

The Leverage of After-school Value

In too many schools today, 3 p.m. marks a daily missed opportunity to meet the tougher achievement demands placed on students and school districts.

For many children, it's when learning effectively stops and when opportunities for inappropriate behaviors line up to take their place. It's when many parents worry, rightly, that their children aren't sufficiently supervised. It's when community, youth, arts and law enforcement groups *could* become potential allies with the school district in helping keep children on track and learning.

Ironically, it's the hour when many of the school district's investments in learning resources and facilities sit idle.

But in more and more school districts around the nation, it has become the time of day for new and creative learning opportunities, offered in settings where children are supervised by professional educators and community partners. By most assessments, today's after-school programs make a positive difference in the lives of students and improve the climate for school and district success.

Accordingly, after-school programs are very popular with the public. A series of annual voter surveys conducted by the Afterschool Alliance shows pub-

Well-supported programs can bring student gains and public favor

lic support consistently running in the 90 percent range, with 76 percent of voters even going so far as to say they'd be willing to pay additional taxes if more after-school programs resulted.

Because after-school programs offer the unique opportunity to engage the public and community organizations with schools, dynamic programs build public support that can advance many of a school district's priorities.

With today's increasingly rigorous academic standards, many students need additional learning time. The public understands as much: In the 2004 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, 94 percent support increasing instructional time. At the same time, rapidly changing workplace demands mean that many working parents need additional help during after-school time to keep children on track.

These two factors played a vital role in the growth of after-school programs throughout the 1990s. But tight local, state and federal budgets have halted the growth of programs in many districts.

So it is fair to wonder whether we are on the verge of missing a unique, even historic, opportunity to fill the hours immediately following the end of the school day with a treasure chest of academically enriching activities and expanded learning opportunities, provided by programs that help build connections to and support from taxpayers and voters.

Multiple Effects

Today's superintendents face stern challenges. Boosting student performance and increasing school safety are constant concerns, as are building public support and modernizing school buildings. With critics of public schools growing ever more vocal and shrill, finding adequate financial and other support to provide students with the breadth and depth of learning opportunities is more and more difficult.

While some superintendents see after-school programming as just another burden, most seem to regard it as an opportunity to address many of the most vexing challenges school districts face. Many of these superintendents are lever-



aging existing school district resources, personnel and facilities to significantly increase learning time, while recruiting and rallying more allies outside the schools to the task of expanding learning possibilities. In turn, the effort demonstrates to taxpayers that their tax investments are being efficiently used—both building support for public education and drawing more of them into the district's schools.

It is perhaps little surprise that those in the business of creating more after-school opportunities believe the current flat-lining of after-school funding is a very bad mistake. To advocates and practitioners, the benefits from after-school programs are in plain evidence, and study after study by independent academics have demonstrated their value. Researchers have examined the impact of programs on students' achievement, social interaction and safety. They've looked at short- and long-term effects. They've examined a broad variety of programs in a range of settings. Results vary somewhat from program to program, but the weight of the research evidence tells us that after-school, done right, lives up to its promise.

To hear Arne Duncan, CEO of the Chicago, Ill., Public Schools tell it at a May 2003 press briefing: "If you look at

results—and we do have to be bottom-line oriented—our test scores jumped to all-time highs, our mobility rate dropped to its lowest point ever, our truancy rate dropped to its lowest point ever, our graduation rate is at an all-time high.

"For the first time ever, we have 8th graders beating national norms; that has never happened before. In a district where 85 percent of our students live below the poverty line, that was a huge real and symbolic accomplishment. And part of the reason—we can't say this is the only reason, but part of the reason—we think we did so much better is [that] last year we added about 50,000 students to our after-school programming. ... So [after-school] is a core, core part of our educational strategy."

Duncan and other school leaders see after-school programs as an opportunity to meet escalating state requirements and No Child Left Behind standards. And their framework for fixing what ails public education reaches beyond the school system's immediate resources to involve the broader community—volunteers, sponsoring businesses, the faith community, civic organizations and the philanthropic community.

It's natural for administrators to fall into the habit of looking inward, first and last, tightening the curriculum and

the school day and working to get the very best from their principals and teachers. Those are very important efforts, but the focus needn't be limited to what happens between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Children's minds don't stop at 3 p.m., and neither should their learning. So their schools and community partners should not stop teaching.

Learning and Growth

Well-structured after-school programs effectively expand learning time for students. Children get individual tutoring along with lessons and activities that reinforce the day's class work and the night's homework. And they have an opportunity to develop the kind of team-building and leadership skills so often squeezed out by the increasing focus on test scores, as well as what some call "21st century Skills"—exploration of college and career possibilities, engagement in art, music and science projects, and increased civic responsibility and self-discipline from service learning. (See www.afterschoolalliance.org for more ideas.)

The results are positive and multifaceted. According to the California Department of Education, an evaluation of the statewide After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Pro-

Understanding Supplemental Educational Services

BY TERRI DUGGAN SCHWARTZBECK

What are supplemental educational services under No Child Left Behind? Title I schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB for three or more years must provide low-income students with supplemental educational services. These services consist of extra academic assistance designed to boost student achievement in reading, language arts and mathematics.

Instruction is provided outside of regular school hours, such as before or after school, on weekends or during the summer, and it generally is provided by an outside entity, such as a for-profit company, non-profit group, local community program, college or university or a faith-based group. This aspect of the law is expanding the number of options, particularly after-school programs, that are available to low-income students whose families might not otherwise be able to afford them.

Schools and districts that have made adequate yearly progress are also eligible to become providers. Providers are responsible for ensuring that content is aligned with state standards and assessments.

How are these supplemental services secured?

First, states must identify and publish a

list of eligible providers. The state must ensure the provider has a demonstrated record of effectiveness and that the services are of high quality, research based and designed to increase student achievement.

Districts then identify eligible schools and eligible students and must notify parents that services are available. Next, the district must identify accessible providers and make that information available to parents. Districts need to make sure this information is easy to understand (which could mean providing translation in the family's native language). The information to parents must describe availability, the identity of approved providers and at least a brief description of the services, qualifications and demonstrated effectiveness of each provider.

The district is required to offer consistent information about each of the available service providers. Many school districts choose to do this by hosting a provider fair.

Districts then must help parents choose a provider, upon request; tell parents how to sign up for services for their child; enter into contracts with providers; ensure providers are paid; coordinate with parents, schools and providers in setting goals for students; and provide information to allow the state to monitor performance.

How are supplemental educational services funded?

School districts have the responsibility of setting aside money from state, local or federal sources. Districts must spend an amount equal to 5 percent and up to 20 percent of their Title I Part 2 allocation unless a lesser amount is needed. Notice that it says *amount equal to* - not *of* - the Title I allocation. The 20 percent amount includes school choice and choice-related transportation as well as SES.

How long does that money have to be set aside?

The law and regulations are somewhat vague, but guidance indicates that school districts must hold that 20 percent for a reasonable amount of time to allow all interested and eligible families to avail themselves of SES. Districts may set a reasonable deadline by which parents must apply.

Miscellaneous Issues and Concerns

- *Safety Requirements:* One commonly voiced concern districts have about SES is the lack of a federal requirement for fingerprinting and criminal background checks for all SES provider staff who will interact with children. This is up to the states, which are responsible for approving providers. However, districts can make information about background checks available to parents, and recent guidance from the federal government has stated that districts can require such checks of providers themselves as well.

- *Accountability:* States have the responsibility for monitoring providers and removing any from the list that do not show results. However, many districts remain concerned about accountability. While providers must show that curriculum is aligned with state standards, whether they do so is determined by the state as it makes its approved list. Districts have no influence or control over the content children are taught in services run by outside providers, yet they remain accountable for the academic performance of those children.

- *Funding:* Some districts face the challenge of having too many students

Additional Resource

Terri Schwartzbeck recommends these resources:

www.tutorsforkids.org—a website developed by the American Institutes for Research with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education with well-organized information for families, providers, states and school districts, including basic descriptions of aspects of supplemental services under No Child Left Behind, a matrix listing the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders and state-by-state information; www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb/choicesupp—a list of forms and letters for districts to use in informing parents about supplemental services, developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; www.nycboe.net/Administration/NCLB/SES/default.htm—examples of fliers and information for parents regarding supplemental services from New York City organized by the New York City Board of Education;

www.mynclb.com—The TransAct corporation offers forms, letters and notices that can be used by districts to inform parents about supplemental services for a subscription fee.

apply for SES. In this case, they are encouraged to, first, ask parents to rank several provider choices instead of only choosing one, maximizing the possibility that a family will be matched. Second, districts will need to create their own priority list, ranking students by lowest achieving and by poverty to ensure the most needy students are first in line. This will maximize the use of set-aside funds.

On the other hand, and more commonly, not all families choose to take advantage of supplemental services. While SES is more popular than the NCLB-required school choice option, many districts find only a small percentage of eligible families apply. In that case, a school district may find itself, as one already has, forced into a contract with the community's lone provider, which required payment for 10 children, regardless of how many signed up. In this instance, only two students did. Other districts find that when only a small percentage of students apply, the set-aside money could be going to help other students instead.

● *Rural Districts:*

Many rural and small school districts find limited numbers of available providers. Some find only online services available, which are limited by connectivity and access to computers.

● *Students With Special Needs:* Many districts have expressed concerns that providers will not be willing or able to serve students with disabilities or students with limited English proficiency. Many districts and schools have become providers expressly to serve this need, although some cannot continue to do so.

● *Districts Serving as Providers.* Many districts choose to offer SES in lieu of choice for some of their students, which is an option if the choice of school alternatives is limited. Many districts also have chosen to become providers themselves. However, some districts have run into an obstacle. After getting initial approval as providers and setting up an SES system, they find themselves declared a district in need of improvement, and under the law they become prohibited from serving as providers.

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gram released in 2002 found “large improvements in achievement among the most high-risk students,” as well as “a direct relationship between gains in math and amount of participation in the program.” Students who participated for 7.5 months or more demonstrated improvements in math scores that were more than 2.5 times those found statewide. School attendance also improved, especially among students having the highest number of absences prior to participating in the program.

Looking down the road, Huron Valley, Mich. Superintendent Robert O'Brien, who was his state's 2003 Superintendent of the Year, points to the significant long-range benefits from after-school. “Research shows that children involved in sports or other after-school activities do better academically, socially and emotionally,” he told the *Detroit News* in December 2004. “They are also less likely to become involved in risky behaviors such as drugs.”

Noting that the middle school years play an important role in the transition from child to young adult, “this transition is made easier if students learn problem-solving, teamwork, leadership and experience new things,” O'Brien said.

South Carolina State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum agrees. “High quality after-school programs don't just keep children away from trouble,” she says. “In today's educational world, where the expected level of achievement keeps rising, after-school opportunities provide the extra time and help that many children need. These programs can play an important

role in students' academic success.”

The significant outlier in the research base is a government-funded examination of pre-NCLB 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. The timing of the study is of particular significance because researchers' findings that the studied programs created no significant academic gains was almost certainly the direct result of the pre-NCLB reality that the programs weren't required to make academics a priority.

But the federal study paddles upstream against a fast-flowing current of studies with opposite, far more positive findings. And it would be difficult to persuade Shirley Prince, superintendent in Scotland County, N.C. Despite being in a low-wealth, rural school district, Scotland County's students are performing close to or above the state averages in reading and math, largely due to their participation in Scotland SCHOLARS, the district's after-school program.

On 23 of 26 reading and math performance indicators, SCHOLARS students showed greater gains than non-SCHOLARS students on their 2004 state end-of-grade exams. “SCHOLARS gives struggling students the time, attention and nurturing they need to succeed,” Prince said.

Her experience has been repeated over and over in various places. So the real questions confronting school leaders are not whether after-school is worthwhile but how to afford it and how to do it well.

A Resource Question

Of course, school districts would be sig-

nificantly assisted in their efforts to expand after-school by an increase in funding for the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers. No Child Left Behind authorized \$2 billion for the current year, but Congress and the president have provided only \$1 billion of that. Separately, states could provide a big boost by including after-school funding in their state school finance formulas. Educators are well advised to advocate for such increases.

That said, however, many school district leaders have found a solution to the funding problem in capitalizing on their own resources to leverage the involvement of community, law-enforcement, youth, parks and recreation, faith, cultural and civic organizations to help sponsor and deliver quality after-school programs. District facilities, classrooms, computer and language labs, libraries, and arts and sports facilities keep students learning after 3 p.m.

Some resources for the expansion of quality after-school programs can be found in the school district itself. Federal Title I and Safe and Drug Free School monies are good resources to deploy in buying more “safe and smart time” after-school and in the summers. The Scotland County, N.C., schools plan to tap



other resources, the result of district administrator Anne Crabbe’s push to have after-school programs licensed as child care centers by the state Division of Child Development. Children at licensed centers are eligible for Department of Social Services subsidies to cover their attendance.

Combining district and school programs that have a student and community focus into a robust comprehensive program provides richness in after-school opportunities that can entice students to attend regularly. The combination can reduce per-student costs, while

expanding programming. Such combined efforts can include tutoring and mentoring programs, college and career access, service learning, literacy and reading assistance, artist residencies, college work-study students, character development, volunteer programs and technology centers, as well as the typical sports, clubs, music and band programs.

After-school programs also can be part of a broader outreach effort to parents that includes General Equivalency Diploma and English as a second language programs in the schools and classes for parents in counseling, computers and more. Explains Arne Duncan, the Chicago schools executive: “[W]e’re teaching young parents how to teach their young children how to read and really starting to engage the entire family. So as our schools become community centers, we’re convinced that it is going to be extraordinarily beneficial to our students long-term.”

Beyond the direct benefit to the students and families involved, the combination of these efforts can create a critical mass of resources to employ full-time or near full-time after-school/community coordinators in schools throughout a district. Such coordinators, working with principals, can be a conduit to identify, rally and coordinate a host of community resources to further strengthen after-school opportunities and thus support for public education. By structuring a program that involves the community in after-school, administrators build support for the public schools themselves. Along the way, they find opportunities to develop new streams of financial support.

For example, many mayors and city council members have embraced after-school programs as a community-building and education-improvement strategy, and they are advocates for local government funding and support for after-school.

This after-school-driven transformation of school into community learning centers also builds voter support. A recent poll by the KnowledgeWorks Foundation finds that public support for paying for new buildings in Ohio increases dramatically if the buildings are to be used for comprehensive after-school programs and opened to community members for adult education, recreation and other classes.

As administrators contemplate creating programs, many quickly recognize that after-school is considerably less expensive by the hour than the regular

A Path to After-school Sustainability

Diversification of funding sources is critical to sustaining the operation of after-school programming.

Many programs become dependent on a single funding source, which complicates their long-term existence.

While it may be harder to develop multiple funding streams, it’s important to do so, says Warren Fauver, director of the Community Learning Centers after-school programs in Wood County, Ohio, “even if some of them are fairly small, to help carry through as other funding subsides.”

Fauver’s program, which has benefited from a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, has had luck funding component parts of its services, such as a pregnancy prevention module.

Ideally, Fauver says, program directors should be seeking long-term support. “Short-term or year-to-year grants, even a lot of them, are not

nearly as stabilizing as renewable funding,” he says. “That’s no secret.” He also has cultivated relationships with a broad range of community organizations for programmatic and fund-raising reasons—an effort that has paid off significantly on both fronts.

Other common sources of revenue for after-school programs include these: United Way, local community or education foundations; city or county government; and sliding participation fees. Additional support can be provided by parent volunteers, a portion of a staff member’s time who is shared by two or three youth-serving organizations (YMCA, Junior Achievement, Boys and Girls Club, 4-H); cultural groups that supply artists and music instructors; high school students performing weekly community service; college work-study students and college volunteers; and a corps of senior citizens who help weekly.

— Terry Peterson

school day. Many of the capital costs, operating costs for the facilities, overhead costs and some of the transportation costs are already paid for. Also the per-hour costs are reduced because quality after-school programs often use a mixture of certified teachers, youth workers, paraprofessionals, college work-study students and volunteers.

These and other factors make an hour of after-school programming cost about a third of what an hour of the regular school day costs. And significantly, after-school programs are often a source of new revenue, as well as a source of enthusiastic community and political support that has systemwide benefits for the district.

District Progress

The synergies to be found in after-school programming are not limited to the financial side, of course. As *The School Administrator* reported in 2003, Tom Andres, then-superintendent in Sauk City, Wis., worked aggressively to integrate after-school programming into the structure of the school system. Many of the district's after-school employees were regular-day half-timers so they're

already known quantities in their schools and know how the system's formal and informal processes work. In addition, program staff are responsible for maintaining solid relationships with other school staff, coordinating after-school curricula and communicating about specific children's progress and needs.

The Greater Latrobe, Pa., school district takes an integrated approach, as well. Assistant Superintendent Stephen Sarokan described the program to the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*: "This is not just a social program. It's about academics and it's highly effective." The program's in-home tutoring component matches its 40 teachers with a certain number of students. The approach increases parental involvement because staff go into the homes, Sarokan said.

At the same time, programs can serve as incentives to gain the buy-in of other groups that want to help children and youth develop and stay out of trouble, such as senior citizens. The rapid increase in the population of active seniors provides an opportunity for schools. These citizens often apply their lifetime of experience in service as volunteers,

tutors and mentors, and many take advantage of learning opportunities offered in after-school programs to brush up on their technology skills or other interests. In the bargain, they develop lasting connections to the schools.

Increasingly, school leaders are seeing after-school programs as useful tools to accomplish multiple goals: increasing student performance, expanding learning opportunities in a safe setting, and building greater parent and community support for their community's public schools. With strategic leadership from the superintendent and district staff, it is possible to get after-school programs off the ground and keep them afloat even in these days of tightened budgets. Robust and comprehensive after-school programs are one important way to leverage more student success and public support. ■

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