

# The Evidence Base for Summer Enrichment and Comprehensive Afterschool Opportunities

Investing American Rescue Plan Funds in Well-Designed and Well-Delivered Summer and Afterschool Learning Opportunities Carries Out the Intent of the Law and Addresses Needed Learning Recovery and Acceleration

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By Terry K. Peterson, PhD, and Deborah Lowe Vandell, PhD

Working Draft (Last updated May 2021)

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**This document highlights some of the evidence base that shows well-designed and well-delivered summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool can address “learning loss,” accelerate learning, and expand opportunities for student success.**

The findings are part of an extensive research- and evidence-base that supports local and state leaders’ efforts to address learning loss and acceleration by investing ESSER III and other funds to expand access, as called out in the law, for “summer learning or summer enrichment” and/ or “comprehensive afterschool programs” and to improve existing opportunities in high-need neighborhoods and schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

From the new **American Rescue Plan**, substantial new funding is now available to all 50 states and many local communities extending over at least a 36-month period. These funds can be used to expand and improve existing summer and afterschool programs and partnerships and to start new programs, especially in low-income and moderately low-income schools and neighborhoods.

These funds are provided through provisions in the **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER III)** portion of the Act. The Act states:

USES OF FUNDS. A local educational agency that receives funds under this section—  
(1) shall reserve not less than 20 percent of such funds to address learning loss through **the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment**, extended day, **comprehensive afterschool programs**, or extended school year programs, and ensure that such interventions respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs and address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on the student subgroups... *(Highlights added by authors to draw attention to these components of the law.)*

The Act and funding also provide for a 5% set aside at the state level to similarly address learning loss and 1% set aside at the state level for summer learning and another 1% for afterschool.

The purpose of this brief is to provide background materials that states, communities, and school districts can use in developing and implementing their own plans for evidence-based summer and afterschool learning opportunities for their students, in partnership with their local communities and families. To this end, we provide a summary of:

- ESSER III guidance from the U.S. Department of Education
- The evidence-base evaluating **summer enrichment programs** and examples of successful programs
- The evidence base evaluating **comprehensive afterschool programs** and examples of successful afterschool programs

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## Guidance from the U. S. Department of Education Pertaining to ESSER III

On April 9, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education released the [\*COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs\*](#) to provide strategies for safely reopening all of America's schools and to promote educational equity by addressing opportunity gaps that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. One section of the Department's Handbook speaks to educators and summer, afterschool and other out-of-school program leaders by suggesting some overarching implementation considerations.

- ***Partner with families.*** Give family members specific resources and strategies to support their children's learning, consistent with legal requirements to communicate in a language and format they can understand.
- ***Focus on relationships.*** Sustained and strong adult-student relationships result in higher attendance and better student outcomes;
- ***Include enrichment opportunities that support social, emotional, and academic development.*** The activities provided can include tutoring and homework help in addition to enrichment activities such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activities, career and technical programs, youth development, physical fitness and health education, and arts programs;
- ***Make programs free, inclusive, and supportive of families.*** Programs can be free of charge for students to participate, may need to provide free transportation and meals, and be available to students with disabilities, English learners, and other underserved students;
- ***Provide flexibility to increase access.*** For example, summer programs can be provided in full-day or partial day options, with flexible drop off and pick up times. If students can only participate in afterschool or summer programs for some of the time, this kind of participation can be allowed for and supported.
- ***Build in frequent program assessment and evaluation.*** Continuous quality improvement and regular evaluations of the program assist providers in analyzing and making improvements to better provide students with engaging opportunities that improve their lives. Use early warning indicator systems to identify students

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*with the greatest needs. See section on “Using data about students’ opportunity to learn to help target resources and support” for helpful examples.*

- ***Scale up existing programs that have demonstrated results.*** *Enrichment activities and experiences can be provided with community partners. Consider partners that already have existing programs that have benefitted students and work with them to support afterschool, weekend, and summer enrichment opportunities for students enrolled in these programs.*

The guidance also notes that these overarching considerations can be more successfully achieved by building strong school-community partnerships. School-community collaboration and partnerships are viewed as an excellent vehicle for aligning services and leaning-on and utilizing the expertise, resources, and capacity that exist in multiple sectors. Partnerships require commitment to a shared vision and may include:

- Shared professional development to ensure evidence-based practices are implemented across agencies and locations;
- Delivery of enrichment opportunities and community engagement, like service learning and entrepreneurship;
- Providing wrap-around services and community supports;
- Space sharing to expand opportunities for more varied experiences to engage students and meet needs and interests;
- Shared staff to maximize capacity and tap into different expertise; and,
- Coordinated services to meet youth and families’ economic, health, food, and other needs.

The guidance about “cross-cutting considerations” in the *Handbook* closely parallels a number of the components outlined in another helpful resource: [\*Planning Impactful Summer Learning\* \(2021\)](#). This document succinctly presents evidence-based findings related to summer learning and enrichment that can be used to plan and deliver evidence-based summer opportunities with the ESSER III funds and that can help to meet the above “Cross-Cutting Acceleration Implementation Considerations.”

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As stipulated by ESSER III, summer opportunities need to be **enriching** and the afterschool opportunities need to be **comprehensive**. The April 9, 2021 guidance offers a solid framework from which to plan, start-up, improve, and expand summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool opportunities with the new ESSER III funds as well as other federal, state and local funds. Also, the new law stipulates that these opportunities need to be “**evidence-based**” and the April 9 *Handbook* provides important guidance for regarding this evidence base, especially in the “Implementation Consideration.”

Now, we provide several additional avenues that can be taken by education and community leaders and their summer and afterschool partners to plan and deliver summer and afterschool learning opportunities that are “evidence-based.” An extensive explanation of *evidence-based guidance* from the US Department of Education can be found in [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments](#) from 2016.

This guidance from the Department of Education emphasizes two factors:

- (1) need to identify strategies that fit local circumstances; and,
- (2) need to select strategies that are evidenced-based.

For evidence-based strategies, schools and communities can draw on the research evidence collected from other afterschool and summer programs that are similar to theirs on key dimensions such as students served, program activities, and staffing. Deploying the components and ingredients of proven evidence-based programs provides schools with a responsible way to plan and deliver new summer and/or afterschool programs or to improve their current programs. By adjusting their staffing, program offerings, and program hours to take into account the research findings from these successful summer and/or afterschool programs, programs can become evidence-based.

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## THE EVIDENCE-BASE DOCUMENTING THE IMPACT AND IMPORTANCE OF SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

In 2018 and 2019, the National Academy of Sciences convened a committee of highly respected scientists to review the available research evidence evaluating the impacts of summertime experiences for child and adolescent development. Following their exhaustive review, they concluded in their 2019 report that:

“Environments, exposures, activities, and interactions during summertime can promote positive cognitive, social, emotional, and skills development, as well as promoting safety and physical and mental health, for children and youth. However, summertime experiences are not evenly and equitably distributed, and many children and youth lack access to quality experiences due to the challenges of availability, accessibility, and affordability. The most vulnerable children...face the greatest challenges in accessing quality summertime experiences,” (p. vii) from [\*Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth\*](#). The National Academies Press. (2019)

Their analysis highlighted two key points. The first is that summer enrichment programs play a key role in cognitive, academic, social, and physical development and second that summer enrichment opportunities are not evenly or equitably distributed. Low-income children and children of color are much less likely to have access to summer enrichment because of cost and availability, depriving them of these critical learning opportunities. These conclusions were made before the Covid-19 crisis, but they are even more relevant in dealing with the recovery and needed acceleration

Further evidence of the importance of summer learning opportunities can be found in a series of studies conducted by the RAND Corporation with funding from the Wallace Foundation. The project began in 2011 and continued through 2020 focusing on how district-led, voluntary summer learning programs that included academic instruction and enrichment opportunities improved student outcomes. Although districts (often with community partners) made their own choices about some aspects of their programs, such



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as the specific academic curriculum and type of enrichment offered, they each implemented the following common elements:

1. Voluntary, full-day programming that included academic instruction and enrichment activities (the latter mainly provided by community partners) for five days per week for no less than five weeks of the summer
2. At least three hours of language arts and mathematics instruction per day provided by a certified teacher
3. Small class sizes of no more than 15 students per instructor
4. No fees to families for participation
5. Free transportation and meals

The community partners were important to accomplishing and delivering many of the common elements. A series of reports have been published, including the final longitudinal follow-up of program impacts published in December 2020.

[\*Every Summer Counts: A Longitudinal Analysis of Outcomes from the National Summer Learning Project\*](#) found that among all students offered the program, there were short-term, statistically significant benefits in mathematics, and that high attenders (those who attend 20 days or more) and repeat attenders reaped the most benefits.

Major findings include:

- After one summer, high-attenders outperformed control-group students in mathematics in the fall and on the subsequent spring state assessment.
- After the second summer, high-attenders saw advantages in mathematics, language arts and social-emotional skills, with the outperformance in math and language arts persisting through the following spring.
- Researchers also evaluated the effect of different implementation factors. They found that the amount and quality of instruction influenced the amount of academic benefit that attenders received from the program.



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Taken together, the findings reveal that well-planned, high-quality summer learning programs can produce meaningful benefits for students, especially for those with high rates of attendance and consecutive summers of attendance. This is important because research has shown that achievement and opportunity gaps between students from low-income families and their higher-income peers widen during the summer months when school is out.

Also helpful for school districts and communities who are considering expanding their summer enrichment programs is the RAND report, [\*Investing in Successful Summer Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act\*](#). This 2019 report describes in detail 43 summer programs backed by research strong enough to meet the federal Every Student Succeeds Act requirement. This report reviews research about summer programming for children and teens and highlights 43 programs that pass the evidence test for Tiers I to III. The programs span the spectrum from elementary- to high-school-age and include an array of endeavors, from helping kids with academics to providing them with career assistance. The publication includes a section with two-page descriptions of all 43 programs, laying out their key features and the research findings about their effectiveness.

A third resource for schools and community interested in successful summer learning programs in America is [\*programs recognized by the National Summer Learning Association\*](#). These award winners over ten years also have had to present evidence that they help their students improve in various important learning areas.

Taken together, these reports and studies offer many examples of evidenced-based activities, strategies and interventions that can be used to develop and expand summer enrichment opportunities in schools around the country. By leveraging off of the knowledge gained in prior research and by partnering with existing community summer programs, LEAs can work efficiently and expeditiously to have summer enrichment programs in place without having to create entirely new programs.

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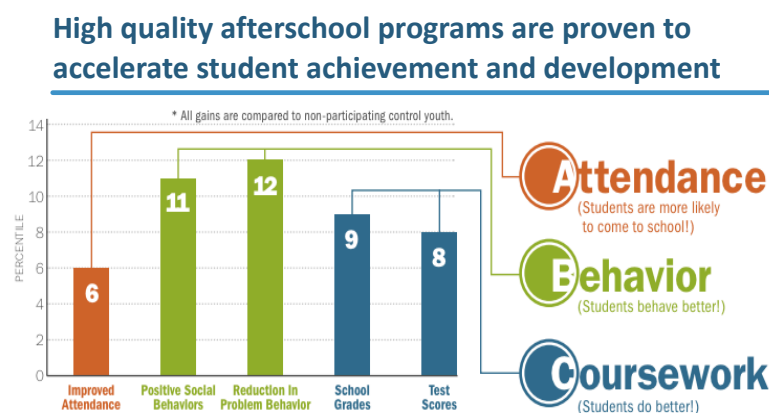
## THE EVIDENCE-BASE DOCUMENTING THE IMPACT AND IMPORTANCE OF COMPREHENSIVE AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

Over the past 30 years, a substantial body of research has documented the role of comprehensive afterschool programs as supports for a variety of important student results and outcomes. Some of these findings are summarized in the brief, [\*What does the research say about afterschool?\*](#) from the Afterschool Alliance.

Two of the powerful types of research used to document the effects of afterschool programming are *meta-analyses* and *longitudinal studies*. Research deploying these techniques have shown positive effects across an important array of foundational skills for students from their participation in afterschool opportunities.

In the meta-analyses, researchers combined the results across multiple afterschool studies to determine overall program effects, minimizing the likelihood of undue attention to isolated findings from a single study. . In one frequently cited meta-analysis of the effects of well-designed and well-implemented afterschool programs involving 40 separate studies, researchers found significant and meaningful effects were found for foundational skills including:

- School grades
- Positive social behaviors
- Test scores
- Reduction in problem behaviors
- Improved school attendance



Durlak & Weissberg, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning;  
*Expanding Minds*, p. 196

These academic, social, and emotional skills were important before the Covid-19 disruptions, but they are even more important during this time of needed acceleration and recovery.

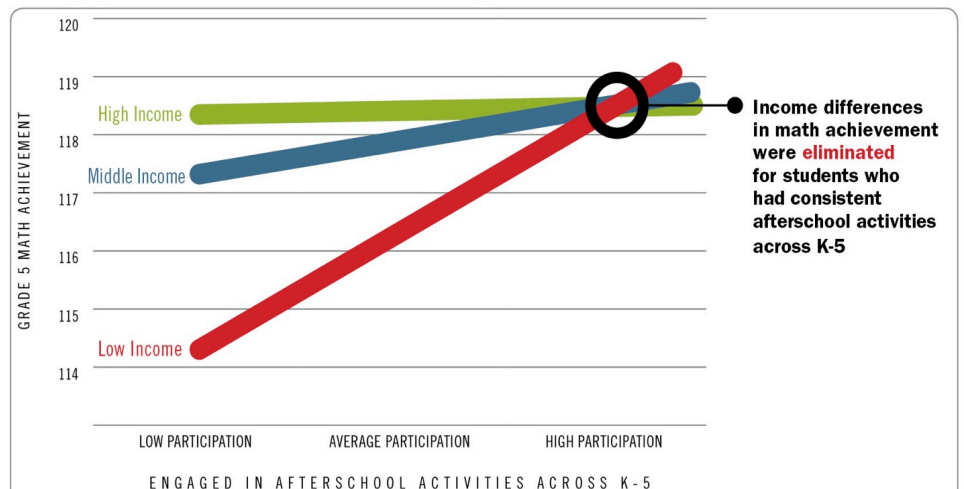
Other research has used longitudinal study designs to determine if the effects of afterschool enrichment programs fade out or if their effects are sustained over time. To address this question, longitudinal research that follows the same children over time is needed. We now have peer-reviewed reports from a longitudinal study involving more than 1000 students to compare how students “fare” later in school and life having experienced afterschool opportunities in elementary school and middle school.

The graph below shows that the more time students spent in afterschool activities during the elementary school years the

more they improved in math achievement at grade 5.

Importantly, while students from all income groups improved, the low-income students improved the most.

**More time spent in afterschool activities during the elementary school years is linked to narrowing the gap in math achievement at grade 5.**



Auger, A., Pierce, K., & Vandell, D.L. (2013). *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Consistency and Intensity of Structured Activities during Elementary School*. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. Seattle, Washington.

During the COVID shutdown, several recent analyses of academic skill losses found that math losses seem to be the greatest even more than reading, and these skill losses are greatest among low-income students. So, while afterschool experiences were important before the COVID disruptions, but they are even more important during this time of needed acceleration and recovery.

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Another longitudinal analysis has contrasted the effects of early care and education (ECE) and afterschool enrichment activities during elementary school on students' academic achievement in high school. Both high quality early childhood education (ECE) **AND** sustained afterschool enrichment in elementary school were linked to higher academic achievement when students were in high school, **AND** these effects were additive, meaning that the effects of afterschool enrichment were over and above the benefits early childhood programming. Also, important to note, the effects of ECE and afterschool enrichment were equivalent in size. To retrieve a copy of this peer-reviewed paper published in *Child Development*, go to DOI: 10.1111/cdev.13136

Still other longitudinal research has shown the importance of afterschool enrichment activities during middle school and high school. Adolescents who report positive experiences at afterschool programs with staff and peers and more opportunities to develop skills they cared about in 6<sup>th</sup> grade had stronger work orientations in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, which then predicted higher grades and more rigorous coursework at the end of high school. To retrieve a copy of this paper, go to <https://bit.ly/VandellSource2020>

And, finally there is evidence that the benefits of high-quality afterschool enrichment activities carry forward into adulthood where research finds that sustained participation in afterschool enrichment activities during elementary school predicts fewer problem behaviors and less crime as well as higher educational attainment in adulthood (age 26). To retrieve a copy of this peer-reviewed paper published in *Development and Psychopathology*, go to doi:10.1017/S0954579420001376.

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### **Five Research-Based Learning Principles for Quality Learning in Afterschool Programs**

1. Learning that is Active: Use active and hands-on learning experiences and discovery
2. Learning that is Collaborative: Use team building skills, listening, and resolving differences
3. Learning that is Meaningful: Encourage youth ownership and choice, make learning relevant
4. Learning that Supports Mastery: Use practice, explicit sequencing of skills, encourage “getting really good at something”
5. Learning that Expands Horizons: Encourage learning new skills, new cultures, and/or exploring careers and college options

[Learning in Afterschool & Summer Project.](#) Temescal Associates

### **Principles to Expand Learning Opportunities**

To help young people reach their full potential, we must consider these nine principles as we work to reopen schools, provide expanded learning opportunities, and help students recover from COVID-19:

1. School-Community Partnerships
2. Active and Engaged Learning
3. Family Engagement
4. Intentional Programming
5. Diverse, Prepared Staff
6. Participation & Access
7. Safety
8. Health & Well-being
9. Ongoing Assessment & Improvement

[Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can Help,](#)

Afterschool Alliance, August 2020

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## TYPES OF AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS LINKED TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A 2019 report funded by the Wallace Foundation, entitled [\*Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act\*](#), identified 62 afterschool programs that meet the research requirements of the top three tiers of evidence and show positive impacts. The identified programs span grades K-12 and focus on everything from academics to physical fitness to career development. These types of programs encompass what many experts consider comprehensive afterschool opportunities and partnerships. The authors conclude:

“the programs improved a variety of outcomes, ranging from mathematics and reading/ELA achievement to physical activity/health, school attendance, promotion and graduation, and social and emotional competencies.”

The report also is accompanied by a detailed guide to the afterschool programs with evidence that meets research requirements of the top three ESSA tiers. It also includes summaries of studies of school-sponsored extracurricular programs, studies that fell short of Tiers I-III but could provide evidence at Tier IV, as well as studies of programs that combine afterschool and summer learning.

For additional evidence of successful programs, schools and communities can turn to the Afterschool Alliance and the New York Life Foundation who identified [outstanding afterschool opportunities and partnerships](#) for middle-school students that help these students to succeed at school and to develop other essential skills.

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## THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR FOSTERING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) THROUGH SUMMER ENRICHMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of whole child development, and there is strong evidence that afterschool and summer opportunities can effectively support SEL. When designed and implemented well, SEL and related practices have the potential to foster safe, supportive, and equitable environments for learning and development. In a comprehensive review, [\*Social and Emotional Learning Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act\*](#), the RAND Corporation examined U.S.-based SEL programs for use in grades K-12—many of which can be implemented in afterschool and summer programming. Because ESSER III funds can be invested in these types of programs as well as the set aside funds for summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool, social and emotional learning can be an integral part of these new educational opportunities.

In addition, the RAND review identified 60 SEL programs that met the Department of Education’s standards for evidence (ESSA Tiers 1-3). The mix of branded and unbranded programs demonstrated evidence of impact across grade levels and in a variety of ways, including improved:

**“intrapersonal competencies** (attention, concentration, emotional regulation, on-task behaviors, coping skills, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perseverance); **interpersonal competencies** (hostile attribution biases, attitudes toward violence, social information processing, aggression, prosocial behaviors, interpersonal communication, and social problem-solving skills); **academic achievement** (standardized assessments on mathematics, reading, writing, and vocabulary); **academic attainment** (attendance, completion of core courses, and graduation rates); **disciplinary outcomes** (disciplinary code violations, disciplinary referrals, and suspensions); **civic attitudes and behaviors** (tolerance of and empathy for others, interest in other countries and current events, and beliefs in a moral order); and **school climate and safety** (perceptions of classroom supportiveness and school safety, students’ feelings of inclusion, quality of student-teacher relationships, and witnessing and perpetrating bullying).” (p. 36-37)



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Increasingly, findings from the science of learning and development along with ongoing studies of SEL programs and practices make it clear that, for young people to reach their full potential, they need to master core academic subjects like reading, writing, and math **and** that they also need the social and emotional competencies to navigate their own development, social relationships, and the increasing demands of autonomy and decision-making as they grow and develop. Moreover, the research is clear that young people need the support to develop competencies in safe spaces with trusting adults who can effectively support their growth. Not only do these opportunities foster social, emotional, and academic growth, they are necessary for growth to happen.

Dr. Pamela Cantor, a leading researcher and partner in the Science of Learning and Development Alliance, has described [how stress impacts the brain](#) in this way:

“The brain is malleable. A brain under stress is shut down. It can’t focus and concentrate, has little working memory, and is easily triggered by emotions. And the way our brains are wired—it is our emotions that drive our cognitive and learning skills. It is our emotions that engage us or shut us down. So today—in the time of COVID-19—we have NO choice. The path to a calm classroom is a calm brain. The path to learning is a calm brain. And the path to both depends on prioritizing activities that build strong relationships, establish predictable and integrated routines and experiences, and develop the skills for resilience.”

The brief, [The Science of Learning and Development in Afterschool Systems and Settings](#) from the American Institutes for Research highlights select findings from the science of learning and development and describes how those findings align with afterschool systems and settings. In particular, the brief calls out:

- Children and youth learn and develop best in relational settings. Improving the quality of settings and conditions for learning helps all children and youth.
- Cultural competence and responsiveness are necessary for equity. Children and youth grow up in communities and cultures that should be reflected, respected, and celebrated.
- Trauma and adversity affect development. But these effects can be mitigated or overcome by supportive relationships and settings.

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Afterschool and summer learning programs are *known* for their ability to provide space spaces, with trusted and caring adults, and opportunities for learning and development that cultivates new interests and affords young people an opportunity to enrich learning in fun and creative ways. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has synthesized key research about the role of afterschool and summer programs in this piece: [Recognizing the Role of Afterschool and Summer Programs and Systems in Reopening and Rebuilding](#)

As we begin to expand and improve learning and supports and the well-being of young people and their families after the many disruptions caused by the pandemic, we must do so together. The science of learning and development findings elevate the value of partnerships (i.e., family, school, community including afterschool and summer programs) in offering a comprehensive approach to supporting the social and emotional learning and development of young people.

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## THE EVIDENCE BASE FOR LEVERAGING THE ARTS AS A COMPONENT OF SUMMER ENRICHMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

The arts offer a very good avenue to help schools, afterschool and summer programs build enrichment and engagement into their programming. In addition, increasing collaboration with the creative sector in a community brings in important set of assets to expand learning with local arts and cultural groups, artists, and museums.

In a thorough examination of the Youth Arts Initiative (YAI)—a unique approach to delivering otherwise inaccessible high-quality arts programs to urban youth—researchers determined that “providing quality arts programming has been shown to lead to positive youth development outcomes.” The report, [Raising the Barre and Stretching the Canvas](#), commissioned by the Wallace Foundation found that “arts programs can provide students with space to express themselves, build student confidence, and offer opportunities for collaboration and creativity.”

With the very high concern about learning loss, recovery and acceleration, it also is useful to review the article on [“Reversing Learning Loss through the Arts in Afterschool and Summers.”](#) published in *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: The Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*. While written before the pandemic, the article could not be more timely.

The analysis by the authors of prior research in arts in learning coupled with their evaluation of their findings and best practices suggests several foundational principles as the basis for more effective afterschool and summer programming utilizing the arts:

“The arts in an afterschool and summer learning context naturally advance quality teaching and learning. When students and teachers have wider parameters in how and where to carry out curriculum, the learning environment flourishes.

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For instance, after participating in (Dallas) Thriving Minds Summer Camps with greater high-impact learning, students' scores rose dramatically in only one year. Participants in grades 3 through 5 who significantly trailed their peers in 2010 saw scores on the 2011 state reading assessment rise 7 percentage points, while math scores improved more than 10 percentage points (Big Thought, 2011).

Too often, parents are called in to the school when there's a problem. With afterschool and summer programs, they are called in when their children are doing something positive and excelling.

(Young Audiences of Louisiana learned that) parents in New Orleans find afterschool and summer programs less intimidating and more flexible, encouraging them to take a more active role in their child's education...This success mirrors the formative work that Dallas Big Thought has done (through their summer and afterschool programs) ...to offer English classes for English language learning parents or workshops for those interested in financial literacy or parenting courses to become better all-around caregivers. "

Two other case studies also describe the value of including the arts and/or cultural institutions in afterschool and/or summer learning opportunities. In ["Leaf Palaces and Illustration Worlds, or Why the Arts Belong in Out-of-School-Time and Afterschool Programs"](#) author Dennie Palmer Wolf writes about !City Arts! In Providence, Rhode Island. And in ["Museums as 21st Century Partners: Empowering Extraordinary "iGeneration" Learning Through Afterschool and Intergenerational Family Learning Programs"](#) authors Val Marmillion and Gene Rose describe how museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and historic sites can be exceptional family learning experiences.

With the emphasis in ESSER III on expanding and improving enrichment in summer learning and in making afterschool programs more comprehensive, integrating the arts and including community artists and classroom arts and music teachers in these opportunities are sound strategies to accomplish these strategies.

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Schools and communities also are referred to the programs of several recent [Excellence in Summer Learning Award](#) winners identified by the National Summer Learning Association for their successes tied to the inclusion of arts learning. For example, in 2020, the Summer Arts & Learning Academy, Baltimore City Schools' free full-day 5-6 week program, operated by the non-profit [Young Audiences of Maryland](#) in 8 schools, gives students in grades PreK-5 a fun summer packed with creative exploration and arts-integrated learning from the some of the best teachers and professional teaching artists in the state has to offer. Intertwined throughout are essential reading and math as well social and emotional skills. [Independent evaluations of the program](#) find that participating students gain as much or more in reading and math skills as any other summer program, but very importantly these students had much higher attendance. This program is designed for two age groups: Pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students.

In 2016, [almost half of the Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners](#) had arts integrated learning and experiences as a major component, and one used STEAM has the entire organizer for their summer learning successes.

Another source for evidence-based arts in education is documented in [Review of Evidence: Arts Education Through the Lens of ESSA](#) from the American Institutes for Research. While much of this research is based on school-day approaches, here too there are lessons learned from more than 60 evidence-based examples that can provide insight into the arts and arts integrated summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool opportunities.

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## CONCLUSION

For more than 15 years, there has been a rapidly growing body of research on and evaluations of summer and afterschool programs. These research and evaluation studies have continued right up to the present. For example, there are new powerful findings from a break-through longitudinal study released in 2020 showing positive effects on young adults from their participation many years earlier in afterschool experiences.

One of us, Terry K. Peterson, has been using a plethora of research and evaluations related to all aspects of education both in school and in summers and afterschool for 45 years to inform policy making and budgeting. The other, Deborah Vandell, has been conducting research related to early education and out-of-school time for more than 35 years. In addition, over these many years, together both of us have reviewed hundreds of studies and evaluation reports about summer and afterschool

**Based on these reviews and experiences, we conclude that well-designed and well-delivered summer and afterschool programs positively impact foundational skills that students need for success in school and life. Bottom-line, quality summer and afterschool opportunities have the evidence base to be deployed to help improve student learning and performance on a variety of factors critical to student success.**

These well-designed and well-delivered summer and afterschool opportunities and partnerships are even more critical in 2021 to help students to re-engage, recover and accelerate learning and development after the severe disruptions caused by the pandemic. To assist with this reengagement, recovery, and acceleration, there is very significant federal funding available to many school districts, schools and community groups that will continue for 3-4 years. Specifically, this federal funding and law, American Rescue Plan, calls out summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool as strategies to help address these needs.

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In addition, investments from the American Rescue Plan call for evidence-based programs and opportunities. After our review of volumes of evidence, we conclude that well-designed and delivered summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool opportunities and partnerships meet the evidence-based requirements of American Rescue Plan.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Deborah Vandell**, the founding Dean of Education at University of California-Irvine, has done extensive research and published many articles on (1) early child care and education - its effects on children's social, cognitive, and behavioral development and strategies for improving the quality of early care and education, (2) after school programs and activities - their impact on children and youth and strategies for improving the quality of after-school programs, and (3) children's relationships with peers, parents, siblings, teachers, and mentors as developmental and educational contexts.

**Dr. Terry K. Peterson**, has used his doctorate in evaluation and statistics in education (1) as chief counselor to former US Secretary of Education and Governor Dick Riley, (2) to develop and grow the federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers and a dozen or so other federal and state education reforms, (3) as Executive Editor of *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summers for Student Success*, and (4) to advise more than a dozen state groups on how to develop in-school education improvements and expand and improve summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool opportunities.

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## KEY DOCUMENTS AND LINKS

### Afterschool Alliance

*A School Year Like No Other Demands a New Learning Day: A Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can Help* (2020)

<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Blueprint-for-How-Afterschool-Programs-Community-Partners-Can-Help.pdf>

*What does the research say about afterschool?* (2017)

[http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/What\\_Does\\_the\\_Research\\_Say\\_About\\_Afterschool.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/What_Does_the_Research_Say_About_Afterschool.pdf)

Afterschool Awards—Recognizing excellence in the afterschool field

<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/awards.cfm>

### American Institutes for Research

*Recognizing the Role of Afterschool and Summer Programs and Systems in Reopening and Rebuilding* (2020) <https://www.air.org/resource/recognizing-role-afterschool-and-summer-programs-and-systems-reopening-and-rebuilding>

*The Science of Learning and Development in Afterschool Systems and Settings* (2019)

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