

The Case for Investing in Extended Learning with Charlotte NEXT

Opportunity and Achievement Gaps

According to the Afterschool Alliance, Extended Learning programs increase school attendance, academic performance, reduce crime, increase graduation rates, foster workforce readiness skills, increase parent participation in the workplace, and increase the overall earning potential of participating students.

Research by the NC Public School Forum titled "[Top 10 Education Issues: 2019](#)" indicates that there is a significant Return on Investment for extended learning time. There is a \$9 return on every \$1 invested in afterschool programs because they improve students' academic performance, increase students' earning potential, and ultimately reduce crime and welfare costs.

Data collected by the [Afterschool Alliance](#) indicates that in North Carolina two-thirds, or approximately 523,140 children, do not have access to afterschool programs but would be enrolled in one if it were available to them. Eighty percent of parents' state that afterschool programs give them peace of mind because they know their kids are safe and engaged in fun learning opportunities. Eighty percent of parents also stated that afterschool programs help keep them employed in order to provide for their children.

A decade of research shows the positive benefits of extended learning programs such as afterschool offerings, yet 14 (out of 24) Title 1 middle schools in the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District (CMS) offer little to no extended learning programs, resulting in approximately 12,000 high poverty, low-performing middle school students without access to quality enrichment experiences outside of the traditional school day.

Investment in extended learning opportunities for middle school students through private funders has not been sufficient to support programming for at risk students in the middle grades and no public funding is currently being invested.

Neither CMS nor the City of Charlotte provide no cost enrichment opportunities for low performing middle school aged children attending high need CMS middle schools.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) After School Enrichment Program (ASEP) operates in schools where at least 20 parents commit to paying for the program. Eighty eight ASEP programs operate in K-5 schools, six include grade six, and only two include grade seven.
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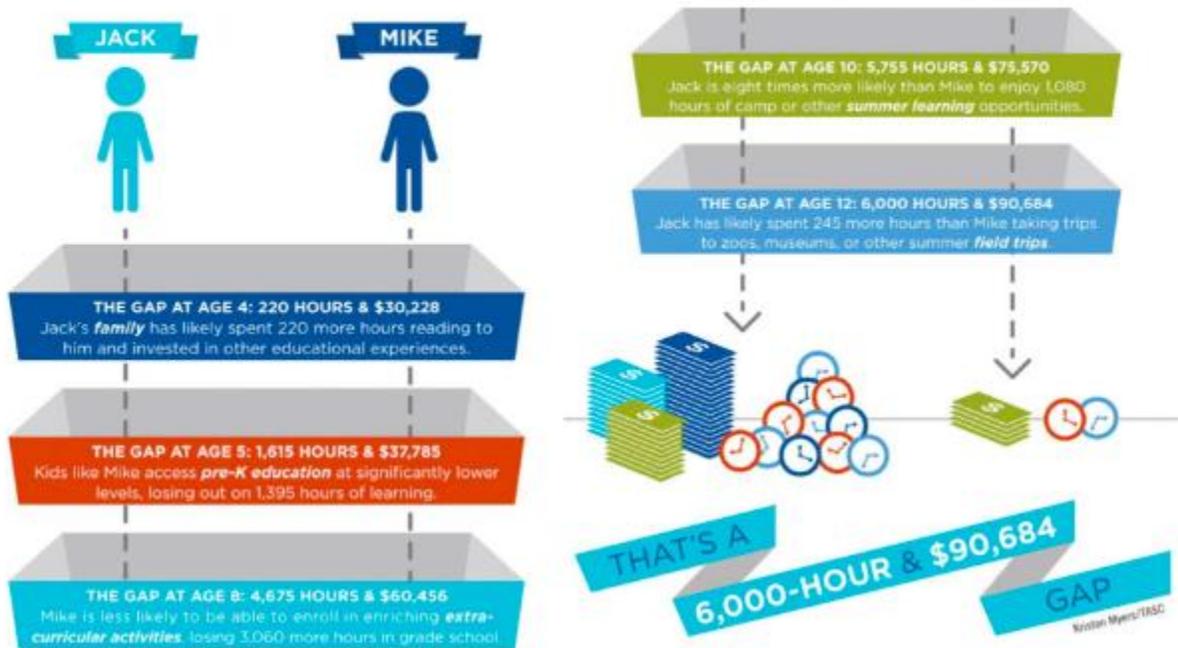
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City of Charlotte annually distributes approximately \$500,000 in federal funding to support afterschool programs. Funding is exclusively focused on providing free programs for elementary school age children in low income communities so that our youngest have a place to go after school while their parents are working.

Inequitable extended learning offerings have fed into the widening **opportunity gap** that continues to grow between well-resourced young people attending schools in high wealth communities clustered in North and South Charlotte and under-resourced young people attending schools in high poverty communities in East and West Charlotte. Well-resourced young people are more likely to participate in afterschool programs and clubs such as Forensics, Odyssey of the Mind, Coding, Dance, French Club, Yoga, Maker Projects, Fashion Design, Young Explorers, and more. As previously stated, the approximately 12,000 low performing middle school aged young people attending high need CMS middle schools have few or no extended learning programs. Opportunities that do exist are primarily focused on tutoring and homework help, neither of which have demonstrated success in improving attendance, academic performance, and graduation rates, much less unlocking creativity, expanding interests, and/or developing workforce readiness skills.

In the "[Power of Afterschool](#)" publication by the North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs, afterschool and summer programs can add 1,080 hours of academic enrichment to a child's year, equivalent to the number of hours in 144 school days. Yet, access is not equal. Low-income youth experience 6,000 fewer hours of enrichment and academic learning than their more affluent peers by the eighth grade.

Opportunity *really* matters



Source: Expanded Schools

In March 2019, MeckEd conducted a countywide survey for all middle school principals in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in an effort to map the landscape of extended learning opportunities. Out of 48 middle schools, 31 middle school principals participated in the survey. Out of the 31, 13 schools indicated that they offer only one to three extended learning programs. Based upon the State of North Carolina's formula for assigning a letter grade to every school in the state based upon performance (80%) and growth (20%), of the 13 schools that offer between one and three programs, eight are rated as "D or below" and they are all Title 1 schools. There were only four schools that indicated that they have 10 or more opportunities and those schools all have a school performance grade of "C or better." Three schools have an "A" rating and are not Title 1.

Why Middle School?

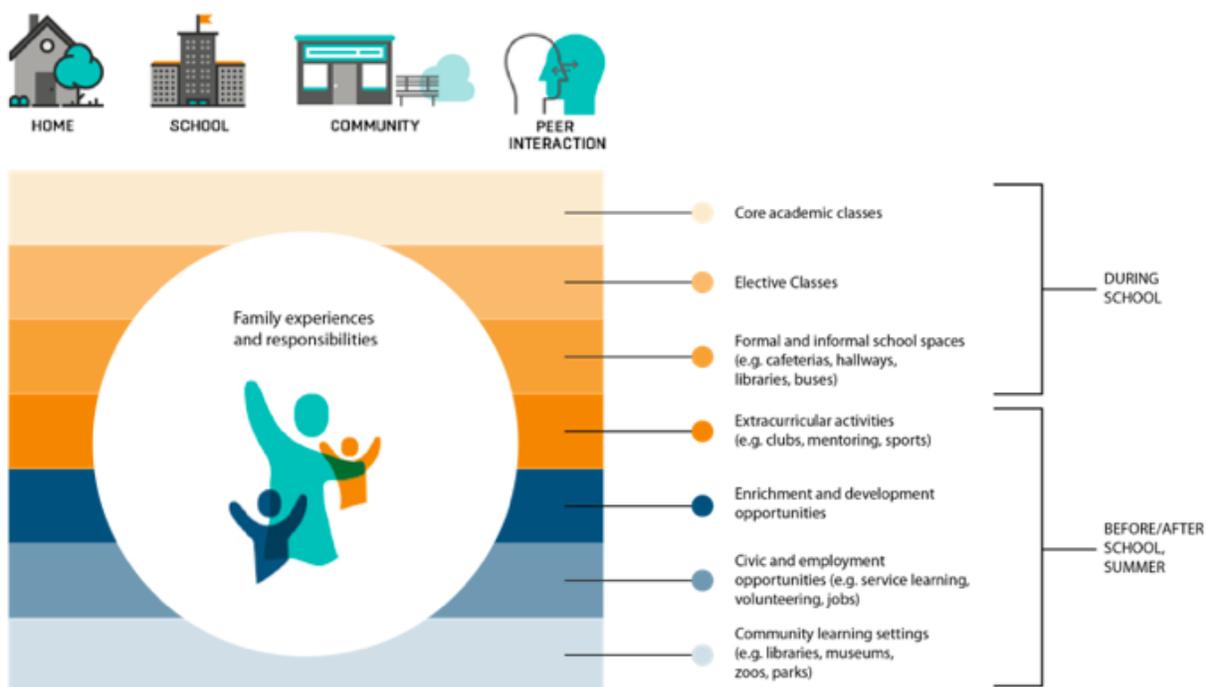
A special emphasis has been placed on middle school aged children for the following reasons. Between the ages of 12 and 14 young minds are as malleable as between birth and three. Early adolescence is when decisions are made, not about what a young person wants to do when

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they grow up, rather how they see the world and who they want to *be* as adults. Yet, beginning at age 12, research points to a dramatic decline in participation in extended learning due to a perception of afterschool programs as childcare which many families believe to be an unnecessary expense. With few exceptions, decreased demand and an unpredictable market has led to the disinvestment by providers in high quality, scalable, age appropriate programs.

According to Recommendation #5 from the [Nation of Hope report](#), providing access to extended learning opportunities to adolescents will help with healthy learning and development.



Source: *The National Commission on Social, Emotional & Academic Development, The Aspen Institute*

The Skills Gap

Data published by Charlotte Works, indicates that in 2018 there were approximately 60,000 available jobs in Mecklenburg County that required either a high school diploma or some post-secondary training and/or certification. During the same period of time there were over 175,000 opportunity youth and adults living in poverty in Mecklenburg County. Of them, only 8,000 had any post-secondary training or certifications to make them eligible to fill the 60,000 “living wage” jobs in the region.

Money, Time, and Learning

By design, school is but one part of a large and complex education system. Closing the skills gap will not only require thinking outside the box, it will require thinking outside the school day. Given that young people spend only 20% of their time in school and 80% outside of school, it is imperative that nonprofits, corporate partners, state and federal agencies, and civic and school leaders collaborate to maximize the educational value of the time young people spend learning outside of school.



Source: *Alaska Afterschool Network*

Extended learning programs that take place outside of the traditional school day to build skills, expand world views, and expose young people to possible careers, have proven to have a higher Return on Investment (ROI) than investments in traditional schooling.

Every dollar invested in extended learning programs has a \$9.00 dollar Return on Investment in terms of reduced crime and welfare costs, increased academic achievement, and increased earning potential (NC Public Schools Forum).

The benefits of investing in extended learning go well beyond those traditionally associated with school. They include strengthening skills and dispositions long associated with preparing tomorrow's workforce. Yet, public education spending remains focused almost exclusively on the 20% of the time students spend in school.

Spending on public education, adjusted for inflation, has tripled since 1970. During the same period of time, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have remained flat, and even declined between 1990 and 2015 (The CATO Institute).

Income, Enrichment, and Economic Mobility

Investments in extended learning illustrate significant disparities that perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunity and limit economic mobility. High income families spend between 7 and 10 x's more than middle-and low-income families on extended learning enrichment. What the money is spent on is different as well. For example, high income spending may include travel, sleep away camp, equestrian lessons, music, art, dance lessons, scouting, coding classes, robotics projects, and personal training for young people involved in sports. Middle income families will spend between \$1,000 and \$2,500 per child annually on afterschool and summer programs. The general focus is on athletics and academic support. Low income families spend less than \$1,000 annually, typically stopping at grade six. Activities tend to focus on homework help and tutoring (Every Hour Counts Network).



Source: Expanded Schools



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Who is getting it right?

In Boston, [Boston After School & Beyond](#) connects government agencies, funders, program providers, business leaders, colleges and universities, and other key stakeholders to align their efforts to provide enriched learning experiences for students in Boston Public Schools.

Every city in the United States that has successfully ensured equitable access to quality extended learning programs has a thriving *intermediary* or operational backbone organization like MeckEd. There are different models designed to meet the unique needs of their particular population and leverage the particular assets of the region. Philadelphia enjoys a public-private partnership with substantial private investments and federal dollars. California has support from the Department of Defense. Five cities-Dallas, Ft. Worth, Louisville, St. Paul, and Boston have prioritized data collection in partnership with local universities.

The [Nashville After Zone Alliance](#) (NAZA) organizes around five geographic locations in Davidson County and provides free high-quality after-school programming for Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) students in grades five to eight.

MeckEd is the only intermediary in North Carolina, and one of only two in the Southeast. Without a thriving intermediary or “backbone” organization, schools and service providers will remain uncoordinated, misaligned, and unaccountable for quality inputs and measurable outcomes.

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools’ Challenge

Data published in 2013 by Harvard University’s Equality of Opportunity Project, led by Raj Chetty, found that Charlotte ranks 50th out of 50 comparable sized cities in terms of economic mobility. In other words, and unless something changes, if you are born poor in Charlotte, chances are you are going to die poor in Charlotte. Ensuring that all young people have access to quality extended learning opportunities will build their social capital, broaden and deepen their world view, and nurture their creativity and curiosity- all of which contribute to a greater likelihood of economic success later in life.

Why MeckEd?

Founded in 1991, MeckEd is an established education focused nonprofit that in 2012 launched Career Pathways, an initiative to ensure that high need CMS high school students were prepared for post-secondary success. The program has positively impacted over 6,000 students and has removed substantial barriers to success for over 1,400 of the most challenged young people in Mecklenburg County. Three years into the Career Pathways initiative it became clear that if we were going to have an impact on economic mobility as well as close the widening skills gap in the regional workforce pipeline, interventions would need to begin before high school.



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After a national search, MeckEd's Board of Directors announced the appointment of Dr. Ross Danis as MeckEd's president and CEO, effective December 1, 2015. His most recent experience was as the founding president and CEO of the Newark Trust for Education in Newark, NJ. There he established a funders collaborative consisting of 12 major funders who agreed on the importance of what was then referred to as Expanded Learning Time. In addition to accessing major support from the Ford Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Dr. Danis was successful in convincing the Newark School District to leverage and repurpose Title 1 dollars to support quality Expanded Learning Time programs across the district, particularly in high need middle and high school environments. Dr. Danis and the Newark Trust were early adaptors in a growing movement to provide Expanded Learning Time opportunities for at-risk youth.

Many of the lessons learned from experiences in other cities, as well as from participating in, or presenting at, programs and conferences sponsored by Grantmakers for Education, the Ford Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation informed MeckEd's strategy and process in developing and introducing Charlotte NEXT to the larger community that it serves. To the extent that historical context and local conditions matter, MeckEd invested significant time and effort in learning about and understanding both in order to design and implement an effective extended learning time initiative that would support and sustain Charlotte NEXT as a high impact intermediary/backbone organization in Charlotte.

Previous efforts in Charlotte to coordinate and align afterschool and summer programs failed in part because program providers viewed the now defunct intermediary (Partnership for Out of School Time- POST) as a competitor in an increasingly crowded nonprofit funding environment. Charlotte NEXT has been intentional about raising and providing substantial financial support for local program providers. Additionally, Charlotte NEXT facilitates no cost professional development for providers and invites input and feedback on Charlotte NEXT's process and strategy.

MeckEd has deep and strong relationships across virtually every sector in Charlotte. With over 135 business partners working with our Career Pathways students, positive relationships with members of the Board of Education, Charlotte's Mayor and City Council, Charlotte County Commissioners, the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance, the Foundation for the Carolinas, Leading on Opportunity, the NC Afterschool Alliance, the Every Hour Counts Network, the NC Public School Forum, and members of the CMS leadership team, MeckEd is well positioned to leverage community and regional resources in order to effectively deliver on Charlotte NEXT's ambitious mission to ensure access to quality extended learning time for all middle school students, particularly those who face obstacles that limit their access to opportunity.

MeckEd's Board of Directors, many of whom are C suite executives representing Charlotte's largest and most successful corporations and industries, are deeply committed to the mission and to serving those young people who need us the most.



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MeckEd is fortunate to have a remarkably talented and dedicated team in place to facilitate the implementation of Charlotte NEXT and our extended learning time efforts. CEO Ross Danis, Charlotte NEXT Director Tiwana Glenn, COO Shelly Biby, Career Pathways Director Anisa Smith, and Career Pathways Coordinator Omar Parkes make up MeckEd's executive leadership team. While they have different backgrounds, skills, and responsibilities, they all share the same unbridled commitment to clearing a path to a bright future for the young people we serve.

Isn't It About Time?

With almost three decades of experience advocating for access to a quality education for all young people in Mecklenburg County, and three years of successful experience working to align and coordinate a fragmented extended learning time landscape, MeckEd and Charlotte NEXT are today poised to increase the scale and scope of efforts to bring quality extended learning time programs to at-risk middle school students. There is a growing sense of urgency about the work that has been fueled, in part, by Charlotte's efforts to move the needle on economic mobility. The recognition of need and interest in extended learning is palpable. We also acknowledge that unless focused attention and additional resources are placed on providing quality extended learning opportunities, at-risk youth attending low performing CMS middle schools will continue to be subjected to the same inequitable conditions that will likely lead to a lifetime of poverty. Together, and with your support, we're just not going to let that happen.