*, et al.*, 2013.

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Afterschool and Afterschool Systems:

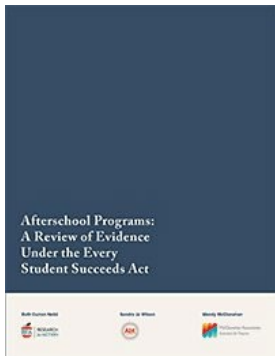## Annotated Bibliography of Selected Knowledge Products

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All publications are available without charge at www.wallacefoundation.org

 = Evidence-based Tool

Evidence of Benefits of Afterschool Programs

Afterschool Programs: A Review of the Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, **by Ruth Curran Neild, Sandra Jo Wilson and Wendy McClanahan, Research for Action, 2019**

The review of research from 2000 to 2017 found 124 afterschool programs with research that meets the research requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act's top three tiers; of these programs, half showed positive impacts on students. The report is accompanied by a detailed guide to these 124 programs and a set of recommendations for program providers, states, program evaluators and the federal government.

The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs, **by Jennifer McCombs, Anamarie Whitaker and Paul Yoo, RAND Corporation, 2017**

The report found that out-of-school-time (OST) programs are generally effective at producing three kinds of benefits—academic gains, enrichment experiences, and safety and homework help—depending on the type of programming that's offered and its duration. The report's authors note that OST programs for low-income students are "worthy of public investment and should be funded at levels that support high-quality programming."

Evidence of Benefits of Afterschool Systems
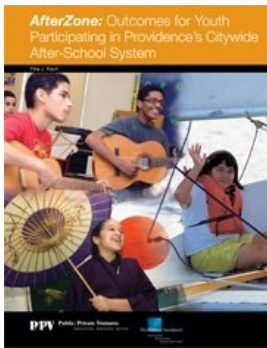
AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence's Citywide After-School System, by Tina J. Kauh, Public/Private Ventures, 2011

The report evaluates AfterZone, a Providence, R.I. program aimed at better meeting the needs and interests of middle school students. The study found an association between students' participation in AfterZone programs and a broad range of benefits. The report also found that afterschool systems strongly rooted in the school context can have a positive impact on school-related outcomes, even without significant resources directed toward intensive academic support. Longer-term participants in the programming earned higher grades in math, by about one third of a grade, than comparison youth.
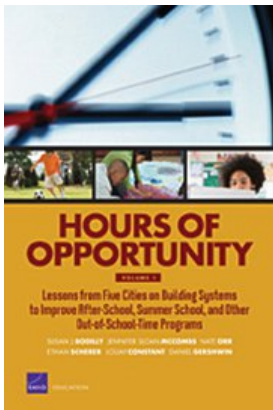
Hours of Opportunity: Lessons from Five Cities on Building Systems to Improve After-School, Summer, and Other Out-of-School-Time Programs (Volumes I, II and III), by Susan J. Bodilly, Jennifer Sloan McCombs, *et al.,* RAND Corporation, 2010

The major report examines Wallace-supported efforts in five cities that aimed to increase access to, and improve the quality of, afterschool programming by coordinating the work of such institutions as schools, parks and nonprofits. Vol I looks at factors that help and hinder these efforts; Vol II examines use of data systems; and Vol III profiles the five ventures. RAND found that the various organizations and institutions within a city involved in afterschool programming can work together to coordinate services. Additionally, they found that this coordination can succeed in boosting access to programs and spur efforts to improve their quality.

Guidance on Starting, Running, and Sustaining an Afterschool System
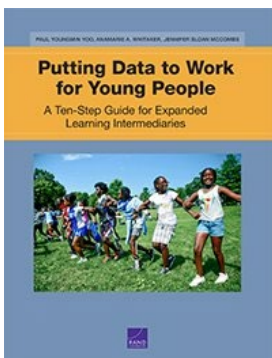
Putting Data to Work for Young People: A Ten-Step Guide for Expanded Learning Intermediaries, by Paul Youngmin Yoo, Anamarie A. Whitaker, Jennifer Sloan McCombs, RAND Corporation, 2019

The 10-step guide offers insights for expanded learning intermediaries into collecting, analyzing and managing data to improve decision-making. The authors reviewed data collection efforts among expanded learning intermediaries in three cities—Boston; St. Paul, Minn.; and Providence, R.I.—and developed a step-by-step plan to help nonprofits in other cities implement their own processes for harnessing data effectively. According to the guide, these processes should be shaped by each city's local context and unique needs.

*Using Data to Strengthen Afterschool Planning, Management, and Strategy:
Lessons from Eight Cities*, **by Beth C. Gamse, Julie Spielberger, *et al.,* Chapin Hall at
the University of Chicago, Gamse Partnership, 2019**

The report presents findings on how data systems were established and operated in
eight cities participating in The Wallace Foundation's Next Generation Afterschool
System-Building Initiative, a four-year effort to strengthen systems that support
high-quality afterschool programs for low-income youth. The report builds on
interim findings, which highlighted the importance of three central pillars to
developing capacity to collect and use data systems: investments in people,
processes and technology.

Governance Structures for City Afterschool Systems: Three Models, **Four Point
Education Partners, 2018**

How are afterschool systems best governed and where should they be based? The
report says there is no one-size-fits-all answer but describes three models for
governance for cities to consider: governance based in a local government agency, a
nonprofit organization, or from a network arrangement tapping several different
institutions.

Growing Together, Learning Together, **by Daniel Browne, The Wallace
Foundation, 2016**

The Wallace Perspective presents a digest of information on how to build and
sustain an afterschool system, along with what challenges and opportunities lie
ahead for this field. The report focuses on four key elements of building strong
afterschool systems: leadership from all major players, a coordinating entity, use of
data, and efforts to bolster program quality.

Connecting the Dots: Data Use in Afterschool Systems, **by Julie Spielberger,
Jennifer Axelrod, *et al.*, Chapin Hall, University of Chicago, 2016**

The interim report presents early findings from a study of how afterschool systems
build their capacity to understand and improve their practices through their data
systems. The researchers found that people and processes are as important as
technology when it comes to the use of data in afterschool systems. The report
identifies a number of strategies that contribute to success including starting small,
ongoing training for staff and enlisting the expertise of outside research partners.

Strong Nonprofits: Resources for Nonprofit Financial Management,
The Wallace Foundation, Fiscal Management Associates, 2020

The library of resources helps nonprofits develop strong financial management, which enables them to better fulfill their mission and deliver high-quality services. The library includes tools and resources to manage operations; pre-loaded, customizable calendars; advice from field experts; and self-assessments to take stock of current operations and clarify where to focus next.

Components of Afterschool Systems

Stability and Change in Afterschool Systems, 2013-2020: A Follow-up Study of Afterschool Coordination in Large Cities, **by Linda Simkin, Ivan Charner, et a;., FHI 360/National Institute for Work and Learning, 2020**

This report is a follow-up to a 2012-2013 study, which found that 77 of 100 large U.S. cities were coordinating the work of out-of-school-time providers, government agencies, private funders, and others to provide high-quality afterschool programs to the children who stand to benefit most. The report provides a look at the state of afterschool coordination just prior to the unexpected and devastating closure of schools and afterschool programs in the spring of 2020 owing to the global pandemic. It focuses on three key components described in the research on afterschool coordination—a designated coordinating entity, a common data system, and a framework or set of standards for program quality.

Demand for Afterschool
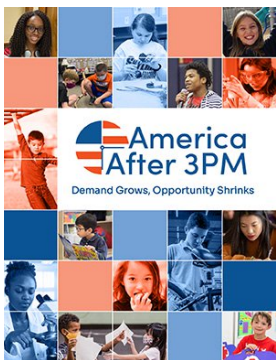
America After 3pm: Demand Grows, Opportunity Shrinks, **by Afterschool Alliance/Edge Research, 2020**

The Afterschool Alliance's fourth edition of America After 3PM provides a detailed, updated accounting of the circumstances and conditions of U.S. children during the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Based on a survey with responses from more than 30,000 U.S. families, the report builds on similar surveys conducted in 2004, 2009 and 2014, offering a complete picture of afterschool programs, including the experiences and opportunities they provide, and who is missing out.