



## School District Recommendations for Implementing ESSA

The ACT Now Coalition is a statewide organization that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality and affordable afterschool and youth development programs. We believe that an increased commitment to young people beyond the traditional school day is a crucial part of their growth into healthy and productive individuals.

The following are recommendations to assist school districts in incorporating afterschool programs into their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) implementation to boost academic outcomes, provide enrichment experiences, and increase family engagement. The Illinois State Board of Education has already included afterschool programs and our organization in its draft state plan; however, there are many opportunities to expand afterschool programs' roles in district implementation plans. The ESSA statute includes many mentions of afterschool programs and community-based organizations that schools can partner with in order to meet their goals. Further, ESSA repeatedly mentions the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and college and career readiness, two subjects which afterschool programs are uniquely situated to address.

Studies show that on the whole students who go to afterschool programs have better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior in school than students who do not participate in afterschool programs.<sup>1</sup> Data shows that the federally funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) improve academic outcomes for students. In 2014, a third of 21st CCLC participants in Illinois improved their grades from fall to spring, an increase from 2013.<sup>2</sup> Surveys of 21st CCLC participants' teachers indicated that students' attendance improved by 56 percent, attentiveness improved by 64 percent, and class participation improved by 72 percent.<sup>3</sup>

This guide is broken into the following topics to show how school districts can leverage afterschool programs to address these areas:

- Family Engagement
- STEM
- College and Career Readiness
- Literacy Instruction
- Training and Evidenced-Based Practices

### Family Engagement

Afterschool programs provide a crucial bridge between communities and schools and can help foster the family engagement called for under ESSA. Parents are a child's very first teacher, and numerous

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<sup>1</sup> Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2010). *Afterschool programs that follow evidence-based practices to promote social and emotional development are effective*. Retrieved from [http://www.expandinglearning.org/docs/Durlak&Weissberg\\_Final.pdf](http://www.expandinglearning.org/docs/Durlak&Weissberg_Final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Goodyear, L., Mansori, S., Cox, J., & Rodriguez, S. *Illinois State Board of Education 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers Program: State-level program evaluation 2014-2015*. Retrieved from [https://www.isbe.net/Documents/statewide\\_report\\_1415.pdf](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/statewide_report_1415.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

studies have shown that parental engagement in a child's education boosts educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup> However, parent involvement is often challenged by obstacles such as limited resources and time, language barriers, and levels of trust.<sup>5</sup> Afterschool programs can often transcend these divides by offering an environment where parents feel at ease, providing parent-related activities during times more accessible to working parents, and equipping parents with the tools to become more empowered in their involvement with their child's education.

ESSA's provisions on Parent and Family Engagement in Title I Part B call on education agencies to collaborate with community-based organizations, such as afterschool programs, to carry out parent engagement plans and in using its parent engagement funds. We suggest that districts consider using the following strategies when deciding on their parent engagement plan and how to spend parent engagement funds:

- *Empowering parents.* Afterschool programs help facilitate parent engagement at school and at home by establishing opportunities by which parents can build their skills in various areas. Afterschool programs are skilled at holding events that engage parents. These events often include childcare, offer a meal, and are held at locations and times that are convenient for parents. Event topics may include how to support reading and math skills, navigating the middle/high school selection process, and how to improve parents' own literacy, technology, and financial planning.<sup>6</sup>
- *Facilitating parent school partnerships.* Afterschool programs in partnership with schools can host workshops that help parents navigate the policies and expectations of the school. Workshops may include preparing parents for successful parent-teacher conferences and helping them to access their child's attendance and performance records.<sup>7</sup> Afterschool programs can also serve as advocates, mediators, and/or translators when relationships between schools and parents become strained.<sup>8</sup>
- *ESSA requirements.* Afterschool programs can prepare parents to participate in the ESSA required school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement.<sup>9</sup> Schools can also partner with afterschool programs in order to meet ESSA requirements by providing parents opportunities to give feedback on Title I programs/school activities, giving parents a voice in which trainings school

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<sup>4</sup> Jaynes, W. (2012). *A meta-analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students*. Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/a-meta-analysis-of-the-efficacy-of-different-types-of-parental-involvement-programs-for-urban-students>. Fan, W., & Williams, C. (2009). The effects of parental involvement on students' academic self-efficacy, engagement and intrinsic motivation. *Educational Psychology*, 30(1), 53-74.

<sup>5</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2012). *Afterschool: A key to successful parent engagement*. Retrieved from [http://afterschoolalliance.org//documents/issue\\_briefs/issue\\_parents\\_57.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org//documents/issue_briefs/issue_parents_57.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> ExpandedED Schools. (n.d.). *Family engagement: A guide to tools, strategies and resources*. Retrieved from [http://expandedschools.org/sites/default/files/TASC\\_FamilyEngagement\\_Resource%20Guide.pdf](http://expandedschools.org/sites/default/files/TASC_FamilyEngagement_Resource%20Guide.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Kakli, Z., Kreider, H., Little, P., Buck, T., & Coffrey, M. (2006). *Focus on families! How to Build and support family-centered practices in afterschool*. Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/focus-on-families%21-how-to-build-and-support-family-centered-practices-in-after-school>.

<sup>9</sup> Henderson, A. T. (n.d.). *Quick brief on family engagement in Every Student Succeeds ACT (ESSA) of 2015*. Retrieved from <http://ra.nea.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/FCE-in-ESSA-in-Brief.pdf>.

personnel attend, and hosting parent and family engagement policy meetings in a language and format that parents can understand.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Youth Guidance Parent & Family Engagement Program**<sup>11</sup>

Chicago-based Youth Guidance’s Parent & Family Engagement Program offers specialized trainings and workshops to parents and caregivers that emphasize the importance of their voice and involvement in their child’s education. Program staff work closely with families to address challenges such as language barriers, complex work schedules, or a general sense of disenfranchisement, particularly in urban areas plagued by violence and crime. Parent & Family Engagement staff help parents build home-school connections that boost a child’s interest and confidence in academics and extra-curricular activities. Youth Guidance’s Parent & Family Engagement Program also includes a two-day Parent Leadership Conference and a specialized Parent Connection curriculum that promotes positive parent-teacher relationships.

## **STEM**

Throughout ESSA there is an emphasis on the importance of STEM learning. The United States is experiencing a rapid growth in the need for STEM professionals. Between 2008 and 2018, the nation’s need for STEM professionals will grow by 17 percent—which is more than the projected growth for administrative work, sales, and transportation combined.<sup>12</sup> Research has shown that an early interest in pursuing a STEM field is a better indicator of whether a student will pursue a career in these fields than a student’s grades.<sup>13</sup> If we want the next generation of students to be fluent in STEM, we must take an immersion approach. School-age children spend only 20 percent of their waking hours in school—the other 80 percent is spent outside of school.<sup>14</sup> Children discover their passions and pick up new skills as they explore their world in afterschool hours. To allow for the level of exposure and experiences needed to develop fluency in STEM, we must ensure that all communities offer opportunities for students to engage with these subjects in multiple and varied ways, including afterschool programming.

The guidelines for ESSA’s Title IV Part A: Student Support and Academic Enhancement Grants (SSAE) indicate that districts receiving more than \$30,000 in federal funds are required to spend at least 20 percent of their funding on “well-rounded” educational activities. An acceptable focus for these funds is to support collaborations among schools and afterschool programs to improve instruction and student engagement in STEM subjects. We recommend that districts consider using SSAE grants from Title IV Part A to invest in out-of-school time STEM experiences. The following are suggested strategies for districts to use:

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<sup>10</sup> Kakli, Kreider, Little, Buck, & Coffrey, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Youth Guidance. (n.d.). *Community & afterschool*. Retrieved from <https://www.youth-guidance.org/community-after-school/>.

<sup>12</sup> Afterschool STEM Hub. (n.d.). *Talking points*. Retrieved from <http://www.afterschoolstemhub.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2011). *STEM learning in afterschool: An analysis of impact and outcomes*. Retrieved from <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/STEM-Afterschool-Outcomes.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

- *Supporting school projects.* Afterschool STEM programs can support students with designing and completing school required science projects.<sup>15</sup>
- *Complementing school learning with real world scientific enquiry.* Coordination of STEM activities between afterschool and school day instructors provides students opportunities to apply what they have learned in school in the afterschool space, helping them to become fluent in STEM.<sup>16</sup>
- *Improving instruction.* The majority of afterschool providers are school day teachers. By engaging in informal STEM exploration afterschool, school day educators increase their confidence in teaching STEM and the quality of the STEM activities.<sup>17</sup>
- *Activating interest.* Afterschool programs allow youth to experiment with STEM in a low-stakes environment that supports exploration.<sup>18</sup> Offering STEM experiences outside of the traditional classroom setting with activities like Lego Robotics or chemistry experiments helps to increase students' interest in STEM.
- *Closing the opportunity gap.* The afterschool setting reaches students from populations underrepresented in STEM fields, provides enrichment opportunities that improve STEM achievement in struggling students, and inspires youth to pursue STEM careers.<sup>19</sup>
- *Preparing STEM workforce.* Afterschool programs expose young people to STEM career options by bringing in professionals from various fields, organizing internship experiences, and arranging field trips.<sup>20</sup>

### **Project SYNCERE<sup>21</sup>**

Project SYNCERE (Supporting Youth's Needs with Core Engineering Research Experiments) provides STEM programming to youth grades six through 12 in underserved communities at more than 50 schools throughout Chicago. They work directly with school districts as well as local universities and community organizations to deliver their engineering-focused programs during both the school day and during out-of-school time. Project SYNCERE's afterschool enrichment programs provide elementary and high school students a strong foundation in STEM learning that prepares them for enrollment in post-secondary STEM programs.

The program has helped to raise students' grades and increase their interest in the STEM fields. Project SYNCERE high school seniors have achieved a 100 percent graduation rate. In addition, 93 percent of

<sup>15</sup> STEM Education Coalition. (n.d.). *Opportunities to advance afterschool and informal STEM education through the Every Student Succeeds ACT*. Retrieved from <http://www.stemedcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Opportunities-Guide.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (n.d.). *Students achieve more with afterschool STEM*. Retrieved from <http://essa.afterschoolalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ESSA-Factsheet-STEM.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Afterschool STEM Hub. (n.d.). *Crafting a well-framed message about informal, afterschool and summer learning opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)*. Retrieved from <http://www.stemedcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Talking-Points-for-Advocates.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Afterschool Alliance, 2011, *STEM Learning in Afterschool*.

<sup>20</sup> STEM Education Coalition.

<sup>21</sup> Project Syncere. (n.d.). *Organizational history*. Retrieved from <http://www.projectsincere.org/inner.asp?ItemID=8>.

graduating seniors from their Emerging Engineers Program have entered college to major in a STEM related field.

## Career and College Readiness

Afterschool programs also provide a link to higher education and career readiness. Afterschool and summer learning programs have a proven track record of helping children avoid the pitfalls of poor academic achievement, poverty, truancy, and behavior issues, which can derail their futures before they begin.<sup>22</sup> Afterschool programs offer a key opportunity to expose students to higher education options and career paths and to teach them skills that can unlock doors to future career prospects. The afterschool hours offer time for apprenticeships, guest speakers, and project-based activities that are not always available during a school day focused on a core curriculum. Afterschool is an essential support to help students move ahead to success in higher education and careers. Afterschool programming in this area could also help to support ISBE's College and Career Ready Indicator as outlined in its ESSA Implementation plan. We recommend that districts consider using student opportunity grants from Title IV Part A to invest in out-of-school time career and college readiness strategies.

- *Exploratory opportunities.* Afterschool programs have the capacity to offer post-secondary enrichment experiences, such as college and career fairs, college visits, and job shadowing that are essential for a successful transition from high school to college and career. They can host, promote, and arrange guest speaker events, field trips, career related mentoring, and work experience opportunities to expand students' horizons in terms of the types of careers they consider.<sup>23</sup>
- *Resource alignment.* Afterschool programs can build the school's capacity by aligning their programs and supports to the school's college and career priorities.<sup>24</sup> School personnel can share materials, such as posters, brochures, and DVDs, that promote college and career readiness with program staff.<sup>25</sup>
- *Continuous quality improvement.* Afterschool programs can support schools in gathering data to assess the effectiveness of their college and career readiness efforts.<sup>26</sup>
- *Workforce skills.* Afterschool programs foster the academic, technical, employability, and civic skills that are necessary for success in the classroom and workforce.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2011). *Afterschool: Supporting career and college pathways for middle school age youth*. Retrieved from [http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue\\_briefs/issue\\_collegeCareer\\_46.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue_briefs/issue_collegeCareer_46.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> College and Career Readiness Center at American Institutes for Research. (2014). *The college and career readiness and success organizer*. Retrieved from [http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/College%20and%20Career%20Readiness%20and%20Success%20Organizer%20Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/College%20and%20Career%20Readiness%20and%20Success%20Organizer%20Brief_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Indiana Afterschool Network. (n.d.). *Indiana afterschool college and career readiness specialty standards*. Retrieved from [http://www.indianaafterschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL\\_IANStandards\\_CollegeReadiness\\_v6.pdf](http://www.indianaafterschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL_IANStandards_CollegeReadiness_v6.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Partnership for Children & Youth. (2016). *Finding common ground: Connecting social-emotional learning during and beyond the school day*. Retrieved from <http://partnerforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Finding-Common-Ground-Connecting-SEL-to-K12-and-ELT.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> College and Career Readiness Center at American Institutes for Research, 2014.

- *Early acquisition of college and career knowledge.* Afterschool programs help youth to explore their personal interests, skills, and goals at a young age, which allows youth to align their school coursework with their desired career trajectory when they get to high school.<sup>28</sup>
- *Tailoring supports to students' interests.* Afterschool programs have the flexibility to incorporate the student's unique college and career interests into their daily programming.<sup>29</sup>
- *Intensive interventions and wraparound services.* Afterschool programs have the capacity to assist schools with providing students with the individualized physical, mental, nutrition, and academic supports they need to be successful and reach their college and career goals.<sup>30</sup>

### YMCA Achievers<sup>31</sup>

The YMCA Achievers fosters the academic, personal, and career development of youth in urban communities. The program provides teens of color targeted programming that helps them set and pursue high educational and career goals. Participants partake in Saturday service learning sessions, biannual worksite visits, annual college tours, job shadow days, and leadership development programs. Achievers introduces youth to diverse college and career options and provides them with positive adult role models and opportunities to practice the lessons they have learned through their strong corporate and community partnerships.

In the YMCA of Metro Chicago's Achievers program, 100 percent of seniors completed high school, 98 percent continued with post-secondary education, 90 percent demonstrated increased school performance, and 85 percent reported that they determined their college major because of their participation.

### Literacy Instruction

Research indicates that more than six in 10 students are less than proficient in reading.<sup>32</sup> When considering race and ethnicity, income level, and English language learners, literacy rates are even lower. Quality afterschool programs have proven effective in raising students' reading skills. Title II Part B of ESSA provides grants to "develop or enhance comprehensive literacy instruction" to entities serving "children from low-income families." ESSA specifically states that these literacy initiatives can be "augmented by after-school and out-of-school time instruction." Districts should take advantage of this opportunity to improve the literacy of high-need populations by coordinating literacy initiatives between in-school and out-of-school time partners. The following are strategies districts could employ to leverage the support of afterschool programs to improve literacy outcomes.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. (n.d.). *Young achievers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ymcachicago.org/pages/achievers-program>.

<sup>32</sup> Afterschool Alliance. (2015). *Building literacy in afterschool*. Retrieved from [http://afterschoolalliance.org//documents/issue\\_briefs/issue\\_building\\_literacy\\_67.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org//documents/issue_briefs/issue_building_literacy_67.pdf).

- *Aligning afterschool literacy activities with the school day.* Afterschool programs can reinforce the school day curriculum by providing individualized coaching and offering opportunities for students to read aloud and discuss what they have read in small groups.<sup>33</sup> Schools can partner with afterschool educators to identify texts that correspond to students' grade, age, and skill levels appropriately.<sup>34</sup>
- *Fostering an interest in reading.* Afterschool programs have the flexibility to utilize student interests, such as dance, music, and the visual arts, to promote the development of literacy skills.<sup>35</sup>
- *Making literacy relevant.* Afterschool programs can engage youth by linking literacy activities to real world situations. For example, creating a peer-reviewed newspaper teaches students how to research, plan, and organize a story line.<sup>36</sup>

### **WITS Workplace Mentoring and WITS on Campus<sup>37</sup>**

Working in the Schools (WITS) develops Chicago Public School students' foundational reading skills and improves their attitudes toward reading. WITS Workplace Mentoring (WPM) is a one-on-one reading and mentoring program that exposes elementary school students to the career world. Once per week the program buses participants to a corporate office where for one hour they work with their mentor to complete activities, read, and work on homework. The WITS on Campus (WOC) is a similar program that exposes students to college campus life.

Of the participants in WITS WPM/WOC programs, 95 percent improved their Fountas and Pinnell reading level during the program year. In addition, 55 percent of WITS WPM/WOC students reported that their overall attitude toward reading improved.

### **Training and Evidenced-Based Practices**

School day teachers are the largest group of afterschool instructors in Illinois. In order to ensure that afterschool programs help bolster youth outcomes, the afterschool program must be high quality. ACT Now released Statewide Afterschool Quality Standards in Spring 2016, as noted in the state's draft ESSA plan. ACT Now developed these Standards in partnership with ISBE. The Standards are evidence-based practices that lead to positive youth outcomes. Using these Standards could promote overall school improvement and academic achievement. We recommend districts encourage teachers and administrators that are involved in afterschool programs take our free Standards trainings to ensure that the programs that their students attend are set up in the best way possible to improve education outcomes.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> SEDL. (n.d.). *Afterschool training toolkit*. Retrieved from [http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/about\\_toolkits.html?tab=literacy](http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/about_toolkits.html?tab=literacy).

<sup>35</sup> Afterschool Alliance, 2015, *Building literacy in afterschool*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Working in the Schools. (n.d.). *WITS 2015-2016 school year evaluation report*. Retrieved from <http://witschicago.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WITS-2015-2016-Full-Year-Report.pdf>.



In conclusion, the implementation of ESSA provides Illinois with the opportunity to create a comprehensive vision for student success. In implementing ESSA, we hope that districts work to coordinate services for young people so that they have everything they need for success, not only academic supports but also coordination with community partners that provide services to promote health, safety, and mentoring. This can be accomplished by greater partnerships between school and out-of-school time programs. Afterschool programming is critical to success for students, and we hope districts capitalize on the benefits offered by afterschool programming to the maximum extent possible in their implementation of ESSA.