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# MetLife Foundation Afterschool Alert

## ISSUE BRIEF

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The Afterschool Alliance, in partnership with MetLife Foundation, is proud to present the first in a series of four issue briefs examining critical issues facing older youth and the vital role afterschool programs play in addressing these issues. The four issue briefs address workforce and career development; recruitment and retention of older youth; dropout prevention and mentoring. These issue briefs examine just a few of the ways afterschool programs support middle and high school youth, families and communities.

### Afterschool: Opening Doors to Work and Careers

Preparing youth for success in tomorrow's workforce is of increasing concern to our nation's schools, communities, policy makers and businesses. Afterschool programs, which have proven to keep kids safe, help working families and inspire learning, are also a powerful tool that helps young people develop the skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace. Through partnerships with community-based organizations, schools, institutions of higher education and the business community, afterschool programs are playing a key role in preparing youth for work and careers.

### A Critical Time for Supporting America's Workforce

During this time of unprecedeted economic uncertainty, families are increasingly worried about their present and future employment prospects, and what kinds of opportunities await their children. Looking beyond the current economic climate, the last several decades have seen the industrial and manufacturing based economy shift to a service economy fueled by information, knowledge and innovation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1996 and 2006 the United States lost three million manufacturing jobs. In that same time frame, 17 million service sector jobs were created, specifically in the areas of health care, education, environment, security and energy.<sup>i,ii</sup> Many of the fastest growing jobs in the service sector are high-end occupations, including doctors, nurses, health technicians, lawyers, engineers, sales and marketing professionals.<sup>iii</sup> While no one knows the how long current economic conditions will last, or their ultimate impact on the labor market, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics historically shows these areas of the labor market to be relatively recession-resistant.<sup>iv</sup> In these unprecedented economic times, it is impossible to predict the precise path of the labor market, but we can use history as our guide and assume that these industries—health care, education, environment,

*Clearly we cannot prepare our children and youth for these changing times by looking at learning and development time in the same old ways. Afterschool and summer learning present an essential new opportunity... It could make all the difference in the world.*

**-- Terry Peterson,  
Afterschool and  
Community Learning  
Network**

security, and energy—will continue to grow, or at least remain stable while other areas may contract.

In response to the current economic climate, workplaces are making changes associated with increased productivity and innovation such as flatter management structures, just-in-time inventory and flexible work arrangements – changes that are critical to our economic recovery and future global competitiveness.<sup>v,vi</sup> However, we must also change how we prepare our young people for the workforce. Advanced economies, innovative industries and high growth jobs require educated workers who possess 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills such as:<sup>vii</sup>

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Information technology application
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Creativity and innovation
- Social and cross-cultural skills

Further, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy is a global one, and the U.S. must prepare its youth to be knowledgeable about world regions and global issues and to communicate across cultures and languages. The economies of China, India and Japan are expected to represent 50 percent of the world's GDP within 30 years.<sup>viii</sup> Currently, one in five U.S. jobs is tied to international trade, a proportion that will continue to increase.<sup>ix</sup> As a result, once in the workforce, today's youth will most likely engage in commerce with other countries, management of employees from other cultures and countries, collaboration with colleagues from around the world and tackling global problems such as hunger, climate change and disaster recovery.<sup>x</sup>

### **Basic Competencies are not Enough**

There is widespread consensus that our education and workforce systems are failing to adequately prepare our students and workers with the skills necessary for success in the workplace. For the past decade, our educational system has focused on closing achievement gaps between the lowest and highest performing students, and emphasizing

core subjects such as reading, math and, as of 2007, science. While these remain essential endpoints, focusing solely on basic curricula does not address the growing demand for advanced skills. A recent report by the Conference Board states that basic skills, such as reading and writing, are simply not enough to prepare youth for postsecondary education or the workforce.<sup>xi</sup> Further, people with only basic competencies are the most likely to struggle in the rising high-skill, high-wage service economy.<sup>xii</sup> According to one study, employers estimate that 45 percent of high school graduates do not have the skills to advance beyond entry-level jobs. Recent high school graduates agree: 39 percent of those now enrolled in college and 46 percent of recent college graduates believe they have gaps in their preparation.<sup>xiii</sup>

*Teaching all students to think and to be curious is much more than a technical problem for which educators, alone, are accountable...The problem goes much deeper – to the very way we conceive of the purpose and experience of schooling and what we expect our high school graduates to know and be able to do.*

**--Tony Wagner, The Global Achievement Gap, 2008**

In addition, U.S. students are faring poorly compared to their counterparts on international assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures necessary 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills like critical thinking and problem solving. These results are significant – countries that do well on PISA demonstrate higher increases in GDP growth.<sup>xiv</sup> Studies show that cognitive skills are significantly more important in determining economic outcomes than the traditional measure of educational success: school attainment. In other words, the amount of time someone spends in school is not as important as what happens during that time, and what is learned during that time must be broader than the current focus on minimum competencies in reading, math and science.<sup>xv</sup>

*Quality afterschool programs provide a unique venue in which young people can develop the range of skills they need to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace.*

-- **Corporate Voices for Working Families**

### **Afterschool Fosters the Development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills**

According to a report released jointly by the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and Society for Human Resource Management, all stakeholders (business, educators and community members) should consider a variety of methods to enhance the workplace skills of older youth. Examples include internships, summer jobs, work-study programs, job shadowing, mentoring, on-the-job training, as well as other educational approaches that include real-world experiences or community involvement.<sup>xvi</sup> The afterschool field recognizes that preparing the future workforce to be competitive in the global economy is something quality programs

can contribute to, and that many of the approaches cited above are commonplace in afterschool programs.

Children and youth of all ages who participate in afterschool programs maintain better grades, have lower rates of truancy, are more engaged in school and attain higher levels of achievement in college.<sup>xvii</sup> Afterschool programs provide benefits to older youth that reach well beyond the school day, offering avenues to college and the workplace by exposing youth to global issues, providing opportunities to develop and use technology, promoting cross-cultural understanding, collaborative thinking, leadership and civic participation.<sup>xviii</sup>

- **Global Kids** is a New York City based nonprofit committed to educating and inspiring urban youth to become global and community leaders – creative thinkers, problem solvers, and contributing citizens prepared for academic and workplace success. Through leadership development, academic enrichment and digital media programs, Global Kids works with youth after school and online to build digital literacy, foster substantive virtual dialogues about current events and promote civic participation. Global Kids holds in-person and online youth conferences, including roundtables and summer institutes at the Council on Foreign Relations and online in Teen Second Life. Global Kids students create action campaigns to educate Second Life participants about global issues and

create educational video games in which players learn about social and global issues.<sup>xix</sup>

Afterschool provides the perfect platform for older youth to acquire basic knowledge and skills, while cultivating applied skills. By introducing real world issues and experiences, afterschool programs can give youth access to a wider world. The skill building and exposure to real work experiences help older youth think about their futures – some for the first time.

- **Brigham and Women's Hospital's Student Success Jobs Program (SSJP)** is an intensive afterschool and summer employment and mentoring program for high school students in Boston, Massachusetts. The program introduces high school students from the city's lowest income communities to careers in health care, science and medicine by offering paid internships within the hospital, and by providing the guidance of health care professionals who serve as role models and mentors. Now in its ninth year, the program shares a strong commitment with the hospital to improving the health of its surrounding communities by providing educational and employment opportunities to young people through SSJP. The program creates pathways into science, health, or medicine careers for those who have traditionally been underrepresented in the field.
- The **JA Academy** in Worcester, Massachusetts was developed by Junior Achievement in collaboration with the Worcester Public Schools' Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) college access program. The goals include decreasing the district's drop-out rate, increasing college attendance rates among underrepresented students and providing low-income youth with the skills needed to achieve success in the YouthWorks summer employment program. JA Academy engages groups of high-potential, but average performing, students in an intensive two-year afterschool program on a college campus. The participants are provided consistent and caring adult mentors who teach them financial literacy and workforce readiness/business ethics courses, as well as workshops on admissions and financial aid, residential life, campus clubs and activities, support services and academic majors offered at the college. Academy students are also invited to participate in the YouthWorks summer jobs program. Students gain enhanced understanding and respect for the connections between educational attainment and future success in the workplace.

*Participating in SSJP as a high school student, and now as a college student, has provided me with professional, hands-on experience in a pharmacy setting that helps me develop the skills and confidence I need to work in the medical field. SSJP ultimately helped me navigate the many career opportunities in health care, and allowed my passion for science to flourish.*

**--Gladys, 20. Brigham and Women's Hospital SSJP Graduate**

Successful afterschool programs develop and promote strong relationships among youth, schools, families, community organizations and institutions of higher education. The afterschool field's use of experiential, hands-on activities makes learning more holistic, authentic and meaningful. This approach provides older youth with the opportunity to

achieve the basics while engaging in projects they like, promoting civic responsibility, helping prepare youth for higher education and the workplace.

- **Centerstone's Community Kitchen** is an afterschool program for older youth with severe behavioral issues; youth who are often ineligible for other afterschool programs. The program's primary focus is teaching culinary arts and life skills training. Meals prepared by the students are distributed to various agencies that feed Nashville, Tennessee's hungry and low-income populations. Students can also participate in the catering component of the program that produces freshly prepared meals for businesses, agencies and other groups in the Nashville area. The program empowers at-risk and disadvantaged youth by nurturing self-esteem, teaching pro-social and job skills, and providing career opportunities. Participants are also eligible for work-study opportunities with local chefs.
- **The Food Project** in Boston provides local youth with afterschool employment, education and skill development opportunities. These skills are developed through partnering with adults to grow and distribute healthy food using sustainable methods on four acres of urban farmland and 33 acres of suburban farmland. Students ("interns") work 8 to 10 hours a week during the school year, and 35 hours a week for eight weeks of summer. Different internship tracks encompass unique sets of activities and goals, as well as a schedule based on the demands of work. Students can choose from tracks such as community supported agriculture (CSAs), diversity in groups, farmers' market, kitchen/culinary arts, rural enterprise/agriculture, serve and grow/recruitment, urban education and outreach. Through this program, a diverse group of students participate in every aspect of sustainable farming from the ground to the market to the table, and learn to work collaboratively and attain leadership skills.

## Conclusion

The future of the U.S. as a global leader depends on the ability of American workers to think critically, act strategically and communicate effectively. Reinvigorating the economy, achieving energy independence and taking advantage of growth industries requires a skilled workforce that is ready to invent and create, apply knowledge of different cultures, and be flexible to new and different ideas. Afterschool programs are providing global literacy opportunities to youth who would otherwise be unable to access them while helping youth gain the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills that employers want and need. As the skills needed to compete in the workforce of the future continue to evolve, so will the practices of afterschool programs. Today, afterschool programs fulfill many needs, not the least of which is helping to keep America competitive. The extra learning time, and time to develop leadership, teamwork and problem-solving skills, are essential to ensuring that today's youth are prepared for tomorrow's workplace.

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