

Inspire Learning

Afterschool Programs Facilitate Both Academic Enrichment and Personal Growth

Afterschool, as it is used in this report, refers broadly to out-of-school time programs for youth from kindergarten to high school age that take place during summer, school vacations, weekends and the hours immediately preceding and following the regular school day.

In Brief

Quality afterschool programs inspire learning in students by supporting academic achievement, improving attitudes toward school, providing opportunities for complementary learning, supplementing the core curriculum with enrichment opportunities, and giving students the tools and confidence they need to be engaged and to excel in and out of the classroom.

Afterschool Programs . . .

Support Student Achievement

Studies of high-quality afterschool programs, particularly those with an academic focus, have shown that students who participate in afterschool programs have higher achievement scores in reading, language arts, mathematics,¹ and science assessments,² as well as higher grades in school,³ and improvements in work habits and task persistence.⁴

Improve Attitudes Toward School

The academic benefits of afterschool programs extend even beyond test scores and grades.

Studies show that out-of-school time program participation is associated with increases in attendance⁵ and decreases in tardiness, dropout rates, and disciplinary action⁶; lower rates of truancy;⁷ increases in time spent on homework;⁸ greater attentiveness and preparedness in class;⁹ and increased enjoyment and effort⁸ in school.

Help High-Risk Students and Accommodate a Variety of Learners

Many afterschool programs offer services to economically disadvantaged students or students with the greatest academic risk. Teachers report improvements in work and study habits for low-income students participating in afterschool programs:¹⁰ a clear indication of such programs' impact on students' confidence and motivation.

It is also critical for out-of-school time programs to provide educational opportunities for different types of learning styles. Because they can be more flexible than the typical classroom structure, afterschool programs provide an opportunity to inspire learning in students who might otherwise be disengaged from school. By offering a variety of learning methods that can be tailored to specific students' needs, students have a chance to gain confidence and self-esteem so they can become more fully engaged in the classroom.¹¹

Mix Educational Opportunities with Fun

Afterschool programs recognize that not all learning occurs in the classroom, and in fact research shows an increase in positive outcomes when students' learning is reinforced in a variety of different contexts.¹² These programs can offer opportunities for extended learning that are often unavailable during the school day because of time and curriculum constraints.

Students are also more likely to engage in activities they perceive as fun rather than as an extension of their schoolwork, and afterschool programs provide an outlet for this kind of interactive education. Learning geography through drawing, fractions through baking, or practicing reading comprehension with theater productions are examples of activities that make education fun and creative. This kind of extended learning improves not only student attitudes about education but also supports academic achievement. Research has shown even when the content of afterschool programs is not explicitly educational, students' achievement scores tend to improve when they participate in programs with these types of complementary learning components.¹³

Promote Health and Wellness

Opportunities for physical education and exercise are often cut from the regular school day to increase academic instruction time, but afterschool programs provide students with a variety of opportunities to be active. Indeed, many see these programs as an opportunity to fight the growing problem of child obesity.

The "Let's Move" initiative, launched by First Lady Michelle Obama to find a solution to childhood obesity, reports that since the 1980's rates of childhood obesity have tripled, resulting in 1 in 3 children being overweight or obese.¹⁴ By keeping students active, promoting the importance of healthy behaviors, and providing healthy snacks,¹⁵ many afterschool programs have been shown to make a difference in childrens' physical activity and fitness,¹⁶ knowledge of healthy diet and behavior,¹⁷ and even childrens' levels of obesity.¹⁸ It is important for children to be inspired to learn academically but also to inspire curiosity and awareness about health and wellness, and afterschool programs provide an opportunity for this kind of education.

Provide Opportunities for Enrichment

Educators feel the need to provide rigorous instruction in the core subjects to meet current assessment standards, often at the cost of supplemental and/or enrichment activities as they struggle with limited funds. Without pressure to meet assessment standards, afterschool programs can provide this kind of enrichment.

Programs like the Ballet Folklórico dance lessons offered at Forest Grove Community Learning Center in Forest Grove, Oregon¹⁹ not only promote physical activity but also provide students with opportunities for learning valuable skills that can be transferred to the classroom, such as teamwork, sportsmanship, and persistence. In classes like Ballet Folklórico, students also have the opportunity to learn about cultures and traditions to which they would not otherwise be exposed.

Afterschool programs provide students the chance to be exposed to, or participate in, a variety of artforms such as drama, painting, creative writing, and music. Arts education provides students a chance for individual expression and emphasizes skills such as sustained attention, discipline, and abstract thought, which children can transfer to the classroom for academic benefit.²⁰

Research indicates that providing these enrichment opportunities in afterschool programs is especially important for students from low-income families, who can rarely afford access to such enrichment opportunities without assistance.²¹

A copy of this document, including footnotes, can be found at

www.oregonask.org.

Footnotes

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