Learning in the 21st Century: Opportunities and Challenges

Today, the pace of change is accelerating at an exponential rate, and life is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Many of the things students may need to know and be able to do in 20 years have not yet been determined, or perhaps even imagined. How do we prepare young people to be successful and productive citizens in this rapidly changing and increasingly global society? How can parents, schools, and communities (be they defined by geography, culture, or virtual connection) help young people cultivate the habits and skills they will need to become life-long learners? And, how do we ensure that young people who are especially vulnerable—children living in high-poverty situations or English language learners, for example—are given the opportunities and supports needed to succeed?

Though answers to these questions vary, one thing is becoming clear: our notions of school, afterschool, community, and learning must change. Learning, as we know, happens all the time. And yet, in most communities across the United States we hold schools primarily responsible for educating our children and cling to school calendars and schedules designed for a different age.

In this publication, we’ll explore how school, afterschool, and community leaders can build a new day for learning. This guide and companion Web-based tools (see www.naesp.org/After-School.aspx) are designed specifically to help elementary and middle school principals and afterschool providers work together to improve and connect learning; and to help teachers, other school leaders, afterschool program directors, community and business leaders, and parents and students collaborate to integrate learning across sectors of our society.
“We believe that collaboration across all sectors must begin at the school level. By working in partnership, school and afterschool leaders can be strong advocates for greater collaboration locally, statewide, and nationally.”


Our aim is not to add to the already long list of responsibilities each of these individuals face everyday, but rather to help people make connections and develop collaborations that benefit everyone. As those who are doing this work will attest, children, families, schools, businesses, and community members all stand to gain when learning is integrated and supported throughout the community.

In this guide, we begin by looking at key elements of the New Day for Learning approach, how our understandings of time, learning, and afterschool are shifting, and some of the benefits to this approach. Second, we identify various systems of support for expanded learning opportunities. Third, we look at models for collaboration and highlight some of the ways in which partnerships are boosting learning and helping to create the conditions for children, schools, communities, and our society to be healthier and more productive. Finally, we identify resources and tools leaders can use to build effective and lasting relationships and programs (to see a full complement of tools and resources, including downloadable podcasts, visit www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx).
Collaborating to Build a New Day for Learning: A Guide for Principals, Afterschool, and Community Leaders

How to Use this Guide, Online Resources, and Podcasts

If you are a principal, school administrator, or teacher, you can use this guide to begin conversations with school staff as well as out-of-school time, district, and community leaders. Use the guide and resources as a jumping off point to discuss the major issues surrounding time and learning in today’s world and how to collaborate more effectively.

If you are an out-of-school time or community leader, you can utilize this guide and resources to work with principals, school, and district leaders in your community to build new learning networks, that bridge traditional divides. If you are a parent or a student, share the guide and resources with your principal and other learning providers in your community.

Access the online resources to listen to podcasts with foundation, school and community leaders, or to find specific collaboration tools such as PowerPoint presentations, sample Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), responsibility checklists, and much more. You can download a PDF of the guide and access the resources and podcasts online at www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx.