

REALIZING POTENTIAL: Comprehensive Afterschool Programs

Comprehensive afterschool programs apply evidence-based practices to support the needs of youth, families, and their communities. Working together, schools, afterschool programs, and community partners are better positioned to accelerate students' learning and growth and support families.

Comprehensive Afterschool Programs:

- ◆ Engage youth in learning and boost school-day attendance.
- ◆ Improve students' performance in reading and math.
- ◆ Help young people build critical foundational skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which benefit them in and out of the classroom.
- ◆ Increase graduation rates.
- ◆ Give working parents peace of mind knowing that their child is safe, supervised, and supported.



A Long-Term Investment In Children's Futures

A 26-year longitudinal study found that young people who consistently participated in afterschool programs were stronger:

LEARNERS



More likely to graduate high school and pursue higher education

EARNERS



Higher income and occupational status

LEADERS



More likely to be engaged in the community and fewer risk-taking behaviors

Key Principles of Comprehensive Afterschool Programs:

School-Community Partnerships

Strong partnerships between community organizations and schools are at the core of successful expanded learning programs. Characteristics include alignment of goals and services, clearly defined roles, effective lines of communication and coordination, and data and resource sharing.

Active and Engaged Learning

Expanded learning programs that engage young people in meaningful and relevant experiential learning opportunities, providing activities that help students discover new areas of interest, engage in hands-on learning, explore career fields, and contribute and lead in a substantive way are essential for successful programming.

Diverse, Prepared Staff

The quality of an expanded learning program depends heavily on skilled, diverse staff, often involving a combination of in-school staff and community partners who reflect the community that they serve. Successful programs align staffing ratios, qualifications, and ongoing professional development with program goals and activities.

Intentional Programming

Explicit goals and intentionally designed activities that align with those goals and engage participants in meaningful ways and meet their developmental and academic needs are critical to the success of expanded learning programs.

Participation and Access

Studies show that the frequency and duration of participation in expanded learning programs matter; the more young people participate, the more likely they are to improve academically and behaviorally. Access to programming that meets students' needs and is age-appropriate, meaningful, and relevant will help them stay engaged in learning.

Family Engagement

Expanded learning programs are well positioned to regularly check in with parents and help schools stay connected to families, help parents navigate challenges and direct them to resources in the community, and provide peace of mind for working families knowing that their child is in a safe and structured setting.

Youth Voice

When young people choose and direct their enrichment experiences, they become more ardent learners and stronger leaders, which can lead to regular and engaged participation.

Safety

Adequate space, supervision, and security are necessary for young people to have the comfort and freedom to focus solely on the task at hand, actively participate, and try new things. Creating a physically and emotionally safe space for students helps them grow their confidence, work productively with peers, and feel that they belong and matter in the program.

Health and Well-Being

The best expanded learning programs take a holistic approach to well-being, helping students connect with one another and build their communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. They also provide opportunities for physical activity and access to nutritious meals and snacks that might otherwise be unavailable.

Ongoing Assessment and Improvement

Expanded learning programs that employ sound data collection and management practices focused on continuous improvement have the most success establishing and maintaining quality services for young people.