The Intersection of Afterschool and Competency-Based Education
An AYPF Discussion Group
October 1, 2015

To further our goal of college and career readiness for all students, AYPF has been exploring the opportunities that exist at the intersection of afterschool and competency-based education (CBE). Research as demonstrated that high-quality afterschool providers help contribute to a student's college and career readiness through college and career exploration, social and emotional learning, soft skills development including communication and team-building, various enrichment activities, and more. In recent years, we have also seen the growth of CBE, an approach within classrooms and schools that stresses specific skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork, and paired with less reliance on seat-time, allows students to advance upon mastering competencies at their own pace. As students learn and develop valuable skills and competencies both in and out of school, it seems natural to explore strategies and policies to support the intersection, interaction, and interrelationship of these two fields that have demonstrated success in preparing students for college and careers through anytime, anywhere, any pace learning.

How can these fields benefit each other as we work towards making all students ready for college and career? How does this opportunity become a way in which we can talk about silos, real and perceived, between in school and out of school time?

AYPF Definitions to Frame Discussion

"AYPF believes the ultimate goal of any effort to help students become college and career ready is to develop economically independent adults, who are involved in their communities and civic life, and who value and participate in continuous learning."

According to AYPF college and career readiness (CCR) is more than just academic readiness. Their logic model starts with the knowledge, skills and abilities or competencies that all young people need to be successful, followed by measures of success for secondary education, postsecondary education, and further on in adult life. Acknowledging that schools alone cannot provide young people with everything they need to be ready and successful in college, career and beyond, AYPF's logic model incorporates a thorough range of supports, including schools, afterschool, community based organizations, families, social, medical, and legal service providers, and more.

"Expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) draw upon the resources of the community, blur the lines between schools and other valuable resources…and incorporate virtual learning when appropriate. ELOs include traditional afterschool activities with an academic focus, but also incorporate activities such as internships with employers, independent study in alternative settings, classes on college campuses for high school students, and wraparound support services."

AYPF conceptualizes afterschool as expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) that can take place anytime outside of the traditional school day, not just from 3-6pm but also summertime, and any other

opportunities outside of the school day. This is important because in moving our thinking to anytime, anywhere, any pace learning, we need to also expand our thinking on the role of afterschool.

"Competency-based education (CBE) is more than just advancement upon mastery of explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives or competencies. It involves transparency, meaningful assessment, timely, differentiated support, both the application and creation of knowledge and the development of skills and dispositions."

AYPF believes the language of competency is creating a currency that allows for more stakeholders to enter the conversation in terms of how to get students to the place of mastery, and what they must do to reach the minimum level of mastery. One area that has gained a lot of traction around this idea of CBE is the concept of transparency, in that students, families, teachers, and community have a better sense of what students are expected to know and the progress they are making toward those competencies. For a quick overview of CBE, watch our [video](#) of competency in 60 seconds.

AYPF has identified several trends to keep in mind for discussion: How can afterschool contribute to the work of schools in terms of defining, understanding, and measuring competencies? How can they award academic credit? How can they provide credentialing of employability skills?

Promising Practices in the Field at the Intersection of Afterschool and CBE

Marcia Dvorak, Kansas Enrichment Network

"These kids need to discover things and analyze and get engaged and get their hands on things to make connections. They need to experience the relevancy of what they're learning." -Marcia Dvorak

Marcia Dvorak described EPIC, a pilot project taking place in two rural communities in Kansas with 40 middle school students participating from each community. Data from the project will be available at the year. The project focuses on measuring employer-recognized competencies in soft skills and technical skills in the following program areas of choice: culinary, manufacturing, construction, and medical sciences. Participating students gain field learning experience and are required to write and reflect on their successes, challenges, and things they could have done differently throughout the year. As they progress, students earn digital badges connected to competencies that are aligned with Kansas's Rose Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and P21 learning standards. For example, a student can earn a technical welding badge once they have accomplished the competencies in order to get that badge. Students can also earn soft skills badges, like a teamwork badge, that can earn through their reflection work and team projects. A field coordinator (presently a retired teacher) oversees the project and determines whether a student has mastered the elements of a badge based on a rubric that has been established for each one. In addition to badges, students gain half of an elective credit going into high school. With the goal of fostering different college and career pathways for students, the project targets students identified as at-risk of dropping out or those who do not officially dropout but are only minimally engaged in learning. In order to make these pathways available to students, the Kansas Enrichment Network partners with a variety of community stakeholders, including: school districts, out

of school time programs, United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, regional workforce boards, businesses, higher education institutions, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Education, and digital badge platforms and providers Open Badges and Utopia. Dvorak concluded her presentation by quoting a young person form the program: *"Until I found my inspiration I was lost and frustrated."*

Beth Unverzagt, Oregon ASK

Beth Unverzagt shared that, with support from Mozilla, Afterschool Alliance, and Concentric Sky, OregonASK has started work in digital badges, wanting to know what badges would mean for Oregon. Following an initial meeting in July of 2014, work groups of a diverse group of afterschool providers, businesses, community stakeholders, and issuing partners convened to discuss, develop, and design badge projects. 10 organizations submitted proposals and 7 completed their pilot projects. Concentric Sky built a badging app to store badges that kids could use at home. High schools are developing Mozilla web clubs for middle school students, whereby a supporting IT person meets with students once a week online. Students are developing their own learning profiles that will continue to evolve which is part of the self reflection process. Eventually, the hope is to give high school kids credit for the work they do in middle school, so they will become team leaders for middle school students. Middle school kids will receive badges in the process and high school students will receive credit. One badge, the career readiness badge, is acknowledged by the Chamber and by the business community, signaling that students are job-ready. The business community is saying they are more likely to give students jobs and internships with that badge and employers are saying they would hire that student over another applicant, a huge motivator to students. The pilot was a learning process and warranted important insights into the badging process: programs must offer meaningful learning experiences to students, badges themselves must be well-designed with clear processes for issue them, and a long lasting online infrastructure is needed to hold badges as long as students want to use them. Unverzagt also acknowledged that there is another facet to this conversation that has yet to be explored in great detail: clubs and student leadership groups like DECA, funded through the Perkins Act with 10 other CTSO (career and technical student organizations).

Daniel Tsin, Urban Alliance

"These employment opportunities are learning opportunities— they help students connect the dots between what's happening in the classroom in the real world." -Daniel Tsin

Dan Tsin described Urban Alliance, a paid internship program that pairs high school seniors with mentors in professional settings in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Chicago, and Northern Virginia. Serving roughly 2000 students across 200 employer partners, Urban Alliance's High School Internship Program provides participating students with job skills training, alumni support, job placement, post-high school coaching, and career mentorship. Given the hands-on, real-world nature of the internship experience, by the end of the ten-week program, students will have increased proficiency in professional work skills, built relationships with professional mentors, and gained long-term professional work experience. With 90% of alumni having enrolled in college and 80% of alumni having persisted through college, Urban

Alliance plays an important role in preparing students to be college and career ready through developing soft skills such as written and verbal communication, workplace professionalism, and teamwork that have been shown to not only change a young person's definition of success but also motivate achievement and increase potential earnings. Employers also benefit from bringing an intern on their team, from increased office diversity, to boosts in office morale, to great hands-on managerial opportunities for lower level management who work with the interns. Urban Alliance is working to increase engagement with the business community and gain more employer partners, with a focus on convincing them to hire ex-offenders. Urban Alliance is also working towards getting schools to offer credit for the internship experience and allow for flexible course scheduling so participating students do not face barriers to graduating on time.

Emerging Trends and Policy Considerations at the Intersection of Afterschool and CBE

Lynn Stanley, New Hampshire Afterschool Network

"There's a difference between competencies and curriculum. Competencies are really broad—it's about where you end up, and you can get there one of many different ways. The curriculum is the way you get there. CBE lends itself nicely to ELOs, since there's great opportunity for out of school time to provide these opportunities and it's not dictated how competencies must be met." -Lynn Stanley

Lynn Stanley discussed how, in 2008, New Hampshire removed the traditional Carnegie Unit, "seat-time" model and mandated the use of proficiency-based diplomas in all high schools, meaning students can no longer average out of courses. This has opened up the opportunity for Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) to help students attain credit outside of the school day and caused many districts and schools to change their policies to allow for ELOs. ELOs are the different means by which students can acquire knowledge and skills outside of the traditional classroom, including apprenticeships, community service, independent study, online courses, internships, performing groups, and private instruction. Moreover, any high school applying for a 21st century grant must include in the proposal how ELOs will be incorporated. In New Hampshire, ELOs are especially helpful for students who have a harder time earning credit or who have barriers to graduating on time because they provide greater flexibility around where, when, and how students learn and earn credit. For example, if a student wants to learn a world language, like Japanese, and the school only offers French and Spanish, the student who wants to learn Japanese will work with the ELO coordinator and language teacher on how to reach that competency, whether through meeting with a Japanese instructor or fluent speaker in the community or using Rosetta Stone. Students "vote with their feet" and participating in ELOs allows students to catch up to their peers through extracurricular activities that are of interest to them. The unique policy environment in New Hampshire has provided an opportunity to bring CBE and ELOs to scale.

Joe DiMartino, Center for Secondary School Redesign

"For policies to work, they need to be communicated better and communicated through a frame of practice, not in a 'policy' way." -Joe DiMartino

Joe DiMartino shared that he's been working to change high schools for 20 years with a focus on personalized learning. Recently, the Nellie Mae Foundation has been funding efforts to create student centered high schools in New England. They have invested millions of dollars into local school districts to create these environments and hired CCSR to do district mapping and find out what the districts are doing. Currently, CCSR is performing a policy audit to examine how policies have supported or hindered student centered learning. The next step will be meeting with district leadership to inform and engage them in a conversation about what policies are helping/hindering them. We are slowly coming to the realization that policy doesn't make much a big difference especially since practitioners often don't care what the policies are, but rather care about what other practitioners are doing. For example, policy in the state of New Hampshire has now wholly embraced the idea of student centered learning through CBE, but we concluded so far that for policies to work they need to be communicated better and communicated through a frame of practice, not in a 'policy' way. In other words, while there is still potential for policy, policy must be communicated through practice that benefits students. Leadership also continues to be a critical aspect necessary for both policy and practice change. DiMartino commented that this work of changing the existing structure of schools is expensive and that he did not know of anyone that's made the change without a lot of money. However, some districts that aren't getting an increase in funding are getting resources in the form of technical assistance.

Caitlin Johnson, Forum for Youth Investment; Spark Action

> *"Too often we use age as a proxy for stage, time as a proxy for progress, completion as a proxy for competence, and access as a proxy for quality."* -Caitlin Johnson

Caitlin Johnson discussed the Readiness Project, a communications and messaging project focused on authentic youth voice. The central point of the project is that readiness can and should be a right for all young people, which is not just about changing policy but is also about changing culture. The ten Readiness Abilities— aligned closely with the Weikart standards for youth program quality— encompass both skill sets and mindsets. These are essentially competencies, which can be measured, mapped, and achieved in a variety of different ways. These are high frequency skill sets and mindsets (20th and 21st century skills, cognitive and noncognitive, academic and nonacademic, etc.), which research shows can all be learned and taught. The problem is that too many young people lack the abilities they need to meet life's demands, also known as Readiness Gaps. These gaps include achievement, expectation, opportunity, and skill gaps caused by Readiness Traps, traps in settings and systems such as, age as proxy for stage, time as proxy for progress, completion as proxy for competence, and access as proxy for quality. What policies are explicitly even if unintentionally creating traps? Where are places that there aren't policies, but where habits are creating these traps? Where are areas where we have flexibility? How do we map those and start those conversations? When asked how to measure these skills, Johnson shared that it looks different in different places; anyone who wants to use this frame can identify specific metrics to match it to. In other words, the Readiness Abilities are not intended to be used as a way to measure, but rather a tool for schools and afterschool programs to use to inform their own work, which has begun in various places.

Themes for Future Exploration

Role of Teachers

There's already a lot of pressure on teachers' time; they have to focus on evaluations and testing and this is just one other thing for teachers to focus on. What happens in afterschool that also applies to school to take some of the pressure off teachers?

Digital Badges and Soft Skills

Digital badges can help what happens in out of school count in school, but there are challenges. Do badges really matter in the traditional K-12 system? Soft skills are very different from technical skills; how do you badge something like critical thinking or teamwork?

Reality of Anytime, Anywhere Learning

How close are we to blowing up the construct of "school day vs. out of school time"? Is 'expanded learning opportunities' a common language between CBE and afterschool? Many times, earning credit or badges focuses on electives rather core subject areas. How do we also focus on math, science, English, etc.? Is there a value of just letting kids play and have fun rather than focusing on skill development?

Equity

We see the equity issue in credit recovery; schools see those students as an area of noncompetition so they are open to CBE for them because they have already given up on them otherwise. How do we focus on all schools, not just needy schools?

Local Control

Schools are excited to do this and other initiatives as long as they can control it. How do we get our educators to think from the students' perspective?

Transparency

Transparency is a key benefit because it can make learning transparent to everyone, but it also exacerbates another host of issues of student trust and data privacy. In other words, data systems and sharing can be a barrier to true transparency.

Conclusion

Moving forward, there is still much to learn and much to consider, but it is clear that afterschool and CBE have much to learn from each other. As we move forward, it is clear that the intersection, interaction, and interrelationship of afterschool and CBE presents a clear opportunity to better support college and career readiness for all students.