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

Throughout August and early September, schools across the country will begin implementing staggered schedules, hybrid learning, and virtual learning to limit the number of students in classrooms and school buildings at one time. The hours students are physically "out of school" will increase dramatically compared to previous school years.

Students will need a safe place and the support of trusted adults to learn and grow during virtual school days, and in many cases for a parent or caregiver's entire workday. Students – and working families - will need access to additional resources and support. For the sake of our children, our families, our communities, and our economy, we need to turn this problem into an opportunity.

It is time to acknowledge that learning can and does happen in a variety of settings and ensure that school reopening plans consider that reality by focusing on a learning day that goes beyond the newly implemented school hours.

The most successful school reopening plans will be developed jointly by school leaders, afterschool programs, community-based organizations, health experts, parents, and teachers, so that together we can ensure our children are learning, safe, engaged, and building academic, social, and emotional skills during the hours their parents are at work. A host of additional resources and local expertise can be tapped to help implement a new learning day and ensure all children reach their full potential. As we move ahead we face an imperative, and an opportunity, to address systemic inequities and gaps in opportunity.

Lessons from afterschool and summer programs operating during the pandemic, in addition to decades of youth development programming and research, provide a foundation for a redesigned learning day that can help our children re-engage and reconnect—focusing on their health, wellness, and learning—after this time of extended challenges and isolation. Afterschool programs and community-based organizations can offer opportunities for youth to develop strong, trusting relationships that research shows can help buffer the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma.[1] Research also shows that student engagement indicators such as attendance, behavior and coursework rise when students participate regularly in quality afterschool programs.[2] Community partners will be especially critical in helping schools address the disparate impacts of systemic inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, providing academic, social, and emotional support to those students who need it most.

[1] "What We've Learned." Science of Learning and Development Alliance. Retrieved from https://www.soldalliance.org/what-weve-learned

[2] Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act Retrieved from https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/afterschool-programs-a-review-of-evidence-under-the-every-student-succeeds-act.aspx

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We urge leaders at the national, state, and local levels to join us in thinking outside of the box and tapping into all the rich resources that communities have to offer when crafting a new learning day. Afterschool programs and community partners can provide safe, engaging learning and supports for students when they are not physically in school – but they will need the help of school leaders who can convene and coordinate conversations and act as partners to meet the shared challenges of space, funding, and staff training to operate cohesively on behalf of students and families.

Five Essential Building Blocks

As we work together to co-construct the learning day, the following building blocks will be essential. Together these components can help ensure that students have access to a multitude of settings and trusted adults, all operating with a shared vision, to help support the social, emotional, and academic learning of all young people. Embedded in each of these building blocks must be a very intentional process of addressing equity. Our nation's most vulnerable youth – youth who are from low-income families, youth who are young people of color, youth and families who have been disproportionately impacted by the dual crisis of COVID-19 and systemic racism -- must be kept at the forefront of all aspects of a redesigned learning day.

1. **School-Community Partnerships**: Perhaps more than any other component, strong partnerships between community organizations and schools will be needed as we redesign the learning day and reopen in ways that look different than a "traditional" school day. Together we can partner to keep students engaged in learning, on track academically, and safe and supported in all of the reopening scenarios. Meaningful, active collaboration can maximize the use of community resources and foster creative learning solutions that engage young people and their families. These partnerships should be characterized by alignment of goals and services, effective lines of communication, and data and resource sharing. Specific considerations include:
    * Inclusion of afterschool and community partners in the planning phases, needs assessments, and implementation of school goals for recovery and operations.
    * Focus on safety by working together to adopt proper safety measures, including masks, sanitation, and smaller staff-to-student ratios so that children are safe and families feel comfortable across learning settings.
    * Access to technology and connectivity that supports learning in and out of school so that students have access to devices across learning settings.
    * Shared use of facilities to ensure safe sites for programs to take place.
    * Joint professional development coordinated between classroom teachers and program staff to help ensure diverse staff with aligned strategies and vision
    * Shared commitment to ongoing assessment & improvement and sharing of data to support social, emotional and academic learning outcomes
    * Efforts to maximize the partnership by ensuring that all partners contribute resources

2. **Commitment to Active and Engaged Learning**: Supporting students' social, emotional, and academic learning as we emerge from this crisis will be a top priority. Together we can engage young people in meaningful and relevant experiential learning opportunities that are culturally competent and responsive to the students we serve. Afterschool programs and community partners can supplement core academics and can tap in to a young person's interests, provide choice and voice over what is offered, and maintain engagement through positive relationships with adults and peers. For example, afterschool programs have been convening youth to talk to state leaders about their needs in recovering from COVID, providing virtual college tours, and helping students design service projects like using 3-D printers to build face masks for essential workers. As we move forward, community partners can provide a broad array of enrichment activities such as theater, science and engineering, outdoor stewardship and activities, physical movement, language and culture that help bring the lessons of the school day to life.

3. **Family Engagement**: Engaging with families to determine how community partners can help supplement any new school day scenario will be essential to help young people, working families, and our economy recover. A wide body of research points to active parent involvement in their child's education as a key factor in student success. Community-based organizations, partnering with schools, can foster a welcoming environment for all families through strategies such as seeking parental input in afterschool program hours, structure, and offerings; providing activities that encourage family engagement; employing staff who often come from the same communities as students and families and can offer a cultural and linguistic connection between school and home; offering workshops or connecting families to community resources; and serving as a source of information to help families become more active stewards in their child's education. A redesigned learning day that provides safe environments for children to learn, offers parental choice, and facilitates communication will be crucial to parents, schools, and most of all students.

4. **Intentional Programming**: Explicit goals and intentionally designed activities that align with those goals are critical to the success of a redesigned learning day. Schools and community partners should work together to be explicit about the complementary roles that they can play in supporting learning. These roles should be based on each setting's unique strengths and the developmental and academic needs of young people. Afterschool programs and other community partners can complement and reinforce school day learning and promote positive youth development by offering activities that are challenging and relevant to students, are sequenced and explicitly defined to help students develop mastery in an area, and are accompanied by the necessary tools and resources for students to fully engage.

5. **Health & Wellbeing**: Together schools and community partners should take a holistic approach to wellbeing, helping students build their social and emotional skills and competencies, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and the ability to work in teams, as well as providing opportunities for exercise and access to nutritious meals and snacks that otherwise might be unavailable. Studies have shown that improving a student's social and emotional skills leads to positive gains in their academic performance and their attitudes toward peers and school. As schools reopen, finding ways to help young people recover from any negative impacts experienced due to social isolation, safety net disruptions, or traumatic experiences related to COVID will be essential to helping them resume learning and healthy development. Afterschool programs and community partners can connect students with caring professionals who provide developmental supports that are proven to help young people develop social skills, gain self-control and confidence, build healthy relationships, and reduce risky behaviors.

Leveraging Community Assets

Partners - There are a wide variety of resources and programs in every community that can be leveraged to help support our students and families. The list below is not comprehensive but is illustrative of the many local and statewide partners that can help design and implement a comprehensive learning day, and in some cases, offer their facilities for shared use:

- Afterschool and summer learning programs
- 50 Statewide Afterschool Networks
- Local afterschool networks and intermediaries (where they exist)
- Community-based organizations such as Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, 4-H, Big Sisters/Big Brothers, Junior Achievement
- Parks and Recreation departments
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Libraries
- Museums of all types, including children's museums, culturally-specific museums, art museums, history museums, historic sites, and historical societies

- Science and technology centers and museums, natural history museums, and other STEM-rich, place-based institutions, such as nature centers, aquariums, planetariums, zoos, and botanical gardens
- Institutions of higher education
- Local businesses
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Summer and day camps
- Public Housing
- School health providers
- Therapists
- Mentor programs
- Sports organizations, leagues and coaches
- Arts and cultural organizations

Staff – Schools, afterschool programs, and other organizations serving our children will likely need more staff to maintain health and safety guidelines in reopening scenarios. Below are some potential sources of additional staff who can work with school day teachers to complement and reinforce learning:

- Afterschool and summer program staff
- AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps NCCC and Americorps VISTA service members
- College students and older high school youth (both paid and for school credit)
- Community and corporate volunteers
- Informal educators, such as those employed by museums and science-engagement institutions

Public Funding - Unfortunately, schools and afterschool programs have already been hit hard by the pandemic and are in desperate need of additional funding.   Below are some of the federal dollars that can be used to support a redesigned learning day that includes supports that extend beyond the classroom:

- CARES Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund)
- CARES Act Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund
- Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) for school-age care
- Nita Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Center funds
- Perkins - Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title I and Title IV Part A funds
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for older youth programs
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act youth employment funding
- Corporation for National and Community Service AmeriCorps and VISTA
- USDA Afterschool Meals and Snacks

Putting the Pieces Together

The current crisis has exposed an opportunity to make learning across settings more equitable for all of our students, but it is unreasonable to expect schools to pull off the massive and uncharted task of designing a new learning day on their own. Afterschool and community partners stand ready to help. Below are examples of the role that afterschool and community partners can play in some

of the most common reopening scenarios. A more complete version of the chart below is available at http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Partnering-with-Schools-to-Reopen-and-Meet-Students-Needs.pdf.

If students are …	Returning to school for in-classroom learning	Participating in remote learning only	Participating in a mix of in-person and remote learning or have a staggered schedule
Afterschool will be critical for helping kids catch up and keep up.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide support with reading, math, tutoring and homework after the school day ends. ✓ coordinate with teachers to address specific areas of learning loss and to help students who are struggling.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide in-person support for students. ✓ connect with students at home to help with online assignments, homework and tutoring for trouble areas.	Afterschool can: ✓ ensure that kids have a safe place to learn every day, including in-person or virtual support to help with remote school requirements. ✓ coordinate with teachers to address specific areas of learning loss and to help students who are struggling.
Afterschool can keep kids safe, engaged and learning when schools are closed or parents are working.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide care after the school day, engaging kids in enriching activities that give them a chance to lead, explore and create without stress.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide a safe place for kids to go while parents are working, help with remote school requirements, and opportunities to engage in enriching activities that give them a chance to lead, explore and create without stress.	Afterschool can: ✓ ensure that families have consistent care for their kids on all days, including a safe place for kids to go while parents are working, help with remote school requirements, and opportunities to engage in enriching activities that give them a chance to lead, explore and create without stress.
Afterschool programs can help schools and community partners provide food to kids and families who need it most.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide snacks and suppers after the school day ends.	Afterschool can: ✓ partner with schools to distribute grab & go meals to families.	Afterschool can: ✓ partner with schools to provide or deliver breakfast and lunch on days students do not attend school. ✓ provide snacks and suppers on days students do attend school.
Afterschool can provide social and emotional supports that kids need to emerge from this crisis strong, resilient and hopeful.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide caring mentors who are trained to support healthy youth development and offer positive social engagement with peers. ✓ engage youth in activities proven to build life skills, such as problem solving, teamwork, and critical thinking.	Afterschool can: ✓ identify community resources and partners who specialize in trauma-informed care. ✓ develop case loads of students so staff can conduct informal check-ins. ✓ develop online learning modules and activities.	Afterschool can: ✓ use socially distant activities (outdoor preferably, on the in-person school days to reinforce SEL concepts). ✓ engage students in project-based or service learning activities that can be started and tracked in-person or virtual.

If students are …	Returning to school for in-classroom learning	Participating in remote learning only	Participating in a mix of in-person and remote learning or have a staggered schedule
Afterschool can help provide connections and support to families.	Afterschool can: ✓ use drop-off and pick-up to share resources on food, health and unemployment resources ✓ ask parents and families what they need (and how they need supports to be delivered).	Afterschool can: ✓ hold community calls with families using video platforms like Zoom or conduct weekly one-on-one calls with students or parents. ✓ distribute resources on food, health and unemployment resources.	Afterschool can: ✓ use drop-off and pick-up as well as platforms like Zoom, or conduct check-in calls with parents. ✓ distribute resources on food, health, and unemployment resources.
Afterschool can help families overcome technology challenges and ensure kids have access to learning platforms.		Afterschool can: ✓ provide internet connectivity and a place where kids can focus on their remote school requirements. ✓ connect with families to help ensure they can access remote learning.	Afterschool can: ✓ provide internet connectivity and a place where kids can focus on their remote school requirements. ✓ connect with families to help ensure they can access remote learning.

Utilizing the building blocks, leveraging community assets, and working collaboratively, we can build a better learning day for all of our kids. Schools, working with afterschool providers, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, museums, libraries, and other community partners can provide increased access to smaller classes and personalized learning; positive youth development; academic enrichment; and better aligned services to help all of our young people, and especially those who have been historically underserved, emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, hopeful, and more prepared for learning.

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The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs.