Chapter 2
What Works: Components of
Exemplary After-School Programs

Quality after-school programs can provide safe, engaging environments that motivate and inspire learning outside of the regular school day. While there is no one single formula for success in after-school programs, both practitioners and researchers have found that effective programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural, and recreational activities to guide learning and engage children and youth in wholesome activities. They also find that the best programs develop activities to meet the particular needs of the communities they serve.

The types of activities found in a quality after-school program include tutoring and supplementing instruction in basic skills, such as reading, math, and science; drug- and violence-prevention curricula and counseling; youth leadership activities (e.g., Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, academic clubs); volunteer and community service opportunities; college awareness and preparation; homework assistance centers; courses and enrichment in the arts and culture; computer instruction; language instruction, including English as a second language; employment preparation or training; mentoring; activities linked to law enforcement; and supervised recreation and athletic programs and events.

However, many programs allow children to spend far too much time in passive activities such as television or video viewing.   One reason for poor-quality after-school activities may be inadequate facilities. Most after-school programs do not have the use of a library, computers, museum, art room, music room, or game room on a weekly basis. Too many programs do not have access to a playground or park.[1] Other reasons for poor-quality after-school programs include large ratios of children to staff, inadequately trained staff, and high turnover due to poor wages and compensation.[2]

Looking at the big picture of after-school programs—those in schools, those run in the facilities of community-based organizations, or those found in houses of faith—researchers have identified some common characteristics necessary to developing high-quality programs that meet the needs of a diverse population of school-age children.[3]

Common elements of successful after-school programs include:

▸ Goal setting, strong management, and sustainability
  - Focus on the goals of the program
  - Solid organizational structure
  - Effective management and sustainability
  - Meeting legal requirements

▸ Quality after-school staffing
  - Role of the program administrator
  - Hiring and retaining qualified staff
  - Professional development for staff
  - Use of volunteers
  - Low staff-to-student ratio
  - Smaller group sizes

▸ Attention to safety, health, and nutrition issues
  - Creating safe places with adequate space and materials
  - Meeting nutritional needs

▸ Effective partnerships with community-based organizations, juvenile justice agencies, law enforcement, and youth groups
  - Steps to building an after-school partnership
  - Using community resources effectively

▸ Strong involvement of families
  - Involving families and youth in program planning
  - Attending to the needs of working parents

▸ Enriching learning opportunities
  - Providing engaging opportunities to grow and learn
  - Challenging curriculum in an enriching environment
  - Coordinating learning with the regular school day
  - Linking school day and after-school curriculum

▸ Linkages between school day and after-school personnel
  - Planning time to maximize children's opportunities
  - Coordinated use of facilities and resources

▸ Evaluation of program progress and effectiveness
  - Using data for improvement
  - Designing effective evaluations

These characteristics of high-quality after-school programs help ensure children's continued growth, development, and learning throughout the preadolescent and adolescent school years.[4]

Goal Setting, Strong Management, and Sustainability

Community coordination and collaboration are key to running successful after-school programs. Programs need to set and communicate goals from the beginning, develop a solid organizational structure, manage effectively, and plan for long-term sustainability.

Focus on the goals of the program.
After-school programs should be clear about their intended goals. Some after-school programs are designed primarily as safe havens, some focus on recreation, and others have a strong academic focus. Leaders, staff, parents, and community members should establish these goals through collaborative decisionmaking. Once the goals have been established, the program should be managed to meet those goals. By creating an evaluation plan that focuses on the goals, an after-school program can set a course for continuous improvement in which the goals may shift or be refined over time.

Communicating the goals of the program is a primary function of the leaders and staff. The program's goals influence and guide the allocation of funding, the structure and activities of the program, the overall size and staffing, plans for long-term sustainability, and many other factors. In addition, a clear set of goals lets families and community members know what the program offers to children and how they can help.

Solid organizational structure.
Organization and management structures vary across after-school programs. The shape of these structures depends on whether the programs are developed by schools or districts, by community-based organizations or other social service providers, or in partnership with several agencies or organizations. Regardless of the sponsoring group or groups, a successful governance structure combines hands-on, site-based management with regular oversight and accountability to all partners. In programs focused on academic enhancement, school personnel and after-school program administrators need a system in place that allows for effective communication, flexibility, and accountability for actions and results.

> **Strong Resource Management Matters**
>
> Ankeny, Iowa, a community of 25,000, maintains programs for 5,000 children K-12 in nine public schools and a community center. One school offers after-school activities, adult education classes, substance abuse counseling, family services, recreation, meeting space for community groups, and a juvenile justice program. Funding for programs comes from a variety of sources, including user fees and registration fees, the parent-teacher association, federal and state grants, local voluntary contributions, city and school funds, and rental fees for private use of facilities.

Effective management and sustainability.
Successful programs use annual operating budgets, accurate bookkeeping systems, affordable fee structures, and multiple funding sources, including in-kind support. Program administrators search for funding continuously and creatively, looking to both new sources (e.g., community foundations and groups, such as the United Way, local education funds, and employers) and traditional sources (e.g., federal formula and discretionary programs, state programs, foundations, community agencies, and organizations). In addition, a number of mayors and governors are proposing new funding for after-school programs. At the national level, President Clinton and Vice President Gore proposed and Congress passed $200 million in 1998 and $453 million in 1999 to expand after-school programs through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Meeting legal requirements.
Successful programs develop procedures and policies that protect children and staff by meeting licensing requirements, addressing liability issues, carrying adequate liability insurance, maintaining appropriate records, regularly reviewing health and safety practices, and complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Inclusion of children with disabilities is part of a good after-school program.

Quality After-School Staffing

Staffing arrangements vary according to a program's size, management structure, and goals. But all programs need staff who are qualified and committed, have appropriate experience and realistic expectations, and can interact productively with regular school staff, whether or not the program is school-based. Staff usually include a program administrator, teachers, paraprofessionals, and college students along with parent and community volunteers.

Role of the program administrator. The program director plays an important part in ensuring that the after-school program provides high-quality services that meet the needs of program staff, students, and families. Effective administrators also develop strong relationships with the schools that the participating children attend and with important community partners.

Hiring and retaining qualified staff. Children in school-age programs indicate that warm, caring, and stable adult relationships are important to their success in an after-school program. This is especially critical for children and youth who may not have the support and guidance they need at home. Having a staff with higher levels of education is related to fewer negative interactions between staff and children and greater parental satisfaction. As such, programs should hire skilled and qualified staff who are experienced in working with school-age children on learning, enrichment, and recreational activities.[5]

Programs should also be willing to provide attractive compensation and work scheduling packages to retain quality staff. For example, teachers who are part of an after-school program may participate on the basis of a staggered school day that begins at 11 a.m. and ends at 6 p.m.

regular school hours. Mid-day assistants, usually college students, relieve teachers and supervise lunch. Ancillary staff, coaches, and music teachers work from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Professional development for staff. In order to sustain a quality program, staff should be provided with training and learning opportunities to prevent high rates of turnover. Staff training often includes how to work with children, how to negotiate, and how to adapt to the needs of children of different ages, races, or cultures and children with disabilities. Training can also give employees ideas for enrichment and hands-on activities, greater expertise in academic subject matter, knowledge in assessing student progress, and strategies for the different program components of academics, enrichment, and recreation. Training is critical to retention of quality staff members and volunteers.

Use of volunteers. Most after-school programs welcome volunteers. Volunteers can include parents, grandparents, caring senior citizens, federal work-study college students, or national service (e.g., AmeriCorp, VISTA, Foster Grandparents) personnel. Their use can dramatically reduce the price of a program while reducing the staff-to-child ratio and creating a community of learners. Volunteers should have meaningful experiences that build of their skill levels and interests. As with the regular after-school employees, volunteers should be oriented to working with children and youth before entering the program and given the opportunity to participate in staff development.

Low staff-to-student ratio. For true student enrichment, the staff-to-student ratio should be low, especially when tutoring or

mentoring activities are taking place. Staff-child ratios vary according to the ages and abilities of children. Usually, the ratio is between 1:10 and 1:15 for groups of children age six and older. Larger staff-child ratios (greater than 1:13) are associated with more time waiting in line and with staff exhibiting poorer behavior management skills.[6]

Community Assessment Leads to After-School Program
Results from a 1990 survey by the American Association of University Women led to the development of the Before- and After-School Explorers (B.A.S.E.) Program in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. Since 1991, the school-based program has more than doubled in size, yet it still maintains a desirable 1:12 teacher-student ratio.

Smaller group sizes. Group size also matters when undertaking learning and enrichment activities, depending on the type and complexity of the activity. Group size should not exceed 30 in any case. By limiting group sizes, children have more positive interactions with staff members and other children. Programs in which children are in groups that exceed 30 tend to lose their learning function. Ratios and group sizes should be kept small when students are learning a new or difficult skill. This is also true for activities involving equipment that could be dangerous if children are not supervised properly.[7]

Attention to Safety, Health, and Nutrition Issues

Creating safe places with adequate space and materials. Programs should be safe, close to home, and accessible to all children and youth who want to participate. They

should have adequate space for a variety of indoor and outdoor activities and age ranges, and age-appropriate materials for enhancing learning opportunities. Safe transit can be provided through such methods as staff escorts and crossing guards.

Safe Places Cut Crime

To create safe places for kids, Baltimore's Police Athletic League (PAL) opened up after-school activity centers in the city's fledgling recreation centers from 2 to 10 p.m. Today there are more than 27 centers that serve as safe places for neighborhood kids. Crime involving youngsters has dropped markedly in neighborhoods where the centers are located. The PAL center becomes an anchor in the community and makes the entire community safer.

Safe, Drug-Free Havens

The Beacon Schools Initiative was formed based on recommendations of a task force charged with developing an anti-drug strategy for New York City. To create safe, drug-free havens for children, youth, and families, Beacon schools are required to be open at least 42 hours a week, six days a week, and year-around, including summers and holidays. Typically, Beacon schools are open from 3 - 10 p.m. everyday, including Saturdays. Participant enrollment at the Beacon schools averages 1,700 student participants, plus community residents. Beacon schools offer such activities as sports and recreation, arts and culture, educational opportunities, vocational training, health education, and the opportunity for community meetings, substance abuse prevention education, and neighborhood social activities. The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development funds the

program. Each Beacon school receives $400,000 annually, along with $50,000 for custodial services. Several private foundations also provide funds to enhance the Beacon schools' programming.

Safe Havens for Enrichment and Recreation

By employing teachers and other staff, LA's BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) provides 10,000 students in 62 schools across the city with academic tutoring and instruction, a safe haven for enrichment and recreation, and an opportunity to develop self-discipline, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills. Through a partnership of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the City of Los Angeles, California Department of Education, and private sector companies, the program runs until 6 p.m. after school, Monday to Friday, serving children in neighborhoods vulnerable to gangs, crime, and drugs.

The program includes homework assistance and learning activities, clubs ranging from computers to cooking, organized sports, field trips, and the arts. Diverse and creative enrichment activities involve children in dance, music, science, and art. A significant number of parents and volunteers participate in LA's BEST programs on-site and in regional and citywide activities.

Independent evaluations have shown that children who participate in LA's BEST get better grades, have greater enthusiasm for regular school and show positive changes in behavior. Schools running an LA's BEST program have shown a reduction in reports of school-based crime.

Meeting nutritional needs. Good after-school programs provide a nutritious snack and other meals when appropriate, for relaxation and socializing and to promote sound nutrition for participants. Federal food and nutrition programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are available to school- and community-based programs to help meet the nutritional needs of students.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Program
The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service sponsors a number of food programs aimed at improving nutrition for the nation's students. Services that can be used in before- and after-school and extended-learning programs include the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Special Milk Program. For more information, call 703-305-2286 or find program fact sheets on the USDA Web site at http://www.usda.gov/fcs.

Effective Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations, Juvenile Justice Agencies, Law Enforcement, and Youth Groups

Running quality after-school programs with activities such as tutoring in reading, arts and music classes, conflict resolution, mentoring to prepare students for college or careers, homework help, computer classes, organized sports, and drug-prevention classes requires solid support from parents, educators, and community residents.

Successful programs also have support from law enforcement agencies, service providers, community-based and civic organizations (e.g., the United Way, YWCAs or YMCAs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Junior Achievement, Boys and Girls Clubs), colleges, employers, arts and cultural institutions, museums, park and recreation services, and public officials.

Effective programs draw on all of the community's diverse resources, including the participation of children and youth in program planning, in order to best address the concerns of an entire community.

Steps to building an after-school partnership. Collaboration often requires changes in traditional roles, responsibilities, expectations, relationships, and schedules. These changes can frustrate even the best of efforts if the men and women who run the new program do not share common goals, a vision for what the after-school program can accomplish, and an understanding of the populations the program will target. The program's leaders must also agree on the strategies to be used. Schools, parents, after-school staff members, and community leaders can take several steps to ensure the success of an after-school program.[8] They must:

‣ **Build consensus and partnerships** among key stakeholders to convey the importance of the after-school or summer program and involve them in its planning.

‣ **Assess school and community needs and resources** to operate before- and after-school programs.

‣ **Design a program** that provides learning opportunities for both children

and families within the school and the community at large.

- **Address logistical issues**, including the use and maintenance of facilities, legal and liability concerns, and institutional policies.

- **Obtain qualified employees and volunteers** and clearly define their roles and responsibilities.

After-School Includes the Entire Neighborhood

The Chicago YouthNet Program is a network of youth development sites located in 20 of the city's 25 police districts, and is funded by City of Chicago corporate funds. The program includes activities such as educational enhancement, support services, and recreational, cultural, and community activities including newly expanded job readiness and family counseling programs. The program uses the community resources of the local police district, local public schools and parks, neighborhood-based service providers, and community and religious organizations to provide a comprehensive joint venture program.

Public-Private Partnerships

The After-School Corporation (TASC) in partnership with the City of New York, New York State, and the New York Board of Education is currently providing after-school funding to 100 sites located in schools in New York City and nine sites in upstate New York and Long Island. As of February 2000, TASC funded programs are serving more than 25,000 school children. The program is open from 3 to 6 p.m. every day and available to children enrolled in that public school. Activities include: arts enrichment, recreation, literacy and language arts, sports, cultural awareness, technology literacy, mathematics and science, community service, career preparation, and college preparation.

TASC provides funding to community-based organizations that manage and staff projects at each school site.

Using community resources effectively. Effective collaboration between the after-school program and the community, whether through partnerships or developed networks, gives students more options and helps to extend the resources available for after-school learning, enrichment, and recreation. Communities can provide a wide range of resources for developing high-quality programs, such as funding, facilities, materials, expertise, job observation experiences, mentors, tutors, and community service and learning experiences. Advisory boards help maintain strong links among the community, families, community-based organizations, religious organizations, employers, and the school system and best use a community's various resources. These boards can help the community conduct an inventory of existing after-school resources, such as opportunities at Boys and Girls Clubs or local churches and identify the needs of students in a neighborhood.

The role of the school. Although the degree to which a school participates in creating a successful after-school program can differ from community to community, the role of the school should be one of a community ambassador and an advocate of quality after-school programs. An effective school is a leader in establishing communication, cooperation, collaboration, and participation among families, school day and after-school staff in an effort to improve learning opportunities for children.

Communities often look to the schools to provide after-school programs. Schools can provide space, accessibility, transportation, staff, management, and other resources for after-school programs.[9]

The role of law enforcement officials. Law enforcement officials are supporting after-school programs as ways to prevent crime. Nine out of 10 police chiefs agree that "if America doesn't pay for greater investments in programs to help children and youth now, we will all pay far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs." Indeed, when asked to pick the strategy that would be "most effective" in the long term in reducing crime and violence, the chiefs chose "increasing investment in programs that help all children and youth get a good start" nearly four to one before "trying more juveniles as adults" or even "hiring additional police officers." Following up on their beliefs, police officers and other law enforcement officials are collaborating with community groups, sponsoring after-school programs for children and youth, and serving as role models and mentors in the programs.[10]

We can make ourselves and our children safer by investing in child care and after-school programs for America's most vulnerable kids, instead of waiting to spend far more—in money and lives—on those who become America's 'Most Wanted' adults.

> *—R. Gil Kerlikowske*
> *Buffalo Police Commissioner*
> *President, Police Executive Research Forum*

Strong Involvement of Families

Research during the past 30 years has shown the difference that family involvement makes in children's learning and chances for success. Family involvement in after-school programs is just as important. The success of an after-school program depends on the involvement of both families and the community.

Involving families and youth in program planning. Programs designed to include families and children in the planning draw greater support from participants and their families and from the community at large. When programs incorporate the ideas of parents and their participating children, activities tend to be more fun and culturally relevant and tend to capture children's and adolescents' interests better. Successful programs seek to involve parents in orientation sessions, workshops, volunteer opportunities, parent-advisory committees, and in a wide range of adult learning opportunities, such as parenting, computer, and English as a second language classes.

Parents Help Plan After-School Activities

The Master Program in Montgomery, Texas, offers elementary students (K-6) the opportunity to experience a variety of educational and recreational activities after school. A committee of 30 parents works with the school's administration to oversee program operations and make decisions on class offerings. This committee serves as a liaison between parents and the school administration, encouraging positive communication as well. During the past year, many more parents have become involved in the program, both on the parent committee and as volunteers in the after-school program activities.

Attending to the needs of working parents. Good programs are aware that their customers are not only the children they serve but their families as well. These programs are designed with sensitivity to the schedules and requirements of working parents. Successful programs also find creative ways to keep parents informed of the daily activities, schedules, progress, and accomplishments of their children, and other helpful family resources information. A parent information center, a family Web site, newsletters, information flyers, or a once-a-month family night provide varying degrees of family engagement opportunities.

Accommodating family schedules

In addition to the after-school hours, activities are also scheduled during the morning hours before school when many parents are either commuting to work or already there. Learning, enrichment, and recreational activities are developed for program operation during school holidays and summer breaks as well as for the children of working parents and others after the regular school day.

Making after-school programs affordable

Cost is an important factor for working families. Good after-school programs are cost effective and make accommodations for families enrolling more than one child. Serving siblings of different ages is critical, whether in the same after-school program or in linked, age-specific programs. Siblings do not need to be served by the same program, but programs should work together to serve all children in a family in a convenient and cost-effective manner.

Tending to transportation

In addition to addressing scheduling and cost issues, programs can help meet family needs by providing transportation to and from the before- and after-school programs. While transportation is a major cost for an after-school program, it is a critical safety and logistical concern for families.

Anti-Drug Tax Provides Free After-School Transportation for Kids
The citizens of Jackson County, Missouri, voted for a quarter-of-a-cent tax increase three years ago to combat drug trafficking and abuse by placing more law enforcement officials on the street and providing prevention and treatment dollars to social services agencies. Bridger Eighth Grade Center in Independence received a grant from the Jackson County Community Anti-Drug Tax (COMBAT) Commission to fund transportation costs for students returning home in the evenings from its after-school program, which the commission considers a drug prevention effort. The regular school bus leaves at 3 p.m. and a late bus runs every day at 4:45 p.m.

Enriching Learning Opportunities

After-school programming reflects a commitment to promote knowledge, skills, and understanding through enriching learning opportunities that complement the school day. By providing structured enriching learning opportunities, after-school programs can be an important resource for improving children's academic performance, as well as their social, emotional, and physical development needs. Instructional practices can be used to actively engage students' attention and commitment. In addition, enrichment opportunities not found during the regular school day—such as art, music, and

drama—can be offered to complement the regular school day program.

Providing engaging opportunities to grow and learn. A wide variety of enriching and engaging activities can be offered in after-school programs to make learning fun and to provide recreation. Quality programs give children the opportunity to follow their own interests or curiosity, explore other cultures, develop hobbies, and learn in different ways, such as through sight, sound, or movement. Children in these programs are encouraged to try new activities, think for themselves, ask questions, and test out new ideas. Quality programming reflects the needs, interests, and abilities of children, recognizing that they change as children grow older.

Developing and Implementing an After-School Enrichment Curriculum
FOUNDATIONS Inc., a nonprofit organization in New Jersey, provides enrichment programs, supportive services, and assistance to children in grades K-12 by operating an extended school day program within school buildings. Using literature-based curriculum manuals, students in grades K-6 in FOUNDATIONS' programs participate in activities focused on five themes: All About Me—exploring conflict resolution skills and understanding of oneself; Our Global Festival—understanding the culture, history, and traditions of others; On the Creative Express—including the creative and performing arts as activities; TechQuest—teaching transferable skills based on student needs and teacher training and Action Earth—exploring local as well as national events and issues. Children participate in individual and small and large group activities; indoor and outdoor activities; and

quiet and active play, all of which carry out these themes.

Challenging curriculum in an enriching environment. Successful programs make the extended-time curriculum challenging but not overwhelming. According to research, a challenging curriculum accommodates individual student needs, coordinates with in-school instruction, and focuses on more than remedial work.[11] It also combines direct teaching with indirect instruction, such as computer use, scientific experiments and other hands-on projects. Art, music, reading for pleasure, youth leadership development, and participation in community activities are also part of successful programs. Research suggests that combining these approaches helps students acquire a set of skills useful in school and in life.

Coordinating learning with the regular school day. Good extended-learning programs provide a continuity of learning experiences for students after school through coordination with the regular school day and communication with the classroom teachers and staff of the school or schools attended by children in after-school programs. Creating continuity in learning requires meaningful collaborations between school-day and after-school staff in designing high quality learning opportunities throughout the day. In some after-school programs school-day teachers and after-school staff work together to establish clear goals and outcomes for individual children.

Linking school day and after-school curriculum. Quality after-school curricula integrate learning and enrichment through clear cycles of assessment and evaluation that meet students' needs. As education improvement strategies focus on achieving

higher standards and better student performance, it is likely that local communities will choose to make after-school programs more relevant to the regular school day and collaborate with school day staff to ensure continuity in learning and enrichment.[12] Some after-school programs have used interdisciplinary and thematic group projects that integrate and reinforce concepts children learn in school. For example, students studying multiplication in their math class might practice the multiplication tables through tap in a dance class or students studying cloud formations in their science class might draw cumulus, cirrus, and stratus clouds in their after-school art class.

Linking School Day and After-School Curriculum

At the 21st Century Community Learning Center in Seneca, Missouri, the after-school curriculum is tied to the state's learning standards and objectives. Providers in this community recognize that making learning relevant and meaningful is key. During the first year, after-school providers offered activities that school day staff aligned with state goals and incorporated additional learning opportunities in the classroom. Based on last year's findings, this year staff expect to tie standards and learning together even more. Teachers plan to link state learning standards to school day curriculum and coordinate with after-school providers to build an integrated school day and after-school curriculum to reach specific goals. For example, second-graders are required to understand symmetry. The after-school program will include a workshop on the Shawnee language, customs, and arrowhead-making taught by a tribal chief. The school day curriculum will

include a physics lesson on why arrowheads need to be symmetrical in order to fly. The program is also developing a tracking system that will allow them to enter and track activities, skills acquired, state goals, and different aspects of children's achievement. Although it is too soon to point out specific academic benefits among students, staff believe that the district will find that standardized test scores measuring concepts being taught, have risen for children attending the after-school program.

"[LA's BEST] isn't baby-sitting. This gives children a chance to experience culture and learning while improving themselves."

— Site coordinator
LA's BEST after-school program

Linkages Between School-Day and After-School Personnel

Quality programs support and coordinate their activities with the school in a way that supports true partnership. In those after-school programs physically housed in school buildings, there is the opportunity to link together school day and after-school personnel and resources through activities that focus on the well-being and growth of participants. Quality programs have:

Planning time to maximize children's opportunities. Time is provided for school day and after-school staff to establish and maintain relationships of mutual respect and understanding. Regular meetings with school day teachers and the after-school or summer-time staff allows time to confer on the social and academic status of participating children, write protocol for

sharing space and resources, develop shared policy and procedures for supervision and transportation, design new curriculum, create a welcoming environment for parent and community volunteers, and make arrangements for the use of facilities and materials, such as computer labs and recreational equipment. In some school-based programs, the after-school staff attend faculty meetings with the regular school day staff and share teacher work areas or have permanent office space in schools. Some after-school programs have systematically linked school day and after-school curriculum. For example, a science lesson during the school day may be followed by visit to a pond for hands-on learning during the after-school program.

Using Daily Planners for Communication

At the Watauga County Schools, 21st Century Community Learning Center program in Boone, North Carolina, students use daily planners as a tool for keeping track of homework, goal setting, prioritizing, and time management. Not only do students use the planners to help them manage their homework, but the planner is also used as a log for all after-school and community activities, a tool for monitoring progress, and for accumulating points for participation in special activities (e.g. caving and climbing trips etc.). Teachers and parents rely on the planner as a way to foster communication between the classroom teacher, the after-school program, the students, and parents about homework, academic progress, and other activities. Teachers and staff expect students to use the planners, and students are given credit for proper use of the planners.

Communication Made Simple

At the Alliance for Rural Kids (ARK), 21st Century Community Learning Center in McCormick, South Carolina, teachers and coordinators meet once a week for planning and sharing information about student participants. In addition to meeting once a week, teachers and after-school staff complete a communication form every two weeks to share with the students. Information on the one-page form consists of school attendance, current progress in academics, and a discipline and behavior report. Teachers and after-school providers talk about the information on the communication form during their weekly meetings and meet with individual students to discuss areas that need attention and praise students for their progress. A carbon copy is also sent home to the parents.

Communication Between Regular School and Extended-Day Personnel

Teachers and after-school staff at P.S. 5, an elementary school in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, make daily communication about children's academic progress a priority. When the school opened its after-school program, Children's Aid Society staff members helped to develop a formal notification system in which teachers would send homework slips to the after-school staff; however, this system was never implemented because teachers and after-school staff already communicated effectively through more informal means. Sixty percent of the after-school staff are school-day teachers. The P.S. 5 school-day and after-school staff plan ahead and work together in a flexible way that works. The Children's Aid Society focuses on lengthening the day rather than adding a whole new component in the form of an after-school program.

Coordinated use of facilities and resources. The most common complaint voiced in after-school programs is the lack of connection and coordination between the school and after-school staff regarding the use of facilities and equipment. These logistical problems are often more severe when the after-school program depends on resources brought together by partnerships between schools and other agencies or organizations. Typical problems include using classrooms and other school facilities and equipment (such as sports equipment and computers), providing transportation, and hiring staff. Communication and planning can prevent potential problems and misunderstandings about use of space and resources.

The National PTA believes that child care programs and facilities are important in addressing the education, nutritional, recreational, developmental, and safety needs of school-age and preschool children. The PTA encourages the effective use of existing facilities, such as public schools, for child care programs during nonschool hours and days.

—National PTA Policy Statement

Evaluation of Program Progress and Effectiveness

After-school programs are, by nature, varied and complex, and no matter how well designed, programs must also take experience into account. Effective after-school programs have a continuous evaluation component built into the design so that program planners can objectively gauge their success based on the clear goals set for the program. For example, programs specifically designed to provide safe places

for children need to monitor indicators associated with safety, such as drug use and victimization, but these programs may not assess academic achievement. On the other hand, programs with a strong academic component will want to assess student progress in the after-school and regular school program.

Using data for improvement. A system of accountability and continuous evaluation supports program improvement. It is important to set clear goals for the program against which leaders, staff, and families can monitor the progress of the program and participating students. Depending on the focus of the program and its goals, data may include students' academic performance; results of surveys and focus groups of children, families, staff, and volunteers; neighborhood and school crime statistics; school attendance records; and other information. Based on this information, leaders, staff, families, and community partners can gather periodically to discuss the progress and success of the program, which will help the program with important decisions about design and funding.

Evaluation Aids Continuous Improvement
Sano y Salvo (Project Safe and Sound), the 21st Century Community Learning Center in Tucson, Arizona, has a committee at each middle school composed of administrators, teachers, parents, and community members who work together to design the program and align after-school activities with the school's core curriculum. They are also using a program improvement and evaluation model. Building off a sophisticated data collection and entry system that already exists through the Tucson Unified School District, program

and evaluation staff have designed instruments and templates, scanable surveys, and a continuous evaluation system for program level data. Data are available to programs in a manner that gives them the ability to make timely changes and adjustments to programming and measure desired results.

In South Carolina, staff members at sites in the Save the Children Out-of-School Time Rural Initiative discovered how useful evaluation data are to planning and improving their programs. One director from a rural part of the state said the evaluation process helps in "focusing on working on the small first" instead of trying to solve overarching problems with a single solution. The director of St. Ann's Catholic Outreach Center said that evaluation and training showed her how to set priorities for improvement of the sisters' program, which serves 90 children, ages 5-17, in Kingstree, South Carolina.

Continuous monitoring and a shared understanding of the program's goals help leaders and staff maintain their focus, improve effectiveness and accountability, ensure parent and participant satisfaction, and identify necessary changes. By using evaluation data, a program's director can assess whether its key features are working as intended and run the program better than before. Data also can help form rationales for the program's effects on children's learning and the need for collaboration as well as guidance for management.

Designing effective evaluations. Programs should be regularly evaluated through the use of both self-assessment and outside assessment efforts that incorporate multiple measures of success that reflect program goals. The best evaluations employ well-

designed, quantitative studies that include a control or comparison group of similar students who have not participated in the program. Finally, the evaluation will be most valuable if it is based on the specific goals of the after-school program and focused on measuring the program's progress towards and success in meeting those goals. As after-school programs begin designing curricula that links school day learning to after-school activities, continuous improvement evaluations will be important in shaping, defining, and delivering curriculum that complements the school day and meet the needs of all children.

Continuous Program Improvement, Evaluation, and Curriculum Design

The Boston 2:00 to 6:00 After-school Project, with its partners, have designed a series of activity modules, in partnership with the city's museums and the public schools, which further the state's learning standards in reading, math, and science in pursuit of desired results in program quality and child outcomes. They are also working toward a program improvement and evaluation system that will include training, technical assistance, and rigorous evaluation. Boston, under the leadership of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, is one of the first cities to try and intentionally meld an after-school curriculum with the academic standards set in Massachusetts to provide seamless learning from the regular school day to the after-school program.

Endnotes

1. P. Seppanen, J. Love, D. deVries, and L. Bernstein, *National Study of Before- and After-School Programs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

2. Robert Halpern, *After-School Programs for Low-Income Children: Promise and Challenges, The Future of Children, When School Is Out*, vol 9 no: 2, (David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Fall 1999).

3. Carnegie Council, 1994; Fashola, 1998; Janie Funkhouser et al., *Extending Learning Time for Disadvantaged Students* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1995); National Institute on Out-of-School Time, Making the Case, Presented at Regional Technical Assistance Workshops for the 21st-Century Community Learning Centers Program, Spring 1998; Janette Roman, ed., *The NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care* (Boston, MA: National School-Age Care Alliance, 1998); Elizabeth Riesner and Janie Funkhouser, Designing Effective After-School Programs (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, 1998); de Kanter et al., 1997; Vandell, 1997; White House Child Care Conference, 1997.

4. This chapter contains a number of examples. Following are citations for these examples: Ankeny, Iowa, Community Schools Community Education Department (515-965-9606); KOALA, Boston, Massachusetts (Laura Gang, 508-941-0300); Cason Lane Academy, Murfreesboro, Tennessee (Jeanne Brothers, 615-898-7245); Police Athletic League, Baltimore, Maryland (Rita Chappelle, 410-396-2166); Before and After School Explorers (B.A.S.E.) Enrichment Workshop for Children, Lansdale, Pennsylvania (Nancy Schall, 215-368-1288); Chicago YouthNet Program, Chicago, Illinois (Kharl Walker, 773-536-2926); Master Program, Montgomery, Texas (Wendy Zunker, 409-597-6494); Bridger Eighth Grade Center, Independence, Missouri (Principal Grover Gelven, 816-796-4800); FOUNDATIONS, Inc. (856-727-8000); P.S. 5, Washington Heights, New York (Pete Moses, Children's Aid Society, 212-949-4921); St. Ann's Catholic Outreach Center, Kingstree, South Carolina (Terry Russell, Save the Children, 203-221-4084); Sano y Salvo, Tucson, Arizona (Barbara Benton, 520-617-7434); 21st-Century Community Learning Center, Seneca, Missouri (Tammy Gripka, 417-776-3690); The After-School Corporation, New York, New York (Lucy Friedman, 212-547-6950); Boston 2-6 After School Project, Boston, Massachusetts (Jennifer Davis: 617-635-2098); 21stCCLC LEADERS program, Watauga County Schools (Bricca Sweet, 828-264-7190); LA's BEST, Los Angeles, California (Carla Sanger, 213-847-3681); Beacon Schools, New York, New York (Jennie Soler-McIntosh, 212-676-8255); ARK, 21stCCLC programs in McCormick, South Carolina (Wally Hall: 864-465-0060).

5. Deborah Lowe Vandell, "After-School Programs Vary in Quality." *Wisconsin Center for Education Research Highlights* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1995).

6. Ibid.

7. Roman, 1998.

8. de Kanter et al., 1997.

9. National Association of Elementary School Principals, After-School Programs and the K-8 Principal (Alexandria, VA: Authors, 1999).

10. Fox and Newman, 1998.

11. Funkhouser et al., 1995.

12. An-Me Chung, Adriana de Kanter, Marianne Kugler, "Measuring and Evaluating Child and Program Outcomes," *School-Age Review,* NSACA, in press.