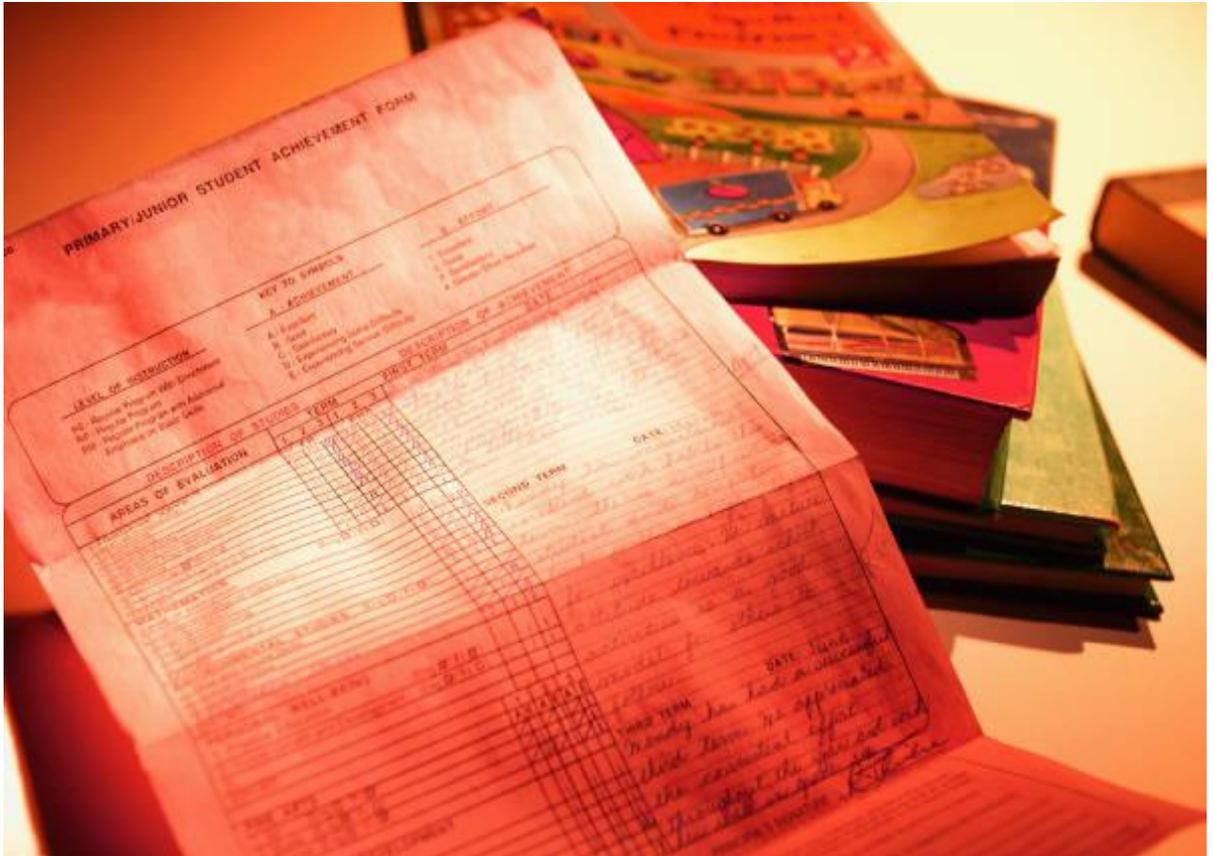


EARLY WARNING INDICATORS: AN AFTERSCHOOL GUIDE



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United Way
of Greater Philadelphia
and Southern New Jersey

NIOST National Institute on
Out-of-School Time
at the Wellesley Centers for Women

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WHAT ARE THE EARLY WARNING INDICATORS?

While overall trends in school drop-out have been steadily declining over the past 45 years, initiatives on the local, state, and federal level to increase the percentage of youth who graduate from high school in four years have created renewed interest in ways to identify and respond to the needs of students at risk of falling off the path to high school graduation.

Research by Bob Balfanz of Johns Hopkins University and Liza Herzog of the Philadelphia Education Fund has found that the majority of eventual drop outs can be identified at key transition points (between sixth grade and ninth grade) using three early warning indicators:

- **LOW ATTENDANCE (LESS THAN 80%),**
- **BEHAVIORAL INCIDENTS (ONE OR MORE), AND**
- **COURSE FAILURE IN MATH OR ENGLISH.**

Balfanz and Herzog's research showed that a sixth grade student who carried one or more Early Warning Indicators (EWIs) had just a 10-20% chance of graduating on time. Chronic absentees were 68% less likely to graduate, those with unsatisfactory behavior markings were 56% less likely to graduate, those who failed math were 54% less likely to graduate, and those who failed English were 42% less likely to graduate.

In response, Balfanz and Herzog have developed an Early Warning Response System framework for schools that combines both prevention and intervention strategies to get students back on track to graduation.

Early Warning Response Systems have:

- **Data systems to identify and track students with Early Warning Indicators**
- **Team-based case management to plan interventions and follow up on implemented interventions, and**
- **Tiered intervention plans:**
 - Tier 1 – comprehensive, whole-school practices designed to keep all students on track**
 - Tier 2 – targeted interventions for the 15%-40% of students who require additional focused support**
 - Tier 3 – intensive interventions reserved for the 5%-15% of students in need of small group or one-on-one supports**

Programs serving youth in out-of-school time are in a unique position to partner with schools and districts to help off-track students get back on track to graduation. Afterschool programs promote engagement in learning by offering academic enrichment or project-based learning activities that help youth develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, creativity and innovation. Afterschool programs also offer supportive and safe environments for youth, fostering positive relationships with adults and peers and helping youth learn to regulate and manage their emotions, be personally accountable, and develop resourcefulness and resilience. The nature of afterschool – with smaller group sizes, more individualized attention, sensitivity to a variety of learning styles, thematic curriculum and project-based learning activities – can support those youth who are not thriving in a typical academic setting. Afterschool programs can also incorporate math, ELA and other state standards into their curriculum, planning activities that support these learning goals.

HOW CAN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS IDENTIFY A YOUTH WITH EARLY WARNING INDICATORS?

One of the advantages of EWIs is that they can be tracked with data that are readily accessible – all of the early warning indicators (attendance, behavior, course grades) can be found on most report cards.

Another approach to identifying youth with EWIs is to directly contact the schools that the youth in your program are attending to ask for attendance, behavior, and course grades – or to ask them to identify any youth that they have particular EWI concerns about. **Before communicating with the school, you should ask parents/guardians to sign release forms – a youth’s information can only be shared if you have already received the family’s permission to do so.**

In order to identify youth that may have one or more EWI, programs may wish to ask youth to:

- 1) provide a copy of their most recent report card at enrollment, and**
- 2) to share a copy of their report cards at subsequent marking periods.**

HOW CAN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUTH WITH EARLY WARNING INDICATORS?

Schools and afterschool programs have a lot in common: both want youth to be ready for life success, both support youth’s learning, both want to promote positive growth and development, and both want to decrease risky behaviors. While schools have information that an afterschool program needs to support youth with EWIs – behavior plans, IEPs, information about academic needs, academic curriculum, and social emotional curriculum – afterschool programs are also a valuable resource to schools in terms of the information they can provide. Afterschool programs can provide insight about children in informal settings where there are smaller ratios, a more relaxed schedule, other curriculum choices like the arts or civic engagement, and opportunities to promote cultural identity development. In addition, afterschool programs can provide information on how youth are doing in terms of their non-academic development.

Making connections between schools and afterschool programs helps to serve youth with EWIs by promoting partnerships between school and afterschool staff and supporting curricular alignment. Your afterschool program may already have established relationships with the schools your youth attend. If not, you can foster this relationship by focusing on specific strategies to increase communication and coordination.

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time's "Connecting School and Afterschool: 15 Ways to Improve Partnerships," (<http://supportunitedway.org/files/SchoolTipCards.pdf>) is an excellent resource that outlines specific step-by-step actions for making connections with school principals, formalizing partnership agreements, communicating information, developing learning support activities, and maintaining the partnership.

Connecting School and Afterschool provides the following suggestions for cultivating an effective partnership:

- *Set realistic goals for the partnership, taking one step at a time and adjusting your goals as needed.*
- *Have clear expectations of the amount of time and other resources your program staff and the school staff each have to devote to communicating with one another.*
- *Have a clearly defined vision and mission that communicates your program's value to the school and its staff.*
- *Take the time to meet regularly with school day staff and administration – both in person and virtually (by email, by phone, etc.)*
- *Formalize your communication by keeping written records of meetings, conversations, and partnership agreements.*
- *Maintain professionalism in all interactions with school staff and defer to them when necessary.*
- *Follow through on all commitments your program has made to the school.*

Schools that adopt Early Warning Response Systems establish EWI Teams – administrators, teachers, counselors, and other school staff – who meet formally on a regular basis to discuss and plan interventions for individual students showing EWIs. The EWI Teams develop a resource map for each student which lists all of the supports that are available internally to the school, as well as external afterschool supports that may enhance the targeted intervention. **These EWI Team meetings can be an opportunity for a representative from your program to participate in the discussion and share information and strategies for working with individual youth with EWIs.** You may want to establish a relationship with the facilitator of the EWI Team so that you can be included in these meetings.

Another good way to connect with schools in order to support youth with EWIs is through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. IEP meetings are attended by members of the youth's IEP Team, which typically includes the youth's family or guardians, social workers, school psychologists, learning specialists, therapists, and the youth's classroom teachers. At these meetings, the Team discusses the youth's current academic and social progress in school, and develops a plan for the following year's program including the special supports that the youth will be receiving. Your program may be able to provide additional supports that complement the programming that staff are providing during the school day. *In order to attend an IEP meeting, you must ask the family for their permission.*

As you develop your connection with the school, it is important to put systems in place that will insure that the progress is sustained over time. You can do this informally by sharing your program newsletter with school staff, attending each other's events, coordinating schedules, or coordinating family support and engagement efforts, or you may want to formalize the relationship by signing a Memorandum of Understanding that outlines the terms of the partnership (i.e. shared space, shared staff, shared funding or other resources, etc.)

You may find that the school principals or staff are open to cultivating a relationship with your program. In some cases, however, limitations of time and other resources or differences in philosophy about learning or approach may make it difficult to foster a true partnership. Even if you are not be able to establish a sustained working relationship with the schools your youth attend, be willing to provide schools with whatever information or support you can, and do not be discouraged to ask honestly for what you need in order to support youth. ***Be patient – it takes time to build trust and relationships.***



HOW CAN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS LINK ACTIVITIES TO LEARNING STANDARDS IN ORDER TO PROMOTE YOUTH'S LEARNING?

This section provides two approaches to linking activities to learning standards in order to promote youth's learning. The first, **Links to Learning**, proposes that you look critically at the activities and programming you are currently offering youth and think of ways to enhance those activities with learning goals derived from your state's learning standards. The second, **A "Backwards" Approach to Designing Activities**, has you think first of the learning goals you want to promote and then work backwards from those goals towards developing activities that support them. Both frameworks have the same ultimate aim – to link activities to learning standards in order to promote youth's learning and development – but they differ in conceptual style. Choose the approach that works best for you and your program.

Links to Learning

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time's *Links to Learning: A Curriculum Planning Guide for After-School Programs* and its associated training provides tools and strategies for creating afterschool programs that effectively connect children's multiple worlds – home, school, afterschool, peers, and community – building on the latest research on topics such as resiliency, homework support, and youth engagement.

The goal of *Links to Learning* is to share strategies for increasing afterschool learning supports for children and youth through: increasing youth motivation, communication and coordination with schools, family involvement, community partnerships, homework centers, and tools for learning. A brief overview of this material is included in the following section.

For more information about *Links to Learning*, contact NIOST at niost@wellesley.edu, or look online at <http://www.niost.org>.

When planning curriculum or selecting activities, it is critical to link the activities to learning benchmarks or standards. "Learning benchmarks" are guidelines created by educators or other experts to provide guidance to teachers and other educators on what youth should be expected to know and learn at different ages or stages of development. Many standards also take into account the different approaches to learning, such as: initiative and curiosity; engagement and persistence; reasoning and problem solving; flexibility, risk-taking and responsibility; and imagination, creativity, and invention.

Traditionally, State Departments of Education define the benchmarks or standards that teachers use to choose the school day activities. More recently, there has been a nationwide push for all states to adopt the Common Core Standards in an effort to make student learning expectations consistent and clear. Program staff can obtain a copy of these standards to examine how well their activities align and to create closer links between school and afterschool.

Linking to learning standards has a number of benefits, including:

- *Enhancing youth’s learning and development by providing a complementary experience to their school day;*
- *Clarifying the purpose of the activity and supporting deliberate, intentional planning and delivery of activities;*
- *Improving the overall quality of your program;*
- *Underscoring the value of afterschool and out-of-school time to funders, schools, and other partners;*
- *Providing a common language and linkage between school day and afterschool which can facilitate partnerships; and*
- *Clarifying expectations for youth outcomes.*

Almost every activity in an after-school program has a natural link to one or more academic subject area. The best way to establish a link between an activity and a learning benchmark is to:

1) **Obtain a copy of the standards** your state has established for the primary core curriculum areas

The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Common Core standards are available at: <http://www.pdesas.org/standard/standardsdownloads>.

• Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening	• Economics	• Family and Consumer Sciences
• Mathematics	• Geography	• Career Education and Work
• Science, Technology, and Engineering Education	• History	• World Languages
• Environment and Ecology	• Arts and Humanities	• Business, Computer and Information Technology
• Civics and Government	• Health, Safety and Physical Education	• Student Interpersonal Skills

2) **Think about the programming you already offer** – how well does it align with learning standards? How can it be enhanced to promote learning standards?

3) **Engage your staff in this process of change.** Work together to find creative solutions for linking activities to learning. Remember that the change will only be possible through the efforts of a fully supportive team.

4) **Plan for the activity** and think about the potential learning opportunities and the academic content areas it may relate to.

- 5) Look through the standards associated with the appropriate content areas for the age level of the children who will do the activity to **find the standards that relate most closely to the activity**. Even if you can't match an activity to a listed learning standard, check it against your program's mission and goals – it may still be a valuable experience for youth.
- 6) **After doing the activity with youth, revisit the learning standards** you associated with it. Did the activity meet those learning goals? Were there other learning opportunities that you didn't anticipate? Having actually completed the activity with youth will give you a much better sense of what was learned and the curriculum area(s) with which the activity was most closely associated.

To support youth with EWIs, you may want to plan activities and curriculum that enhance the skills and content currently taught in school. You can ask youth's school-day teachers to share current school themes, topics, and lessons with you. You may also want to ask them to review your activity plan to offer suggestions on how to make connections with school-day content.

In addition to linking to learning standards, programs should always be examining the activities they offer through the *lens of quality* – does this activity meet the highest quality standards? The following list identifies the characteristics of afterschool programs that have been determined to be necessary to support both youth's academic success and their overall development.

Key Elements of Effective Afterschool Programs:

- ✓ **Safe, stable places**
- ✓ **Basic care and services**
- ✓ **Caring relationships**
- ✓ **Relevant, challenging experiences**
- ✓ **Networks and connections**
- ✓ **High expectations and standards**
- ✓ **Opportunities for voice, choice and contribution**
- ✓ **Personalized, high-quality instruction**

Once you have thought about ways to link typical afterschool activities to learning standards, the next step is to move towards identifying the learning outcomes you want to achieve. Activities that support youth's learning and development should be challenging, should stimulate thinking, and should spark and sustain youth's interest and curiosity through the activity. For older youth, it is also important to offer choice, shared decision-making, and opportunities to share control and responsibility.

A “Backwards” Approach to Designing Activities

Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins’ *Understanding by Design* (1998) proposes a “backwards” approach to designing learning activities – first considering your learning goals or targeted outcomes for youth, and then working backwards from there to develop and design activities that support those goals. Their book divides this process into three parts: 1) identifying the knowledge and skills you want your youth to learn, 2) determining how you will know if youth have gained knowledge and skills, and 3) designing experiences that support and promote youth’s learning.

PART 1 – IDENTIFY THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS YOU WANT YOUR YOUTH TO LEARN

Different out-of-school programs have different priorities, from academic enrichment and civic engagement to employability and life skills. Consider your program’s priorities: What ideas are important for youth in your program to understand? What skills do you want them to obtain?

PART 2: HOW WILL YOU KNOW IF YOUTH HAVE GAINED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Once you have identified the knowledge and skills you want youth to learn from your activity, the next step is to determine what evidence you will have that youth have met these goals.

Performance Tasks

One way to determine whether youth have gained knowledge or skills is to develop activities (or “performance tasks”) that provide youth with a tangible way of demonstrating their newly developed knowledge or skills. These tasks may include projects, experiments, presentations, performances, etc. Real-world challenges are typically more meaningful and engaging than projects that do not reflect the real-life experiences of youth.

Reflection

Another way to assess the impact of your activities on youth’s learning and development is to engage in reflective discussion – *during the activity* as well as *at the end of the activity* – which asks youth both to assess the activity itself as well as to self-assess their own learning. These dialogues should include open-ended questioning in order to probe and expand youth’s thinking, gain their feedback, and plan for next steps.

Portfolios

A more formalized way to measure individual youth’s progress over time is through the curation of portfolios. Portfolios typically include samples of the youth’s work, staff observations and notes, behavioral information, notes or records from school-day staff, and notes from the family. Youth should be involved in the process of selecting and organizing their work to include in the portfolio, giving them an opportunity to self-assess their progress, describe their achievements, communicate what they have learned, and set their own learning goals.

PART 3: DESIGN EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT AND PROMOTE YOUTH'S LEARNING

McTighe and Wiggins define the act of understanding as being able to “teach it, use it, prove it, connect it, explain it, defend it, [and] read between the lines” (82). Their *Six Facets of Understanding* describe the different ways people express or demonstrate understanding:

Explaining - being able to understand how things work, why things happen, how they connect, and why an answer or approach is the right one.

Interpreting – being able to pull together facts and points of view to tell a meaningful story.

Applying – being able to use and adapt what you know in a variety of contexts.

Considering Others' Beliefs – being able to see and hear points of view through critical eyes and ears; seeing the big picture.

Empathizing - being able to see the world from different viewpoints and find value in what others might discount.

Considering Personal Beliefs – being aware of one's own personal style, prejudices, judgments, and habits that shape – and inhibit – one's understanding.

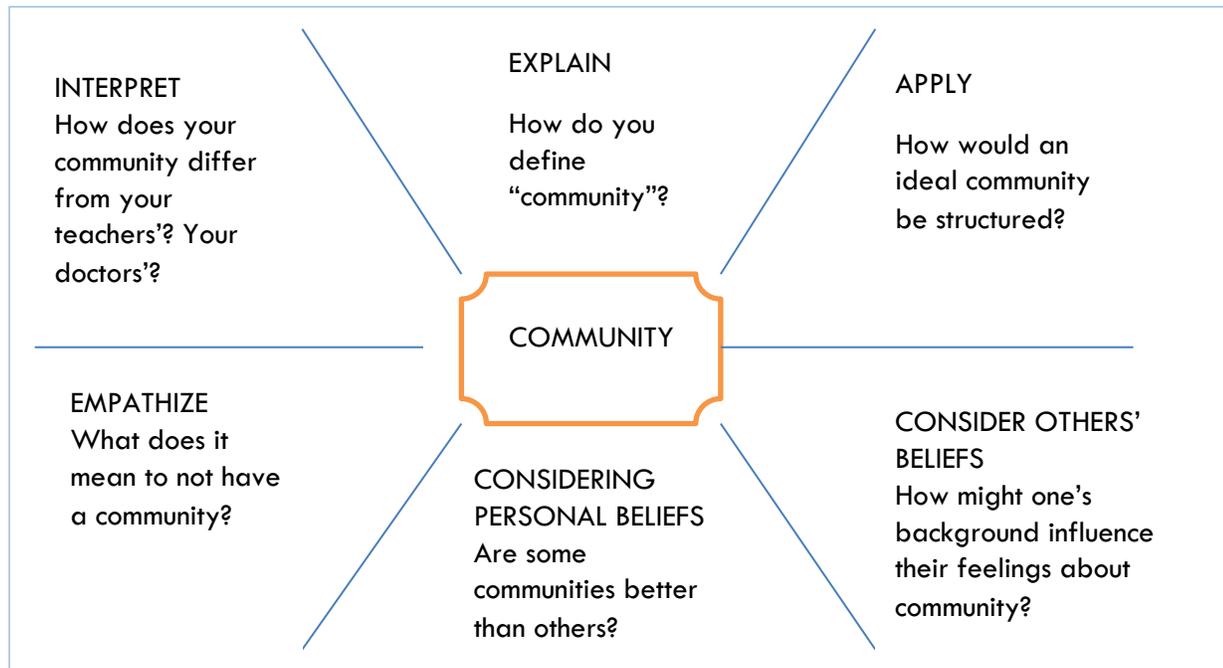
When you are designing activities to support youth's learning and development, try to focus on giving youth the opportunity to grow in one of these understanding areas. The following table provides verb prompts to help you think of the types of projects or experiences that promote these understanding areas:

Explaining	Interpreting	Applying	Considering Others' Beliefs	Empathizing	Considering Personal Beliefs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate • Derive • Describe • Design • Exhibit • Express • Instruct • Model • Predict • Prove • Teach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critique • Document • Evaluate • Illustrate • Judge • Make sense of • Provide • Read between the lines • Represent • Tell a story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt • Build • Create • Fix • Invent • Perform • Produce • Solve • Test • Use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze • Judge • Argue • Compare • Contrast • Criticize • Infer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume the role of • Be like • Be open to • Believe • Consider • Imagine • Relate • Role-play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of • Realize • Recognize • Reflect • Self-assess

EXAMPLE:

Program goal: Youth have better understanding of **community**.

Applying the six facets of understanding to your program's goal:





It is important to remember that in order to support youth's learning and development, activities should be challenging, should stimulate thinking, and should spark and sustain youth's interest and curiosity. For older youth, think about ways you can offer choice, shared decision-making, and opportunities to share control and responsibility. Make your program's goals for understanding explicit – post your goals and explain to youth how you will be keeping track of their progress towards these goals. Hook your youth – use engaging openers (i.e. questions, problems, challenges, and stories) that point youth towards the bigger idea. Plan how to make the activity resonate with youth in a tangible way – make it real. And finally, make time for reflection in order to help youth refine their understanding and skill.

RESOURCES

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