



# Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

# **the** Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This collection of articles is excerpted from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

**promote student success and college and career readiness;**

**build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**

**foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**

**engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit [www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds](http://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds).

## About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at [www.expandinglearning.org](http://www.expandinglearning.org).

**Richard W. Riley**

U.S. Secretary of Education, 1993–2001

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## **Conclusion: Leveraging the Power of Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning: An Important Strategy for Student Success Across America**

As a result of rigorous academic standards recently adopted by almost all of our states, teaching and learning are improving all across America. Yet too many of our students are still struggling to master basic skills and learn well the core subjects.

In the 21st century, it is more imperative than ever that all of our students master the skills and behaviors that lead to high school graduation—the critical first rung on the ladder to economic success and a productive future, both for our students and our great country. To achieve this goal, though, our schools are being called upon to do much more but with many fewer resources.

In today's multimedia, 24/7 environment, our young people are taking in information and ideas 100% of the time. Yet schools—full of learning resources—are often closed and locked 75 to 80% of the time.

At the same time, many parents have to work all day, leaving them to worry about those hours after school ends, when their children and adolescents may be at home alone or otherwise unsupervised.

We know from successful experience that hundreds of thousands of arts, cultural, sports, and other youth organizations, as well as civic and faith-based groups, want to partner with educators and schools to expand, broaden, and reinforce learning. Far too often, however, potential community partners are disconnected from schools and the students who could benefit from their support.

Well-designed expanded learning opportunities provided during the afterschool hours and summers through school-community partnerships are outstanding and cost-effective ways to address gaps in learning and to foster positive development. These enriching learning opportunities can be designed and developed by the partners to maximize use of all available school and community resources. They can be delivered during the “worrisome 3:00–6:00 p.m.” hours, during the summer and, where needed, before school and on weekends.

**The need to leverage the power of expanded learning opportunities in afterschool and summers has never been greater. To prepare our students adequately for their life in the 21st century, we must strengthen basic skills, provide next-generation learning opportunities, foster community-school partnerships, and promote family engagement.**

As our world has become increasingly complex, we have come to recognize that schools alone cannot support all of the learning needs of children and youth to be prepared for careers, college, and life. Today’s reality is that young people will require a new set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to succeed in our rapidly changing, knowledge-based, global economy. This requires that learners have opportunities to explore, test, venture, and create so they can develop the assets they will need to benefit from and contribute to an increasingly information-filled world. Innovative expanded learning afterschool and summers with school-community partnerships are well suited to provide these opportunities.

We are pleased that educators, youth-serving organizations, and community- and faith-based organizations now have access in one place to the knowledge and expertise contained in the nearly 70 articles and studies in *Expanding Minds and Opportunities*. This extensive compendium comprises a significant body of literature about the powerful benefits of expanded learning programs for America’s future. These articles demonstrate clearly that high quality, engaging afterschool and summer experiences complement school instruction, provide affordable and sustainable means to accelerate achievement and attainment, and build partnerships that lead to student, family, and community success. They describe a variety of effective strategies and partnerships that extend and build on learning from the school day into the nonschool hours.

**One of the most significant catalysts for expanded learning opportunities afterschool and during summers has been the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. With the addition of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with bipartisan support in Congress, this federal funding stream has united school and community partners to provide active, engaged learning opportunities that expand the minds of children and youth to leverage learning whenever and wherever it happens.**

During the second term of the Clinton Administration, the positive impact of the program grew dramatically as the President and First Lady both made it a strong education priority to scale up 21st Century Community Learning Centers in thousands of schools and communities across America. Their leadership, supported by several Congressional champions, brought annual funding increases for 21st Century Community Learning Centers from \$1 million to \$1 billion. In the years since, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have continued to approve the program's funding level.

This compendium offers evidence and stories from high quality, local 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs across the country, as well as findings from other initiatives, that illustrate the positive impact of quality afterschool and summer programs on children, families, and communities.

The authors of the studies, articles, and commentaries in this volume represent a diverse array of educators, community leaders, and youth-serving participants in the expanded learning and afterschool field, including researchers, practitioners, funders, policy makers, and thought leaders. A central theme pervades and connects all the articles in the compendium: ***Expanded learning programs can assist and support many more children and youth with opportunities to learn and grow so they can succeed educationally and lead productive lives.***

Fundamentally, expanded learning programs help students stay on track with academic basics as well as foster school success through better attendance, study habits, and attitudes. Expanded learning opportunities also hold compelling promise to push the leading edge of learning by engaging young people in activities that involve

- *digital and blended learning;*
- *exploratory science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) experiences;*
- *opportunities for creativity and to innovate through the arts;*
- *development of cultural competence; and*
- *building international and entrepreneurial awareness.*

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The learning and developmental results and impact that high quality expanded learning, afterschool, and summer programs can yield are potent. Afterschool and summer programs promote essential social and emotional capacities that advance cognitive and academic development. Equally powerful are the benefits to families and communities. Quality afterschool programs promote parent/family engagement in their children's learning, as well as essential partnerships between schools and a wide array of community entities—universities, businesses, museums, libraries, cultural and arts organizations, and civic and faith-based institutions.

During the past 15 years, such relationships have cultivated infrastructures designed to build program quality and capacity through various local, regional, state, and national networks.

These coalitions of public and private stakeholders have focused intentionally on continuous improvement through training and professional development, interagency collaboration, evaluation and accountability systems, and leveraging funding streams to ensure affordability and sustainability.

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**With these infrastructures in place, the potential is high for scaling up to more schools and communities that want and need quality afterschool and summer learning programs.**

For example, after a little more than 15 years, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is now funding nearly 11,000 school- and community-based centers throughout all 50 states. Moreover, the program now annually serves more than 1.5 million students, involves nearly 300,000 parents and other adult family members, and engages the support of tens of thousands of community partners across the country. This means that over the past 10 years alone, almost 15 million students and 2.5 million adult family members have participated in learning opportunities provided and leveraged by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Notably, these numbers reflect the involvement of—and impact on—some of the most economically needy families in the country.

We encourage you to use this compendium as a resource in your work to support the learning and development of children, youth, families, and communities. Good progress has been made, but much more needs to be done. There are almost 50,000 public schools with more than 40% of their children from low-income backgrounds. In almost all 100,000 of our nation's public schools, there are struggling students from all income levels who could benefit from participating in high quality expanded learning experiences.

## Recommendations

Given the growing body of evidence of effectiveness and the many different examples of best practices and positive school-community partnerships, it is clear that a very important tool for contemporary education improvement and reform is expanding learning opportunities during afterschool and summers.

Many entities—school districts, municipalities, county governments, United Ways and foundations, as well as state governments—can take steps that will incentivize and leverage these powerful learning experiences. We recommend the following actions.

- 1.** Provide resources to deploy a full-time coordinator for school-community partnerships and afterschool/summer learning for each school or neighborhood that needs and wants significant expansion of learning opportunities and learning supports. A full-time coordinator helps link and pool appropriate local/community and school resources.
- 2.** Provide funding and regulatory support so students can be transported easily from school to/from community, cultural, college, youth-serving, and workplace opportunities that are a formal component of the afterschool and summer learning partnership with schools.
- 3.** Change policies and practices so that middle and high school students can earn additional credits for high school graduation and career and college readiness through afterschool, weekend, and summer learning programs in school partnerships with employers and/or other educational institutions—museums, libraries, 2- and 4-year colleges, cultural and science centers, etc.
- 4.** Support the development and strengthening of local and state afterschool and summer learning networks to rally an array of elementary and secondary education resources; community and youth-serving organizations (4-H, YM/WCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools, etc.); higher education; faith-based groups; as well as health, fitness, arts, and cultural resources; and interested employers to expand learning any time and in credible places.
- 5.** Connect and support strongly the professional development, technical assistance, and coaching services available to expand learning in afterschool and summers. This will help improve program quality, effectiveness, and resource alignment that, in turn, will contribute positively to factors that lead to greater student success, achievement, and attainment. At the same time, students will be provided engaging, motivating, broadening, and hands-on learning and development opportunities.
- 6.** Include indicators in evaluation and accountability systems for expanded learning afterschool and summer programs that are linked to student success in moving from grade to grade and graduating on time and to boosting overall post-secondary technical and college enrollment rates. These include, for example, such indicators as student attendance, grades in core subjects, homework completion, engagement and interest in learning, participation in career and college awareness and preparation programs, and standardized achievement scores. Many of these indicators can be collected and used to inform quality advancement efforts during the actual time during the year that afterschool and summer learning programs are operating. These indicators also can and should be collaboratively used with school personnel for joint improvement endeavors.

Finally, action at the federal level is warranted. Although the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative currently funds about 11,000 school-community partnerships annually, there remain almost 30,000 to 40,000 schools with significant numbers of struggling children and youth. It makes fiscal sense for Congress to increase significantly the funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers to address this gap.

As the expansive evidence in *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* documents, we know that expanded learning opportunities are essential to help our struggling students catch up, keep up, and get ahead. They also benefit all students by broadening their knowledge and skills. By building school-community partnerships, we can keep more young people of all ages on track for success in school, in the community, and in life... and we can do it cost effectively.

**Expanding and improving afterschool and summer learning partnerships is a positive way to advance the American dream. We urge you to join us in taking action to ensure these powerful learning opportunities are accessible to young people in every school and community in America who want and need them.**

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Richard W. Riley**, former secretary of education and former governor of South Carolina, is a leader and advocate for improving education. *Time* magazine named him as one of the top 10 Cabinet members in the 20th Century. Riley currently serves in leadership capacities in the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Riley Institute at Furman University, and the ACT Board. He is a senior partner at Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP, where he counsels clients on business, governance, and financial matters. He started his involvement in education improvement as a PTA co-president and state legislator.

**Terry K. Peterson**, a longtime associate of Dick Riley, is also a leader and advocate for educational reform and improvement. In addition to serving as one of Secretary and Governor Riley's principal go-to persons in designing and implementing a number of successful state and national education reforms, he has a long history of also working at the grassroots level and even internationally for educational change and advancement. Peterson has been a classroom teacher and parent involvement specialist, taught statistics and research design courses, testified in a dozen states on school reform issues, and has provided advice to education reformers in Brazil, Argentina, South Korea, Mongolia, and Denmark.