

WELCOME

With this issue of *Afterschool Matters*, we are thrilled to recognize the 25th anniversary of the National AfterSchool Association (NAA). Barb Roth, chair of the NAA Board of Directors, notes in the Summer 2013 issue of *AfterSchool Today* that, 25 years ago, people working in the out-of-school (OST) time profession believed in (a) learning through play, (b) development through fun and physical activity, (c) healthy snacks as a support to learning, and (d) academic development through helping children and youth to discover and develop their passions. And now the research has finally caught up!

Enormous strides in the OST field have been propelled by NAA's work in these 25 years. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) has partnered with NAA throughout that time. In the early 1990s, we determined that programs had few ways to gauge their success in providing high-quality programming. In our role as a national technical assistance provider to the emerging field, NIOST developed a self-assessment tool that later became the basis for the standards used in national accreditation. The first NAA accreditation was issued in 1999. Acute attention to the *quality* of children's OST experiences as well as their logistical structure is one of the major accomplishments of the field over the last two decades.

We are also thrilled that this issue of *Afterschool Matters* leads off with our first article contributed by a fellow of the Afterschool Matters Practitioner Research Fellowship, Level II, Benjamin Cooper. The first level of the fellowship brings practitioners into a learning community where they explore issues in the field and complete an action research project in their own programs. Level II fellows are selected from the Level I fellowships in several cities around the country to spend another year refining their work into an article for possible inclusion in this journal.

In addition to Ben's work, this issue brings you an article about stimulating youth participation in social action and community service, along with several pieces on content and learning outcomes in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). We are grateful for the continued support of the Noyce Foundation, which has helped us to focus on STEM in the last few issues.

Robert Halpern concludes in his book *Making Play Work* (2003) that "in the larger fabric of children's lives, the after-school hours have always had an evocative, even slightly magical quality" (p. 164). Program quality, practitioner research, a new focus on STEM—these and other topics covered in *Afterschool Matters* attest to the amazing power of afterschool. We salute NAA for its 25 years of inspiring the development of magical experiences for children and youth.



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Afterschool Matters is a national, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness in the field of afterschool education. Published by the Robert Bowne Foundation and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, the journal serves those involved in developing and running programs for youth during the out-of-school hours, in addition to those engaged in research and shaping policy. For information on *Afterschool Matters* and the Afterschool Matters Initiative, contact

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