



NEWS RELEASE

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NEW RESEARCH SAYS AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Boston – According to a new research report afterschool programs can make a big difference in how well children perform in school. The report comes at a time of intense national and state-level debate about afterschool programs—programs many educators and researchers consider to be one of the most promising education reform strategies to emerge over the past decade.

The report, ***Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success***, was commissioned by the Quincy-based Nellie Mae Education Foundation and conducted by Dr. Beth M. Miller, a noted expert affiliated with the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College. ***Critical Hours*** synthesizes the evaluation data currently available from existing studies of afterschool programs and offers a detailed series of conclusions based on that assessment.

Dr. Miller noted, "Much of the current policy debate in Washington and at the state level misses the mark. There is a consensus in the research community that high-quality afterschool programs – especially those that promote active learning and have consistent student participation – do increase student engagement. Increased engagement leads to positive, measurable academic outcomes."

Citing the ***Critical Hours*** report, Dr. Blenda Wilson, President and CEO of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, called afterschool programming the next frontier of education reform, and called on government leaders to maintain their support for this critical programming.

"Our data tell us that children in afterschool programs have made real progress in improving their learning and academics," said Wilson. "At a time of scarce resources we must continue to invest in those programs that we know are making a difference for our children. Clearly afterschool programming is near the top of that list."

Hailing the new research, hundreds rallied in Boston today to highlight the importance of afterschool programs on the academic achievement and overall development of children. Speaking before a large crowd of community leaders, public officials, parents, funders, and program providers, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino called on the state and federal governments to maintain their commitment to afterschool programs or risk short-changing the region's children.

"All the data tell us that afterschool programs are critically important to success in school," said Menino. "But the state and federal governments are poised to walk away from our kids, just at the time when we are beginning to understand how important these programs are."

Chris Gabrieli, Chair of Boston's After-School for All Partnership, echoed the call for increased public commitment to after-school, and praised the Nellie Mae Education Foundation for funding this vital research. "For too long, afterschool has fallen into the category of a frill, a nice-to-have," he said. "What this data tells us is that afterschool programming is absolutely critical if we are serious about standards and if we want our kids to get the skills they need to succeed. Nellie Mae deserves tremendous credit for this important contribution."

A second report released on the same day, ***Strategies for Success: Strengthening Learning in Out-of-School Time***, is the result of a year-long research project by Boston's After-School for All Partnership, a \$24 million funding partnership launched in 2001. This report also highlights the important contribution that afterschool programming can have on children's academic achievement. Boston's After-School for All Partnership also announced a new *After-School Literacy Coaching Initiative* that will provide nearly \$1 million to offer coaching and support to afterschool program staff by experts on child literacy. The initiative will train over 200 staff in 40 programs across the city with the goal of improving literacy for some 1,600 students in afterschool programs.

Another speaker, Boston School Superintendent Tom Payzant spoke of the importance of extra learning time to children's academic success. "We know from this research and from experience that students need support beyond the school day to ensure their success," he said.

Critical Hours Conclusions and Examples of Research Referenced in *Critical Hours*

Students who lack adult supervision after school are at greater risk.

- For example, researchers from the University of Southern Illinois and University of Chicago found that middle school students who spend three or more hours home alone during out-of-school time are significantly more likely to use drugs and alcohol, have high levels of stress and anger, experience more depression and behavior problems, possess lower self-esteem, and perform less well academically.
- A study by Camp found that extracurricular activities are more strongly linked to academic outcomes than study habits, family background or academic ability.
- In one study of 500 6th-12th graders, Cooper found that time spent in structured groups, doing homework and extracurricular activities was positively associated with higher grades and test scores, even after controlling for the effects of student background characteristics like ethnicity, income, gender, and grade level.

Students who attend after-school programs are more engaged in learning.

- In a study by Cornell University, compared to a group of over 250,000 students in grades 5-12, participants in New York's 4-H program showed stronger motivation to achieve, higher educational aspirations, greater capacity to develop friendships, and a higher level of interaction and communication with adults.
- Middle school students in Texas afterschool programs reported statistically significant increases in their connections to caring adults, the belief that being able to work with others is important, and their ability to work out conflicts.
- A study of low-income students in 3rd through 5th grade by Vandell and her colleagues found that over the course of just one year, participants improved their classroom work habits and school attendance, and had fewer problem behaviors than children in a comparison group.

Increased engagement in learning can result in higher academic performance.

- Eighty-three percent of the 18,000 students in the LA's BEST program indicated they liked school more as a result of program participation. After the second year of the program, students' grade point averages in math, science, social studies, reading, and writing increased from between 24% and 32%.
- An evaluation of the San Francisco Beacons Centers, which serve middle school students, found that participants with high attendance in the programs showed significant improvement in math and reading scores on standardized tests.

Afterschool programs have a special role to play in reducing racial and income achievement gaps.

- A national survey of 10th graders found that students from high-income families were twice as likely to spend 5 or more hours per week in extracurricular activities as students in lower income families.
- Students who spent time in extracurricular activities were 6 times less likely to drop out of school by senior year; 2 times less likely to be arrested by senior year; and about 75% less likely to smoke cigarettes or use drugs.

About the Nellie Mae Education Foundation

Based in Quincy, Massachusetts, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is the largest philanthropy in New England that focuses exclusively on promoting access, quality and effectiveness of education. Established in 1998, the Foundation provides grants and other support to education programs in New England that are designed to improve low-income and underserved students' academic achievement and access to higher education.

The Foundation also funds research that examines critical educational opportunity issues affecting underserved students, adults and families. It convenes educators, policymakers and community members to discuss and influence pivotal education issues. Since 1998, the Foundation has awarded nearly \$34 million in grants and support to education programs in the region. To download a copy of the ***Critical Hours*** Executive Summary or the full report, visit www.nmefdn.org or contact Sharon Davis at (781) 348-4257. For information on ***Strategies for Success***, visit www.afterschoolforall.org or contact Debra McLaughlin at (617) 624-8135. [END]