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The link between afterschool & college and career readiness

College Changes Everything / ISAC Conference

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(Transition from video)

I wanted to kick off with this video to show what strong programs can look like, to demonstrate what these programs can help students achieve, and to show how many ways afterschool programs' goals overlap with the goals of everyone who cares about CCR.

Project Exploration is a great example of a program comprehensively integrating academics, behavioral assets, and college and career exploration. And they reach high need kids.

Project Exploration is a nonprofit organization that provides free access to free afterschool and summer science programs that spark an interest in science, motivate youth to pursue STEM careers, and start them on a path to being qualified for science careers. There is hands-on programming, fieldwork, leadership development, and long-term relationships with educators through ongoing mentorships. Programs include a 3-week summer fieldwork immersion program where participants take classes on anatomy, geology, and paleontology and end with a week-long field expedition.

These programs help young people think about their futures, learn some of the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education and the workplace, and draw connections between classroom learning and the real world through structured learning experiences.

Now I want to take a big step back for a minute. Because Project Exploration is just ONE example of what an afterschool program can look like. I think it's worth asking: What do we mean when we use the phrase "afterschool program?"

Well, part of the strength of afterschool programs is that they are flexible and diverse. They're built to be responsive to local communities' and students' needs. But that doesn't mean there's a lack of evaluation and accountability. The strongest programs are intentional and comprehensive. They're built to support not only academic growth but a broad spectrum of youth development. Whether they're held at a school or at a community center, they're

structured and they leverage community partnerships. They have staff that are constantly learning best practices. They're far more than drop-in centers where youth pass the time. And in fact, the term afterschool is even a bit of a misnomer because we mean it to encompass programs that serve students before school, on weekends, and over the summer. Out of school time is actually more accurate, but it's a bit of a mouthful.

Given that context, I want to talk about the link between CCR and afterschool.

The group of stakeholders that cares about CCR is large and diverse. Afterschool providers definitely consider themselves part of that club. Not only do they care about helping youth prepare for college and careers, but they are playing an important role in **making** it happen! Collectively, we share many common goals, and the efforts of afterschool programs align with educators and counselors at every level, as well as employers and the business community.

I think everyone in this room cares about promoting academic mastery, closing the achievement gap, and boosting high school and college graduation rates. I think we all want to ensure that students have marketable skills leading to meaningful careers. And I don't need to tell you what you already know: Namely, that getting there requires NOT ONLY solid academic and critical thinking skills – which are essential – but also the behavioral and personal skills and a whole set of supports that ultimately allow students to persist in college and careers.

Today, our panel is going to share how afterschool programs can be vital partners in making all of that a reality. I'm hoping we can have a discussion about how our work aligns, and explore the opportunities for greater collaboration that will ultimately benefit youth and make all of our work more effective (and possibly easier!)

Defining the link: How afterschool supports CCR

I want to start off by offering an overview of exactly HOW afterschool programs promote college and career readiness. I'm breaking it down into 4 overarching categories: academic performance, college exploration and persistence, behavioral assets, and workforce readiness.

ACADEMICS

Let's start off with academics. High-quality programs have been proven to improve grades and mastery of core subjects like reading and math. They can raise standardized test scores. They can boost attendance and graduation rates while lowering dropout rates.

The strongest programs do this in close partnership with their local schools. They collaborate with teachers, principals and superintendents to ensure their academic support is aligned with students' classroom lessons. They check in with parents and teachers, acting as part of a

unified team to support academic growth. They are complementing and supporting what takes place inside the classroom.

But part of afterschool programs' unique benefits come from their hands-on, engaging approach. While many programs offer traditional tutoring from qualified youth development professionals – and sometimes teachers themselves – they also give students a chance to learn core skills through project-based experiences out in the community. This can be difficult for schools to offer, given the extensive demands placed on them. Novel approaches can inspire all types students, especially hard-to-reach and at-risk students who struggle in traditional classroom settings. In fact, research demonstrates that students at greatest risk of dropping out often realize the greatest benefits from afterschool participation. In this way, afterschool programs not only offer ALL students pathways to greater academic achievement, but are part of the equation when it comes to closing the achievement gap.

- A study of afterschool programs found that quality afterschool programs lead to the following:
 - a **31%** positive impact in school achievement,
 - a **24%** positive impact on grades, and
 - a **31%** increase in school attendance.
- Performance data from 21st CCLC grantees nationwide found that **43%** of students increased their reading scores and **42%** increased math performance.
- Students in Washington, DC, and LA improved their standardized test scores, and combined studies reinforce that gains in programs using quality materials are statistically significant.
- At Chicago's AfterSchool Matters, students have higher class attendance, lower course failures and higher graduation rates than similar students who do not participate in the program.

Going back to Project Exploration, which serves high-need youth, 95% of participants and alumni have graduated high school or are on track to graduate, nearly double the overall rate of Chicago Public Schools. A 10-year review demonstrated that had higher high school graduation rates, higher 4-year college enrollment and completion rates

- At Erie Neighborhood House, which serves high need youth, 100% of their seniors graduated from high school. **SEE SLIDE**

I'm sharing these facts to reiterate that OST programs are an important component of helping students meet basic academic requirements for college. I want to briefly highlight the STEM subjects, which are such an area of concern for educators and employers.

- **STEM**

It turns out that one of the areas that afterschool can really help students gain ground is in the STEM arena. Science *in school* is necessary, but not sufficient for engaging and supporting students' involvement in science. We still see wide gaps between the scores of white and minority students, poor and more affluent students, and boys and girls in science and math tests. With schools strapped for time and resources, and teaching students at all different abilities, afterschool programs' hands-on approach and small size can help students improve their mastery of science and math and help them connect concepts to the real world, including careers. When aligned with courses, afterschool programs act as a key partner in improving students' test scores in these often intimidating areas.

- In fact, nationwide studies demonstrate that math achievement gaps can be eliminated among students with high afterschool participation.

Project Exploration is a great example; **SEE SLIDE**

COLLEGE

So that's the academic piece. But afterschool programs don't stop at helping students excel in middle and high school. They help translate that success into college attendance and persistence. Let's shift gears a little bit and hit our 2nd point: The fact that afterschool supports college readiness beyond academics.

How do they do this?

They help students imagine college as a viable path for them. As you well know, too many youth write college off early on as "not for them." Afterschool programs break down that mindset. And then they show kids how to go from dreaming about college to making it a reality. Afterschool programs provide direct, concrete college exploration opportunities. They take them on college tours. They teach them about college requirements and the application process. They can act as links to financial information. All of this complements the supports offered in schools. Again, this is achieved in close collaboration with educators, counselors, and community partners.

For example, Chicago-based AfterSchool Matters is developing a program specifically for college exploration, allowing teens to hone in on the knowledge they need. Local Y's offer ongoing

series about the application process and take students on college tours around the Midwest. Other programs offer one-on-one college coaching, which can supplement the excellent work high school counselors do. Indiana also offers a great example of the potential of this work. Like Illinois, Indiana's Afterschool Network aligned around the Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025. They then developed College and Career Readiness Standards for afterschool providers. The standards offer best practices and recommendations for promoting CCR, and give programs benchmarks to measure their work with. That's just a great example of how afterschool programs can focus on a goal, put the time into it to get it right, and achieve results.

These college exploration experiences are ESPECIALLY important for economically disadvantaged students and first-generation college-goers. The extra support can be the difference between a student considering college and letting the complicated process stop them in their tracks versus them following through and enrolling.

BEHAVIORAL ASSETS

Of course, getting into and succeeding in higher education requires more than just decent test scores: There are some personal and behavioral traits that make students more likely to graduate. Afterschool programs help youth develop those traits, too. For example,

- Planning for the future
- Self Discipline
- Persistence
- Teamwork
- Problem Solving, and
- Critical Thinking are all key traits and skills fostered through a wide variety of hands-on, project-based experiences offered in afterschool.

The Becoming a Man Program, for example, combines counseling, mentoring and educational enrichment with sports to promote social, emotional and behavioral competencies in young men. They emphasize goal-setting, accountability resiliency and self –determination in weekly sessions.

CAREER

Of course these skills aren't just good for college. They're needed on the job. Afterschool programs also improve students' job prospects by specifically addressing career preparation and exploration.

Afterschool programs offer youth unique opportunities to explore careers. When students fall in love with something new – something they never would have discovered elsewhere – it lets them dream big and motivates them to stay focused. Kids and teens get exposed to meaningful

career exploration, dive into internships and apprenticeships, and meet professionals who inspire and mentor them. This yet another area in which afterschool programs do a great job of leveraging community partners and delivering something that schools often don't have the opportunity to. And yet, they can still align with the classroom and complement counselors' work by matching career exploration to whatever lessons students are immersed in at that time.

For example, the Chicago-based AfterSchool Matters program offers in-depth apprenticeships with professionals in areas such as technology, science, the arts, and "words" – which includes everything from creative writing to journalism to public speaking.

CONCLUSION

So I wanted to hit those broad points about how OST fosters CCR with a multi-pronged approach. They are a unique complement to the efforts going on in schools. And they reach at risk students very effectively. Now, I'm going to let our other panelists share their specific experiences.