

Career and College Exploration in Afterschool Programs

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A high school diploma used to be enough to get by in the job market, but this is no longer the case. A Georgetown University study found that the percentage of jobs in the US that requires some form of postsecondary education will reach a projected 63 percent by 2018, up from 28 percent in the early 1970s (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). This trend is being driven by the increasingly complex global labor market that requires more advanced levels of math, science, and language arts proficiency.

In addition to higher levels of basic skills, Tony Wagner from Harvard University argues that in today's knowledge economy, students need 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, adaptability, imagination, and entrepreneurship, to participate economically and civically. Yet he laments that these skills are noticeably underemphasized in instruction and assessments within American schools and that youth have few opportunities to develop such skills in school settings (Wagner, 2010).

For Tony Wagner's recommendations on essential skills that are currently needed in classrooms see: <http://www.tonywagner.com/resources/rigor-redefined>

High schools are increasingly focused on ramping up student performance in basic academic skills, certainly a laudable goal. However, many of them are not able to provide opportunities during the school day for *all* students to learn about college and career options or to develop vital 21st century skills.

Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds can more easily access learning opportunities through networks of family, friends, and other options, but economically disadvantaged youth often have little access to these opportunities and services. As the President has set the goal of having the largest share of college graduates in the world by 2020, we must ensure that all young people are prepared for success, both in college and careers.

Many afterschool and summer learning programs expose youth to the importance of college by taking them on visits to college campuses, working with students and families to identify prospective colleges, providing assistance in the college application process, helping families navigate the financial assistance jungle, and providing encouragement and support to students who do not see themselves as college material. These activities, which many high schools do not have the time and resources to provide, are key to helping students become college-ready and make a successful transition into college (Education Trust-West, 2011; Herrera, Linden Arbreton, & Grossman, 2011; Seftor, Mamun, & Schirm, 2009; Bowles & Brand, 2009) .

Other afterschool and summer learning programs provide youth opportunities to learn about careers, participate in internships or work experiences, participate in community service projects, or earn stipends for work. Employers are often key partners with afterschool programs in providing work-based learning or apprenticeship-type experiences. These activities are important for youth who have little exposure to careers or who are unfamiliar with the workplace, again, since activities of this nature are rarely scheduled into the regular school day. (Afterschol Alliance, 2009; Halpern, 2008; Pearson & Fabiano, 2006; Hirsch, Hedges, Stawicki, & Mekinda, 2011; Moran, n.d., Bowles & Brand, 2009)

Afterschool and summer learning programs also provide engaging learning opportunities for youth by connecting learning to careers, college, and other future plans. In many classrooms, students do not learn how to *apply* their knowledge (Conference Board et. al, n.d.). They learn content from a theoretical standpoint, divorced from the real world and rarely placed in the context of how the information or

knowledge can be used to solve actual problems. Many afterschool and summer learning programs excel in providing opportunities for youth to develop these types of skills and abilities by encouraging them to work in teams, design and implement complex projects rooted in real-world challenges, undertake community service, and serve in internships or apprenticeships (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Chi, Snow, Goldstein, Lee, & Chung, 2010; Bruschi & Clewell, 2008).

Examples

What follows are descriptions of several exemplary afterschool and summer learning programs that provide youth with opportunities to learn about postsecondary education and careers and develop employability skills. The programs profiled below include Upward Bound Math-Science, Citizens Schools, and Project Exploration.

- **Upward Bound Math-Science** is a college access program that is funded by the US Department of Education TRIO program that has an afterschool and summer component. The program was designed to provide disadvantaged high school students with skills and experiences that prepare them for success in a four-year college and help them succeed in a math or science career field. Grants are given to two- and four-year colleges and universities to provide programs during the school year and summer. School-year programs include supplemental academic instruction and enrichment activities such as faculty-assisted experiments, seminars with outside speakers, and field trips. The six-week summer program includes an intensive focus on math and science instruction and exposure to life in college, including residency in college dorms. All programs include activities such as preparation for college entrance exams, information on postsecondary opportunities, and assistance completing college applications and understanding financial aid opportunities. A 2007 evaluation of Upward Bound Math-Science showed improved high school grades in math and science and a greater likelihood

For more information on Upward Bound Math-Science see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomathsci/index.html>

of majoring in math or science and completing a four-year degree in math or science (Olsen, Seftor, et al, 2007). The latest evaluation showed that all participants benefited from an increased likelihood of earning a postsecondary certificate or license. Among participants with the lowest initial educational expectations, it found an increased likelihood of receiving AP, honors, or core academic credits in high school and greater chances of enrolling in and completing some type of postsecondary program, (Seftor, Mamun, & Schirm, 2009).

- Citizen Schools**, funded in part with 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds and based in Boston, partners with public middle schools to provide structured expanded learning opportunities for educational enrichment, career exposure, and high school and college preparation to students in grades 6-8 during and after school. The program incorporates academic support, apprenticeships with adult volunteers in a variety of fields, and a community explorations curriculum that brings the community into the classroom and the classroom to the community. Students participate in experiential learning projects, referred to as apprenticeships. These learning experiences are led by volunteer community members and employers, who set goals, focus on academic support, and teach leadership skills. Students build 21st century skills, such as communication, collaboration, data analysis, effective reasoning, and problem solving, and they create and present a final product to share what they have learned with families, teachers, public officials, community members, and business leaders. Citizen Schools also takes 8th graders on college visits, where students visit classes, attend social events, and engage in other guided activities that provide a concrete awareness of college life. An evaluation of Citizen Schools found increased levels of student engagement and achievement, higher attendance and course pass rates, lower suspension rates, a positive impact on English and math course grades, and an increased propensity to select a rigorous high school (Pearson & Fabiano, 2006).

For information on how Citizen Schools aligns resources among multiple partners see <http://www.citizenschools.org/school-partners/expectations/>

- Project Exploration** is a non-profit organization that provides science education to underrepresented groups, particularly females and minorities. The Project provides over 300 Chicago Public School youth access to free afterschool and summer science programs that spark an interest in science, motivate youth to pursue science-related careers, and ensure that they are equipped for such careers. Participants benefit from hands-on programming, authentic fieldwork, leadership development, and long-term relationships with educators through ongoing mentorships. Programs include a 3-week summer fieldwork immersion program where participants take classes on anatomy, geology, and paleontology and conclude with a week-long paleontology field expedition. Students also can fulfill high school community service graduation requirements by serving as docents for science exhibits at local museums. They also offer science programs for girls where science exploration is combined with leadership development through hands-on science activities and interactions with female science role models. A 10-year retrospective review found that Project Exploration benefited from higher high school graduation rates, higher four-year college enrollment and completion rates, a greater likelihood of majoring in a science field, and greater employment rates in science-related professions. The study also found that participants had an increased science capacity and that meaningful engagement in a community of practice with strong relationships supported peer learning and helped students envision careers in science (Chi, Snow, Goldstein, Lee, & Chung, 2010).

These afterschool and summer learning programs help young people think about their futures, learn some of the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education and the workplace, and draw connections between classroom learning and the real world through structured learning experiences. All of them rely on strong partnerships among schools, community-based organizations, colleges, and/or employers that enhance and strengthen their programs. These partnerships

For information on Project Exploration's youth programs, resources, and links to various projects see <http://www.projectexploration.org/programs.htm>

also help youth connect with caring adults, who can provide advice and support about career and college pathways.

Summary and Recommendations

Afterschool and summer learning programs can and should help youth be prepared for college and careers but many do not explicitly include it as an emphasis. Here are some recommendations along with examples of programs addressing the issues. First, afterschool and summer learning programs can intentionally focus on helping youth explore, set goals, and prepare for postsecondary education. One program that helps youth explore and prepare for postsecondary education is College Track, a national nonprofit which partners with high schools and local community-based organizations and offers college preparatory activities to almost 1,200 underserved youth afterschool and during the summer. Activities include college tours, academic advising, enrichment workshops, ACT and SAT preparation, summer writing institutes focused on the college application process, and guidance on college entrance and financial aid (College Track, n.d.).

Second, programs can create partnerships with employers to help youth learn about and experience careers first-hand through work-based learning, apprenticeships, or internships. The Youth Astronomy Apprenticeship Program, through collaboration between the MIT Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space Research, the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, the Timothy Smith Network, and local afterschool providers, fosters science learning among urban teenage high school students and prepares them for professional competitive opportunities. In the program, equal effort is put into pursuing science learning for academic enrichment and in stressing the link between employable skills and the skills developed in science and other professional fields. During the summer apprenticeship program, youth participate in paid positions, working with scientists and science educators from MIT and Harvard. An evaluation showed that youth who participated in these programs increased their commitment to science

and demonstrated improved leadership and a greater understanding of astronomy and scientific concepts (Norland, Foutz, & Krabill, 2009).

Third, programs can develop engaging, relevant, and age-appropriate programming for youth that connects their academic studies with hands-on, project-based, experiential, and collaborative work, set in the context of real-world challenges. The Build San Francisco Institute, a partnership between San Francisco Unified School District, the non-profit Architectural Foundation of San Francisco, and several business and community partners, began fifteen years ago as a six-week summer mentorship program for students interested in design, construction, architecture, and engineering. This collaboration then grew into an integral partnership with San Francisco Unified School District that offers a half-day high school program, complete with fully accredited courses in Architectural Design and Urban Studies, mentorships with two dozen major San Francisco firms and civic agencies, and up to 15 units of high school credit (approved for CA State University admission) per semester (AFSF, n.d.).

Fourth, programs can ensure that youth have opportunities to develop 21st century skills. In New York City and Washington DC, Global Kids focuses on digital literacy and civic participation through in-school, out-of-school, and online work so that youth can succeed in school, participate effectively in the democratic process, and achieve leadership in their communities and on the global stage. The non-profit program receives funds from and partners with several corporations, foundations, and government institutions. Thousands of students study global issues, develop local connections, and work in peer education, social action, digital media, and service-learning. Through its various activities, the Global Kids has an explicit focus on engaging students in 21st century skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication (Global Kids, n.d.).

These recommendations and examples make clear that afterschool and summer learning programs can develop strong partnerships with K-16 education institutions, employers, museums, and community-based and youth-serving organizations in order to create stronger connections to college and careers. Given their

prevalence in communities across the country and their ability to be flexible and responsive to community needs, afterschool and summer learning programs are well-positioned to provide youth, particularly underserved youth, with opportunities to be college and career ready.

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