

Beyond sports: Off-the-field afterschool activities to challenge your child



(BPT) - From soccer to lacrosse, sports are what most parents initially think about when considering extracurricular activities for their children. However, today's schools and communities understand there's a need for diverse afterschool options that challenge kids in a variety of ways.

"While participating in sports can have many benefits, to raise a well-rounded child it's important to consider other afterschool activities that help them to develop different skillsets," says Ellen Marks, educational expert and curriculum director at [Bricks 4 Kidz](#). "Introducing a variety of activities

helps kids have many experiences so they can discover their natural talents as well as improve areas where they may struggle."

These extracurricular activities are guaranteed to broaden your children's horizons and provide them with plenty of fun and education:

Nature: Because we live in such a digitized world, many school systems are now offering nature-based programs that teach important science and biology skills while instilling respect for Mother Nature. Check out these types of programs at school or through your local nature center. Scouts is another fantastic option with many nature-based activities.

Theater: Many kids dream of becoming stars on their favorite TV shows, and theater experience is the first step in exploring that interest. It's not just for high school students. Acting classes, musical theater and play production are all great options enjoyed by students with a wide-range of abilities.

STEM: Help your kids grow important science, technology, engineering and math skills through STEM classes like [Bricks 4 Kidz](#). These group classes — available for kindergarten through middle school — use LEGO Bricks, gears, motors and more to build exciting projects. Students learn to work together and solve problems while creating something they can feel proud of.

Music: Music afterschool activities exercise the brain in a variety of ways. Inherently creative, music is also very technical. Learning about notes, chords and music theory is mathematical in many ways. Explore choir, instrument classes and band camps to inspire your junior Mozart.

Martial arts: Taekwondo (from Korea) and Karate (from Japan) are both great options for children. Classes offer physical exercise that improve balance and stamina, but parents enjoy many of the other benefits that often come from studying martial arts, including increased focus, discipline and respect for others.

Cooking: With the expansive popularity of cooking shows, kids have never had more interest in what goes on in the kitchen. Sign students up for cooking classes and they'll learn proper cooking technique and whip up some tasty treats in the process. Soon enough, you may be able to hand off one meal a week to your chef-in-training.

Art: With the reality of many schools reducing or cutting art programs, exploring art education outside of the classroom becomes even more important. Kids love to create and there are a variety of art programs for the next Picasso or Rembrandt. Drawing programs are wildly popular, but also consider sculpture, pottery and mixed-

media classes.

Technical clubs: Today's youth grow up with technology, so they have a natural inclination toward any activity that incorporates it. For example, robotics clubs are popping up in elementary and middle schools across the country. Check out Bricks 4 Kidz Jr. Robotics and Advanced Robotics classes where kids build a motorized model and watch it come to life using simple LEGO WeDo and LEGO Mindstorms EV3 software. Learn more at www.bricks4kidz.com.