

Foreword

There is never a shortage of good ideas in education. Our problem is that good ideas are so often misapplied.

In recent years, the idea of extending the school day has become popular throughout the United States. The potential of an extended day is clear. Afterschool programs can provide additional time for learning of basic skills and enrichment opportunities tailored to children's individual interests. They can provide cultural programs, sports, drama, and community service opportunities. They can engage students in productive, prosocial activities as an alternative to unstructured, unsupervised time that many children with working parents may put to ill use, be it in passive television watching or delinquent activities.

The problem of the afterschool movement, in fact, is in the very breadth of its potential outcomes. All too often, extended-day programs expected to increase basic skills end up instead as enrichment at best, babysitting at worst. Afterschool programs may be funded to help children who are at risk of school failure but then are attended by the children who are not at risk. In a time of increasing accountability based on test performance, in which children may be retained in grade if they do not achieve at acceptable levels, afterschool and summer school programs are often proposed as a means of giving children a second chance to make up lost ground. If they fail to do so, children suffer, and the programs themselves are deemed failures. In such circumstances, providing services that are not focused on academic achievement may cause real damage to vulnerable children. Alternatively, an afterschool program designed to serve the whole child, to provide cultural and intellectual enrichment, would be considered a failure if it instead focused on academic basics. Yet these mismatches between intentions and actions frequently occur in afterschool programs expected to serve many masters.

This book presents a sensible, comprehensive overview of afterschool programs and, in particular, reviews research on programs that have been or could be used in afterschool programs to increase academic achievement. The book begins with the perception that the afterschool movement, represented most dramatically by the substantial funding provided to the federal 21st Century Learning Communities program, creates an extraordinary op-

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portunity for America's children. Its purpose is to give readers an overview of research and best practices to enable them to make intelligent choices, to match the objectives of afterschool programs with strategies capable of achieving those objectives. In this, it provides a unique source of information, experience, and evidence that is essential for any educator or policymaker involved in planning afterschool programs for children.

—Robert E. Slavin
Johns Hopkins University