After School Issues

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Focus on Partnerships

Finding Common Ground
School and Out-of-School Time Program Partnerships

In the past several years, schools and out-of-school time providers across the country have increased their focus on the value of connections and partnerships between school districts or individual school sites and after-school programs. In many cases, these collaborations result in increased support for children's academic, social, physical, and emotional development.

What partnerships look like.
Relationships between school and out-of-school time programs fall along a continuum ranging from schools leasing space to community-based child care and youth programs in their city to a joint commitment by schools and programs to align their educational goals and standards.

Schools and programs in partnership have a distinct but critical role to play in children's learning and development. The donation of space, resources and sometimes transportation by schools benefits children in out-of-school time programs. In turn, programs help to complement the school day by supplementing children's learning.

"Before our partnership, at 3:20, [school] kids turned into [program] kids but this year they are all our kids all day long"
–Seattle School Principal

Intentional efforts to meet and communicate about the ways in which both schools and programs can contribute to children's academic, social, and emotional development can create a "seamless day" for the kids they serve.

Connections can be made through formal and informal communication and through one-time activities or ongoing, systematized partnerships. They can range from a call to a school principal from a program supervisor at a community-based program to discuss the progress of a particular child who is struggling, to a weekly meeting between program staff and school staff or even the program operating in the school's gym.

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Reasons why partnerships are valued now. Interviewees cited many reasons for the increased focus on school/out-of-school time partnerships. Some credit the greater emphasis placed on partnerships through 21st Century Community Learning Center grants. Others cite the focus on test scores and reaching academic standards among many school districts in the country, and the fact that after school programs are increasingly viewed as places for students to receive additional support to meet academic goals.

In addition, out-of-school time programs are valued by political leaders for giving kids a safe place to be after school and contributing to reduced juvenile crime rates, which peak between 3 and 6 p.m. in many cities. Perhaps most importantly, out-of-school time programs assist working families with child-care needs for their younger children and enrichment opportunities for older children and youth.

Schools and out-of-school-time programs share common goals. Whatever the impetus, as communication between schools and out-of-school time programs grows, both parties are learning they share a common goal: to support children's academic, social, and emotional development. Schools and parents are learning that out-of-school time programs offer opportunities for kids to reinforce classroom material through experiential learning as well as to learn new skills, nurture their talents, get support from peers and adults, and to increase social skills. In addition, out-of-school time programs often offer activities that have been reduced or eliminated by schools such as art, drama, physical education, music and dance.

At the same time, providers find that the children they serve are benefited when out-of-school time staff are viewed by school staff and parents as part of a team that contributes to the development of the whole child.

"I think that partnerships are here to stay because there's a growing recognition that both schools and nonprofit organizations have much to gain by coming together. One sector of the community alone isn't going to provide all that is needed by children and youth during their after school hours
— Ellen Gannett, National Institute on Out-of-School Time

Schools and programs can accomplish more working together. Partnerships and communication can enable schools and program providers to leverage more resources and serve more students than ever before. In addition, the two groups working together often come up with innovative ideas. Ron Morris of the Dallas Independent School District told us, "when schools work with community-based organizations, the result is a program that neither entity could create alone. You get more creative programs, and ideas are shared that schools or community-based organizations may not have had on their own, and we're able to serve more students than we originally expected."

As connections develop, roles must be clarified. One commonly voiced piece of advice was to clarify the roles of schools and the roles of programs when making connections between school and out-of-school time programs. True partnerships are more likely when both groups value the unique contributions each offers to children's development.

The recent national push for demonstrable academic success and higher test scores has created a climate where schools are under more pressure than ever to prove their effectiveness. In some cases, this means schools have less time

2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative and Expanding Youth Horizons

Boston, Massachusetts

The Program

In 1998, Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino created the 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative to support and expand Boston's network of high quality out-of-school time programs that provide academic and social growth opportunities for the city's school children.

The initiative brings together educators, municipal agencies, parents, after-school program providers, the cultural and business communities and private foundations to support children during their out of school time.

The prospect of increasing children's academic performance through after-school enrichment was a major impetus for launching the 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative. By 2003, every Boston student will have to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test in English and mathematics to graduate from high school. Recent test scores indicate over half of Boston's public school students scored below grade level in reading and mathematics, making it unlikely they would meet MCAS standards. Quality out-of-school time supports can assist children in their efforts to successfully meet the benchmarks and the City of Boston has prioritized this issue.

Linking In and Out-of-School Time

The 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative is successfully facilitating partnerships between Boston Public Schools and after-school pro-grams. Community-based after-school organizations may use school buildings rent-free after school, and schools and providers have begun to work together to help children develop academically and emotionally.

One component of the 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative's work is to provide resources for and facilitate partnerships with Boston's 250-plus after-school programs, encouraging the use of promising practices for learning. In 1999, the 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative partnered with The Children's Museum, Boston and other after-school providers to start Expanding Youth Horizons (EYH). EYH supports after-school programs in their efforts to integrate fun, creative and high quality learning activities into their curricula.

EYH was launched at a conference bringing together 300 members of the Boston after-school community. Conference participants received a Resource Notebook that explained the Boston Public Schools learning standards and suggested developmentally appropriate learning activities for a wide range of age groups. The notebook was created under the leadership of a Boston public school teacher. Responding to provider requests, EYH has also published a Training and Technical Assistance Catalog for after-school providers seeking to build their capacity to nurture learning.

Currently, a diverse group of after-school providers, educators, and representatives of cultural institutions are working under the EYH umbrella to create a common language about children's learning for in and out-of-school time staff and other stakeholders; define the unique role of after-school programs in supporting children's academic and social development; foster communication among school and after-school program staff; and develop systemic ways to ensure that programs and children access increased resources to improve learning activities during out of school time.

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to focus on children's social, creative, and emotional development.

At the same time, many out-of-school time programs are not staffed by certified teachers, and are not structured in ways that promote formal instruction in reading and math. For this reason, and the value they place on emotional and social development, most programs are not comfortable being held accountable for children's grades or test scores.

Some experts prefer a model where the school's role is seen as primarily academic and instructional and the out-of-school time program's focus is on social skills, emotional development, creativity, play and experiential learning.

Out-of-school time programs support learning in unique ways. While there is some controversy over how much responsibility out-of-school time programs should take for children's academic achievement, there is growing recognition that when children's emotional and developmental needs are met, they are more likely to perform well academically. Out-of-school time programs and schools can align their programs in ways that support children academically and developmentally.

With the stronger focus on academics, school-sponsored hands-on activities and field trips are becoming less frequent. Out-of-school time programs are uniquely equipped to provide these experiential learning opportunities. A cooking activity can become a lesson in math and science; a trip to a local park can provide an opportunity to observe birds or insects discussed in a biology lesson; and a field trip to a colonial village can support a history lesson.

At the same time, children acquire interpersonal skills and support in out-of-school time programs that may contribute to their academic success and keep them invested in the school community, especially if the out-of-school time program is located on school premises. According to John Leichty of the Los Angeles Unified School District, kids who stay connected to school, community and home during middle school have a significantly increased chance of being successful adults. Ron Morris of the Dallas Independent School District reports that he has seen decreased school absenteeism and discipline problems from kids who attend after school programs.

But an out-of-school time program does not have to be located on school premises to make connections with the school day. Boston's Expanding Youth Horizons (EYH) program collaborates with cultural institutions and Boston Public Schools to provide school-based and non-school based

"Out-of-school programs were originally created to provide supervision and recreation. Only recently, with high stakes testing, are schools looking at after-school programs as opportunities to provide extended learning. However, we can't lose sight of the importance of activities young people have a passion for. A skateboarder not doing well in school is going to continue to skateboard. If the school pushes the activity off the campus, the skateboarder will simply go somewhere else. Many students participating in this activity are marginalized students. Our after-school programs must begin to embrace these activities and provide portable skateboard parks and then leverage this activity and others back to academic assistance. The activities of after-school programs must keep young people connected to their school, home and community."
– John Leichty, Los Angeles Unified School District

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child care providers information on ways to incorporate fun, experiential activities that support learning standards. EYH is currently exploring the creation of a web site to provide updated resources, curriculum tips, and a forum for educators and out-of-school time providers to communicate. This is especially valuable to busy people who may find it easier to log on to a web site at 8 p.m. rather than attend a meeting at noon.

In some cases, out-of-school time programs can have an impact in the larger community. Charlotte's Partners in Out-of-School Time (POST) program provides a three-hour training on quality out-of-school time that is open to every adult in the community who works with children. This includes scout leaders, soccer coaches, ballet teachers, mentors, counselors, teenagers who work in summer camps and many others.

Schools as a Community Resource:
Dallas' 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Dallas, Texas

The Program
The Dallas Independent School District began the 2001-2002 school year with forty-five 21st Century Community Learning Centers providing after-school and community programs for over 10,000 students, parents and community members.

The 21st Century sites were started with two goals in mind: foster greater cooperation between schools and other after-school program providers, and link after-school activities more closely with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills Curriculum (TEKS) used by schools.

In addition to progress in these areas, the Dallas Independent School District has seen a drop in absenteeism and behavior problems in students who participate in the after-school programs at 21st Century Learning Centers.

Linking In and Out-of-School Time
Texas state law mandates that schools themselves – not districts or central administrations – make decisions about enhancing student performance on their campuses. This includes the critical decision to set up and maintain a campus-based after school program. Each 21st Century school therefore works with community organizations to create its own unique after-school program.

Dallas schools invited community-based organizations to run after-school activities in school buildings at no cost for the space. Because of this partnership, after-school programs are able to serve more students than ever before by rotating children through different programs at the same site. At 3 p.m., one group may attend an after-school tutoring program, while another attends a YMCA after-school athletic program. At 4 p.m., the groups switch.

All of the Dallas 21st Century sites link after-school activities to TEKS. The most recent 21st Century Learning Grant applications included funding for out-of-school enrichment activities and materials aimed at boosting academic performance in school.

Two committees oversee each 21st Century Learning site. The Site Advisory Council (including teachers, out-of-school-time program staff, community organizations, parents and other community members) oversees and advises the after-school program on what the community wants for its kids. The School Support Team (made up of administrators, after-school site coordinators, school counselors, teachers, food service workers, transportation staff and custodial staff) informs and involves the community and assists with coordination of regular day and after-school programs. They also help link after-school activities to reading, mathematics and science, and coordinate use of facilities between school day staff and after-school staff.

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Strategies for Successful Connections

In interviews with both national and local experts on school and out-of-school time partnerships, all shared similar insights on building successful collaborations and partnerships:

1. Communication is key.
Opening lines of communication between school and out of school-time program staff, as well as among other partners, is critical. By taking the time to understand each other's unique cultures, contributions and challenges, partners are better able to articulate roles and develop programs for alignment between school and out-of-school time. Partners are more motivated to communicate when time and money is allotted to support their efforts instead of simply adding additional task to large workloads.

2. Intermediary organizations can be a bridge.
Organizations like Partners in Out-of-School Time in Charlotte, Boston's 2:00- to—6:00 Initiative and School's Out Washington can serve as facilitators and translators. Schools and out-of-school time programs have distinct cultures and approaches, and it is often valuable to get assistance with communication and understanding.

3. Work from shared goals.
While establishing relationships and communication, partners should also talk about their vision for what young people need to succeed and should focus on shared or overlapping goals rather than differences.

4. Involve the community.
The most successful partnerships involve not only school and out-of-school time program staff, but also parents; political, faith and community leaders; local and state governments; and funders. It is best to involve all players in the planning and relationship building phase. It is also important that collaborations and partnerships reflect the school and program community in terms of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

5. Leaders must buy in.
Many people told us that partnerships struggle if the school principal and out-of-school time program director are not fully invested. Leaders model collaboration to the entire community.

6. Staff at all levels must support partnership.
At the same time, it is also important that all school and program staff - from administrators, to janitors, to teachers to childcare providers – are aware of the partnership and support it.

7. Partnerships should be reciprocal.
Children, youth, families and communities should all benefit from a partnership. Collaborations focused just on increasing children's academic performance for the benefit of schools or to provide programs with facilities can feel one-sided.

8. Put it in writing.
It is important to put agreements about collaboration, communication and resource sharing in writing so that they survive transitions among leadership and other key staff and partnership participants.

9. Back up your efforts with sound research.
In Boston, Charlotte, and other cities, solid research supporting the value of out-of-school time programs contributed to school and community buy-in and informed partnership planning.

Out-of-School-Time Program/School Linkages Project and Alignment Initiative

Seattle, Washington

The Program

In 1999, Seattle MOST (Making the MOST of Out-of-School Time) provided a grant for six school and out-of-school time provider teams to strengthen connections and partnerships between out-of-school time programs and schools. The grant was administered and supported through a partnership of School's Out Washington, The City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools.

The first year of the grant (1999-2000) was designated as a planning year for teams to assess needs in their program and school community, develop a plan to address those needs and increase cooperation between out-of-school-time programs and schools. The second year (2000 – 2001) was for implementation. The teams included school staff, program staff, parents and community members. Teams attended training and received technical assistance to enhance their team-building efforts.

For the 2001-2002 school year, Seattle Public Schools is engaged in an Alignment Initiative to strengthen rela-tionships between programs and schools, in order to enhance children's learning and to increase children's social and emotional development. Programs and schools will be asked to work together to align out-of-school activities with schools' learning standards. Programs that demonstrate curriculum alignment will be offered rent-free space by the district.

Linking In and Out-of-School Time

Prior to the Out-of-School-Time Program/School Linkages project, it was common for school staff and program staff to have no or very little contact with each other, even though out-of-school time programs are often housed inside school buildings. The Linkages grant allowed school and program staff to get to know each other over an entire school year, build a strong team and plan collaborative strategies. Most participants in the Program/School Linkages project felt the connections they have made through this initiative will benefit their agencies and the children they serve, long beyond the two-year grant period.

Through the Linkages grant, schools and programs discovered many innovative ways to support and strengthen each other's work. Final plans included strategies such as:

- Institutionalizing systems of communication and coordination between schools and programs

- Developing a handbook and model for coordination between a school and a community center

- Developing consistent standards of behavior for children in school and out-of-school time programs

- Working together to present "family reading nights" for kids and parents

- Including program staff in school staff meetings and the school governance structure

- Hiring program staff to assist in classrooms during the school day

- Hiring a staff person to serve as a liaison between school and out-of-school time programs

- Including program staff in parent/teacher conferences.

Lessons learned from the Program/School Linkages effort are being currently being captured through a process evaluation to help inform and strengthen continued partnerships through the Alignment Initiative.

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Overcoming Challenges to Collaboration *(cont. from p. 6)*

Interviewees also shared some challenges they have experienced and strategies for overcoming those challenges.

1. Time is the biggest challenge.

Because school staff, program staff and parents are all incredibly busy and have different "shifts" with kids, finding time to meet together can be the biggest challenge to a partnership. However, when partners are committed and flexible, they can find time to meet.

2. Move forward despite cynicism.

Several cities have been able to address concerns about programmatic effectiveness by establishing pilot projects. Instead of convincing an entire school district or city that all schools and out-of-school time programs should partner, pilot partnerships are set up to test ideas and processes for partnership.

3. Administrative systems pose a challenge.

Schools and out-of-school time programs are often subject to different sets of standards and bureaucratic requirements. Many partnerships found that understanding each other's systems and goals and looking for ways to align or streamline requirements was extremely helpful.

Resources

Interviewees:

This article is based on one-on-one interviews with the following people, which took place in August and September 2001:

- Ellen Gannett, Co-Director and Director of Training, National Institute on Out-of-School Time, www.niost.org

- John Leichty, Assistant Superintendent of Extended Day Programs, Los Angeles Unified School District, 213-625-4009, jleichty@lausd.k12.ca.us

- Ron Morris, Specialist, Dallas Independent School District, 972-502-1249, rmorris@dallasisd.org

- Clare Tate, Director, Partners in Out-of-School Time (POST), 704-376-9541, post@fftc.org

- Marinell Yoders, former Senior Program Manager, Boston 2:00 –to-6:00 Initiative. Contact Kathleen Traphagen, Executive Director, 617-635-2098

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