Effective expanded learning programs help students succeed in school and in life.

Expanded learning opportunities are inclusive of before-school, afterschool, and summer learning. Decades of research documenting the outcomes of afterschool and summer programs reveal a core set of key principles that are essential to yielding the best results. Aligning the spectrum of expanded learning opportunities with these principles will ensure quality and consistency across all programs. This document can be used to guide expanded learning policy at the local, state and federal levels.

1. **School-Community Partnerships**: Strong partnerships between community organizations and schools are at the core of successful expanded learning programs. These partnerships should be characterized by alignment of goals and services, effective lines of communication, and data and resource sharing.

2. **Engaged Learning**: Expanded learning programs engage young people because they make learning meaningful and relevant. Activities tap in to a young person’s interest, sparking their imagination and igniting a fire within. They engage young people initially by providing choice and voice over what is offered, and maintain engagement through positive relationships with adults and peers.

3. **Family Engagement**: A wide body of research points to active parent involvement in their child’s education as a key factor in student success; community-based organizations, partnering with schools on expanded learning, can often help facilitate that involvement. Expanded learning programs that provide safe environments for children to learn, offer parental choice and facilitate communication are crucial to parents, schools and most of all students.

4. **Intentional Programming**: Explicit goals and intentionally designed activities that align with those goals are critical to the success of expanded learning programs. In addition, successful programs must also engage participants in meaningful ways and meet their developmental and academic needs.

5. **Diverse, Prepared Staff**: Successful expanded learning programs ensure that staffing ratios, qualifications, ongoing professional development and overall staff diversity are closely linked to program goals and should be representative of the community. In most instances, staffing involves a combination of both in school staff and community partners.

6. **Participation & Access**: Studies show that frequency and duration of participation matter; the more kids participate, the more likely they are to show academic gains. However, participation should not be mandatory; when children choose and direct their enrichment experiences, they become more ardent learners and stronger leaders.

7. **Safety, Health & Wellness**: Adequate space, supervision, and security are necessary for young people to have the comfort and freedom to focus solely on the task at hand. In addition, the best programs provide opportunities for exercise and access to nutritious meals that otherwise might be unavailable.

8. **Ongoing Assessment & Improvement**: Programs that employ sound data collection and management practices focused on continuous improvement have the most success in establishing and maintaining quality services. Frequent assessment (both informal and formal) and regular evaluation (both internal and external) are ingredients needed to refine and sustain expanded learning programs.

For more on Expanded Learning Principles and to download the full publication, visit: www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyexpandedlearning.cfm

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Expanded Learning Opportunities  
Connecting Principle to Practice

School-Community Partnerships in Afterschool & Summer Programs support youth and families by creating a holistic system that can more effectively respond to individual and local community needs. Partnerships are a proven and cost-effective way for schools and community organizations to provide more meaningful expanded learning experiences - making a real difference in the lives of children and families.

Expanded Learning Opportunities in afterschool and summer help build more Engaged Learners:

- Programs spark greater interest in school so students attend school more often, get better grades, and are more likely to graduate.
- Students in afterschool programs learn by doing, explore their imagination and strengthen social skills while building relationships with peers and dedicated educators.

Expanded learning opportunities provide an authentic conduit for engaging families in a child’s education, while also giving parents peace of mind knowing their kids are safe, learning, and having fun. Parents need flexible, affordable options after the school bell rings, and to know their kids are safe.

Quality afterschool and summer programs use intentionally designed activities to provide new learning opportunities for youth. This can be especially helpful and necessary when programs are designed to address specific areas of need for the community.

- The flexible nature of afterschool programs lend themselves to expose students to the wide spectrum of career fields, helping many students develop the skills they need to land that first job.
- Afterschool & Summer programs help kids discover who they are and what they love to do, inspiring them toward future careers
- Employers want to hire problem solvers and team players - experience in hands-on STEM can help build essential workplace skills. More than 70 percent of students in STEM afterschool programs reported positive gains in knowledge and skills such as perseverance and critical thinking.
- Summer Learning is one of the most powerful tools we’ve got for closing the achievement gap in our schools.

We know many barriers exist that prevent youth from participating in afterschool & summer programs. However, we also know that the more kids participate, the more likely they are to show academic gains in school. Providing meaningful, relevant enrichment experiences for all youth strengthens their confidence as they become more ardent learners and stronger leaders.

Providing reliable, affordable expanded learning opportunities supports healthy habits for youth, gives access to food for thousands of hungry kids that rely on it, and provides a safe haven helping kids avoid risky behaviors, online and offline, during the peak hours for juvenile crime.