

21st Century Learning for Children:

Out-of-School Time Programs

by Wendy Nadherny Fachon

Out-of-school time (OST) learning is any organized program available to children and youth outside of the school day, including afterschool and summer learning programs. These programs provide a safe, supportive environment for youth and engaging activities that promote greater social, emotional, physical well-being and academic success. Historically, youth success has been measured mostly with test scores and school-related outcomes. However, in order to better prepare our children for the future, we are beginning to redefine education to include learning that takes place outside of the classroom and to redefine success to include social-emotional and 21st century skill development.

21st century skills are the learning and literacy abilities students need to succeed in the evolving information age and the newly emerging age of environmental consciousness. Learning skills are comprised of the four C's – Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Communication and Creativity. The literacy skills required go beyond language to technological, financial and environmental literacy.

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) works with the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance (RIAS-PA) to support a number of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) around the state. These centers manage OST programs which serve more than 13,000 students attending high-poverty and low-performing schools. In addition to helping students meet state and local standards in reading and math,

the CCLCs offer a broad array of enrichment activities that teach 21st century skills through creative arts, physical education and STEM programs.

Typical Elementary Level CCLC Afterschool Program

At 3 p.m., students ages 6 to 11 will sit together and eat a quick snack before settling down to do their homework. Many parents in these low-income communities lack the ESL skills and knowledge needed to help their children with homework. Afterschool teachers help students think through their homework assignments by asking leading questions. The teachers encourage students to help one another and also make sure all homework is completed. Until the work is done, a student is unable to participate in the fun learning activities planned for the remainder of the afternoon. Students who finish their homework early are given a choice of interesting books to read or materials for drawing. Fun activities are the big juicy carrot at the end of the stick, and it is no surprise that these CCLC-supported students tend to outshine their peers academically.

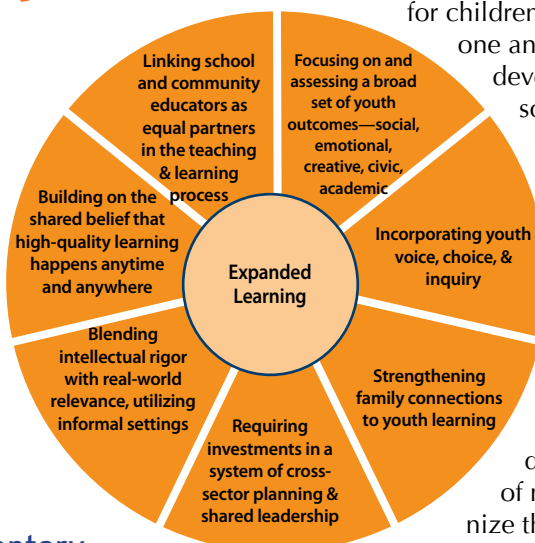
From 3:30 to 4 p.m. participants engage in student-directed physical

activity. Some urban schools provide only one 40-minute gym class per week during regular schooltime. A good afterschool program offers opportunity for physical activity everyday through a combination of adult-directed play and free play, which is a special time for children to interact with

one another as they develop their physical, social and emotional skills. While schooltime gym class is generally a teacher-directed activity focusing on one class/grade at a time, afterschool gym/playground time can be quite different. Students of mixed ages organize themselves into

teams, establish rules and monitor one another's behavior. The oldest students tend to step into leadership positions, while younger students learn by watching and modeling. Teachers manage behavioral issues, give encouragement, assure inclusion, and they provide conflict mediation and positive discipline as needed.

From 4 to 5:15 p.m., students engage in elected learning and literacy activities. For example, second and third graders may engage in a Lego Club and learn about architecture and design. Fourth and fifth graders may take on a challenge to simulate respiration (biochemistry) by disassembling PopCube models of large molecules (carbohydrates) and reassembling those cubes with more cubes (oxygen) to transform the cubes into many small molecules (water and carbon dioxide). After solving that problem the students will play with the PopCubes to build spinning tops for a competition, while learning concepts in engineering and physics. At 5:15 p.m., students help clean up and get ready for parent pick-up.



CCLC Programs Transform Children

Between the ages of 6 and 11, students develop their communication skills through interaction, trial and error. They build their vocabularies and learn how to use their words more effectively. Group activities enable them to develop teamwork skills. They learn to listen to one another's ideas, feelings and needs, and they learn to come up with solutions that take into account every team member's point of view. As they learn to articulate their thoughts clearly using positive expression, they cultivate strong friendships. Through all of this, children become more self-reliant and

self-confident, while also learning how to collaborate with others for a better outcome.

The elementary years are formative ones, and quality afterschool programs help students make real world connections with their school day academic learning. Intentionally-planned, well-executed afterschool programs offer the motivation that promotes better school attendance records, higher test scores and improved physical, social and emotional well-being. These programs also prepare young students with skills relevant to this day and age. CCLC-managed Child Opportunity Zone (COZ – pronounced cozy) programs

are currently offered in the following school districts: Central Falls, Cranston, Newport, North Kingstown, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket. COZ program administrators welcome adult volunteers and program facilitators from the surrounding community to share their expertise and help enrich these students' lives. Teaching OST is a rewarding experience and a lot of fun.

Wendy Nadherny Fachon is an afterschool educator offering environmental learning programs to elementary schools around Rhode Island. Visit her website at Netwalking.com to learn more.



Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance

Centrally located in the United Way building on Valley Street, in Providence, Afterschool Plus Alliance (RIASPA) partners with school districts, private schools, YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs and nonprofits in the environmental education sector. RIASPA supports expanded learning initiatives in these organizations with professional development workshops, planning and assessment tools, networking events, field research, results data, trend reports and policy briefs.

Expanded learning is the idea that children and youth can learn anytime, anywhere, including afterschool and summer camp. Expanded learning emphasizes links between schools and community organizations; a focus on many youth outcomes, including social, emotional, academic, civic and health; youth voice and choice; family engagement and involvement; rigor and real-world relevance; and shared leadership between schools and community organizations that translates into youth success.

Expanded learning improves education. A U.S. Department of Education report compiled by Learning Point Associates in 2011 shows that annual teacher-reported performance data from 21st CLC grantees across the country demonstrate that students attending 21st CCLC programs raise their math grades (37 percent) and English grades (38 percent), while also improving their homework completion and class participation (72 percent) and their behavior in class (67 percent).

Find out more about how RIASPA is getting us to rethink learning at AfterSchoolRI.org/for-advocates/rethink-learning.

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