

New Day for Learning

"New Day for Learning is not a curriculum or one-size fits all program; it's a 21st century vision for learning that builds on a foundation of core academics by leveraging community resources to incorporate strategies such as hands-on learning, working in teams and problem solving."

(www.newdayforlearning.org, 2009)



Initiated by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in 2005, the Time, Learning and Afterschool Task Force brought together experts in the field of education and afterschool to take a comprehensive look at connections between time, learning, and afterschool. Led by former NAESP Executive Director, Vincent L. Ferrandino, the group looked carefully at what kids do during out-of-school time and at the opportunities and challenges facing youth and families from different socio-economic backgrounds. They also looked at the various ways in which young people learn, at how learning works in different contexts, at the ways in which approaches to in-school and out-of-school learning are similar and yet different, and at how these approaches to learning could be connected to create a seamless learning day for children.

New Day for Learning—Key Elements

The published report of the Task Force’s work—A New Day for Learning—outlines a vision for learning designed to build on the best approaches to learning in and out of school. In this new vision, there are five key elements of a new learning system.

1. Expands the definition of student success

Reading, math and science are critical to a solid educational foundation but must be bolstered by applied skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and teamwork. Beyond merely teaching students these skills, we must thoughtfully assess them to ensure that today’s young people are fully prepared to succeed in school, work and life.

2. Uses research-based knowledge about how students learn best

Students can’t learn if they are not engaged. Educators and community stakeholders must utilize research-based knowledge about how students learn best to effectively frame their programs and instruction.

3. Fosters collaboration across all sectors

To focus all resources on supporting academic and developmental goals for students, new collaborative structures must be built across sectors in communities and up and down government hierarchies. The vital involvement of community, business, civic and municipal leaders, parents and social service providers is critical to student success and pays economic, civic and social dividends to all stakeholders.

4. Integrates various learning approaches and places

Engaging strategies that incorporate the arts, technology, service learning and apprenticeships can amplify core academic learning and provide students with opportunities for enriching their education and connecting it with the adult world that they will enter. Schools are just one of the many places in the community where learning and student success can happen.

5. Provides new opportunities for leadership and professional development

While most current leadership development and certification programs are school-based, the importance of community-building skills is growing. Teachers and youth development staff can forge partnerships that result in heightened professionalism for both—and in better outcomes for students.

(www.newdayforlearning.org, 2009)

New Language—Expanded Learning Opportunities

Since the release of *A New Day for Learning* in early 2007, our understandings of how the learning day is constituted have begun to shift. As Anne Bowles and Betsy Brand point out in *Learning Around the Clock: Benefits of Expanded Learning Opportunities for Older Youth* (2009), even the language surrounding school and afterschool learning has changed. What used to be described primarily as *afterschool*, began to be called *out-of-school time* to include the productive activities students engaged in on weekends and during the summer. More recently, leaders and practitioners have begun to use the term *expanded learning opportunities* to describe the myriad learning options for youth (see also Little, 2009).



Expanded learning opportunities (ELOs), particularly for older youth, occur in a 24/7 environment, draw upon the resources of the community, blur the lines between schools and other valuable teachers, such as colleges, community organizations, museums and employers, and incorporate virtual learning when appropriate. ELOs include traditional afterschool activities with an academic focus, but also incorporate activities such as internships with employers, independent study in alternative settings, classes on college campuses for high school students and wrap-around social supports. ELOs are more fully integrated into the fabric of services and programs provided to all children and youth and contribute to the notion of community-wide learning systems (Bowles and Brand, 2009).

Though Bowles and Brand are focused primarily on older youth in their study, the language of expanded learning opportunities applies to youth of all ages (Stonehill and Edelstein, 2009; Little 2009). And this call for a new perspective has begun to take other forms as well, as evidenced by campaigns such as A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education—a national initiative supported by education and civic leaders across the country—which calls for a similar understanding of expanded learning and more attention to the whole child (see www.boldapproach.org).

Benefits of this Approach

In many schools and communities across the country, leaders are working to develop and connect integrated and high quality systems of learning that confer substantial benefits, including but not limited to:

Academic gains for youth

- lower dropout rates
- improved test scores
- better grades
- better communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and writing skills
- better overall academic performance
- increased school attendance
- improved homework completion

Social and emotional gains for youth

- boosts to overall physical and mental health
- healthier eating habits
- better relationships with peers and mentors
- improved physical activity
- and a variety of youth development outcomes fostered by having safe and high-quality opportunities to learn and grow

Improved outcomes for parents, families, schools, communities, and society

- better relationships between parents and schools
- improved care and expanded learning opportunities for children who would otherwise care for themselves
- richer connections across communities
- improved community-based problem-solving capacities
- a better-educated and more globally-prepared and integrated workforce and citizenry

Dozens of studies of afterschool programs and initiatives repeatedly underscore the powerful impact of supporting a range of positive learning outcomes, including academic achievement, by affording children and youth opportunities to learn and practice new skills through hands-on, experiential learning in project-based afterschool programs, which complement, but do not replicate, in-school learning.

(“Supporting Student Outcomes Through Expanded Learning Opportunities,” 2009)

This is what we see: students coping with realities never imagined even one generation ago—and public schools trying to respond to growing academic demands by overloading an outmoded structure. In the six- to seven-hour day, basically unchanged for decades, many educators must cram more subject matter coverage—with extra drill in reading and math for millions of students—and administer more standardized testing as an answer to the pressure to improve student achievement. Generally left out of the picture is the research-based knowledge on how students learn best: with a rich curriculum, multiple ways of reinforcing it, and relevance. Communities and resources around schools often can provide these commodities. The development of essential skills is vital, but must be coupled with broader ways of schooling to fully prepare students to be effective workers and responsible citizens.

(New Day for Learning, 2007)