Afterschool and summer learning programs can help close the achievement gap

The academic achievement gap between students from lower- and higher-income families has grown by 40 percent in 30 years. Children from lower-income families spend less time in afterschool and summer learning programs and have less access to enriching opportunities such as tutors, mentors, homework help, academic guidance, and artistic, social and cultural programs. These disparities contribute to the achievement gap.

Quality afterschool programs are safe, fun, academic, enriching spaces that take a whole-child approach to development during the time before school starts, after school between 3 to 6 p.m. when risky behaviors spike, and over the summer when academic progress can slip. Students who regularly participate in quality afterschool programs:

- Improve their self-perception and esteem.
- Have opportunities for physical activity, healthy snacks and nutrition.
- Take fewer negative risks and make better decisions.
- Are excited about and more engaged in learning.
- Behave better in the classroom.
- Can connect with adults and mentors to broaden their base of support.
- Are more likely to advance to the next grade and graduate high school.
Title I funds aim to improve students’ academic outcomes and support their well-rounded development. Research finds that afterschool programs are an effective part of the solution and shows regular attendance in quality programs can help eliminate the achievement gap.

- Students at greatest risk show greatest gains with afterschool.
  - Regular participation in afterschool programs has been shown to narrow the achievement gap between 5th graders from low- and high-income families.  
  - Among low-income students, the higher the levels of participation in afterschool, the smaller the math achievement gap is between them and their high-income peers.
- Summer learning programs help prevent students from falling behind academically.
  - Low-income students lose more than two months of educational progress over the summer months, while middle-income students make slight gains. This loss makes up about 67% of the achievement gap in reading among 9th graders.
  - Elementary school students from five low-income, urban school districts across the country who participated in a summer learning program performed better on math tests in the fall than their non-participating peers. Researchers equated participants’ gains to a 17% to 21% average increase in math learning.

Many families lack access to affordable afterschool and summer learning programs.

- The demand for afterschool programs is higher among low-income families and among Hispanic and African-American families. These parents also report significant barriers that keep their kids from participating, including a lack of available programs, program location, and lacking safe travel to and from the program.
  - 4.5 million kids from lower-income families attend afterschool programs
  - 9.7 million kids from lower-income families would take part if programs were available
  - $114 per week: average cost for families who pay for their child’s afterschool program
  - $288 per week: average cost for families who pay for their child’s summer learning program

Additional research about the benefits of afterschool is available at: afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm

2. www.afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm
8. www.afterschoolalliance.org/aa3pm