

## Improve out-of-school learning opportunities

Student achievement gaps are more than academic. They are rooted in wealth gaps, safety gaps, and experience gaps that transcend schools. Gaps in out-of-school learning opportunities are another key determinant of student academic outcomes. Some children leave school for a quiet place to study, shelves full of books, a computer fully loaded with up-to-date software, and parents who are ready and able to review the day's learning and provide homework support. Other children live in homes that are chaotic and poorly equipped to support learning, or homes where no adult is able to help with homework.

During the summer, these differences in out-of-school experiences are exacerbated by the sheer amount of time students have to fill; some students attend high-quality summer camps, visit zoos, museums, and libraries, and take several family vacations, while other children spend the summer months largely alone, indoors, watching television. Children who rely on free or reduced-price lunches during the school year often find their access to well-balanced meals disappears during the summer. These differences in out-of-school experiences matter, particularly for low-income children who are least likely to have access to enriching out-of-school experiences.

### PSEA Recommendations

- Provide funding and programmatic support to align out-of-school opportunities with the academic school day.
- Ensure that all students have access to academically enriching out-of-school programs, including safe, reliable transportation.
- Provide adequate funding for individualized, data-based and curricular-aligned instructional support to students who are struggling in school.
- Staff out-of-school programs with certified teachers and trained youth development workers.
- Adopt standards that include evaluation of program performance on a variety of academic, social, and developmental measures.

## The case for out-of-school programming

Research is increasingly clear that persistent achievement gaps between students from high- and low-income families are substantially linked to unequal learning opportunities out of school, in students' homes and communities.<sup>1</sup> Evidence suggests that — far from creating achievement gaps — schools do a tremendous job of equalizing learning across high- and low-income students during the school year, but this is still not sufficient to offset the unequal learning opportunities during a child's out-of-school time.<sup>2</sup> One study found that about one-third of achievement test score differences between low- and high-income students could be traced to academic differences that existed prior to starting 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and the other two-thirds of test score differences could be traced to summer learning differences through elementary school.<sup>3</sup> Estimates are that students from low-income families lose more than two months of reading achievement during the summer, while middle-class students continue to make slight gains in reading during their months out of school.<sup>4</sup>

Research clearly shows that *out-of-school learning matters*, particularly for students from low-income families. Participation in high-quality before and after-school programs and summer programs is associated with several positive outcomes that can help counterbalance the impact of poverty on student achievement. Organized out-of-school programs for children and youth have achieved several positive outcomes:

- Higher levels of academic achievement, including higher achievement test scores, less school absences and tardiness, lower dropout rates, higher rates of grade promotion, higher rates of homework completion, and more engagement in learning;<sup>5</sup>
- Better social and developmental outcomes, including fewer behavioral problems, greater self-confidence, more initiative, better attitudes toward self and school, improved relationships with others, and enhanced social and communication skills;<sup>6</sup> and
- Fewer risky activities among youth, including avoidance of drugs and alcohol, reduction in juvenile crime, delinquency, and violent behavior, and avoidance of sexual activity.<sup>7</sup>

# The Power of a Great Education: PSEA's 20/20 Vision for the Future



High-quality out-of-school programs designed to help students achieve academically, socially, and developmentally share several characteristics.

- **Academically aligned with the school day.**<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that out-of-school programs are simply extended school. Out-of-school programs should provide academic tutoring and homework help that extends and supports individual student learning. But other out-of-school activities, including games and field trips, can and should also be scheduled into children's out of school time and used to support the academic curriculum. This coordination requires detailed and structured communication between the school and the out-of-school program provider.
- **Designed to maximize student participation and attendance.**<sup>9</sup> Many factors affect student participation and attendance in out-of-school programs, including "location, transportation, timing, length, program offerings, and frequency of services."<sup>10</sup> High-quality programs pay attention to access and convenience, and they also ensure that their services are attractive to youth and parents and provide services and features the local community wants.
- **Provide one-on-one tutoring to students who need specific academic support.**<sup>11</sup> One-on-one tutoring provides students with the individualized attention they need and also provides the time and focus students need to engage in continuous progress assessment and instructional planning.

# The Power of a Great Education: PSEA's 20/20 Vision for the Future

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- **Balance formal academic support with fun, hands-on educational experiences and physical activity.**<sup>12</sup> Out-of-school programs are voluntary, and students are often fatigued after a long school day or year. This means that programs must be particularly engaging to attract and retain students, and they need to recognize multiple student needs, such as exercise, nutrition, social learning, and engagement in hands-on activities.
- **Staffed by certified teachers and trained youth workers.** These programs need to be professionally staffed by individuals who are trained to meet the academic, social, and developmental needs of children and youth. This includes full certification for academic staff, and youth development training and credentials for other program workers. Hiring and retaining professional staff may require out-of-school programs to provide substantially higher salaries to professional employees.

(01/10)

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R. & L.S. Olson. (2007). "Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap," *American Sociological Review*, v 72, April: 167-180.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Downey, D.B., von Hippel, P.T., and B. Broh. 2004. Are Schools the Great Equalizer? School and Non-School Sources of Inequality in Cognitive Skills, *American Sociological Review*, 69(5), 613-625.

<sup>3</sup> Op cit. Alexander et al. *American Sociological Review*, v 72, April: 167-180.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, H., Nye, B. Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., and S. Greathouse. (1996). "The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review," *Review of Educational Research*. 73, 1-52. Cited in Afterschool Alliance. 2008. "Summer: A Season When Learning is Essential." *Afterschool Alert Issue Brief*, June.

<sup>5</sup> Harvard Family Research Project. (2008). "After School Programs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Their Potential and What it Takes to Achieve It," *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*, No. 10, February.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2009). "Structuring Out of School Time to Improve Student Achievement," *IES Practice Guide*. USDOE: Institute of Educational Science.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Op cit. U.S. Department of Education. USDOE: Institute of Educational Science.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.