

# After-School Grows Up:

## Helping Teens Prepare for the Future

APRIL 2009

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This year, with funding from the William T. Grant Foundation, we are focusing the Forum's policy commentary series (originally funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation) on issues related to recent and emerging research related to out-of-school time, with an emphasis on exploring the many factors that contribute to setting quality and affect youth developmental outcomes. Please see [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org) to review previous commentaries in this series.

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Suggested Citation: The Forum for Youth Investment. (2009, April) *Out-of-School-Time Policy Commentary #14: After-School Grows Up: Helping Teens Prepare for the Future*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment.

Available online at [forumfyi.org](http://forumfyi.org)

In this issue, we focus on how high school after-school programs are increasingly playing a role in helping to prepare young people for college, work and life. Please see [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org) to review previous commentaries in this series.

From all corners of the country, concerns are growing among parents, educators, policy makers, employers, and students themselves, that a large number of teens are not engaged in their education, not on track to graduate from high school and/or not prepared to successfully transition into post-secondary education or the workforce.

These various stakeholders come at this concern from different perspectives but tend to agree on a definition of success, one that extends well beyond high school graduation. In short, young people need to be ready for college, work and life.<sup>1</sup> Getting there requires a range of supports:

- Connections to positive adults, peers and community institutions;
- Access to meaningful interests and pursuits;
- Maintaining school grades and being on track to graduate;
- Acquisition of skills they will need in post-secondary education, the workplace and larger adult world;
- The expectation and means to continue their education through some type of post-secondary training.

With success defined broadly and the supports necessary to get there varied, it clearly follows that no single institution, program or approach can take responsibility for supporting the transition to adulthood. It is also clear that these supports are in particularly short supply for our most vulnerable youth. Efforts to provide needed supports and address critical gaps must be coordinated and expanded.

Against this backdrop, communities are engaged in significant efforts to ensure older youth have the supports and opportunities necessary to be ready for college, work and life. Often these efforts run in parallel, even within one state or community:

- High school reform
- Dropout prevention
- Workforce readiness

<sup>1</sup> The Forum for Youth Investment developed the phrase "ready for college, work and life" as part of its Ready by 21<sup>®</sup> Challenge, which supports leaders with conceptual and practical tools that help them change the way they do business in order to change the odds for youth. Ready by 21 is a registered trademark of the Forum for Youth Investment.

- College access and success
- Civic engagement
- High school after-school

This commentary focuses on the last of these strategies – high school after-school. While teen programs during the out-of-school hours are by no means new, there has been a significant increase over the past several years in publically funded high school after-school. While federal and state after-school funds have traditionally targeted elementary students (CCDBG and TANF, the largest funding streams, cut off at age 12), the numbers of middle and high school programs receiving federal 21st CCLC funding has increased significantly.<sup>2</sup> With this increase in public support and funding from private foundations for innovation, capacity building, and documentation, it's safe to say after-school programming for middle and high school students is in a major growth phase.<sup>3</sup>

Though some expressed doubts about the ability of after-school programs to attract and retain older youth, it is happening. It is happening in school- and community-based settings, and it is happening at scale. This emerging sector is beginning to demonstrate its value. Lessons learned in this arena are valuable in and of themselves and have the potential to inform and influence discussions of workforce readiness, high school reform, dropout prevention and the other strategies listed above.

### ***In this Issue***

This commentary takes readers on a cross-country tour of after-school innovation – from northern and southern California to Chicago, New York and New Hampshire. In ***On the Ground*** we describe two very different school-based models in California. In ***Research Update*** we summarize lessons from recent evaluations of After

<sup>2</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2008). *21st Century Community Learning Centers Federal Afterschool Initiative Policy & Action Center Brief*. Washington, DC: Afterschool Alliance. Retrieved March 17, 2009 at <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policy21stcclc.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> Nationally, about 36 percent of 21st CCLC funded programs serve middle school students, though only 20 percent exclusively target this population. Fifteen percent serve high school students, but only five percent exclusively target them. *Source: Afterschool Alliance Policy & Action Center (see above).*

School Matters in Chicago and the OST Initiative in New York City and identify studies to watch for. In ***Voices from the Field*** we talk with leaders from New Hampshire where an ambitious high school redesign effort is building upon successful high school after-school programs.

In 2004 we published a commentary entitled *High School: The Next frontier for After-School Advocates?*<sup>4</sup> Five years later, it feels safe to say we have made significant strides. This progress is due in large part to increasingly productive partnerships at the local level between teachers and youth workers, principals and after-school program directors, schools and community-based organizations. Individuals and institutions are stepping outside of their traditional roles, putting young people's needs at the center, and the results are worth watching.

State and national leaders must learn from our local counterparts and develop policies and strategies that support their efforts to connect and innovate. Let's officially bust the myth that schools worry about 9-3 and academics, and youth organizations focus on social, emotional and civic concerns during afternoons and weekends. Preparing young people for college, work and life is a huge and complex task. And yes, it really does take a village.

## **On the Ground**

### ***California High Schools Step Up and Scale Up***

To understand the potential and the challenges of implementing high school after-school at scale, we turn our attention to the state of California. With programs operating in over 300 high schools and half of the state's 21st CCLC funding allocated to high schools, California offers a unique learning laboratory for identifying what works and imagining what's possible. According to Sam Piha, founder and principal of Temescal Associates, the field is currently in an era of high experimentation. "We very quickly ramped up from the idea of after-school support for older youth to having over 300 funded programs, averaging \$200,000 a piece. But there is a

<sup>4</sup> Forum for Youth Investment (February 2004). *High School After-School: The Next Frontier for After-School Advocates?* Forum Focus. Retrieved March 19 at <http://forumfyi.org/node/546>.

thin research base for large-scale efforts, so we are in a pioneering era of the movement.”

As one would expect amidst experimentation, program success varies widely, and some programs are fully-enrolled while others struggle. There is still much to learn about effective high school after-school programs. Here, we feature two programs that appear to have hit upon a good mix of opportunities and supports to attract and retain high school students and are doing so at significant scale: Blair High School in Pasadena and Skyline High School in Oakland.

Our focus here on school-based examples is not meant to ignore the long, rich history of community-based youth development programs that have successfully engaged teens. These programs should be, and in many cases, are, informing this newer wave of school-based and school-linked programming for older youth, a less documented and less understood phenomenon.

### ***The BlairLEARNS Program***

In 2003, when Blair High School joined 23 others on the state of California’s list of schools failing to make “adequate yearly progress,” Rich Boccia, a successful “turn around” principal (and recipient of the 2005 California Secondary School Administrator of the Year award) was recruited from Wilson Middle School. Charged with leading a similar turn-around at Blair, a 7-12 school serving roughly 1,200 students, Boccia made creating an after-school program a top priority.

Having used after-school programming as a key strategy for turning around Wilson, the principal turned in-house for a program director and hired staff member and former athletic coach Bill Fennessy to head up the program. Charged with the “more time” mantra and the goal of creating a seamless day, Fennessy began to build the after-school program.

### ***Building from the Ground Up***

That fall, with support from an original 21st CCLC grant for the middle school, Blair launched the after-school program that was eventually named BlairLEARNS. In that first year, 17% of the middle school population

Many of our kids need more time – more time to get through school and more time to get both their academic and social needs met... we need to build a seamlessness between the school day and after-school.

Bill Fennessy, Director  
Blair High School After-School Program

attended the program regularly. Encouraged by this initial success, the program was expanded to high school students in 2004, taking advantage of California’s 21st Century ASSETS (After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens) funding.

Over time, the program evolved to include a mix of academic enrichment, community-based programming, academic credit recovery, traditional school sports and clubs, and mentoring, all operating under one umbrella. By 2007, BlairLEARNS boasted over 700 unduplicated 9th-12th grade attendees (900 of the 1200 students in the 7-12 school are high school students), and a regular attendance rate of nearly 40% of the high school population (defined as youth attending the program 90 days or more within an academic year).

Regular after-school attendees showed significant increases in school day attendance over non-participants, averaging 11 more days of school attendance than non-participants in the 2006 – 2007 school year. Though the school is still establishing reliable benchmarks for improvement, early internal reports suggest that the after-school strategy is contributing to a rise in student achievement as well. On the English-Language Arts portion of the California Standards Test, 50% of the frequent participants in Blair’s after-school program scored proficient or higher compared to 24% of non-participants. Similar (though less dramatic) patterns between participants and non-participants were found for mathematics scores.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Blair International Baccalaureate High School. (2007). *2006-2007 BlairLEARNS High School Program Data Points*. Pasadena, CA: Blair International Baccalaureate High School.

**Success through Partnership**

Blair’s success stands out on several levels, beginning with its sizable recruitment and retention numbers. Beyond that, Blair has built an after-school program that meets explicit school improvement goals while effectively engaging an older population that can easily “vote with their feet.” “We learned that if you give kids a program, a person or a peer group they want to belong to, they will want to maintain that connection in whatever ways they can,” said Fennessy, “Especially for kids who are disconnected from school, the program provides a reconnection to the things that have historically connected kids to school in the past.”

The linchpin of Blair’s success to date appears to be the strong partnership between Fennessy and Boccia. According to Piha, “It requires attention and leadership from the school administrator for after-school programs not to be marginalized. If the principal works with counselors to open up access to student performance data, meets with coaches to get them on board with tutoring, sets aside school-day funds for blended programming, and allows access to the library, the gym, other facilities – that’s key. Those are doors that cannot be opened without the school administrator actively on board. Programs that have strong support and participation of the school administration are thriving.”

Echoing Piha’s observations, Fennessy is quick to cite two essential elements as the glue that holds the school day and after-school programs together: 1) the quality of the relationship he has with the principal and school day staff and 2) access to data on kids that help him to target programming to the needs of the population. Such data include grades, test scores, attendance and student behavior. Fennessy noted, “The principal and I meet regularly. My office is intentionally located in the main office. I attend the administrative meetings and work closely with the school counseling staff. I have a presence during the school day. All of that has been critical to our success.”

**A Diversity of Offerings**

BlairLEARN’s appeal goes beyond cutting-edge enrichment programming—though they boast digital media,

**BlairLEARNS Program Sample Schedule<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Academic Assistance/ Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Academic Assistance (Mon – Fri)</li> <li>• Athletic Team Academic Assistance (Mon – Thur)</li> <li>• High School Credit Reclamation (Mon/Wed or Tues/Thur)</li> <li>• Targeted 9th Grade Intervention (Tues &amp; Fri)</li> </ul>
<b>Enrichment Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drama (Wed &amp; Fri)</li> <li>• Cartooning (Tues &amp; Thur)</li> <li>• Culinary Arts (Fri)</li> <li>• Digital Media/Graphics (Mon – Fri)</li> <li>• Yearbook (Mon, Wed, Fri)</li> <li>• Swim Lessons (Tues &amp; Thur)</li> </ul>
<b>Community-focused Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAT Prep (Mon, Wed, Sat, Sun)</li> <li>• ESL Classes (Mon – Thur)</li> <li>• Computer Literacy (Tues)</li> </ul>

performing arts and culinary arts offerings that are highly attractive to teens. The program combines a unique mix of enrichment, interest-based clubs and sports with no-nonsense academic supports, including credit recovery, for kids who’ve gotten off-track and need extra time.

A large percentage of students who participate in BlairLEARNS take advantage of after-school credit recovery classes. The school has increased its on-time graduation rate by over 28% in the last four years, and last year, 62 of the 150 graduating students took at least one credit recovery offering during after-school in order to walk across the stage on time.<sup>7</sup>

Additional academic support strategies that are part of BlairLEARNS include embedding tutoring into sports and enrichment activities. For example, all sports coaches

<sup>6</sup> Blair International Baccalaureate High School. (2008). *Fall 2008 Master Schedule*. Pasadena: CA: Blair International Baccalaureate High School.

<sup>7</sup> Blair International Baccalaureate High School. (2007). *2006-2007 BlairLEARNS High School Program Data Points*. Pasadena: CA: Blair International Baccalaureate High School.

include an hour of homework and tutoring as part of practice for student athletes. Coaches play double-duty as tutors, and participation in academic support sessions is a mandatory part of being on teams. In another approach with similar goals, academically and socially successful seniors are paired with struggling incoming freshmen (a targeted group with 8th grade GPAs between 1.0 and 2.0). Pairs meet two times a week for peer tutoring. Mentors are compensated with in-kind supports of free or discounted prom tickets and graduation night give-aways as well as cap and gown and year book credits. In yet another strategy, incoming freshman with GPAs lower than 1.0 participate in academic “boot camp” and are paired with local police officers who serve as mentors, tutors and role models.

Reflecting on these varied strategies, Fennessy notes: “Our philosophy is that some of our kids need more time to get through school, and after-school provides us with that time. With the program, we build in that extra time, and anchor that time in a relationship.” Speaking of relationships, the BlairLEARNS staff is as diverse as the programming itself. Coaches do double-duty as tutors, students run a variety of interest-based clubs with advisor support, community-based organizations and other vendors offer special programming and a sub-set of teachers rounds out the after-school staff.

### ***Student Experiences***

The typical BlairLEARNS participant is engaged in at least two different offerings, and the master schedule is designed to maximize students’ opportunities to participate in multiple activities. One student may participate in the credit recovery program on Mondays and Wednesdays, and dance and cartooning on alternating days. Another student might join the yearbook class that starts during the last period of the school day and continues on into after-school. That same student may also take a weekend SAT prep class (BlairLEARNS operates seven days a week). Students bring home information to family members who might in turn sign up for ESL, computer literacy or community college extension courses.

In summing up the scope of BlairLEARNS, Fennessy notes, “Basically, everything that moves is under our umbrella.”

### ***One Land, One People Youth Center at Skyline High School***

In the late 1990’s, racial conflict erupted within the 2000-plus community at Skyline High School when misunderstandings between African American and Asian American students resulted in a riot. Campus-wide mediation sessions gave rise to a new idea for addressing student needs and shifting school culture. Current program director Tony Douangviseth, who goes by Mr. D., explained, “We kept coming to this idea that if all of us are living on this one land, then we have to figure out a way to become one people, too. So from that idea we came up with the name for a new youth center – One Land, One People.”

### ***Supporting the Whole Student***

Supported by a community-based agency called Youth Together, 10 young people worked with the school to get the school-based center up and running. Starting with a vision for supporting student voice while establishing a strong conflict mediation program, the One Land, One People (OLOP) Youth Center sought to address a range of social needs that often impede student success – peer conflict, unaddressed physical and mental health concerns, uneven achievement expectations across different student populations, navigating cultural identity issues, and programming to help bridge the disconnect between many youths’ school day experiences and out-of-school realities.

The OLOP center couples programs and services with strong in-school student advocacy efforts so that students have opportunities to improve their physical and mental health and strengthen their academic, social and leadership skills. Guided by a strong orientation toward student voice, students serve alongside adults to build programs and serve as peer counselors (for example, OLOP trains between 100-150 peer mediators annually to support conflict resolution programming).

Relationships between school and Center staff are critical. “The principal’s philosophy is the same as ours. The goal is to retain as many kids as possible. We are trying to get rid of the behaviors that get students off track, not the students themselves,” explained

Douangviseth. This shared vision between school-day and center staff makes for an intentional referral process. Center staff work with a school attendance specialist to identify kids who are repeatedly truant, at-risk for school-ordered suspensions, and/or seem otherwise off-track or disconnected from school. Douangviseth noted, “Our referral process is tight and very structured. We narrow it down to, ‘what’s getting in the way of their success in school?’ We work with teachers and parents and we utilize a lot of peer-based support to reinforce the message that ‘your future is too important, so let’s get the support you need to keep you on-track.’”

### **Nontraditional Programming**

A key part of “keeping kids on track” is programming that happens during traditional after-school hours but is hardly traditional in focus. Due to the unique origin of the Center, there is an intentional focus on cultural programming and helping youth become more firmly connected to each other and to issues in their community. The Center intentionally offers culturally-specific programming such as the Native Youth Leadership club or Brotha’s Keeper, which attracts African American males, as well shared spaces for students from all backgrounds come together around common interests.

## **Emerging Practices of Successful High School After-School Programs**

What distinguishes strong, effective high school after-school programs from struggling ones? The research base remains thin, but according to Sam Piha, programs that appear most successful share many common features, including:

- A full-time on-site program director
- Engaged leadership from school day administrators
- Data-sharing between school and after-school staff
- Relevant, progressive programming in which students can build increasingly complex skills
- A flexible menu of diverse offerings

Basing programming on student interests has led to the development of offerings such as break dancing, guerilla theater, writing workshops, graffiti arts and the martial arts. Like at Blair High School, academic support comes in many forms. Some tutoring opportunities stand alone; others are built into existing extra-curricular and after-school groups such as sports teams and student clubs.

In a unique, reciprocal arrangement, OLOP also runs several classes during the school day, including a leadership class focused on improving school culture and a social living class that deals with a range of issues young people must navigate.

### **Multiple Entry Points**

Pathways into and through the One Land, One People Youth Center are varied. One student might come in to discuss relationship problems, and, in addition to on-site counseling, get connected to a girls’ after-school club. A year later, that student might participate in conflict mediation training and serve as a support to other young women going through relationship problems, one of the top sources of interpersonal conflict at Skyline. Another student may feel somewhat lost in the shuffle until a peer invites him to join an after-school club focused on cultural identity and community. He also gets interested in the guerilla theater class, creating performances that address a variety of issues facing Skyline and greater Oakland. That guerilla theater class may in turn focus a performance on health issues facing teens, partnering with the Rise Up Wellness staff at the center to reach out and educate the broader school community.

No single after-school activity would have changed the climate of support for Skyline students. To offer all of these services and supports under one roof, the school combines Title I and 21st CCLC funds with other sources to create a seamless, one-stop shop where students go to get a range of needs met. Equally important, the school has partnered with many community agencies and individuals – cultural groups, mental health services agencies, traditional after-school providers, local artists, coaches and teachers – in order to make good on the holistic *One Land, One People* vision.<sup>8</sup>

Anecdotally, the Center appears to be having an impact on the culture of Skyline High School. Douagviseth reflected, “Students let us know that, in many cases, if it weren’t for the partnership between the Center and the school that they wouldn’t be here. The dropout rate in Oakland is about 50%, so we know that we have to be reflective of and responsive to students’ lives. The culture we create here has to step up to their lives, their struggles. But whatever the struggle is, we all struggle together.”

*To see these and other high school after-school programs in California in action, watch Beyond Expectations: The Power of High School Afterschool, a video developed by Temescal Associates and available online at [www.temescalassociates.com/video/beyondexpectations.htm](http://www.temescalassociates.com/video/beyondexpectations.htm)*

## Research Update

### *Learning about Large-scale Programs*

The contributions that after-school programs can make to the positive development of children are well established. In recent years, interest in programs serving older youth has increased. But important questions remain. Will teenagers participate in high school after-school in significant numbers? Can these activities help them acquire important skills as they transition to adulthood? As these programs emerge as viable investments, it is increasingly important that we understand their potential and develop strategies to ensure effectiveness.

While the number of rigorously evaluated after-school programs for older youth remains limited, we are beginning to see evidence that individual programs can make a difference. For example, the American Youth Policy Forum recently released a compendium featuring evaluations of 22 programs for older youth that provide high quality “expanded learning opportunities” – a term increasingly being used to describe the range of programs and activities available to youth outside of school.<sup>9</sup>

8 Skyline High School. (2009). *One Land One People Youth Center Page*. Oakland: CA. Retrieved March 24, 2009 at [http://www.skylinehs.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=55210&type=d&termREC\\_ID=&id=0&rn=4494109](http://www.skylinehs.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=55210&type=d&termREC_ID=&id=0&rn=4494109)

9 Bowles, A. & Brand, B. (2009). *Learning Around the Clock: Benefits of Expanded Learning Opportunities for Older Youth*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

The individual programs featured in *On the Ground* are in the early stages of collecting evidence that will help explain their approach and demonstrate their impact.<sup>10</sup> Broadening our discussion beyond California and shifting our focus up to the system level, *Research Update* features recent studies of two well-established city-wide after-school systems that target older youth – Chicago’s After School Matters (ASM) and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Out-of-school Time Programs for Youth Initiative (DYCD OST Initiative).

### *New York City OST Initiative*

As part of their evaluation of the DYCD OST Initiative, Policy Studies Associates recently published findings related to the implementation of high school programs.<sup>11</sup> Data were collected from September 2005 through December 2007 and focus on participation, self-reported benefits, and promising program approaches. As this multi-year evaluation continues, future reports will further address the question of impact.

### *Enrollment and Participation Rates*

Programs for older youth often struggle to achieve high enrollment and high attendance. Despite these challenges, participation levels exceeded DYCD’s expectations. Over 8,300 youth enrolled in 122 programs during 2005-06, over 13,000 the following year, and nearly 8,800 (across 111 programs) in the beginning of the final year (2007-08).<sup>12</sup>

DCYD set an initiative-wide expectation of 108 service hours per high school participant per program year. From this standard, they expected programs to achieve an average rate of 70% participation or higher (i.e., each high school participant is expected to attend 70% of 108 hours, or 76 hours per year). On average, youth

10 Hipps, J., & Diaz, M. (Jan 2007) *California 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) Program Independent Evaluation Final Report*. Retrieved April 1, 2009. [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/eval-07-02.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/eval-07-02.pdf)

11 Russell, C., Diehl Vile, J., Reisner, R., Simko, C., Mielke, M., & Pechman, E. (2008). *Evaluation of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Out-of-School Time Programs for Youth Initiative: Implementation of Programs for High School Youth*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

12 The number of participating programs dropped from 122 to 111 due to program closings in 2007.

attended 97 hours of programming during the first year and 105 hours in the second. A deeper look suggests that a core group of youth likely participated for well over 108 hours per year. About 56% met or exceeded the participation standard in 2007 while a substantial minority remained harder to engage. Center-based programs reported higher participation than school-based, a difference attributed to the higher number of planned program hours in center-based programs.

### **Self-Reported Benefits**

In Year 2 of the evaluation, participants were surveyed and some were interviewed to assess their experiences. Participants felt a strong sense of belonging within their programs and developed positive relationships with peers and staff. Two-thirds of youth strongly agreed that staff respected them and encouraged them to learn new things. While high school programs did not specifically aim to provide academic support, about one-third of the youth agreed that participation in an OST program helped them improve academically.

### **Promising Program Approaches**

The evaluation identified four program features associated with successfully recruiting and retaining older youth:

- The use of creative, age-appropriate strategies to recruit youth and encourage their continued participation;
- The recruitment and retention of staff that had both strong relationship skills and content expertise;
- Programming designed to meet the developmental needs of older youth – i.e., activities that support youth in preparing for post-high school, career and other opportunities;
- The creation of partnerships designed to increase fiscal and other resources available to the program.

Data from qualitative interviews suggest that a combination of strategies provides the firmest foundation for success. While stipends may get young people in the door, relationships keep them coming, particularly given that stipend amounts are typically

much lower than regular part-time jobs. The program's relationship to host organizations is another factor, setting the stage for the stability of the program, smooth operations and the ability to secure additional resources. A final set of strategies associated with successful programs relate to outreach and the importance of youth-friendly methods (e.g. facebook, text-messaging) for getting the word out and keeping youth updated on program happenings.

*To learn more, download the full report at: [www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/OST%20High%20School%20Programs.pdf](http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/OST%20High%20School%20Programs.pdf)*

### **After School Matters**

In 2007, researchers at Chapin Hall published a quasi-experimental study assessing the impact of participation in Chicago After School Matters (ASM) on school attendance and performance.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the biggest high school program in the country, ASM offers students in many of the city's most underserved high schools paid apprenticeships in the arts, technology, sports, communications and other areas. All apprenticeships are taught by skilled professionals and the program emphasizes increasing competency as students continue in successive semesters. One of the primary aims of the program is to expose youth to career skills and options that lead them to value the skills learned at school and motivate them to perform at higher academic levels. An important requirement of ASM is that students attend school any day that they participate in the after-school program.

### **Positive Academic Gains**

This evaluation was conducted in 24 high schools during 2002-2003. Outcome data was collected on 20,370 students, including 3,411 ASM participants and 17,099 non-participants for comparison purposes. The findings point to a relationship between participating in ASM and three important academic outcomes: improved school attendance, fewer course failures and higher graduation rates. In addition to demonstrating that ASM participation was associated with gains in important

13 George, R. Cusick, G., Wasserman, M., Gladden, R. (2007). *After-school Programs and Academic Impact: A Study of Chicago's After School Matters*. Chicago: Chapin Hall.



outcomes, researchers also examined the impact of various levels of participation.

**School attendance.** Robert George and his colleagues on the research team found that students who participated in ASM missed fewer days of school than similar classmates (on average two fewer days) and tended to fail fewer courses. A closer look at the findings suggests that duration and intensity matter. Students who enrolled in ASM for three or more semesters and those who participated in ASM at the highest levels (attending 90% or more of possible program days) had higher rates of graduation and lower dropout rates than similar non-participants. The positive effect of ASM participation on school attendance held steady for students that continued the program for successive semesters. In contrast, the positive effect on school attendance ceased for students who disenrolled from ASM in successive semesters. After one semester of non-participation, attendance for these youth decreased to the levels of those never enrolled.

**Academic achievement.** Participation in ASM was also positively associated with increased academic achievement, and, specifically, avoidance of course failures. Controlling for prior course failures, academic preparation, and previous levels of school attendance, the study found that teens who participated in ASM at the highest levels failed a significantly lower percentage of core courses – 9.6 percent compared to 15.8 percent for those who did not participate. Students who participated in ASM at lower levels (one semester or less and/or 40% or less of the time), however, had course failure rates that were not statistically different from non-participants.

Finally, students who participated in ASM had higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates than non-participants. Students who participated at the highest rates and for the most semesters (four or more) were 2.7 times as likely to graduate than similar nonparticipating students.

*To learn more about this study, download the research brief at: [www.chapinhall.org/article\\_abstract.aspx?ar=1444](http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1444)*

## **Research to Watch**

The first randomized controlled trial of ASM, being conducted by Bart Hirsch and Larry Hedges of Northwestern University, will build on Chapin Hall's findings and bring more rigor to the question of program impact. Their study focuses on how After School Matters works when implemented well, with a focus on apprenticeships taught by experienced instructors who do a good job implementing the program model. If findings from the trial are positive, further evaluation efforts will test whether the scaled-up model is effective under different conditions, across a broader set of sites.

Hirsch and Hedges designed the evaluation and selected measures with the program's specific goals and components in mind. This involved developing a reliable way to assess job skill development. One of the data collection strategies involves a mock job interview conducted by HR professionals. At the end of the interview, each youth is rated on specific skills, attitudes, and behaviors including things like problem solving, teamwork, and communication. Interviewers also make an overall recommendation as to whether they would hire the young person for an actual entry-level position.

With the bulk of the data collection now under their belts, Hirsch and Hedges are analyzing data and findings should be forthcoming in late 2009.

## **Voices from the Field**

### ***From After-school to Expanded Learning in New Hampshire***

Guided by the state superintendent's High School Redesign and Follow the Child initiatives, New Hampshire's Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) pilot is building on a traditional high school after-school model but pushing beyond, blurring the lines between school and out-of-school learning.

Four schools are piloting the New Hampshire ELO program, in which students work with a highly-qualified sponsoring teacher to co-design a learning experience that meets specific criteria and is aligned with state

standards in academic subjects. ELOs can include independent study, private instruction, performance groups, internships, community service, apprenticeships and online courses. In the fall of 2008, nearly 400 students began earning credit towards high school completion through ELOs.

To learn more about the pilot we talked with Suzanne Birdsall, 21st Century Community Learning Centers Coordinator; Paul Leather, Director of the Division of Career Technology and Adult Learning at the New Hampshire Department of Education; Janice Hastings, ELO Manager at New Hampshire PlusTime; and Melissa Gallagher, Community Development Specialist at New Hampshire PlusTime.

**Forum: How did the ELO pilot develop?**

**Suzanne Birdsall, Coordinator, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC):** Several different entities were all positioned to look at high school at the same time. The Governor’s office had been looking at changing the mandatory school attendance age to 18; the state Department of Education had just released a paper on High School Redesign; high school was gaining more attention in the after-school world; and the National Conference of State Legislatures had just issued an RFP called Supporting Student Success to get decision-makers together to make deep changes in education. A bit later, the Nellie Mae Foundation became interested in funding a pilot project. We intentionally piloted the program in four high schools with 21st CCLC grants. Our rationale was that we wanted to pilot this in schools that already had a community partnership infrastructure in place.

**Paul Leather, Director, Division of Career Technology and Adult Learning at the New Hampshire Department of Education:** When New Hampshire’s minimum standards were amended in 2005 the essential policy shift was to make schooling at the high school level more flexible, more student-centered, and more connected to 21st century skill expectations. The idea was to make curriculum, instruction and assessment more portable and transparent so they could be applied in a variety of settings like after-school and in the community.

**Forum: Say more about the connection to after-school.**

**Paul:** If you have a robust secondary 21st CCLC program, then you have capacity that’s connected to the school, and you have community resources that you otherwise wouldn’t have. Those after-school programs that were truly robust definitely added value to the overall effort. And the after-school folks are happy because this makes them more integrated into the school. The interest on the part of the after-school movement in general to be directly involved in student learning was important as well; that Mott and other foundations and nationals were behind that direction was helpful.

The link to after-school has also been important when it comes to engaging teachers. We’re not framing ELOs as another reform strategy. Rather than saying you have to change what you’re doing, we’re saying we’re working with new partners to expand what we offer to kids.

**Janice Hastings, ELO Manager, New Hampshire PlusTime:** This is about motivating, engaging and sustaining youth engagement; after-school generally knows how to do that. Many of the clubs in 21st CCLC have amazing content, so it’s a matter of placing that content in the context of academic competency assessment. We’ve had a number of calls from schools looking to incorporate tenets of ELO into their 21st CCLC work at the middle and high school levels.

**Forum: How do ELOs work?**

**Janice:** Through the pilot we are rethinking how, where and under what time frame students learn. The goal of is to connect students to experiences based on their interests, and provide opportunities for them to receive credit by developing a learning plan that meets state standards and is co-designed with a highly qualified teacher and a community partner. Each participating school has an ELO team that has been working on completing competency-based assessments to assess learning and grant credit for ELOs.

**Melissa Gallagher, Community Development Specialist, New Hampshire PlusTime:** An important aspect of this is minimum expectations around

the content of an ELO. Plans must include ongoing journaling, development of a portfolio, and a final exhibit or presentation in which the student presents a deliverable product in front of a panel.

**Paul:** One thing sometimes gets lost in the conversation and that's the after-school network provider, PlusTime New Hampshire, which is very much on board and a huge resource to us. They are a provider but also help coordinate the overall effort, which allows us to engage partners in a deeper way than we would normally. The role of intermediaries is not to be underestimated.

**Forum: What's an example of an ELO?**

**Janice:** We have a high school senior interested in joining the military. He needs a civics credit, and has an interest in understanding how the military relates to broader social, political and economic forces. He is working with his social studies teacher and a community partner – a retired JAG officer – to co-design his ELO. Together they have come up with a variety of activities and a plan for how to obtain information that helps to answer his essential questions.

**Melissa:** We are also beginning to see more group ELOs – students who may or may not be earning credit in the same class. For example, in one school a group of students designed an ELO to establish a recycling program for the school. As part of their plan, they will research recycling programs in other schools and make recommendations to the school board.

**Forum: What is the reach of the current pilot and where would you like to see this go?**

**Janice:** We have four pilot schools, all 21st CCLC grantees. In December of 2008, we had 337 students in some stage of the process – 110 were social studies related. We also have six unfunded “network” sites that are auditing the process. This network is engaged and we support them through technical assistance. Their presence allows us to see how schools that aren't getting funding are proceeding.

We will seek other funding to supplement, but we are looking to those districts that have set policy and can inform other districts. The governor is watching, the legislature is asking about costs – we'd like this to be available for all New Hampshire high schools.

**Melissa:** We've had an overwhelmingly positive response from students and parents. Community members get this. They understand that we have a global economy and students need to be prepared differently than in the past. As for teachers, we've seen a pendulum shift from a year ago. Once teachers began to see students being successful, we saw a shift in attitude in terms of who can learn and when and where. As for the continuing challenges, questions remain around the workload for teachers, how to translate the ELOs onto transcripts, and what the ELO program looks like at scale.

## Resources

For more information on high school after-school, the following publications may be of interest:

- ***Meeting the High School Challenge: Making After-School Work for Older Students*** [www.ctafterschoolnetwork.org/documents/file\\_hs\\_report\\_2007.pdf](http://www.ctafterschoolnetwork.org/documents/file_hs_report_2007.pdf)
- ***Learning Around the Clock: Benefits of Expanded Learning Opportunities for Older Youth*** [www.aypf.org/documents/AYPF\\_ELOs\\_w-cvr.pdf](http://www.aypf.org/documents/AYPF_ELOs_w-cvr.pdf)
- ***Rethinking the High School Experience: What's After-School Got to Do with It?*** <http://forumfyi.org/node/91>
- ***High School After-School: What Is It? What Might It Be? Why Is It Important?*** <http://forumfyi.org/node/84>
- ***High School: The Next Frontier for After-school Advocates?*** <http://forumfyi.org/node/84>

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**OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME  
POLICY COMMENTARY**

the  
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FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

# After-School Grows Up:

## Helping Teens Prepare for the Future

**APRIL 2009**

In this commentary, we take readers on a cross-country tour of after-school innovation focused specifically on high schools – from northern and southern California to Chicago, New York and New Hampshire. Though some have expressed doubts about the ability of high school after-school programs to attract and retain older youth, these examples demonstrate that effective programming is happening at significant scale. Lessons emerging from these programs have the potential to inform and influence not only the after-school movement but discussions about workforce readiness, high school reform, dropout prevention, college access and other strategies aimed at helping ensure all young people are ready for college, work and life.

How are school-based after-school programs effectively attracting and retaining high school-aged youth?

What are we learning from large-scale efforts?

What strategies appear most promising for informing the future of after-school as well as other efforts to support older youth?