After School Calls for Transition Supports

Between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m., millions of children – especially those from
low-income communities – are left unsupervised, increasing the
likelihood of delinquency, academic disengagement, and risky behavior.
(Gottfredson et al., 2004)

After school hours raise opportunities for and concerns about student well-being, educational equity, public safety, and long-term youth development. While some students have access to supportive, structured after-school programs, many do not – particularly those attending schools serving low-income families.

A range of advocates regularly argue for after-school programs (e.g., the After School Alliance, National Afterschool Association, National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning, Coalition for Community Schools). The need for such advocacy was highlighted by recent policy actions that threatened federal funding.

> The summer of 2025 saw over $6 billion in federal education grants, including $1.3 billion designated for after-school and summer programs through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, frozen by the administration. This caused hiring and planning to stall, especially in rural areas, and many schools had to cancel summer sessions or delay fall openings.
>
>   The funding freeze was part of a broader review to ensure alignment with the administration's priorities, including restrictions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices. States now must certify compliance with federal civil rights laws under new interpretations, which some see as politically motivated
>
>   While the $1.3 billion in after-school funding has been released following bipartisan pressure, billions more remain frozen. Programs continue to face uncertainty, especially in states not covered by recent court rulings. As noted by Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance, "We remain deeply concerned that the administration is proposing $0 for 21st CCLC next year, instead collapsing it into a 'K-12 Simplified Funding Plan' with dramatically reduced support."

Besides threats to funding, after-school programs often are portrayed as remedial or disciplinary. This undercuts appreciation of their value as protective and supportive opportunities to enrich and empower students' development (Adelman & Taylor, 2017; Welsh, 2023).

Available research indicates that after-school programs reduce delinquency by reinforcing bonds to community institutions and providing adult oversight during high-risk hours. Studies show findings such as lower arrest rates, better school attendance, and improved social-emotional outcomes (Gottfredson. et al., 2004; Rizo, 2025; Vandell, 2021).

> Our Center focuses on after school as a facet of a student/learning supports domain that calls for supporting all school-related transitions. The following highlights after-school activity as part of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system designed to enhance the well-being of students and improve schools.

After-School: A Period of Transition

The school day ends, and what happens in the interim up to bedtime often leaves much to be desired from a school and parenting perspective. Many students transition from the structure of a school day to relatively unstructured and unsupervised time. The problem can be particularly acute in communities where poverty and inequities of opportunity prevail.

After-school programs for this transition period intend to provide safe spaces for students to gather and engage positively in academic, recreational, and social activities. The aims are to promote healthy and enriching development, enhance school connectedness and engagement, and address factors interfering with school success. The hope is that engaging students in positive activities will divert those who otherwise would pursue negative acts. For examples of the wide range of activities that schools have implemented at one time or another, see the Appendix.

What Lies Ahead?

As with all school-related efforts, after-school programs continue to face funding instability. For example, it is unclear what will happen to federal funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) and other youth development grants. Even with such funding, inadequate budgets will continue to limit longer-term planning, investment in staff and infrastructure, and the number of students who can participate.

> Relatedly, too many programs will be unable to remedy gaps with respect to meeting student differences in background, language, interests, and capabilities.

And, advocates will continue to struggle to counter the stigma and misinformation that lead to public perceptions that after-school programs are primarily remedial or punitive. To combat these misconceptions, strategic outreach and rebranding efforts will stress after-school as essential to enhancing positive youth development and equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond.

Moving Forward

At a time when schools are struggling to address so many students who are not doing well, we suggest that after-school programs are best viewed and pursued within the context of addressing a school's need to enhance graduate rates, reengage disconnected students, enhance equity of opportunity, and close the achievement gap.

From this perspective, after-school activities are not optional add-ons. They are an integral facet of school improvement efforts designed to transform student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system (see **https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html**).

Transitions occur daily and over the year at schools (e.g., daily transitions before, during, and after school; assisting students and families as they negotiate the many hurdles related to reentry or initial entry into school; school and grade changes; program transitions; accessing special assistance; entering and returning from special education).

Supports for transitions is one of six domains of student/learning supports that are facets of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and promoting healthy development (Adelman & Taylor, 2017).

Appendix

Examples of After-School Activities

Activities are designed to fit at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Academic Enrichment

Homework help / tutoring
STEM clubs (science, tech, engineering, math)
Robotics or coding clubs
Mathletes / math games
Reading circles or book clubs
Creative writing workshops
Debate or speech team
Foreign language clubs
History or geography trivia
Environmental science projects

Arts & Creativity

Visual arts (drawing, painting)
Photography or digital art
Theater / drama club
Dance (hip-hop, ballet, cultural)
Music (band, choir, instrument lessons)
Film-making or video editing
Fashion design or sewing
Creative writing / poetry slam
Comic book or graphic novel creation

Physical Activities & Sports

Team sports
Martial arts or self-defense
Yoga or mindfulness movement
Dance fitness (Zumba, step)
Track and field / running club
Skateboarding or biking
Gymnastics or cheerleading
Hiking or outdoor adventure club

Leadership

Peer mentoring
Buddy programs
Student council
Leadership club
Conflict resolution
Peer mediation
Community service
Volunteering
Civic engagement
Mindfulness and stress management
Empowerment groups
Cultural identity or affinity groups

Life Skills & Career Exploration

Cooking or nutrition classes
Financial literacy
Budgeting games
Gardening or urban farming
Job shadowing or career talks
Resume writing / interview skills
Entrepreneurship or business club
Auto repair or DIY skills
Public speaking workshops
Social-Emotional Learning groups

Special Interest Clubs

Chess or board games
Anime or fandom clubs
Animal care / pet club
Magic or puzzle club
Model UN or mock trial
Travel or world cultures club
Science fiction or fantasy club

Technology & Media

Coding / app development
Game design or esports
Podcasting or radio club
Blogging or journalism
3D printing or maker space
Drone flying or tech tinkering

Note: Full service community schools use after-school support services to address academic, social, emotional, physical, and legal needs of students and their families. To bring service providers to school sites, they pursue partnerships with community providers.

References and Resources Used in Preparing this Information Resource

Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (2017). *Addressing barriers to learning: In the classroom and schoolwide*. Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. **http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html**

Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (2021). *Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports*. Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. **https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/evolvecomm.pdf**

Adelman, H.S. & Taylor, L. (2022). *Student/Learning Supports:A brief guide to understanding and addressing barriers to learning.* Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. **https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf**

Afterschool Alliance. (2024). *Concentrated poverty and the role of after-school programs.* Author online. **https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/aa3pm/concentrated_poverty.pdf**

Afterschool Alliance. (2019). A history of afterschool. *Afterschool Snack.* Online. **https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/afterschoolsnack/A-history-of-afterschool_07-02-2019.cfm**

Commonwealth Institute. (2017). *Unequal opportunities: Fewer resources, worse outcomes for students in schools with concentrated poverty.* **https://thecommonwealthinstitute.org/tci_research/unequal-opportunities-fewer-resources-worse - outcomes-for-students-in-schools-with-concentrated-poverty/**

Gottfredson, D.C., Gerstenblith, S.A., Soulé, D.A., Womer, S.C., & Lu, S. (2004). Do after school programs reduce delinquency? *Prevention Science, 5*, 253-266. **https://doi.org/10.1023/B:PREV.0000045359.21986.6e**

Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office. (2016). *Before and after school programs: A resource guide.* Author online. **https://ceo.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Before_and_After_School_Programs.pdf**

Ma, A. (2025). Education Department will release some frozen grants supporting after-school and summer programs *Associated Press.* Online. **https://apnews.com/article/education-grants-after-school-summer-211451212c377321fad4c751da3eb9df**

Oregon Department of Education. (2022). *Summer learning best practice toolkit.* Online. **https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/Documents/ODE_Summer_Learning_Best%20Practice%20Toolkit.pdf**

Rizo, M. (2025). Afterschool benefits kids for life. *After School Snack.* Online. **https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/afterschoolSnack/Report-Afterschool-benefits-kids-for-life_03-11-2025.cfm**

U.S. National Library of Medicine. (2024). *Effects of after-school programs with at-risk youth on attendance and externalizing behaviors.* National Institutes of Health. **https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10959024/**

Vandell, D. (2021). *A 26-year study shows early care and afterschool are crucial, and benefits last.* **https://www.mott.org/news/articles/results-a-26-year-study-shows-early-care-and-afterschool-are-crucial-and-benefits-last/**

For more on after-school, see our Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find

>*Afterschool programs and expanded learning opportunities*
https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/afterschool.htm