
Developing Resiliency in Children: The Role of Afterschool with Schools

"There are no 'silver bullets in education' – everything is related to everything else."

– Harold "Bud" Hodgkinson, 2006

With Prop 49 starting in California, afterschool services are growing quickly throughout Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the state. The expansion comes at a time when afterschool providers and schools increasingly share the same expectations for helping students. These expectations include making sure students attend school, do well in school, learn appropriate social behaviors, avoid high-risk behaviors, and improve standardized test scores.

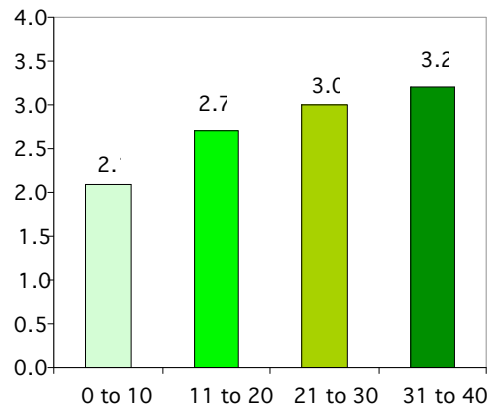
Shared expectations and pressures bring fresh opportunities. Now is the time for afterschool and school staff to improve their work together in promoting children's success. This success is not specific to academics. It includes **positive social, emotional and academic development**.

A long history of research links children's positive development to their resiliency – the skills and attitudes that help children handle the challenges in their lives. The higher children's resiliency, or developmental assets in Search Institute language, the better their academic and even lifelong success (see Figure 1; Benard, 2004). A growing set of afterschool evaluations and research by experts shows that high-quality afterschool programming contributes to resiliency.

This paper has been developed by LAUSD Beyond the Bell (BTB) in order to help outline the whole child approach underlying the goals for BTB afterschool programs' work with schools. It presents current understandings of:

- resiliency skills and whole child development,
- main factors that promote resiliency,
- afterschools' special qualifications for supporting resiliency, and
- specific enrichment activities that foster whole child development.

**Figure 1. The Search Institute:
Average Grade Point Average by
Level of Developmental Assets**



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The afterschool program has helped students to feel connected to the school and close to staff who are near their own age. I think they also feel safer at school as a result of the program.

– School principal

A Common Understanding about Resiliency and Whole Child Development

Many words can describe the skills and attitudes children need to be successful in school and in later adult life. Resiliency is one increasingly used, as it focuses on the strengths children naturally have. The most important thing to know about resiliency is that **everyone has it**.

Bonnie Benard (2004), a leading researcher in the area, describes the four following ways in which resiliency can be seen.

Social competence

The skills and attitudes needed to form positive relationships, such as communication, caring, compassion, and empathy.

Autonomy

The development of a sense of self, including independent action, initiative, mastery, and a sense of personal power.

Sense of purpose

The feeling that the future will be positive, includes creativity, goal direction, motivation, aspirations.

Problem solving

The ability to figure things out, requiring critical thinking skills, flexibility, planning and resourcefulness.

Benard draws on 10 years of research to conclude that resiliency improves when children's experiences include:

- caring relationships,
- high expectations, and
- opportunities for participation and contribution (Benard, 2004).

Informally, school and afterschool staff sees this in action for children everyday (See Maria's and Sam's stories).

The Search Institute uses slightly different language but comes to the same conclusions. **The more developmental assets a child has, the higher their grade point average, the higher their sense of school success, and the lower their risk-taking.** They also found that a caring school climate, service to others, high expectations, youth programs, and time at home (i.e., not in unsupervised activities) are each linked with at least two of these academic outcomes: grade point average, self-reported grades, attendance and academic self-efficacy (Roberts & Scales, 2005).

Studies with children of all ages, from elementary through college, confirm the importance of resiliency to their success. One that follows college

**Fostering Resiliency:
Maria's Story**

When Maria started high school, she was very shy and quiet, uncomfortable with adults, and with few friends. She never looked up, seldom answered or asked questions. She completed her homework, but never anything more. If she was creative, no one knew. If she was bright, no one saw it.

Early freshman year, her science teacher suggested she look into the afterschool program. Once in the program, the coordinator arranged a mentor for Maria. She also realized Maria was a math whiz and started her tutoring elementary students weekly.

Over the next four years, Maria attended the program regularly. She also became involved in nearly every activity the high school had, called city leaders to discuss a student center, and had one of her poems published.

In senior year, Maria completed college applications with the help of her mentor, since her parents were unable to do so. She also used her new social skills to follow-up with the college when they lost one of her forms and to ask questions about classes and dorm life.

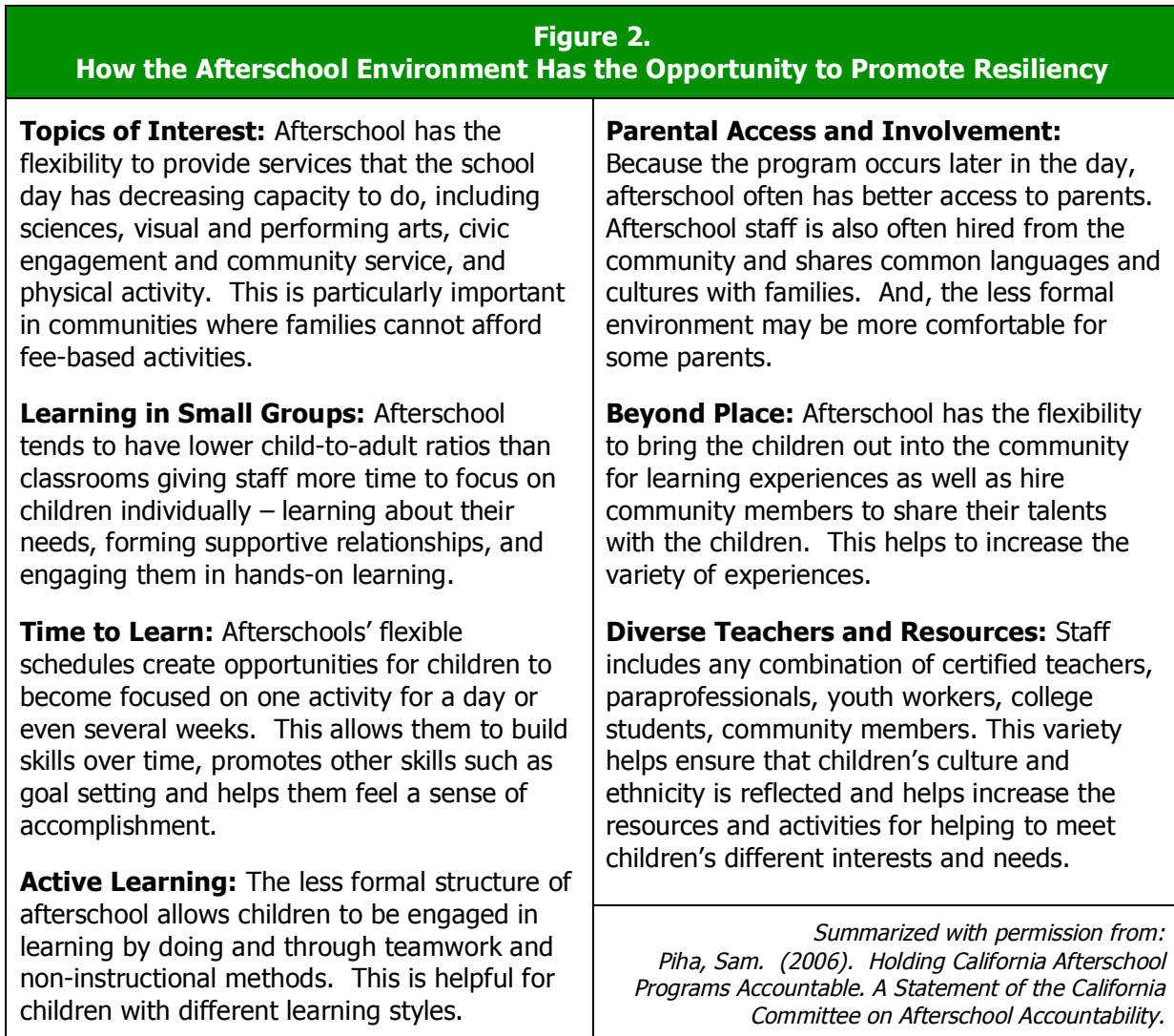
This Spring, Maria graduated at the top of her class. She was accepted into the University of California at Santa Barbara where she plans to major in English and minor in math. She has clear goals for her future, hoping to become a pediatrician or a teacher.

students echoes the findings for younger students from Benard and The Search Institute. It states: "Students who master course content but fail to develop adequate academic self-confidence, academic goals, institutional commitment, and social support and involvement may still be at risk of dropping out" (Lotkowski & Robins, 2004).

The role of afterschool providers with schools becomes more clear when including resiliency in student success. Afterschool has the flexibility to add more of the needed supports than schools can on their own, such as small group attention, activities of interest to children, and community learning experiences (Piha, 2006). Afterschool can put more of these supports in place partly due to the time of day when they are provided and how they are staffed. Figure 2 provides a summary of the many ways in which afterschool has the capacity to promote resiliency (Piha, 2006).

The program provides what our students desperately need: guidance, competition, development, supervision, and most importantly, belonging.

– School teacher



High-Quality Supports that Promote Children’s Resiliency

A review of afterschool and resiliency research points to the following six areas as essential supports for children’s resiliency. Programs that have been found to achieve results, whether afterschool or school day, have these six supports in place and make sure that they are of high-quality.

- A. Safe and Supportive Environment**
- B. Caring Relationships**
- C. Variety of Interesting Enrichment Activities**
- D. Flexible Opportunities for Skill Building**
- E. Opportunities for Youth Contribution**
- F. Parent Involvement**

Below is a brief summary of each support, including why it is considered essential and what it looks like in a high-quality afterschool program. Parts of these descriptions can also be applied to how the supports look during the school day. This can help afterschool providers and schools to move forward together in improving the quality of these supports and making sure they are in place for each child, whether during the school day, afterschool or both.

A. Safe and Supportive Environment

Safety establishes the foundation of all other efforts. Children must feel and be physically safe when at the program and when going to and from it. An environment of physical safety is built through collaboration between the school and afterschool staff at all levels. It includes having shared knowledge of the safe school plan, shared expectations about the use of space, and regular communication about potential issues.

Ensuring the emotional safety of children is also required and happens when:

- The program has a clear structure
- Expectations and rules about behavior are well defined to students
- Staff regularly monitor students’ behavior and consistently reinforce rules
- Staff shares high expectations with students
- Students feel that the adults care about them

B. Caring Relationships

The research review consistently shows that *caring relationships* is the number one support needed to promote youth resiliency. It is not the activities alone that impact resiliency, but the **quality of the interactions**. A few key characteristics of a high-quality program with this element are:

- Overall positive emotional climate
- Adults model empathy, are warm & supportive
- Low child to staff ratios (~ 10:1)
- Caring relationships occur between adults and children, between children, and between adults

A common finding in resilience research is the power of the teacher, often unbeknownst to him or her, to tip the scale from risk to resilience...

Young people talk about [adults] who listen, who notice when they are absent, and who seem interested in them... [They] are identified, first and foremost, as caring.

– Benard, 2004

The last characteristic in the above list is critical. An environment in which children feel emotionally supported and cared for is created by building caring relationships throughout the whole program. This goes beyond the relationships between adults and children. It involves the relationships among the program staff with one another and between program and school staff.

C. Variety of Interesting Enrichment Activities

A variety of activities that are of interest to the children makes up the core of afterschool programming. The emphasis is on appealing to differing interests and expanding ways of learning to help keep children engaged in afterschool and school. While a variety should be offered, all activities do not need to be offered by one provider. Rather, students should have the chance to choose from all of the following:

- Literacy enrichment
- Visual and performing arts
- Physical fitness and sports
- Science enrichment
- Service learning

This list includes many of the school day and extracurricular programs taken away from schools due to the high-test score driven NCLB legislation. Yet, these activities expand children's opportunities to learn, and research shows that they all positively affect resiliency and learning skills (See section: *Detail on Specific Enrichment Activities*).

D. Flexible Opportunities for Skill Building

This support is closely connected to the one above. All enrichment activities need to include opportunities to build skills specific to the activity as well as academic skills and inquiry-based learning skills. A high-quality program with this element:

- Targets skills and challenges that are meaningful to children
- Challenges children beyond what they think they can do yet structures the activity so success can occur
- Intentionally promotes learning in the specific enrichment area and builds in the learning of academic skills
- Uses a variety of non-instructional learning styles (e.g., hands-on, group/team)

Staff needs to be flexible in the types of learning styles used and the level of learning targeted during activities. Since children have different skill levels in each of the enrichment areas, activities should be designed so that all children will feel comfortable participating. It may also help to concentrate more on certain types of opportunities depending on the age of the children. For

Engaging in Enrichment: Frank's Story

Frank would wear all black to school and was clearly depressed. He started taking guitar lessons at the afterschool program. His enjoyment was obvious to all who saw. This positive experience led to his decision to get involved in other extracurricular activities as well.

Through his new activities, Frank made new friends. Now, he is "sunnier," more confident, and making better choices for himself.

I see myself in art class and I'm like, 'Wow, I can draw. I'm really good.'

– Afterschool participant

example, research suggests that literacy activities benefit younger students more than older ones, and that older students value service learning activities.

Skill building in afterschool can be especially helpful for children who are not experiencing a sense of success during the school day. Enrichment activities engage them in additional learning styles and help to build their sense of learning efficacy. Schools and afterschool can also work together to support children's development at the individual level. That is, afterschool staff can learn from school staff which students need help and would benefit from alternative educational approaches.

E. Opportunities for Youth Contribution

Promoting children's contribution within the structure of afterschool helps them to develop the resiliency skill of autonomy. When their voice and service is encouraged and acknowledged, they gain a stronger sense of self, learn to act independently, and develop a sense of personal control. This element becomes even more meaningful to children during the middle and high school years.

Student contribution should occur on many levels. The most basic one is that they make their own decisions about what they choose to do each day. They also need authentic opportunities that allow them to:

- Give feedback to staff on decision-making, on topics of importance to them such as types of activities, rules, and attendance incentives
- Act as leaders within the program and as liaisons to the school and community
- Volunteer within the program, school or larger community

Like caring relationships, promoting youth contribution starts with modeling the behaviors. To have a participatory style with children, the adults need to have a participatory style with each other. This means that program staff at all levels feel they have a say in their work with children and that their input about the program is valued. This also applies to how the afterschool and school staff works together.

Building Resiliency: Sam's Story

Sam, a thirteen year-old, was seriously at risk for gang involvement. In school, he was disciplined daily and failing both math and English. At home, he defied his parents and fought with his siblings.

He joined the afterschool program but nothing the staff did seemed to help. They assigned him a daily homework sheet, and every day he had a new poor excuse for not having it done. Staff tried spending quality time and talking with him but it was as if he had decided to tune out.

Then Sam's mother opened up to the staff and told them the story of her life. Having been a former drug user and gangster and served some time in prison, she had already lost two of her older children to foster care. She painted a picture of Sam's world that David, one of the afterschool staff members, related to. He had come from a similar background and was even a former program participant.

The afterschool director decided to ask David to mentor Sam and to include him in a three-person youth leadership team. The director said, "That was one of the best decisions I ever made in my ten years of working with youth." Sam immediately identified with David, and David knew exactly how to reach him. Sam made a complete turnaround and became more engaged in the program. In school, his grades went from failing to an "A" in Math and a "B" in English.

F. Parent Involvement

While there is less research on parent involvement in afterschool, research on parent involvement in children's education is plentiful. It presents clear connections to children's success: When parents are more involved in their children's education, students do better academically and socially. Two studies specific to afterschool found that family involvement in the program increased how much the family helped with homework (Kakli, 2006) and increased how often parents read with their children (Evaluation Training Institute, 2006).

Another study describes the relationship between parent involvement and afterschool involvement (Lodestar, 2006). Both elementary and middle school students who join afterschool because their parents sign them up stay in the program longer and attend more days than other students. The long-term participants also discuss how their parents support their involvement in the program, while participants who drop do not raise this topic.

Involving families in afterschool covers many types of activities, most common of which are inviting them to special events and community celebrations of students' work, sending home newsletters, and having informal conversations during pick-up times. Families also need to have opportunities to participate in additional ways vital to program success, such as parent conferences, leadership groups, and volunteering. A report on family participation found that afterschool programs that successfully engage parents have staff with at least some percentage of time dedicated to family outreach and program development (Weiss & Brigham, 2003).

Parent involvement is another area in which school and afterschool can complement each other. Afterschool can provide additional ways in which parents can become involved. They can also reach parents who may not be able to attend activities during the school day because of their work or school schedules.

Delivering Quality and Results: LA's BEST

LA's BEST — Better Educated Students for Tomorrow — is nationally recognized for its high-quality afterschool program. Everyday, thousands of elementary children participate in educational, enrichment and recreational activities.

The activities are based on formal curricula, and staff receives high levels of training on specific activities, youth development and working with parents.

Ten years of evaluation show many positive impacts on students (Huang, 2000, 2006). The benefits are even seen years after elementary school. Students who attended LA's BEST were more likely than those who did not to...

- *Have better high school attendance*
- *Not drop out of school*

Former participants said the program helped them to:

- *maintain friendships*
- *develop social skills*
- *receive adult support*
- *continue extracurricular activities in high school*

As a staff member and former participant said, "LA's BEST helped me realize who I am. If it wasn't for this program believing in me more than I believed in myself, I guarantee I would have been another negative statistic. I thank LA's BEST for guiding me to the understanding that it is not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you are not."

The Relationship of Afterschool to Children's Resiliency

This section highlights positive impacts on student success and resiliency found from afterschool and resiliency research and evaluation. It includes research by experts (e.g., Vandell, Fashola) and evaluations of specific programs. To reveal the relationship between impacts and participation, the evaluations cited here use one or more of these comparison methods: participants to non-participants, high-attending to low-attending participants, participants before and after program involvement. Of critical note is that results are usually found only when the programs are of high quality and include the supports defined above, and when children attend regularly. The discussion is organized according to Benard's four resiliency areas: social competence, autonomy, sense of purpose, and problem solving.

Social Competence

As mentioned, the evidence supporting the importance of caring relationships to children's social skills is plentiful. The three main ways in which the research shows program participants are affected in this area include that they:

- Reduce/delay high-risk behaviors
(Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Eccles, 1993; Grossman et al., 2002; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Tierney & Grossman, 1995; Vandell et al., 2005)
- Reduce behavior problems
(Fabiano, 2005; Grossman et al., 2002; HFRP, 2006 (Citing Garza & LeCapitaine, 1990); Vandell & Shumow, 1999)
- Improve peer relationships
(Grossman et al., 2002; Tierney & Grossman, 1995; Vandell & Shumow, 1999; Vandell et al., 2005)

I enjoyed the writing and when we talk in groups about positive things. I learned respecting, caring and sharing.

– Afterschool participant

The Big Brothers/Big Sisters evaluation establishes the importance of caring, supportive adults in children's lives. For example, participants are 46% less likely to use drugs and 27% less likely to drink alcohol than non-participants (Tierney & Grossman, 1995). Similarly, a Boys & Girls study found that program participation helps to decrease children's increased tendency to engage in negative behaviors as they age (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003).

Autonomy

Afterschool and school staff often informally comments on the positive changes they see in children's sense of self after attending afterschool programs. One of the reasons for this is afterschools' flexibility to design activities to build a sense of personal success (Policy Studies Associates, 2006). Research confirms staff's feelings, showing that participants have:

- Better sense of self (esteem/confidence)
(Fashola, 1998 (for cross-age tutoring); HFRP, 2006 (citing Garza & LeCapitaine, 1990); Lodestar, 2005; McLaughlin, 2000; Walker & Arbetron, 2004)
- Better work habits (effort/initiative)
(Dynarski et al., 2002 (for middle school); Vandell & Shumow, 1999; Vandell et al., 2005; Walker & Arbetron, 2004)

I referred many students to participate in activities that their parents cannot afford (drum, art, theatre, sports, etc). My students' work habits and study skills improved. They gained confidence and learned who they are.

– School principal

Several evaluations discuss that these changes occur only for children who regularly attend the program. In the San Francisco Beacon Initiative evaluation, students who attend a year or more are 33% less likely to have a decreased sense of self-efficacy than non-participants and low-level participants (Walker & Arbetron, 2004). Woodcraft Rangers has similar evidence that afterschool helps to keep high-level participants' self-efficacy from dropping as much as other students as they go through the challenges of puberty (Lodestar, 2005).

Sense of Purpose

An impact on participants' sense of direction and of the future is established in several studies by their:

- Better school attendance
(Birmingham et al., 2005; Dynarski et al., 2004; Fabiano, 2005; Grossman et al., 2002; Huang et al., 2000; Lodestar, 2005; Tierney & Grossman, 1995)
- Better school attitude
(Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Fashola, 1998 (for cross-age tutoring); Grossman et al., 2002; Huang et al., 2000; Lodestar, 2005)
- Higher future aspirations
(Birmingham et al., 2005; Dynarski et al., 2004; HFRP, 2006 (citing Lauver, 2002); McLaughlin, 2000)

Numerous evaluations establish the connection between program attendance and better school attendance. This includes the recent evaluation of Beyond the Bell's partner agency afterschool programs, completed by BTB in collaboration with the district's Program and Evaluation Research Branch. The relationship is usually found for older students since attendance is more of an issue in middle and high school. Like self-efficacy, students' attendance tends to drop as they advance into higher grades. As a result, program impact is typically seen in a significantly slower decrease in participants' school attendance compared to non-or low-participants.

Another sign of a child's sense of purpose is their completion of high school. Quite a bit of research links higher resiliency to lower drop-out rates. A study of LA's BEST follows their elementary participants into middle and high school to track their continued development. In a major finding, students who participate in LA's BEST in elementary school are less likely to drop out of high school than students who did not attend the program (Huang, 2006).

Problem Solving

Few studies measure skills such as critical thinking or resourcefulness. Instead, they use academic measures that can be considered to show that children have problem solving skills. Multiple evaluations identify positive relationships between afterschool attendance and students' school grades and even standardized test scores. Typically, participants with high levels of involvement improve in one or both of these areas. In some cases, it is also found that participants do better than students who are not involved or have low levels of

Building a Sense of Purpose: Sandra's Story

Sandra was having a lot of problems at home and school. Then, she joined the afterschool sports activities. That actually helped to keep her focused on her schoolwork.

Sandra's grades went up and things got better for her. She enjoyed coming to school more because she looked forward to afterschool.

The program has been very beneficial to students that are below average. In a period of a year, I have seen them grow and improve a lot academically.

– School teacher

involvement.

- Improve school grades
(*Eccles and Barber, 1999; Fabiano, 2005; Fashola, 1998 (for cross-age tutoring); Huang et al., 2000; Lodestar, 2005; Society for Research in Child Development, 2004; Tierney & Grossman, 1995; Vandell & Shumow, 1999*)
- Improve standardized test scores
(*Birmingham et al., 2005; Fabiano, 2005; Fashola, 1998 (for reading program); Huang et al., 2000; Lauer, 2004; Lodestar, 2005; Society for Research in Child Development, 2004; Vandell & Shumow, 1999*)

Detail on Specific Enrichment Activities that Promote Student Success

With schools' increased focus on testing and textbook based learning, afterschool programs have become the place where students can participate in the enrichment activities of:

- Literacy
- Visual and performing arts
- Physical fitness and sports
- Sciences
- Service learning.

Each of the next five pages provides detail on one specific enrichment activity. It includes a figure that identifies the key elements needed for ensuring high-quality delivery of the activities. It also summarizes some of the benefits found for children who participate in the specific type of enrichment activity.

The key across all of these types of activities is to specifically build in efforts known to strengthen resiliency – to reach beyond strengthening the skill directly addressed by the activity. This includes building in the promotion of specific academic skills through alternative learning methods. Research documents that **programs that build in such types of educational activities are more likely to see results than those that do not** (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Birmingham et al., 2005 ; Goldsmith et al., 2004; McLaughlin, 2000; Proscio, 2006; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Walker & Arbetron, 2004).

Another key that cuts across the five enrichment types is that within the activity, every child is encouraged and supported to feel a sense of success no matter their proficiency or talent. This means providing many levels of activities as well as verbal encouragement of all children's steps. Finally, youth contribution and parent involvement can be built into each one of the types of enrichment to help ensure that varied and concrete opportunities exist for these two essential program elements.

Combining Approaches: Families Make the Difference

Beyond the Bell started a Reading is Fundamental family program, Families Make the Difference, in dozens of its afterschool programs. FMTD motivates children to read and supports family involvement in reading by distributing books to children and providing a series of parent workshops.

The program helped to significantly improve parents' knowledge, comfort level and behavior related to reading to their children. When the program started, only 37% of the parents knew a lot about reading aloud with their children. After the program, 87% knew a lot.

One mom said, "I normally don't pick up a book, but I started doing word puzzles and my daughter and I started doing that together, so now we're reading."

Literacy Enrichment

Reading in afterschool can be quite different from and a vital help to reading in school. It needs to be approached from the perspective of building children's interest in reading and writing for personal enjoyment. Because afterschool literacy activities do not have to be test-oriented, children can read books that are of interest to them, on any of a variety of topics, and at their actual reading level. With this approach, afterschool can complement schools' efforts at skill-building by adding a sense of success to children's involvement with reading.

Children's ownership of literacy is enhanced when they can act on their own initiative and use materials and other resources to their own ends, when staff respect children's choice of reading material, the connections children make in their reading, and the ways children choose to express ideas.

– Halpern, 2006

Benard (2004) discusses many positive affects on resiliency for those involved in literacy activities. In one study, adults with high levels of resiliency are those who were involved with reading and books as children. Several others show that writing one's personal story is connected with positive health. Experts document that reading aloud is the most crucial element of literacy enrichment. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education's Commission on Reading (1986) states: "*The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.*"

Literacy Enrichment That Works

- Have plenty of materials, and a wide variety of them
- Read aloud to/with children
- Focus on books, written materials of interest to children and at their reading level (regardless of grade level)
- Strengthen motivation to read and write, comprehension and meaning making
- Encourage discussion, listen to children's thoughts and ideas
- Tie to personal experience, cultural experiences
- Explore reading and writing as a vehicle for self-expression
- Use a playful approach



Example Impacts

Academic performance was higher at schools that had afterschool activities specific to literacy, such as reading, storytelling and writing, than schools that did not (*Birmingham et al., 2005*)

Higher academic self-esteem, cooperation and perceptions of student-teacher relationships found for cooperative language arts participants than non-participants (*Fashola, 1998*)

Greater reading assessment gains found for children in CORAL groups where implementation quality was most consistent versus children in groups where quality was not adequate (*Arbreton et al., 2005*)

Visual and Performing Arts

Of all the enrichment areas, it is the visual and performing arts that was once most integral to schools' services and is now often cut in this world of high-stakes testing. Yet, the number of studies providing evidence for the impact of arts involvement on children's skills is vast. Shirley Brice Heath (1998) reviews the research on youth organizations that provide arts opportunities and found that participants do better academically, are less likely to drop out of school, feel a greater sense of self-efficacy, and are more likely to perform community service. A January 2007 article in *Prevention* magazine provides some of the latest research on students involved in music. They do better in math, are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, and do better on college entrance tests.

The arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one's choices and to revise and then to make other choices.

– Eisner, 2004

Several experts (Eisner, 2004; Hamblen, 1992) say these impacts happen because the arts involve children in thinking visually and conceptually, looking at relationships between things, and using symbolism. All of these help develop the resiliency skill of problem-solving. The arts also help children with basic skills such as shape recognition and measurement.

Arts Enrichment That Works

- Include music, dance, theater and visual arts
- Design to appeal to all students, not only those who show artistic talents
- Integrate literacy building within activities
- Provide for active involvement rather than passive learning
- Include field trips, links with cultural organizations
- Tie to cultural experiences



Example Impacts

Arts involved youth did better **academically**, were less likely to drop out of school and had **secure sense of own abilities** (Heath, 1998)

Improved **reading scores** found for children involved in arts programs, especially those that integrated vocabulary and reading (Hamblen, 1992)

Students highly involved in the arts did significantly better than those with low arts involvement in their **grades, standardized tests** and **school attitude** (Catterall, 1999)

Schools with an arts partnership program **closed the achievement gap** more significantly than did arts-poor schools (Catterall, 2000)

Physical Fitness and Sports

Children's health and fitness is a rapidly growing concern in the United States. The need for more regular opportunities for physical activity is confirmed in that only about 25% of the state's students meet the California Physical Fitness Test standards (2005-06). This importance increases in middle and high school given that more than two-thirds of children who play sports stop by age 12 (Cornell University, 2005 citing research by Daniels & Perkins, 2003).

What makes a sports program into a youth development program is not only the quality of the activity itself, but the quality of the adult guidance behind it, and the kinds of skills, attitudes, and experiences it instills in its young participants.

– Proscio, 2006

The research consistently shows that children who participate in sports are more likely to have better health than those who do not. Sports participants also have higher resiliency skills, such as leadership and self-esteem, and school performance. Part of the finding is that it is how the staff delivers the activities that lead to the changes, even more than the activities themselves (PSA, 2006; Proscio, 2006; Reisner, 2004; Weiss, 2000).

Afterschool can expand opportunities beyond what schools already offer. Also, fitness activities in afterschool do not need to have the same types of pressure associated with schools' competitive sports, and can be tailored to include children of all fitness levels. In providing these alternatives, afterschool can help children to feel a sense of success and enjoyment that can help sustain program attendance, and maintain activity into adulthood.

Fitness Enrichment That Works

- Train coaches and staff in youth development
- Use positive feedback and encouragement, non-punitive language
- Offer competitive team sports, more individual activities and general fitness activities
- Appeal to all fitness levels
- Incorporate activities that build specific youth development skills, not just sports skills
- Make it fun
- Reduce fears of being hurt, making mistakes



Example Impacts

Students at sites with more sports/fitness activities improved **math** and **english skills** more than at sites with fewer such activities (Reisner, 2004)

Student athletes outscored nonathletes on **leadership** (Policy Studies Associates, 2006)

Boys improved **self-esteem** after participating in a baseball team with supportive coaches (Policy Studies Associates, 2006 citing Smoll, 1993)

Girls involved in sports increased **self-esteem** and decreased **smoking initiation** (Team-Up Fact Sheet, 2006)

Science Enrichment

Another area of concern is students' learning and involvement in the sciences. A February 2006 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* describes the low college graduation levels in science, technology, engineering, and math. It states that while one in three freshmen are interested in these majors, only 5% actually graduate with a degree in those fields. The crisis level becomes clearer when comparing the United States to other countries. The percentage of graduates in these fields is closer to 40% in countries such as India and China.

Afterschool has the flexibility to re-introduce exploration and a sense of fun to science activities. Hands-on experimentation helps to develop children's capabilities for investigation, design and discovery. Evaluations of science-focused programs show that they contribute to learning skills, build academic knowledge in the sciences, and increase children's interest in the sciences. This last benefit is repeatedly seen in afterschool programs. In one specific example, a seventh grader involved in creating perfume as an afterschool science project was overheard saying, "I never thought I could do chemistry!"

Say the word epidemiology in a pre-teen classroom and you're likely to draw blank stares. But talk about super sleuths and disease detectives, deadly ailments and backpack pain—and engage students in seeking clues and solving mysteries—then you've got a recipe for motivating fledgling scientists.

— Adler, 2004

Science Enrichment That Works

- Focus on hands-on activities and experimentation
- Promote curiosity
- Use inquiry based materials
- Take a playful approach
- Have materials for each child to fully participate
- Do small group activities
- Use research-based curriculum



Example Impacts

Science participants increased **classroom participation, initiating and peer assisting** and had **higher science ability** (*Columbia-Wilamette Area Health Education Center, 1997*)

Children in afterschool science program showed significant improvement in **science knowledge and interest in science careers** (*Johnson, 2005*)

Children did significantly better on a **letter writing assignment** after participating in the science program (*Johnson, 2005*)

Service Learning

Extensive research supports that service learning is a highly meaningful experience for children, especially in the middle grades and above. Although service learning is not easy to organize because of the many logistics involved (e.g., parent permission, transportation), it can be easier to do in afterschool because relationships with community organizations often already exist. This type of enrichment allows children to learn about their role as a member of society. It also provides them with an opportunity to connect their education with real-life activities.

The concept of service-learning as an educational strategy is still new to most Americans. ... when the concept of service-learning was explained, an overwhelming 90 percent of respondents said that they would support such a program in their local schools, with parents of current students the most supportive.

– Fiske, 2002

A person who has written extensively on the research concerning service learning is Shelley H. Billig. From a review of more than 30 studies, Billig (2000) identifies benefits to children's personal and interpersonal development, academic skills, and their likelihood of risk-taking activities. Several of these studies look at students' standardized test scores, and find positive results.

Service Learning That Works

- Use project based learning that is tied to what is being taught in school
- Center activities around themes
- Involve student input and choice about the topic and how to go about the project
- Include a high level of adult participation and enthusiasm
- Build on relationships with community organizations



Example Impacts

Youth who participated in Chicago's After-School Matters **attended school** more faithfully and **failed fewer courses** (Proscio, 2006)

Students in quality service-learning programs increased **responsibility, communication** and **sense of educational competence** (Billig, 2000 citing Weiler, et. al., 1998)

Students in service-learning showed greater **empathy** and **cognitive complexity** than comparison groups (Billig, 2000 citing Courneya, 1994)

Service-learning tutoring youth increased **standardized test scores** and were **less likely to drop out** of school (Billig, 2000 citing Supik, 1996; Rolzinski, 1990)

Other Program Considerations

This paper focuses on the afterschool supports and activities that promote positive development for children. In addition, there are a few other considerations that are critical to a program's ability to affect its participants. This includes:

- Maintaining children's attendance in the program,
- Providing ongoing professional development for staff,
- Hiring experienced site leadership, and
- Ensuring the organization's administrative and fiscal structures effectively support the program.

Staff development must be emphasized, given that the adults in the program are the key to high-quality program delivery and to children's success. As Seligson and Stahl (2003), authors of a guide to successful afterschool staff development, say:

"...If you are able to create a culture within your center or program where staff are free to be who they are, to build trust and connections with others, and to work effectively as a group, you will create a healthy social and emotional learning environment where children can grow and thrive."

Such training includes staff and volunteers, and happens at the beginning of employment as well as throughout each year. It also needs to be comprehensive, including training both on how to implement specific activities and how to work effectively with children.

Taking the Next Steps

This paper confirms the importance of afterschool to schools' efforts to help children succeed. One of the first steps in turning paper into action is to use this information as a discussion tool between school and afterschool leadership. Through this activity, schools and afterschool providers can combine their expertise and decide if all of the needed supports are in place and of an agreed-upon level of quality. A follow-up step would be to decide on ways to regularly communicate about the overall program and work with students.

When moving forward, keep in mind that **it is not the time of day in which the supports occur that matters, but that they do occur for each child every day.** Afterschool can help make this happen. It does this through large-scale programming to fill school enrichment gaps and through individual efforts with students who may not be succeeding within the more traditional school environment.

The true key word throughout this document is "staff," and that is you. Knowing even more clearly now that it is you who makes the difference in children's resiliency, it is time to find ways to combine that power with that of others – both during the school day and after.

This is the best program that I have ever been in. I mean, everybody cares for you like a family. Thank you.

– Afterschool participant

Additional Reading and Resources

Resiliency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bonnie Benard. <i>Resiliency: What We Have Learned</i>: www.amazon.com* The Search Institute: www.search-institute.org
Quality Afterschool Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sam Piha and Andrea Fletcher. <i>A Guide to Developing Exemplary Practices in Afterschool Program</i>: http://www.ccscenter.org/?mvcTask=article&pageId=dee14ac146684632856126ae798cd5a2* Harvard Family Research Project: www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp National Institute on Out-of-School Time: http://www.niost.org
Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michelle Seligson and Patricia Stahl. <i>Bringing Yourself to Work: A Guide to Successful Staff Development in After-School Programs</i>: www.amazon.com*
Parent involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zenub Kakli, Holly Kreider and Priscilla Little. <i>Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School</i>: http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/families/index.html
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robert Halpern. <i>The Role of After-School Programs in Supporting Low-Income Children's Literacy Development</i>: http://www.erikson.edu/files/nonimages/Halpern_role.pdf Southwest Educational Development Laboratory – National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning: http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/resources/literacy.html
Performing and Visual Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shirley Brice Heath. Living the arts through language and learning: a report on community-based youth organizations. <i>Americans for the Arts Monograph</i>: http://pubs.artsusa.org/pdf/ARTS048/pdf_image/1-20_300.pdf
Physical Fitness and Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Studies Associates. <i>Everyone Plays!: A Review of Research on the Integration of Sports and Physical Activity into Out-of-School Time Programs</i>: http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/OSTsports.pdf
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Association for Advancement of Science – Science Netlinks: http://www.sciencenetlinks.com Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA): http://www.ncrsepa.org/Resource/teacher.htm
Service Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning in Deed: www.learningindeed.org

* Resources are free with exception of those noted by the asterisk.

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