



SCHOOL BOARD STRATEGIES TO BUILD AND SUPPORT QUALITY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS:

Developed for the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Extended Day Learning Opportunities project by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, Senior Fellow for Policies and Partnerships of the University of South Carolina Educational Foundation and Director of the National Afterschool and Community Learning Network at the College of Charleston and University of South Carolina

In this new and challenging era of leaving no child behind, it is imperative for school district leaders to seek out and implement strategies that expand learning time and learning partners — with proven, measurable results — which will improve the education of all children. There are numerous educational movements afoot nationally, but one in particular is growing with momentum with the voting population—before- and after-school programs.

According to a 2002 survey of registered voters age 18 and over, the Afterschool Alliance found nine in ten voters agree that there should be some type of organized activity or place for children to go after-school every day that provides opportunities for them to learn. Even more revealing is that overall, 72 percent of voters agree that “after-school programs are an absolute necessity for [the] community.” Support holds across all demographic groups – by race, age, partisan affiliation, geographic region, gender, level of education, marital status, urban/suburban/rural, religion, type of employment and salary.

After-school programs are a significant opportunity to improve learning for students. However, they must do more than help children “complete worksheets” and “play kick ball.” To really make a positive difference in learning, after-school and summer programs must be engaging, comprehensive and be done in partnership with families and key sectors in the community. In addition, after-school programs should **intentionally** enhance learning opportunities for children and their families by:

- **Helping students catch up.** Many children need more individualized learning time beyond the school day and year, and they need help completing their homework. This doesn’t mean “drill and kill” worksheets. The time should be personalized, hands-on and interesting.
- **Engaging students in learning at higher levels.** Many children need an accelerated set of learning opportunities to keep up. They need extra help and connections to real-world tasks and people in diverse settings to see first-hand how their education relates to their future. Assets to learning at higher levels can include the arts/music, service learning, computer training, learning about other cultures and languages, job shadowing and college linkages. Academic skills in state standards should be embedded in these projects and activities.
- **Encouraging greater family connections and involvement.** After-school programs can be a good vehicle to link more families with their own children’s education—at home, in the schools and in the community.
- **Giving families opportunities to boost their own education levels.** The education level of parents is strongly correlated with children’s readiness for school and the likelihood they will complete high school and go on to college. Comprehensive after-school programs should work to increase access to adult education, computer classes, beginning college and technical college courses for parents.
- **Strengthening the climate of a school and surrounding community.** With the broad involvement of youth serving groups, civic organizations, employers, arts and cultural organizations, faith based alliances and families in after-school and summer programs, the very expectations of a school-community relationship can be positively changed.

School board members are in a unique position to build and sustain the momentum around after-school program initiatives in their communities. The board, collaborating with the superintendent, staff and community wide leaders can initiate a package of policies, networks, funding adjustments, incentives, quality standards, training, technical assistance and convening strategies to help transform schools into community learning centers with a rich array of learning opportunities beyond regular school hours. At the same time these initiatives can help make after-school and summer programs better count for learning and positive youth development.

Some of these initiatives necessitate a redirection of current funding or new funding, but many pull together schools and community resources and build partnerships to get the job done. Below are selected initiatives that have potential:

1. **Provide leadership by setting policies that encourage and prepare key people to collaborate** and work in partnership among various school-community stakeholders:
 - a. For parents and community leaders—develop seminars and workshops to help them engage in and support improvement strategies in after-school programs and building better partnerships among schools, youth serving and community groups.
 - b. For teachers, principals and after-school directors—develop institutes, methods and materials to effectively engage parents and community, faith-based organizations, youth, older citizens and civic groups as well as businesses, the arts and cultural groups and colleges.
2. **Create incentives and eliminate regulation barriers** to make it easier for the schools to develop learning partnerships with organizations and groups that can help serve the students and families with expanded learning opportunities. Following is a list of potential partnerships:
 - a. The arts and cultural groups
 - b. Colleges—with courses offerings and/or providing tutors
 - c. Local businesses for job shadowing and internships
 - d. Community-based organization (CBO's) such as the 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brother/Big Sisters, Y's, etc.
 - e. Faith-based organizations (FBO's) for tutoring
 - f. Law enforcement for mentoring
 - g. County/city extensions to do fitness programs and interesting healthy meal preparation
 - h. Civic organizations for life skills
 - i. Parks and recreation for supervised recreation
3. **Provide financial support for a full-time after-school/community schools coordinator** (perhaps in conjunction with county/city government, CBO's and FBO's) to build the partnerships and programming for an engaging, enriching community-learning center in each school-community that wants it.
4. **Take advantage of the Title I Supplemental Service provision** by offering engaging academic help in your own after-school programs. Work with the superintendent and after-school coordinator/community schools coordinator to ensure that the district's after-school program is on the state approved Supplemental Services Provider list.
5. **Provide a transportation allotment** for students participating in after-school learning programs—as well as those playing sports, in the band and other extracurricular activities—particularly if they are interrelated and connected to student learning, youth development and school improvement.
6. **Create incentives or requirements, when renovating or constructing school facilities.** Design and make buildings to be community schools/ learning centers that are much more welcoming, accessible and useable for after-school learning programs for students and community education centers for families and neighbors.
7. **Create a competitive mini-grant fund for energetic teachers** and teaching assistants to develop engaging and enriching after-school classes. These can be clubs and activities—available after-school and summers—that are linked to the school day. A requirement for the grant could be the periodical dissemination of a “what works” report to the other programs in the community.

8. **Develop several leadership academies at outstanding after-school sites** as professional development centers to help after-school and regular school staff learn how to maximize out of school time and partnerships between the school day and after-school. These academies should focus on improving student performance, involving parents, and strategies for youth development and community learning.
9. **Develop, in collaboration with key stakeholders, after-school learning standards based on the latest research** and best practice literature and use them as an approach to encourage continuous improvement.
10. **Encourage schools before each school year to sponsor community-wide showcases of best practices** in after-school/summer/weekend programs for educators, parents, students and the community to gain their interest and involvement.
11. **Support the development of capacity building networks** to better link powerful school and community school programming across the school district:
 - a. Networks of principals and community school, community education, and after-school directors interested in out-of-school time and school-community partnerships
 - b. Networks of after-school directors and lead staff on content issues with classroom teachers
 - c. Parent and community support alliances
12. **Make it more feasible for teachers to use your communities as learning resources** as a way for students to learn and serve. Develop community service and service learning initiatives, materials and trainings that include peer tutoring and youth tutoring.
13. **Create more obvious pathways and connections for middle and high school students in after-school and summer programs** to post-secondary education, career opportunities, and successfully finishing high school. For example create incentives to offer:
 - a. Courses for credits in middle schools that lead to college prep courses in high school (e.g., algebra and geometry, foreign languages, art and music), especially in low-income schools
 - b. Additional college prep, tech prep and career courses and connections in high schools (e.g., chemistry, physics, trigonometry, pre-calculus, a variety of foreign languages, AP courses and introductory college courses taught by both community colleges and four-year colleges). Career and technical courses perhaps taught in conjunction with technical and community college should be available along with more youth apprenticeships and internships with employers
 - c. Make-up courses for students who missed course work or credit during the school day so they can graduate with their peers
14. **Rally and expedite the array of potential volunteer support for tutoring and mentoring in schools and after-school** tapping senior citizens, National Service programs, Federal Work Study programs, and caring college and community members and civic and faith-based organizations. Expand efforts to engage older Americans in both helping improve educational opportunities for young people and in improving the learning activities for the seniors themselves.
15. **Participate in the 2003 Lights On Afterschool! Campaign.** On October 9, 2003 communities around the country will celebrate *Lights On Afterschool!* in a day of national activity. Be a part of this effort to showcase the importance of afterschool programs and underscore the need for quality afterschool programs for all children. For more information, visit http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/lights_2002/get_involved.cfm

School boards, elected or appointed, represent the community's beliefs and values. Over 90% of the registered voters in the 2002 Afterschool Alliance poll agree that there should be some type of activity or place for children to go after school that provides learning opportunities. By providing leadership and direction to establish and sustain extended day learning opportunities—such as before-and after-school programs—local board members can embody the quintessential nature of serving students and community. It is imperative in this environment of leaving no child behind, that school boards unearth and support the needs of the community and its children.