

Preface

In October 2014, a group of practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and youth came together at Youth-Nex: The University of Virginia Center to Promote Effective Youth Development to talk about the current state of the after-school arena and chart a course for the field's future. The participants shared a Positive Youth Development (PYD, Lerner et al 2015) frame for understanding youth's after-school time, focused on the inherent competencies that youth bring to the settings in which they engage and exploring the promise of after- and out-of-school programs for enhancing those competencies. Across two days, adults and youth shared experiences, challenges, best practices, and next steps, considering topics ranging from how to recruit and engage youth, to how to effectively evaluate program outcomes and activities, to what policies and practices would help expand and improve after-school opportunities for all youth.

At the same time the conference was occurring, the After-School Alliance released its report on youths' participation in and access to after-school activities nationwide (After-School Alliance 2014). The report highlighted the importance of the dialogue in which the conference participants were engaging. While participation rates in after-school programs are growing and fewer children are unsupervised during the after-school hours, there is still a great deal of unmet demand for high-quality after-school opportunities. Twenty percent of children are still unsupervised after-school, and nearly forty percent of parents say they would enroll their child in an after-school program if there were one available to them. Further, this unmet demand is not distributed equally; children whose families are lower on the socioeconomic ladder and children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds participate in after-school programs at higher rates than their peers, but their families are also more likely to report unmet demand for after-school programs (After-School Alliance 2014). Further, there is broad support from parents for expanding resources for after-school programs, with 84% of parents surveyed reporting that they support public funding for after-school programs in under-resourced communities. The demand and public support for after-school programs exists. It is the responsibility of policy makers, practitioners, and researchers to come together to meet that demand through supporting effective

policies and practices to improve and expand after-school opportunities for all youth, but especially for those youth whose needs are the greatest.

This brief and its companion brief, *After-School Programs to Promote Positive Youth Development (Volume 1)*, seek to identify promising next steps for doing just that. The chapters in these briefs are drawn from presentations made by practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and youth at the October 2014 Youth-Nex conference. The majority of chapters in this brief are collaboratively authored by practitioners and scholars and present a unique blend of lenses on after-school programs and practices, many of them drawn from professional experience as well as research. The chapters in this second volume focus on specific types, models, and cases of programs. The authors review the literature on summer learning programs, provide an overview of different types of programs with a focus on the lessons that can be applied across program contexts (including from the point of view of youth participants), and present case studies of specialized out-of-school programs with a discussion of the unique challenges and strengths of different models.

In Chap. 1, Hall discusses the importance of summer learning as an oft-neglected area of out-of-school time. Drawing on the literature on summer learning and an evaluation of summer programs conducted by the National Institute for Out-of-School Time (NIOST), Hall provides a review of components of high quality programs, outcomes from such programs, limitations in our current knowledge on summer learning, and the role of summer learning in the field more broadly. In Chap. 2, Ehrlich and colleagues provide overviews of the challenges and opportunities in six specific types of after-school programs: arts-based, sports-based, STEM, mentoring, educational-empowerment, and comprehensive after-school programs. Within each program type, challenges and opportunities identified by youth participants, program staff, and researchers are presented and common themes are then highlighted from across the six program types. In Chap. 3, Levy and colleagues present case studies of five after-school programs that were designed to target either specific populations of youth (i.e., proven risk youth; girls; trans*youth) or specific domains of content (i.e., technology; social entrepreneurship). Each case study discusses the identified need, how the program was developed to meet that need, challenges faced by the program and how those challenges were addressed, and outcomes that the program has documented to date. Through presenting specific case studies of actual programs, the chapter provides models for how practitioners and researchers have worked together to develop, evaluate and improve domain or population-specific programs. The Executive Summary draws from across the chapters in both briefs to provide specific policy and program recommendations for the field.

There is still great disparity in youth's opportunities in the after-school hours. This disparity amplifies the already present gaps in opportunity within educational and other social resources, thereby perpetuating the persistent gaps in educational attainment and achievement of youth from different social locations. The after-school arena, with its more common focus on youth potential and assets, holds great promise for helping even the playing field in terms of opportunities for youth. It is the role of practitioners, policy makers, and researchers to work together to

meet that potential, reduce current inequities, and ensure that all youth, but especially those who need it most, have access to high quality, engaging, and developmentally promotive after-school environments.

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After-School Programs to Promote Positive Youth
Development

Learning from Specific Models, Volume 2

Deutsch, N.L. (Ed.)

2017, XIV, 73 p., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-59140-7