

# Afterschool and Summer COVID-19 Response: Helping to Meet VT's Students' Learning Needs



The afterschool and out-of-school time field is an essential part of our communities' response to the coronavirus pandemic, and programs will continue to play a critical role throughout recovery. Today, afterschool programs are innovating to keep kids safe and engaged in learning, help essential personnel continue to do their jobs, provide food for families in need, and stay connected with caregivers and parents.

As we look ahead to next school year, afterschool leaders and educators stand ready to help children and youth catch up and keep up, which includes ensuring all kids have access to learning opportunities and the supports they need to emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, and hopeful.

## Boosting Protective Factors

By their very nature, afterschool and summer learning programs offer safe spaces for youth to build protective factors by providing opportunities for young people to connect, learn new things, express themselves, access healthy food, and build relationships with caring adults.

- Afterschool provides a safe place where professional educators and youth workers connect with kids, engage them in hands-on learning, help them navigate challenges, and talk about how to make good decisions.
- Staff are trained to focus on the whole child and offer enriching activities that encourage young people to try new things, build confidence, and develop social skills.
- During this time of crisis, programs continue to partner with school districts by providing virtual programming, distributing learning activities with school lunches and summer meals, and offering virtual check-ins and support for working families.

## Supporting Learning

Afterschool programs are proven to help students get excited about learning and improve their work habits and grades. These programs inspire youth of all ages to love learning by engaging them in creative, hands-on projects that teach foundational skills, like communication, teamwork, and problem solving.

Students who regularly participate in afterschool:

- Make gains in reading and math
- Improve their test scores
- Have higher graduation rates

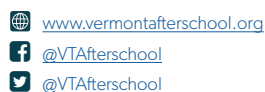
New research published in 2020 also shows that early childhood care and subsequent out-of-school time (activities—which included extracurriculars, such as art, sports, or music, and afterschool programs—are formative experiences with lasting impacts on adolescent development. The effects of high quality early childcare and organized afterschool activities were cumulative, with both contributing to adolescents' reading and math achievement in high school.

## Innovating to Continue Serving Vermont's Families During COVID-19

- Providing safe places for the children and youth of essential workers and first responders after schools closed.
- Providing connections to critical support systems for the families they serve.
- Continuing to partner with schools to provide virtual programming and offer virtual social and emotional support for families.
- Providing healthy snacks and meals to children and youth.
- Providing in-person, virtual, and hybrid summer camps and enrichment opportunities for youth across Vermont.

### Vermont Afterschool, Inc.

We are a statewide nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that the children and youth in every Vermont community are able to benefit from the power of afterschool, summer learning, and third space programs during the out-of-school time hours.



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## Partnering with Afterschool to Address Students' Needs



**More time for engaged learning.** Even before the COVID-19 emergency exacerbated lost learning time, students spent only 20% of their waking hours over the course of a year in school. As schools develop strategies to help students make up for lost time, including virtually and as schools re-open, working with partners like afterschool and summer educators who help support learning during the other 80% of students' time will be critical. Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Engage students with additional learning time in a way that feels valuable and rewarding, different but complementary to the school day
- ✓ Provide new ways to explore material and ideas
- ✓ Reduce the 6,000 hour learning gap between high-income and low-income families



**How students feel and heal.** Focusing on students' well-being is critical to helping them learn. Current research from the [National Academy of Sciences](#), the National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development demonstrates that learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits. Positive, supportive relationships and rich, stimulating environments spur the brain to form and strengthen connections that promote further development and learning. Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Support social and emotional development
- ✓ Offer experience and observational tools that foster positive youth development
- ✓ Provide opportunities for athletics, arts, passions and joys that keep students motivated
- ✓ Create opportunities for students to express their voice and lead in their communities
- ✓ Foster connections between young people and caring adults
- ✓ Provide healthy snacks and/or dinner



### **Sustaining connections to families and communities.**

During the initial response to COVID-19, many families connected with their afterschool programs to get information about available resources. These programs can build bridges that help establish effective pathways of communication. For example, as schools switched to virtual learning, afterschool programs reached out to families to check in and see how they could help as well as stepped up to set up essential care programs in partnership with school districts. Afterschool, out-of-school time, and community-based youth programs can help to:

- ✓ Establish and strengthen bridges with families and communities
- ✓ Represent the demographics of the groups they serve
- ✓ Leverage resources (each program has an average of six partners)
- ✓ Connect students and families to food, health, economic and other types of support



### **Address inequities that are likely worsening.**

The digital divide, the ability of parents to help students with homework, and the economic strain on families with low income make learning even harder for those traditionally underserved. According to UCLA education professor Pedro Noguera, "This virus is exacerbating the inequalities we knew were there before. The kids who have the least are getting the least now. If the state is serious about equity, it will try to do some things to address that." Noguera noted that ideally, kids would have access to afterschool programs that provide art, robotics or other enrichment activities to balance out ramped-up instruction. Afterschool programs can help:

- ✓ Reach and serve a significant number of young people from low-income families and racially diverse backgrounds
- ✓ Provide the space for students from all backgrounds to gain confidence through hands-on, real world learning experiences
- ✓ Promote opportunity and equity in employment fields where minorities and women are traditionally under-represented, such as women in STEM

