

AfterSchool Issues

Community-Based Afterschool Programs and Schools: Building High Quality Afterschool Programs

The National Institute on Out-of-School-Time (NIOST) investigated partnership strategies between community-based organizations conducting afterschool programs and the schools they serve. NIOST used in-depth phone interviews and site visits to collect information on several community-based organization afterschool programs and their affiliated schools. This publication highlights three partnership strategies that contribute towards meaningful and rewarding collaborations. In bringing the experiences of program providers, schools, and community organizations together, NIOST can learn and share strategies for strengthening the afterschool program field.

For further information
please contact NIOST:

NIOST
Wellesley College
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
781-283-2547

www.NIOST.org

NIOST

*National Institute on Out-of-
School Time*

Promising Practices in Afterschool Program and School Partnerships

Community-based organization afterschool programs and schools may have different approaches on how to serve youth, but their goals are the same — to help students reach their potential and achieve positive outcomes. However, in many ways, afterschool programs and schools often live in separate silos with little or no contact between them. The process of entering into meaningful and successful partnerships can sometimes be a challenge.

Many community-based organizations have years of experience serving youth during the out-of-school time hours. Community-based organizations have historically been very effective at building relationships, engaging community members, and seeking opportunities to expand community capacity and awareness. These distinctive, often grassroots organizations aim to fulfill the immediate needs of those in the community while providing long-term solutions to pressing community issues. Community-based organization afterschool programs can include innovative enrichment activities and educational programming that complement the regular school day.

Afterschool programs that are able to successfully partner with schools will ultimately be able to better support student learning while keeping their mission to provide a safe, healthy, and dynamic environment for children and youth. Coordinated alliances between parties with similar goals can improve school outcomes and school climate, connect families to support services and engage, guide, and motivate students to produce their own success (Epstein et al., 2002).

What We Know About Effective Partnership

Partnerships take time to establish and require strong communication to sustain over time. Open lines of communication between partners such as afterschool program directors and school day faculty are crucial to forming sustainable and promising afterschool program and school relationships. The importance of interweaving afterschool program and school day learning and developing a collective set of goals with the school is a significant step to establishing partnerships that will grow and intensify over time.

Support from the school principal is crucial to the development and sustainability of afterschool school partnerships. Afterschool programs often must find resourceful and creative ways to engage principals and school staff in order to achieve important goals for student success. Through becoming a member of school committees, action teams, or participating in other regular meetings with school personnel, afterschool program staff can exchange valuable information with school staff and make meaningful contributions to school planning.

Cont. on p. 2

Promising Practices

Continued from p. 1

In recent years, the goal of afterschool programming has shifted to not only providing safe environments and supervised activities for children and youth, but also to support academic improvement and links to community resources. Assessing student academic needs allows afterschool programs to tailor learning supports and creates opportunity for connection with classroom teachers. Familiarity with student progress reports and implementing full circle communication between afterschool program staff, teachers, and parents about homework can help afterschool program staff assist students in more focused ways.

Building relationships with schools can represent new ground for some afterschool program directors. It was evident from the investigated programs that the task of building and sustaining partnership relationships may fall mostly on the afterschool program director. Afterschool programs may need to alter schedules, procedures, or content to meet the needs of schools. More than any other task, building lasting partnerships requires establishing trust with school administrators and staff.

The following three case studies highlight some of our findings about effective afterschool program and school partnerships. We focus on three important strategies: Curricular Connections, Program Directors as Resource Connectors, and Dedication to Partnership.

Profiles

Curricular Connections Supporting Partnership

The afterschool program at the Gardner Extended Services School (GESS), a school-community-university partnership elementary school, is based on collaboration and curricular connection. The GESS afterschool program, managed by the YMCA of Oak Square in Allston, Massachusetts, has been in existence for ten years and serves approximately 150 students in grades K–5.

In addition to directing the afterschool program, the GESS Coordinator serves as a liaison between the afterschool program and the school to support goal and curricular connection. Through the role of the GESS Coordinator the afterschool program has full access to the school day environment and connects to the variety of learning opportunities and activities that take place in the school.

GESS has pursued a partnership strategy centered on connecting afterschool program and school curriculum. YMCA Oak Square has three priorities for curricular connection: (1) integrate the curriculum; (2) make it meaningful and applicable; and (3) emphasize student enjoyment and engagement. Partnerships that form around a specific initiative, such as developing an afterschool program/school connected curriculum, can create an invested team of teachers and afterschool program staff that work together towards the benefit of both the school and the afterschool program.

Integrating school day curriculum into the afterschool program is a challenge that requires strong communication between the afterschool program and school day staff as well as knowledge of teaching and learning methods. Support and investment from the principal is critical to the success of adapting the school day learning content into educational and afterschool program activities that appeal to students.

Over the years the GESS afterschool program has established itself as a major contributor towards the learning improvement and healthy development of the school's students. The afterschool program has made a commitment to supporting school day curriculum, improving afterschool program quality, and providing professional development for afterschool program staff through collaboration and partnership with the school.

Partnerships that form around a specific initiative, such as developing an afterschool program/school connected curriculum, can create an invested team of teachers and afterschool program staff that work together towards the benefit of both the school and the afterschool program.

Cont. on p. 3

Promising Practices

Continued from p. 2

The GESS coordinator, Julie Bott (Director of Extended Services), worked with five school day teachers (compensated through an afterschool program budget special grant) to create a comprehensive curriculum that is aligned with school day teaching and learning standards for each grade level. This Curriculum Development team, which consisted of teachers and afterschool program staff designed templates for lesson plans. The team created month long unit topics for each grade level which were aligned to the school day curriculum calendar. The participation of school day teachers in the Curriculum Development team was critical to the success of the initiative.

Using her role as Director of Extended Services, Bott was able to:

- Find effective ways for the afterschool program to support school day learning.
- Gain the confidence and support of school day personnel.
- Participate in a variety of leadership teams and staff meetings.
- Secure grants to support the program goal to connect the afterschool program activities with school day learning.

A successful and collaborative afterschool program/school curriculum development project is dependent on several components being in place. It is important for the afterschool program director to outline to the school community and parents the project objectives and the potential benefits for students. Consistent communication between the afterschool program staff, school day staff, and school administration is also essential. Bott regularly attends school staff meetings, school activity meetings, and is a member of the school's Instructional Leadership Team. Frequent updates go out from the afterschool program to the school informing on the experience of curriculum

connections. An afterschool handbook for school day staff and families provides an overview of how afterschool program activities are aligned with school standards. **Leaders and staff from the afterschool program and school agree that curricular connection has been a primary and overwhelmingly successful vehicle to establish and sustain afterschool program and school partnership.**

Afterschool Program Directors as Resource Connectors

Partnership is thriving at the Piagentini Jones School (Intermediate School 192) on Hollywood Avenue in the Bronx! Under the caring umbrella of the Police Athletic League, IS 192 functions both as a Beacon center (full-service neighborhood center) and a TASC (The After School Corporation) sponsored afterschool program. The Police Athletic League (PAL) was founded in 1914 and provides educational, recreational and employment programs during the out-of-school time hours. PAL is the official youth organization of the New York Police Department and serves more than 60,000 boys and girls between the ages of 3-21. Through the PAL, Beacon, and TASC partnership IS 192 is able to offer an afternoon afterschool program, Saturday and summer programming, and a night center program for ages 14-adult.

Attracting and maintaining the flow of resources into an afterschool program is challenging work for afterschool program directors. While partnerships between community organizations like PAL and schools open new resource doors, they also strain human capacity for organizing and work time. To a great extent the "job" of holding up a community organization/school partnership has landed on the shoulders of afterschool program directors. **In the most successful and effective afterschool program and school partnerships, program directors have been able to position themselves as resource connectors.**

It is important for the afterschool program director to outline to the school community and parents the project objectives and the potential benefits for students.

Cont. on p. 4

Promising Practices

Continued from p. 3

Beacon and Afterschool Program Director at IS 192, John Oswald, suggests that outreach skills are paramount to his work. He is regularly a part of organization and committee meetings such as:

Local Community Board, School Leadership Team, PTA, Parent Coordinators, Precinct Council, Home Owners Association, New York City Sports Commission, and the Beacon's own Advisory Council. One connection recently led to a holiday gift give-a-way funded by a local plumbing supply company. Through his outreach Oswald is able to:

- Share and promote the work of the Beacon and afterschool program.
- Leverage parent support and interest for youth programming.
- Identify partners focused on youth issues.
- Connect to a broad array of potential organization resources.
- Position the youth programs at IS 192 as a viable investment for corporate fundraising and donation.

The foundation for effective outreach and relationship cultivation begins in the school building. Oswald considers the strength and quality of his relationship with the school principal as an asset to the external outreach agenda. For particular initiatives the Beacon and afterschool program may share physical or financial resources with the school. Consistent effort is made to publicly acknowledge each others' roles in student and organization achievements. It is easy to see the complete and coherent package IS 192 presents as a model for afterschool and school partnership to a community or corporate organization.

The foundation for effective outreach and relationship cultivation begins in the school building.

Connecting resources to support the development of comprehensive and broad youth program services requires a particular skill set. Oswald identifies three worker qualities that contribute to fulfilling a role as resource connector:

Visionary - It's essential to see the potential of how program services can grow and develop through resource connections, and to have a shared vision of how full partnership with a school could look and feel.

Persistence - Being able to craft and re-craft messages and requests is key. It takes persistence to figure out the points of connection between organizations and agendas, but getting there can have a positive payoff.

Flexibility - In the world of afterschool programming and youth services all things can

happen and they will! A successful resource connector is responsive to the individuals and community he/she is serving and expects to work through direction, priority, and personnel change.

Dedication to Partnership

The partnership between Kids Co. afterschool program and The John Hay Elementary School in Seattle, Washington has developed over the past 15 years by building relationships between afterschool program staff, principal, teachers, and parents. The Kids Co. afterschool program has been serving students at The John Hay School currently serves approximately 70 students in grades K-5. Kids Co. offers a variety of activities including arts and crafts, sports and outdoor games, cooking, life-skills, drama and music, homework and reading help, as well as fun group activities in a safe and nurturing environment.

The experience of Kids Co. afterschool program demonstrates that building partnership requires dedication over time. While the Kids Co. afterschool program has had a presence at John Hay

"You just have to have faith in your vision - you have to believe that what you're doing is right for your kids and eventually everyone sees the results of it."
John Oswald
PAL Beacon 192 Director

Cont. on p. 5

Promising Practices

Continued from p. 4

for many years, the goal of building a formal and comprehensive partnership with the school has become a more intentional focus over the years.

Fulfilling their ambition to provide quality afterschool programming ultimately led Kids Co. to want to work more closely with the school they serve. Commitment to partnering with the school has now become a major part of the afterschool program's mission. The culture of the school, during the same time period became more welcoming as the benefits of quality afterschool program became recognized. This awareness was supported by the Seattle Public Schools partnership with after-school programs through the Community Alignment Initiative. A climate of partnership is conveyed through policies and attitudes of the school district, the city, the afterschool support organization (Schools-Out Washington) and Kids Co.

When the program director, Nikki Bautista, arrived at the John Hay School five years ago she was able to build upon the existing groundwork supporting collaborative relationships between the afterschool program and the school. Supporting and sustaining partnership with the school is a priority in her job as afterschool program director. For an afterschool program director, dedication to partnership means investing time, leadership, and energy into developing and maintaining a culture of open communication and trust with school leadership and personnel. Bautista has found that partnership must start with the principal and is not limited to any one person; rather it is essential to make links to a wide variety of school staff, teachers, and administration.

Dedication to building partnership overtime has had visible results for the afterschool program:

- Increasingly able to provide greater support to struggling students in the afterschool program.
- Gradually be viewed as a critical part of the children's lives, school culture, and school arena by school day teachers and parents.
- Steadily increase communication with teachers and school administration which paves the way for collaborative planning, fundraising, and problem-solving.
- Increasingly be invited to participate in school day

activities, events, planning, and professional development trainings with the school staff.

- Gaining additional physical space for afterschool program use.
- Progressively more viewed as a "resource" rather than just a school "add-on."

Dedication to partnership by the program director has been central to holding the partnership together and keeping partnership always moving in a forward direction. Overtime the partnership has grown and is now institutionalized to the extent that the afterschool program "feels a part of the school." Bautista clearly affirms the value added to the afterschool program from continuous and long-term commitment to growing partnership: partnership that is rooted in working towards common youth goals, valuing communication, and recognizing the contributions and resources of afterschool programs and schools.

Promising Practices

Resources:

Interviews conducted for this publication:

Nikki Bautista

Program Director
Kids Co.
John Hay Elementary
School
201 Garfield Street
Seattle, WA 98109
johnhay@kidscompany.org

Julie Bott

Gardner Extended Services
School Coordinator
The Thomas Gardner
Extended Services School
30 Athol Street.
Allston, MA 02135
jbott@boston.k12.ma.us

John Oswald

Program Director
Beacon Program
I.S. 192 Piagentini-Jones
School
650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx, NY 10465
joswald@palnyc.org

References:

Epstein, J.L., Sanders,
M.G., Simon, B.S., Salinas,
K.C., Janshorn, N.R., &
Van Voorhis, F.L. (2002).
School, family and
community partnerships:
Your handbook for action
(2nd ed). Thousand Oaks,
CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Helpful websites:

AED Center for Youth
Development and Policy
Research
<http://www.afterschool.org/>

Coalition for Community
Schools
<http://www.communityschools.org/>

Forum for Youth
Investment
<http://www.forumfyi.org/>

The Finance Project
www.financeproject.org/

The National Youth
Development Information
Center
<http://www.nydic.org/>

