

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF

Issue Brief No. 19



August 2004

Afterschool: A Natural Platform for Career Development

As technology evolves and the economy changes, greater demands will be placed on the workforce of the future. Myriad opportunities are and will be available to those who have the knowledge and the skills to meet those challenges. Afterschool programs offer a key opportunity to expose students to ideas and teach them skills that can unlock doors to future career prospects. During the afterschool hours, there is time for field trips, guest lecturers and new activities that are not always available during a school day filled with the basic three Rs. Going beyond the usual image of high school students working a part time job, afterschool programs create a learning environment where students from first-graders to seniors learn about and even get a taste of the career choices available to them in a variety of fields. At the same time, students learn life skills that will serve them well as adults, regardless of what career they choose.

Preparing the 21st Century Workforce

In 1950, 80 percent of jobs were classified as “unskilled.” In the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, that figure has reversed itself. Today, 80 percent of jobs are classified as “skilled,” and employment growth is expected to be fastest for positions that require some type of formal postsecondary education, such as database administrator, physician’s assistant, or computer software engineer.¹ However, only 40 percent of adults in the workforce in 2000 had any postsecondary degree, and fewer than half of all high school graduates who go on to college obtain a degree. This may in part be because only 32 percent of high school graduates are prepared for college coursework, meaning they require no remedial classes.²

In light of the need for a better-educated workforce, the business community is looking for ways to make sure future workers are prepared beyond basic proficiency in core subjects such as reading and math. Young people must be adept at creative thinking, problem solving, teamwork, communication, self-direction and use of technology—“the very skills employers know contribute most to success in the workplace of the future.”³ And the very skills that the business community knows students have the chance to cultivate in afterschool programs. Corporate Voices for Working Families is calling for public and private efforts to create afterschool programs for all students because “[q]uality after school programs provide a unique venue in which young people can develop the range of skills they need to enter the 21st Century workforce.”⁴ Also, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recommends providing “mentoring and after-school programs targeted to underachieving students” on its list of ways to improve K-12 education.

Exploring Career Opportunities

With all these new and changing career opportunities available, students look to afterschool programs for opportunities to sort them all out and discover where their skills and interests might lie. Plus, it benefits various industries, particularly the more difficult science and technology sectors, to get youth interested in their fields so they can establish the next generation of workers. From agriculture to zoology, afterschool programs are teaming up with a variety of community industries to show youth what the future will hold for them.

Economics and Business

Career opportunities abound in the business world, and it is difficult during a busy school day for students to learn the specifics about what it means to be a “business person” or find out how economic and financial issues factor into their own lives.

- Junior Achievement was started in 1919 as a collection of small afterschool business clubs in Springfield, Massachusetts, to teach students about entrepreneurship and prepare them for the workforce. During the 2001-2002 program year, JA and its 112,732 volunteers offered more than 4.1 million students nationwide programs, both during and after school, on economics, running a business, international trade, problem-solving, math, personal finance and job shadowing. Research shows that JA programs have a significant effect on student learning. JA participants have better understanding of economic concepts, better critical thinking skills, better leadership skills and are better at succeeding at a job than non-participants.⁵
- About 1,500 fifth-graders in a Junior Achievement program in New Orleans are learning how to run their own city. The Exchange-City students will fill the positions of business owners, judges, mayor and other citizens in their city, which exists on the campus of a local community college.

[This program will] expose them to what could possibly be a future for them.

--Anita Dinwiddie, Vice President of Operations, local JA chapter⁶

- Students in Ferrell Middle School’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers program do more with their summer than hang out by the pool. Among other activities, they are learning how to use professional office software, which will come in handy as they run their business, Enterprise. A carry-over from the previous year, Enterprise produces the school’s physical education uniforms, personalized buttons and note pads.⁷

Science and Technology

“...[T]he work force being produced almost seems to fear math, science and technology,” says Kenneth J. McCreight, director of a Cleveland-area, technology-based afterschool program. He also notes that of the 53 college-bound graduates from a local high school, none planned to study math or science.⁸ But this techno-phobia is not particular to northern Ohio. An aversion to science and math seems to be a nationwide trend. Of the more than 1.2 million bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2000, only 1 percent were in math, 5.8 percent in engineering, 2.9 percent in computer and information sciences, and 1.5 percent in physical sciences.⁹ Afterschool programs get youth in touch with the possibilities open to them in these fields and get youth excited about math and science in order to make them want those careers.

- The NASA Robotics Education Project (REP) sponsors robotics competitions and events with the goal of “encouraging people to become involved in science and engineering, particularly robotics.” Students involved with the competitions work with professional engineers to build their robots and learn about engineering, mechanics, project leadership, time management, task sequencing, physics, computers and teamwork.

Interesting students in science, technology and engineering through this competition is one of the many ways NASA is seeking to inspire the next generation of explorers.

-- John Hairston, NASA’s Glenn Research Center Director of External Programs¹⁰

- Mr. McCreight’s program, dubbed the Mini-Robot Project, brings 100 students from five area high schools to Cuyahoga Community College to expose them to manufacturing and technical work by having them design and build robots that will compete in an obstacle course race later in the year. Senior Eddie Nelson, 18, said this program has encouraged him to consider a

career in manufacturing and possibly become a mechanical engineer. Junior Christine Price, 17, said the program has reinforced her decision to go into electrical engineering.

I have some kids jumping on the buses at night to get here, and they aren't even enrolled in the class.

--Kenneth McCreight¹¹

- Students from the **University of South Florida** expose youth in Pinellas County Public Schools' 21st CCLC afterschool program to marine biology after school and during the summer. The university students are part of a group called Project Tampa Bay, an initiative to introduce minority children to the wonders, and career paths, of marine biology. The middle school students learn about ocean ecology through field trips to local keys, marshes and islands, as well as a three-day camp excursion.

We have nearly 100% attendance. That says it all when you are talking about a program of choice.

--Johnetta Haugabrook, a middle school science teacher and partner in Project Tampa Bay

Agriculture

The Baltimore Urban Gardening with Students (BUGS) After School Program uses horticulture (gardening) and ecology to empower inner-city children to develop academically, creatively, and socially. Students not only learn about growing food, but also about producing homemade foodstuffs and crafts, all to be sold to local businesses and at their annual Student-Run Farmer's Market. Those activities subtly teach them about the business side of agriculture as they learn about budgets, marketing, packaging, customer service and handling money.¹²

Culinary Arts

Thanks to Boys & Girls Clubs and the food bank America's Second Harvest, students in 600 Kids Cafes nationwide are getting an education in nutrition and food services. Students of all ages in Houston learn to establish healthy eating habits, and the high school students find out about culinary careers in a food safety class that also trains them to work as volunteers in the food bank's kitchen. The older students also volunteer to work with the younger students in their classes.¹³

Education

The Learning for Life program incorporates students of all ages in a Las Vegas community. The program, which is designed to teach character-development and living skills to pupils in kindergarten through fifth grade, employs 160 high school volunteers to teach and mentor the younger students. The older students use lesson plans to teach the younger ones about accepting consequences, making the right decision, choices, anger management and conflict. And as the youngsters benefit from the interaction with their older teachers, the high schoolers get hooked on a future career.

I have had many high school students go into teaching because of the Learning for Life program.

Two have come back here to teach in Las Vegas, and a lot of them have gone elsewhere. It's really a win-win situation.

--Program Director Jennifer Sage Tuggle¹⁴

Law and Law Enforcement:

- Berlin High School in Wisconsin has teamed up with the Berlin Police Department to create the school's first Junior Police Academy, which is funded this year by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant. During the eight-week course, students experience many aspects of police work, including SWAT drills and crime scene investigation. The primary goal of the program is to establish better relationships between police and teens, but all of the students who applied for the program have an interest police work as a career.¹⁵
- Working with the American Bar Association and Boy Scouts' Learning for Life Program, students on Hamilton Southeastern High School's Mock Trial team take their lessons to court.

A fictional case takes them to a real courtroom to be judged and aided by real prosecutors and private attorneys. Besides learning law and legal tactics, students work on courtroom etiquette, poise and public speaking skills.¹⁶

A Time for Learning and Life Skills

As they are exploring their future careers, students learn broader lessons to take away once school is behind them. Besides answering the question “when am I going to use this?” by reinforcing classroom lessons with real-world examples, career development programs teach students self-confidence, compassion, perseverance, tolerance and ethics. Many programs rely on volunteers from the community, which gives youth a chance to develop substantive relationships with adults, not to mention great networking opportunities, and many programs offer scholarships to their graduates to help them achieve their goals.

- Students in the BUGS program apply basic math skills as they plot their gardens and measure out ingredients during cooking class. They also use language arts skills to keep their gardening journals, research recipes and publish their own cookbooks, and they use art skills as they create their own crafts to sell at their Farmer’s Market.¹⁷
- Boys & Girls Clubs’ Career Exploration and Job Ready programs show students various career possibilities and teach them basic job skills, such as business etiquette and interview techniques, in order to give youth a head start on life.

Since I’m a senior (in high school), I’m ready to go to work. I needed to learn how to fill out an application and write a resume. (The program) has helped me a lot. On my own, I was doing my resume wrong, but they taught me the correct way.

--Career Exploration participant Trina Charles, 17¹⁸

Expanding Options and Narrowing the Achievement Gap

The afterschool hours are particularly important for children in disadvantaged communities. Many afterschool programs, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, target low-income, at-risk youth. The afterschool hours provide an opportunity to offer these youth opportunities to develop the academic, social and citizenship skills they need to succeed and bring them a variety of mentors and role models from their own communities who can show them what is possible. A college degree is becoming increasingly important in many fields, but college may seem an unattainable goal for some students. For example, white, non-Hispanic students earned more than 70 percent of the bachelor’s degrees awarded in 2000.¹⁹ And although women are now attending college at a slightly higher rate than men, they lag in degrees conferred for traditionally male-dominated fields. Fortunately, quality afterschool programs help all children boost their grades and their ambitions.

- Detroit’s Davison Elementary School serves a neighborhood plagued by abandoned homes and drug houses, and 87 percent of its primarily African American and Bangladeshi students live at the poverty level. Through the school’s reform model, called Microsociety, students get jobs at 37 local businesses and earn “Davison dollars” while they learn life skills such as filling out applications, interviewing and saving money. The school has recruited parents and local auto companies and the United Auto Workers to work with the students. As a result, in 2000, 83 percent of the students passed the reading and math MEAP (Michigan Education Assessment Program), with 60 percent passing science and 65 percent passing writing.²⁰
- Girls Inc. is a national nonprofit organization that provides educational programs, including topics such as math and science, sports, self-defense, pregnancy prevention and finance, that inspire girls to be strong, smart and bold. It serves more than 900,000 girls, the majority of whom are girls of color from single-parent households with incomes less than \$20,000.
 - Zulma Perez of California is the child of Mexican immigrants and her family’s first Girls Inc. participant, something her parents were reluctant to allow. In her five years of participation, Zulma built up her math, science, technology and sports skills and was able to set goals for college and career.

She won a \$10,000 Girls Inc. scholarship and graduated from Berkeley with a degree in environmental molecular biology and plans to apply to medical school. She said the weekly leadership and cultural afterschool program for Latinas, *Latinas y Que*, had the biggest impact on her.

Latinas y Que is one of the reasons I decided to apply to Berkeley, even though science was always a tough subject for me. Like everything at Girls Inc., it helped me realize that hard things aren't bad things, and that it pays to set ambitious goals.
--Zulma Perez²¹

- Ruby Comes Flying of Rapid City, South Dakota, finds a great deal of encouragement in her Girls Inc. program, which offers a gym, art studio, computer lab and meals for girls who sometimes don't get enough to eat at home. Ruby has been greatly inspired by the variety of women role models she's had the chance to meet through Girls Inc.

I want to be a social worker. I want to help kids. I've met some social workers who came to talk to us, and I like what they do. But I also might want to be a doctor or a ranger. I met some women who are these things, too. So, who knows...
--Ruby Comes Flying²²

Looking to the Future

A quality education is essential for all young people to prepare them for the working world, a world that grows more demanding every year. Unfortunately, there just isn't time during the regular school day to equip students with the knowledge and skills they will need to continually adapt in an evolving marketplace. That is why afterschool programs are vital for preparing youth to become confident, caring, productive adults. Youth need safe, encouraging environments in which their experiences can offer insights that will help them discover their own goals for the future and ultimately succeed in life.

¹ "2002-12 Employment Projections," Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t04.htm>, 2004.

² Buehlmann, Beth B., VP and Executive Director, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Careers for the 21st Century: The Importance of Education and Worker Training for Small Businesses," testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Small Business Committee, June 2, 2004.

³ *After School for All: A Call to Action from the Business Community*, "The Missing Piece in our Education System: Why America Needs High-Quality After School Programs," Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2004.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ www.ja.org

⁶ Faciane, Valerie, "Fifth-graders to take charge in Exchange City," *Times-Picayune*, 5 December, 2002.

⁷ Cobb, Alysha, "Positive Performers," *Tampa Tribune*, 30 June, 2001.

⁸ Prizinsky, David, "Getting a taste of tooling; Tri-C program brings teens to shop floor," *Crain's Cleveland Business*, 11 November, 2002.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2000.

¹⁰ <http://robotics.nasa.gov>; "Students and Robots Converge on Cleveland to Compete," PR Newswire, 5 March, 2003.

¹¹ Prizinsky.

¹² Rebstad, Heather, Program Director, BUGS After School Program, 4 April, 2003.

¹³ Vaughn, Carol E., "Inner-city children learn to prepare healthy meals," *The Houston Chronicle*, 28 February, 2002.

¹⁴ Rinella, Heidi Knapp, "Learning for Life program helps elementary schoolchildren," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 27 October, 2002.

¹⁵ Wolff, Patricia, "Academy clues students in to detective work," *Oshkosh (WI) Northwestern*, 15 April, 2003.

¹⁶ Stetzel, Amanda, "Kids put real effort in mock trial; School team does its homework, focuses on fundamentals as it prepares to compete," *The Indianapolis Star*, 19 February, 2003.

¹⁷ Rebstad.

¹⁸ Gibson, Kathy, "A deposit on dreams; Humble business donates \$ 3,500 to Aldine Westfield Boys & Girls Club," *The Houston Chronicle*, 13 February, 2003.

¹⁹ USDE.

²⁰ Meriwether, Heath, "Tough love leads to success: 2 Detroit schools deliver educational excellence by never giving up on kids," *Detroit Free Press*, 26 August, 2001.

²¹ Girls Inc. Annual Report, 2001, p. 6-7.

²² Ibid.