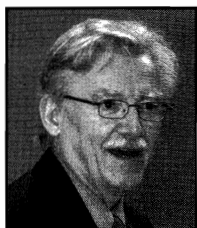

Sustaining Quality Afterschool Programs and Community Learning Centers: Practical Recommendations from the Field

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by Terry Peterson and
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The Importance of This Issue to Schools, Families, and Communities

Study after study is finding that quality community learning centers and comprehensive afterschool programs help address a variety of needs of children, families, schools, and communities, but sustaining the funding is a serious challenge.

The mounting evidence about the importance and impact of quality afterschool programs helps in arguing for funding. For example, Fight Crime Invest in Kids (1999) found that the hours 3 to 7 p.m. had the highest youth crime rate during the school week. In their annual public opinion poll, the Afterschool Alliance (2002) found that voters see afterschool programs as key to keeping children safe and helping them learn. A number of large-scale afterschool programs around the country have found key components of afterschool programs that seem to work and make a positive difference: California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program (ASLSNPP) (University of California-Irvine, 2001); LA's Best (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) (Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, and Baker, 2000); The After-School Corporation (TASC) (Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2000); Foundations, Inc. (Author, 2003); and Extended Service Schools (ESS) Initiative (Grossman, Price, Fellerath, Jucoy, Kotloff, Raley, and Walker, 2002). The Harvard Family Research Project (July 2003) summarizes positive results from many afterschool programs from several points of view.

However, it takes more than growing evidence to sustain funding. Often, local afterschool programs and community learning centers get started through a successful application submitted by a group of concerned educators, parents, and community groups to a state or federal program. If the proposed local program is ranked high enough, a grant is awarded to help the program get started or to expand services. The funding for the application, however, is rarely for more than 3-5 years.

Keeping schools open after school as a learning resource necessitates staying power so that families, children, teachers, and the community can count on them being available year after year. Clearly, they need to be sustained. Federal and state funding are critical to starting up programs, but they are notoriously fickle, particularly in tight budget times, and currently cannot be viewed as a constant source of funding for individual local programs.

To keep the programs going forward year after year in a local school or through a school-community partnership requires serious sustainability plans and thoughtful actions.

What should be in the plans? What should be the actions? How do you create the environment in the schools and community to sustain

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quality afterschool and summer programs? How should these sustainability plans and actions be put together and activated?

With the rapid ramp-up of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers across America, many educators and nonprofit leaders in communities of all types have been grappling with the above questions and many more. The timeline of the initial grants was for only three (3) years, so hundreds of afterschool leaders from the school, community, and nonprofit sectors have been searching for strategies for sustainability.

What better people to ask about sustainability of funding and support for afterschool programs than a sample of 21st Century grantees from around the country? That is exactly what we did.

Findings

The grantees were asked to give advice in two ways. First, they were asked to rate eleven commonly recommended sources of funding and resources for sustaining afterschool programs and community learning centers. Second, they put in their own words three recommendations of what providers of afterschool programs should do to keep their program going forward when their main source of funding was about to end.

The grantees were sampled at random from 21st Century Community Learning Centers in 16 states (see Appendix A for methodologies). Thirty-one grantees voiced their opinions and suggestions about how to sustain afterschool programs.

Local Grantees' Rating of Sustainability Strategies

The grantees were asked to rate eleven commonly suggested strategies for sustainability. They could rate the suggestions from 10 to 1, with "10" being critical, "1" being nice, and "5-6" quite important. Table 1 summarizes the ratings given by 21st Century grantees to the eleven possible strategies for sustaining afterschool programs.

1. None of the eleven suggested

Strategies Rated by 21st Century Grantees	Ratings (10 highest; 1 lowest)
In-kind resources from a school district (e.g., space, supplies)	9.4
A half-time coordinator paid for by the school district	8.7
A meaningful contribution from a local foundation	7.5
Financial support from city or county government	7.0
College work-study students and college volunteers	6.9
A sliding fee or volunteer hours supplied by parents	6.5
Cultural groups daily supplying artists and music instructors	6.1
High school students doing community service every week	6.1
A specific portion of a person's time donated by two or three youth-serving organizations (e.g., Y, Boys and Girls Club, 4-H)	6.1
A corps of senior citizens that helps every week	5.7
One of the items partially funded by the United Way	4.9

(See Appendix B for statistical analyses.)

strategies for sustainability was rated below "4.9 out of 10." In other words, all eleven were rated better than "nice" and at least "quite important."

2. Two suggestions were considered most important (roughly a rating of "9 out of 10").

- ◆ In-kind resources from a school district (e.g., space, supplies)

- ◆ A half-time coordinator paid for by the school district.

3. While not rated statistically higher than five of the remaining strategies, "a meaningful contribution from a local foundation" (a rating of 7+ out of 10) is worth noting as is "financial support from the city or county government" (a rating of approximately 7).

4. The following suggestions were considered to be *quite important*, (a rating of approximately 5-6 and not statis-

tically different from one another).

- ◆ A sliding fee or volunteer hours supplied by parents

- ◆ College work-study students and college volunteers

- ◆ A specific portion of a person's time donated by two or three youth serving organizations (e.g., Y, Boys and Girls Club, 4-H)

- ◆ Cultural groups daily supplying artists and music instructors

- ◆ A corps of senior citizens that helps every week

- ◆ High school students doing community service every week

- ◆ One of the items partially funded by the United Way

What do the grantees recommend, in their own words, to sustain quality afterschool programs?

The grantees were asked to give their best ideas of how to sustain afterschool

programs when funding was scheduled to end. Specifically, they were asked:

You are invited to advise the key players in an afterschool program that is half-way through a three-year grant. What are the first three 'things' you would tell them to do to keep their program going, and in a quality way, after the three-year period?

A wide range of responses and ideas resulted from this question and real-life scenario. The ideas and recommendations can be organized into three categories.

1. Create a Quality Program Coupled with Constant Outreach
2. Collaborate and Develop Win-Win Partnerships
3. Identify and Build a Portfolio of Funding

To provide the full flavor and in-depth nature of the survey responses, the specific words of advice from the grantees have been organized into three general strategies (Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Conclusions

This 'voices from the field' survey adds to our understanding about what actions and approaches have the most promise in sustaining funding for afterschool programs and schools as community learning centers. While there is no one definite answer for sustainability, the 21st Century Community Learning Center grantees from around the country give us some clear pathways, partnership building strategies, and resources that, potentially, can lead to success.

These voices from the field report that sustaining quality afterschool programs requires multiple sources of financing. They also recommended a set of very helpful actions as outlined above.

- ◆ Create a Quality Program Coupled with Constant Outreach
- ◆ Collaborate and Develop Win-Win Partnerships
- ◆ Identify and Build a Portfolio of Funding

Table 2	
Ideas to Create a Quality Program and Outreach Campaign	
General Approach	Specific Actions
<p>Demonstrate to your school board and administration the importance of the program.</p>	<p>Show them the better grades, lower discipline referrals, and better attendance.</p> <p>Make sure the superintendent and board believe in the program.</p>
<p>Make program users, families, and lead staff aware of the program quality and funding fragility.</p>	<p>Garner the support of the participants' parents to advocate for and recruit support from others.</p> <p>Ensure that the main teachers/mentors in the program are true advocates for the program.</p>
<p>Have expected outcomes, measure them, and report them loudly and often to everyone touched by the program.</p>	<p>Get your name out into the community — splash newspapers with events and successes, and by 'word of mouth.'</p> <p>Publicize your successes through newsletters, VIP visits, and testimonials.</p> <p>Craft an evaluation system that allows you to showcase your results, e.g. 70 percent of students have improved reading skills.</p>
<p>Balance academics with fun and enrichment.</p>	<p>Provide engaging activities.</p> <p>Build relationships with the regular school staff, be organized, and continue looking for best practices with them.</p>

The overall strategies and specific actions recommended are each important in their own right; they also are interconnected. For instance, the respondents suggested that the *manner* in which the individuals and groups being approached for funding and support is important. Clearly, partnerships and collaboration seem to have the most potential. They explain how essential it is to have collaboration and support both in

and outside the schools. For example, the suggestions range from "demonstrating to your school board and administration the importance of the program" to "getting volunteers."

When these resources are tapped and mobilized for support appears to be important, too. Starting early is key. It takes time to build trust and collaboration. Therefore, beginning very early and often to seek funding and partners is

Table 3
Strategies to Collaborate and
Build Win-Win Partnerships

General Approach	Specific Actions
Form a partnership with the local government.	<p>Work directly with city and county officials to gain support for the programs.</p> <p>Form partnerships with local governments together with businesses, civic organizations, and parent groups.</p>
Develop strong community collaboration.	<p>Focus on providing services for partners (<i>you have the students and the space</i>); do not look at costs or expenses initially — look at providing them with what they need to accomplish their missions and goals — and then ask them to help with your objectives.</p> <p>Speak with local community agencies (community-based and faith-based organizations) to help support and fund programs, from the beginning.</p> <p>Be visible in your community; the more people who know about the program, the more likely it is to be funded.</p>
Have a developed group of volunteers to help staff.	<p>Aggressively recruit volunteers and bring in guest speakers.</p> <p>Make sure that the staff/volunteers are of high quality, and train them.</p> <p>Form a 20 percent club at each site — this means, bring in 20 percent of volunteers per enrollment per campus/site, e.g., if you have 200 students participating, you would need 40 volunteers to meet your goal.</p>
Continue/enhance relationships with colleges/college-age students.	<p>Work with local high schools and colleges to recruit students to earn service and internship hours to help with the program.</p>

recommended. Win-Win partnerships are critical.

Getting and constantly communicating positive results are important, too. Quality programs matter, both for achieving good results for children and families and for holding on to and securing new funding. For example, the respondents urge “getting your name out into the community and having expected outcomes.” The grantees also suggest that the popularity of afterschool programs among parents, students, and teachers often is not mobilized and shared with the broader community and decision makers, but should be.

Several people who reviewed the findings felt strongly that one area that was understated was the importance of private philanthropy and foundation fundraising. This is not surprising, given that many afterschool directors may have little experience in this area. Fundraising is really hard work. Perhaps partnering in a significant way with a non-profit group, even at times having them be the lead partner, may help with sustainability by raising funds from sources not typically tapped by schools or afterschool programs.

The bottom line is simple. If an afterschool program is operating on one grant and without involving partners in and outside the school, this program will most likely terminate when the grant ends. That is sad! Practitioners in the field tell us it does not have to be that way.

Community learning centers and afterschool programs can be sustained and improved, but this does not happen easily or accidentally. Besides taking much more aggressive actions to sustain their programs locally, community educators and afterschool providers and their allies should be strong and continuous advocates working for increased funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers at the federal level. State governments also should be pushed to begin or expand their funding for quality afterschool programs and community learning centers.

In conclusion, we found that the suggestions and advice that we received could be useful in helping maintain

Table 4
Methods to Develop a Portfolio of Funding Support

General Approach	Specific Actions
Start Early.	<p>Start looking for new funds and begin application processes for new funding now!</p> <p>Begin with the philosophical buy-in of potential partners, and gain financial support later.</p> <p>Early on, have all partners find funds to replace any they received from the grant.</p> <p>Form a sustainability task force committee to work on alternate funding ideas.</p>
Take time to do asset mapping and to list possible partners.	<p>Get students involved in asset mapping to support the program and its development.</p> <p>List possible partners, such as community agencies, county extensions, colleges, cultural and arts organizations, youth groups, kinships, senior citizen groups, law enforcement, civic and faith-based groups.</p> <p>Identify existing funding sources in local entities and school district programs that can be tapped (e.g., Title I in schools; Child Development Block Grants, state grants).</p>
Charge a reasonable fee.	<p>Get parents involved by having a small fee for tuition, using a sliding scale for families with more than one child in the program.</p> <p>Develop a fee schedule by researching local providers and considering family income.</p>
Recognize all kinds of resources and invite all kinds of contributions.	<p>Incorporate new players into the initiative.</p> <p>Access Title I Supplemental Services or State Intervention funds for academic support and couple them with outside collaboration for enrichment, supervised recreation, and art and music opportunities.</p> <p>Engage the city, school, and county to partner in solving funding problems.</p>

afterschool initiatives beyond the initial funding period from one grant. We found it beneficial to have 21st Century Community Learning Center grantees from around the country offer their advice and hope that it will provide useful information in sustaining funding and support for other afterschool programs and Community Education initiatives. □

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Appendix A

Methodologies

Questions

The survey contained two sections to be completed by grantees or their representatives. It was first field-tested in California, Wisconsin, and Minnesota in a small group setting. Survey results from these field tests were incorporated into the results of those grantees who had been randomly sampled.

The first section of the survey asked grantees to give a score from "10 to 1" to some commonly suggested sources of finances and "people power" to sustain quality afterschool and summer initiatives. A score of "10" means that it is critical. A "5" or "6" means that it is "quite important." A "1" means that it is "nice" to have. The suggested sources that were rated are as follows.

- ◆ In-kind resources from a school district (e.g., space, supplies)
- ◆ Financial support from the city or county government
- ◆ One of the items partially funded by the United Way
- ◆ A sliding fee or volunteer hours supplied by parents
- ◆ A specific portion of a person's time donated by two or three youth-serving organizations (e.g., Y, Boys and Girls Club, 4-H)
- ◆ Cultural groups daily supplying artists and music instructors
- ◆ High school students doing community service every week
- ◆ A meaningful contribution from a local foundation
- ◆ College work-study students and college volunteers
- ◆ A corps of senior citizens that helps every week
- ◆ A half-time coordinator paid for by the school district

The second section of the survey gave the grantees a scenario. Here is the situation: You are invited to advise the key players in an afterschool program that is half-way through a three-year grant. *What are the first three "things" you would tell them to do to keep their program going and in a quality way after the three-year period.*

Sampling

To gather data, a total of approximately 200 21st Century grantees around the country, randomly chosen from 16 states, were surveyed. The following states were included in the results.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| ◆ Alabama | ◆ Nevada |
| ◆ Arkansas | ◆ New York |
| ◆ California | ◆ South Carolina |
| ◆ Colorado | ◆-Texas |
| ◆ Connecticut | ◆ Utah |
| ◆ Florida | ◆ Vermont |
| ◆ Georgia | ◆ Washington |
| ◆ Illinois | ◆ Wisconsin |

The number of sites that returned surveys totaled 31, approximately a 15 percent response rate. While the sample is intended to give a snap shot of ideas, the sampling and return procedures were not intended to represent a national representative sample. However, the authors periodically ran a one-way analysis of variance on the 11 items in the survey to detect differences in the ratings as the responses were returned. There was only minor shifting in averages and standard deviations. While this does not substitute for a larger sample, it does suggest the order of priority is probably fairly close to what would be obtained from a larger sample and higher return rate.

The surveys from the 21st Century grantees came from people who worked for the school district, with a few exceptions, such as volunteers or a person working with a youth-serving organization. In compiling the answers to the open-ended question about what to do if funding were ending, all responses were analyzed. For the numerical data, if numerous surveys were received from the same town or city, the one from the project coordinator was used; if the coordinator did not respond, all surveys from that site were averaged.

Appendix B

Statistical Information

One-Way Analysis of Variance

Analysis of Variance

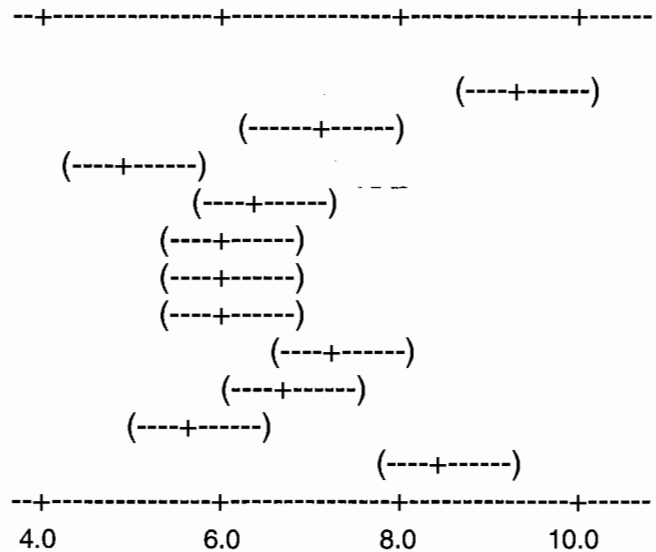
Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Factor	10	543.89	54.39	8.29	0.000
Error	326	2138.98	6.56		
Total	336	2682.87			

Level	N	Mean	StDev
Source A	31	9.419	1.822
Source B	31	6.935	3.098
Source C	30	4.867	3.159
Source D	30	6.433	3.059
Source E	30	6.067	2.690
Source F	31	6.065	2.421
Source G	31	6.097	2.357
Source H	31	7.484	2.502
Source I	31	6.871	2.391
Source J	30	5.667	2.294
Source K	31	8.710	2.053

Pooled StDev = 2.562

MTB >

Individual 95% CIs For Mean
Based on Pooled Standard Deviation



- ◆ Source A: In-kind resources from a school district (e.g., space, supplies)
- ◆ Source B: Financial support from city or county government
- ◆ Source C: One of the items partially funded by the United Way
- ◆ Source D: A sliding fee or volunteer hours supplied by parents
- ◆ Source E: A specific portion of a person's time donated by two or three youth serving organizations (e.g., Y, Boy's and Girl's Club, 4-H)

- ◆ Source F: Cultural groups daily supplying artists and music instructors
- ◆ Source G: High school students doing community service every week
- ◆ Source H: A meaningful contribution from a local foundation
- ◆ Source I: College work-study students and college volunteers
- ◆ Source J: A corps of senior citizens that helps every week
- ◆ Source K: A half-time coordinator paid for by the school district