# FabNewport

## Fostering relationships to create a strong sense of belonging

Student-centered, active, and engaging learning experiences that build on young people's interests, while developing their skills and knowledge, are at the heart of high-quality afterschool programs. Young people of all ages can benefit from these experiences, however, adolescence is a critical time for exposure to these types of learning opportunities, when young people are discovering their interests and passions as they begin on their path toward adulthood.

Afterschool programs can provide older youth opportunities to find their inspiration and gain skills that will benefit them in and outside of the classroom while allowing them to earn school credits. Credit-for-learning programs in the afterschool space—which can range from students earning physical education credits through a local YMCA to taking part in a boat-building course for elective science credit—are a valuable resource that individualizes knowledge acquisition and complements school day lessons for middle and high school youth.

### Overview

**FabNewport** operates as a maker space and learning studio in schools, libraries, and community sites across the Newport and Providence, Rhode Island, areas. As part of Rhode Island's All Course Network, FabNewport offers credit-bearing afterschool classes for middle and high school youth that engage students in hands-on, experiential learning. While the classes that FabNewport offers are unique and engaging—ranging from coding to cultural classes—the main draw of the program is the emphasis on fostering strong teacher-student relationships that help students feel safe and supported.

### A typical day for students

While a typical day varies depending on the class, the courses that FabNewport offers are intentionally designed to engage students in hands-on experiences. Each class has roughly 10 to 13 students and a lead teacher that guides youth, while providing flexibility for student choice and leadership. On any given day, students may be working independently, collaborating on a group project, or on a field trip to a community site relevant to their course content.

## FabNewport

Newport, Rhode Island

**1,000**   Average number of students served during the school year

**68%**   Families with low incomes

Main funding sources:

▶ Contracts

▶ Grants

▶ Private philanthropy

## Outcomes

Since the All Course Network began in the 2016-17 school year, FabNewport has helped more than 125 middle school students earn high school credits in the afterschool space through in-person and virtual programming, and high school students earned more than 50 college credits for AP computer science principles taught by FabNewport staff.

## Program characteristics

FabNewport offers middle and high school students the opportunity to take classes after school through the state's All Course Network. The range of classes that FabNewport offers is broad, from advanced computer science and coding classes to unique and specialized electives, such as cultural classes. For example, one cultural class offered is a bilingual maker program—Jóvenes Creativos—where students work on their design skills while improving their confidence in speaking Spanish. The class also takes regular field trips to connect with Hispanic community members to help students expand their cultural and social networks. For students who attend schools that are unable to provide these types of courses, taking classes after school offers the chance for students to challenge themselves and explore their interests.

Regardless of the class, relationships are at the core of learning at FabNewport. To ensure that each student in their program feels connected to their teachers, creating a sense of community and belonging in the program, FabNewport staff actively ask about and engage with students around their interests, passions, curiosities, and needs. The program found that students learn best when they have a relationship with their teacher, as it can improve academic engagement and motivation; help instill a love of learning; and establish an environment where students feel safe, valued, and supported. Through the combination of a variety of classes that allow for student voice and choice and a caring and supportive staff, FabNewport is a space where Newport and Providence youth want to come and continue learning after the school day ends.

FabNewport intentionally organizes their programming to maintain relationships with students over many years. These teacher-student relationships often begin in 5th grade before students sign up through the All Course Network. Afterschool and summer programming at FabNewport begins in elementary school, and once the program has established a relationship with a student through their typical programming, they aim to continue that relationship throughout high school, encouraging students to take classes through the All Course Network. Most, if not all, of the students enrolled in programming through the All Course Network are students that participated in FabNewport programs previously.

## The need for credit-for-learning opportunities

Credit for learning expands educational opportunities for youth, where young people can explore their interests and delve deeper into subject matter outside of the classroom. These programs provide diverse learning experiences, promote student engagement, and prepare students for life after graduation.

### Boosting motivation and engagement

When students are interested in what they are learning and have the opportunity to experience and develop a sense of agency, it can increase their engagement and motivation to learn. Credit for learning employs this student-centered learning approach, where learning is tailored to students' interests and needs, and students have ownership of their learning. This approach can be especially beneficial for older students, as school engagement has been found to decrease as students get older, or for youth who are disengaged from school.

### Improving college and career readiness

Credit for learning provides youth the chance to engage in real-world learning experiences and learn about potential career paths while earning school credit. In these hands-on and applied learning contexts, students can develop skills that employers value, such as problem solving and collaboration, be mentored by and build connections with industry professionals, and complete internships or apprenticeships.
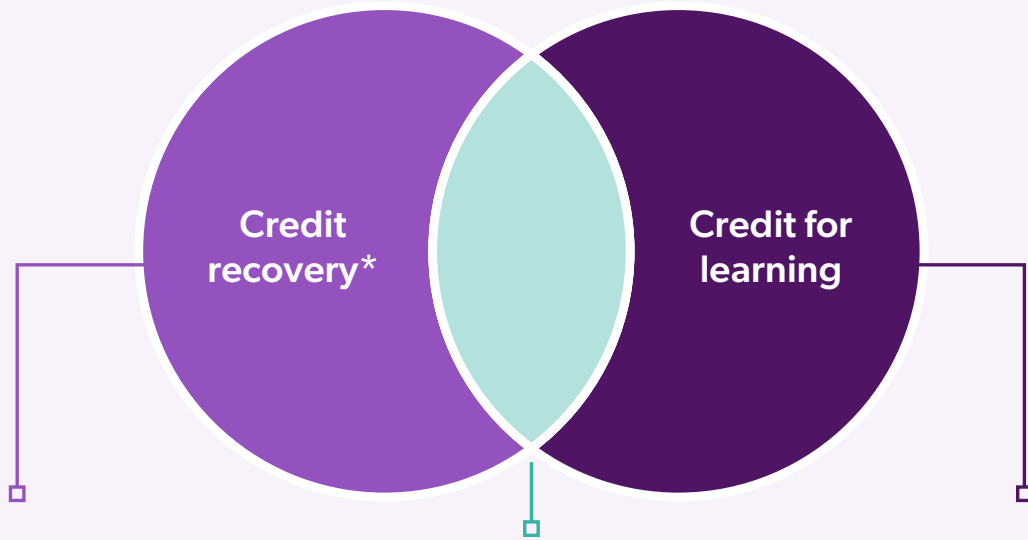
### Addressing opportunity gaps

Research shows that students attending high-poverty schools too often lack access to the same learning opportunities as students attending low-poverty schools. Credit for learning can address equity issues present in the education system, broadening access to learning opportunities that schools may be unable to provide.

Read *Credit for Learning: Making Learning Outside of School Count* to learn more.

# Credit recovery vs. Credit for learning

While the underlying intention of **credit recovery** and **credit for learning** differ from one another, there are overlapping strategies between the two credit earning opportunities.

**Credit recovery***

**Credit for learning**

- Intended for students who are *falling behind academically* or *at-risk of not graduating on time*.

- Students can *redo coursework in a class they have failed* or *retake the class* in an alternative manner, such as in summer school, during afterschool or weekend classes, or online.

- Provides opportunities to earn credits outside of the school day that count toward graduation requirements.

- Can take place in afterschool and summer programs.

- Intended for students interested in *earning additional credits* toward graduation, or students looking to *further personalize their education or pursue an interest*.

- Students can *earn credits for various activities and experiences outside of the classroom*, such as community service projects, internships or apprenticeships, independent studies, and student-led projects.

*\*U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Issue Brief: Credit Recovery. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/high-school/credit-recovery.pdf*

## Program history

FabNewport started in 2013 as a maker space and fabrication lab for students in the Newport area, and in 2015 they joined the Rhode Island Department of Education's All Course Network to offer credit-bearing opportunities in the out-of-school time space. Today, FabNewport has expanded to serve students from Providence as well, and focuses primarily on urban middle and high school youth.

## Recommendations

*for fostering relationships to create a strong sense of belonging:*

▶ Prioritize relationship building in your program. Regardless of the program or content covered, students learn best when they feel comfortable with and connected to their teachers.

▶ Afterschool should be fun—ask students what they want to learn. This will not only help engage students, but let them know that you care about their interests, which can further strengthen the teacher-student relationships.

▶ Connect students to their community so they can see how the real world works and how they might fit in and take an active role while still in middle or high school.

**Afterschool Alliance**
afterschoolalliance.org