The time has come to pay closer attention to the middle grades. The field of afterschool in California has focused on programs at either end of the K–12 expanded learning continuum, while middle school afterschool programs and participants have remained lost in the middle. There is too much at stake for youth and for the field of afterschool to delay fully addressing this age group. Students have a lot to say about why they come to these programs and ultimately what will keep them coming back. They are fully capable of making insightful and meaningful contributions to the dialogue regarding the middle school afterschool attendance crisis. These research findings point to possible paths and strategies to alleviate the middle school afterschool program attendance crisis. This breathes new life into finding solutions that are beneficial and rewarding to all.

Free download available at:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/43n287qr
The purpose of my study was to address the problem of low attendance and growing attrition of middle school students participating in afterschool programs. This study centered on youth and practitioner perceptions of the conditions that foster young people’s interest, attendance, active participation, and meaningful engagement in middle school afterschool expanded learning programs funded with After School Safety and Enrichment (ASES) and/or 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grants. A one-size fits all approach to attracting and supporting youth in afterschool programs is ineffective; focusing on understanding and meeting the needs of this adolescent group is an essential component to supporting and sustaining their attendance. Three elements were found to be keys in fostering enrollment and continued attendance for youth in these programs: (a) alignment between what matters to youth and the content of the activities and program; (b) thoughtful staff recruitment and development processes; (c) meaningful collaboration and shared decision-making between staff and students.

Youth and staff involved in these programs described environments, experiences, and activities which young people were active, both mentally and physically, and engaged in tasks that were meaningful, varied, involved learning, and supported their mastery. Interesting experiences and wide-ranging tasks were favored over routines and conditions that discouraged young people’s desires to participate and learn in the hours outside of school. Their perceptions provide insight into three frameworks on effective engagement practices with middle school adolescents during afterschool programs: (a) Convergence of Matterness: A Youth Perspective-Centered Model; (b) Validity of the Learning Experiences Continuum and Process, and (c) Participation-Involvement-Engagement (PIE) Continuum. These frameworks illustrates a shift from traditional approaches of addressing categories in isolation to the connectedness of categories and a confluence of contributing factors, and their relationship to a quality learning experience that further drives attendance by validating and meeting students’ expressed needs and interests. Moving students along a continuum from participation to involvement and to the ultimate goal of full engagement is a recommended goal for programs. Reviewing the implications and implementing the recommendations for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers will strengthen middle school afterschool programs thus helping to alleviate the attendance crisis.
Middle School Afterschool Success in the Middle Matters!

Michelle R. Perrenoud, Ed.D.

Workshop Description

BOOST Conference: April 2016

Program Design and Engagement Strategies for Working with Middle School Students
Middle School Afterschool: Success in the Middle Matters!

Workshop Description

Learn what matters to middle school students about their afterschool expanded learning experience and how to transition your middle school program into a thriving space that will meet the growing needs of young people’s desires to attend and participate. Foster young people’s design to attend and participate, transition your program into a thriving learning zone. Discussion focus: Design, Attendance, and Interests.

Objective(s)

- Attending and Interests.
- Program into a thriving learning zone.
- Discussion focus: Design.
- Transition your program to meet the needs of this age group. Learn about research on youth and practitioner perspectives.
- Distinctive challenges while striving to meet the needs of this age group between elementary and high school. Programs also face students in middle school face unique challenges in the transitional years.

The Middle Matters!

This presentation and materials are based on the following dissertation:

http://escholarship.org/uc/item/43n287qr

Attracting and Retaining Middle School Youth Participants in Afterschool Expanded Learning Programs

Perrenoud, 2015

© Michelle Perrenoud (2015)
My role today is to facilitate the process.

We are focusing on Middle School Afterschool – Success in the Middle Matters!

Today, we will address only the tip of the iceberg.

There will be lots of work for you to do as you continue to advance in your
development and work.

As your Facilitator, I will:

9 Act as your discussion guide;
9 Often be outcome driven;
9 Play devil’s advocate;
9 Ask that you trust the process, and look beneath matters easily taken for
   granted.

Middle School Afterschool: Success in the Middle Matters!

Michelle Perrenoud (2015)

©
There is a Problem!

Did you KNOW?

Why are we here today?
In California, there is an ongoing concern regarding a statewide ATTENDANCE CRISIS of middle school students participating in state and federally funded afterschool programs.

• Of 1079 programs statewide; 300 (nearly 28%) faced fiscal reduction due to low attendance in 2012–2013. This has continued to be a pervasive issue each year.

• While there is an emergent body of research that documents afterschool programs over the past 15 years, relatively little is known about middle school afterschool programs.

• A one-size fits all approach to attracting and supporting youth in afterschool programs is ineffective.

• Focusing on and understanding and meeting the needs of this adolescent group is an essential component to understanding attendance.

• Did you KNOW? Middle School Afterschool: Success in the Middle Matters! © Michelle Perrenoud (2015)

There is a PROBLEM! Did you KNOW?
Come Learn About...

1. What attracts middle school youth to attend afterschool programs, from the students’ and staff members’ perspectives?

2. What activities do middle school youth choose to participate in during their afterschool programs and why?

3. In what ways are youth involved in planning activities and selecting materials within afterschool programs?

4. What professional development and prior experiential learning do staff identify as most valuable in working with middle school youth in afterschool programs?
Frameworks

Convergences

1. Convergence of Matterness: A Youth Perspective - Centered Model
2. Validity of the Learning Experiences Continuum and Process
3. Participation – Involvement – Engagement: Buy-in and Ownership
4. Daily Program Schedule

Connections

Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California

Middle School Afterschool: Success in the Middle Matters!

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Points of Integration

• Who will you share with what you learned?
• How will you apply what you learned?
• How will this information impact your work?
• What were your Ah-Ha’s today?

Share Out

Middle School Afterschool: Success in the Middle Matters!

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Success in the Middle Matters!