

HANDOUT:

How Afterschool Supports Students' Learning

The afterschool field is an essential part of our communities' response to the coronavirus pandemic, and programs will continue to play a critical role throughout recovery. Today, afterschool programs are innovating to keep kids safe and engaged in learning, help essential personnel continue to do their jobs, provide food for families in need, and stay connected with caregivers and parents.

As we look ahead to summer and next school year, afterschool leaders and educators stand ready to help children catch up and keep up, which includes ensuring all kids have access to learning opportunities and the supports they need to emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, and hopeful.

Afterschool Programs Support the Whole Child

While schools are closed and when they re-open, students need not only academic support, but also social and emotional support. They need help sustaining and rebuilding relationships, talking about their experiences and emotions, developing as leaders and agents of change, and re-engaging with their interests.

- Afterschool provides a safe place where professional educators connect with kids, engage them in hands-on learning, help them navigate challenges, and talk about how to make good decisions.
- Staff are trained to focus on the whole child and offer enriching activities that encourage young people to try new things, build confidence, and develop social skills.
- During this time of crisis, programs continue to partner with school districts by providing virtual programming, distributing learning activities with school lunches, and offering virtual check-ins and support for working families.

“Preliminary forecasts parallel many education leaders' fears: missing school for a prolonged period will likely have major impacts on student achievement come fall 2020.”

The Collaborative for Student Growth at the Northwest Evaluation Association

Afterschool programs are proven to help students make gains in reading and math, improve their test scores and graduate. They inspire kids of all ages to love learning by engaging them in creative, hands-on projects that teach foundational skills, like communication, teamwork, and problem solving.



Partnering with Afterschool to Address Students' Needs



More time for engaged learning. Even before the COVID-19 emergency exacerbated lost learning time, students spent only 20% of their waking hours over the course of a year in school. As schools develop strategies to help students make up for lost time, including virtually and as schools re-open, working with partners like afterschool and summer educators who help support learning during the other 80% of students' time will be critical.

Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Engage students with additional learning time in a way that feels valuable and rewarding, different but complementary to the school day
- ✓ Provide new ways to explore material and ideas
- ✓ Reduce the 6,000 hour learning gap between high-income and low-income families



How students feel and heal. Focusing on students' well-being is critical to helping them learn. Current research from the [National Academy of Sciences](#), the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development demonstrates that learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits. Positive, supportive relationships and rich, stimulating environments spur the brain to form and strengthen connections that promote further development and learning.

Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Support social and emotional development
- ✓ Offer experience and observational tools that foster positive youth development
- ✓ Provide opportunities for athletics, arts, passions and joys that keep students motivated
- ✓ Create opportunities for students to express their voice and lead in their communities
- ✓ Foster connections between young people and caring adults
- ✓ Provide healthy snacks and/or dinner



Sustaining connections to families and communities.

During the initial response to COVID-19, many families reached out first to their afterschool programs to get information about the school and available resources. For families that struggle to develop connections with the formal school, these programs build bridges that help establish effective pathways of communication. For example, as schools switched to virtual learning, afterschool programs reached out to grandparents and English Learning families to help them navigate the tools and resources shared by schools.

Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Establish and strengthen bridges with families and communities
- ✓ Represent the demographics of the groups they serve
- ✓ Leverage resources (each program has an average of six partners)
- ✓ Connect students and families to food, health, economic and other types of support



Address inequities that are likely worsening.

The digital divide, the ability of parents to help students with homework, and the economic strain on families with low income make learning even harder for those traditionally underserved. According to UCLA education professor Pedro Noguera, "This virus is exacerbating the inequalities we knew were there before. The kids who have the least are getting the least now. If the state is serious about equity, it will try to do some things to address that." Noguera noted that ideally, kids would have access to afterschool programs that provide art, robotics or other enrichment activities to balance out ramped-up instruction.

Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Reach and serve a significant number of young people from low-income families and racially diverse backgrounds
- ✓ Provide the space for students from all backgrounds to gain confidence through hands-on, real world learning experiences
- ✓ Promote opportunity and equity in employment fields where minorities and women are traditionally under-represented, such as women in STEM