

# after-school programs: an investment that pays off

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS CAN BE AN EXCEPTIONALLY COST-EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS, SUCH AS IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND BUILDING VITAL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS.

**I**n less than five years, California has clearly demonstrated its leadership role in funding after-school programs in low-income communities. The state's *Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Programs* has increased support from \$3.6 million to \$131 million. Combined with Federal *21st Century Community Learning Centers* funding of \$220 million, these investments fund programs for more than 250,000 children. With the success of a statewide ballot initiative last November, the number of participating children is likely to increase to nearly 750,000 by 2005.

As documented by the University of California, Irvine, these programs are making a difference — especially in improving student academic performance, and they are an exceptionally cost-effective approach to supporting school district goals. Students in the lowest quartile have increased their reading and math test scores by more than twice that of their peers not enrolled in after-school programs. Attendance during the school day has increased by an average

of 17 days a year and grade retention has significantly declined, resulting in an estimated cost savings of \$13 million.

In an era of school reform and high stake demands for improvement in API scores, the reinforcement of learning that occurs in quality after-school programs can and does make a real difference.

Although there are variations that reflect local needs and interests, these programs share a common purpose:

1. Providing a safe, positive environment for children and youth during the hours they are most at risk;
2. Raising student academic performance and strengthening social skills; and
3. Building community partnerships that strengthen program quality and improve prospects for sustainability.

Elementary school students attend three hours a day, five days a week. Those in middle schools attend at least three days a week. Programs are offered free of charge for all

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By Andria J. Fletcher and Wayne Padover

students attending schools with at least 50 percent free and reduced lunch populations.

California's approach is unique and offers an exceptional opportunity to secure a long-term funding source. Funding through *Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Programs* is ongoing, subject to the demonstration of positive outcomes in student academic performance, improved social behavior and attendance during the school day.

### Benefits to districts, communities

The benefits to schools are very real. Fifteen hours a week of additional support provided through homework assistance and an environment that reinforces learning and accelerates the acquisition of language arts and math skills results in increased achievement. Authentic partnerships between schools and after-school programs produce solid results. When after-school strategies are aligned with the school day and activities are fun and engaging, student achievement can be two to three times greater than the statewide evaluation figures indicate.

The long-term goal of strengthening the ability of young people to build the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in adolescence and early adulthood is critically important to community stakeholders. City and county governments, community foundations and local businesses have a vested interest in what is broadly termed youth development.

The real value of after-school programs lies in their potential for providing supports and opportunities for children and young

people to strengthen all of their skills and competencies. This is one reason why a broad range of local stakeholders, including an increasing number of school districts and individual schools, are finding them an increasingly important investment opportunity.



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### Balanced and diversified funding

Whether after-school programs will produce long-term changes ultimately depends on the extent to which local stakeholders take a proactive approach in ensuring that they are adequately funded and sustainable over time. While many communities rely heavily on state and federal funding to support after-school programs, those experiencing the greatest success understand that sustainability is primarily a local responsibility and opportunity.

Communities that build a solid local funding base and receive state and/or federal funds are well positioned for long-term success. Moreover, the typical return on their investments exceeds the cost of doing business in other ways by as much as 1,000 percent.

Innovative approaches are being used throughout the state. Sacramento, Pasadena and Los Angeles have developed balanced, diversified funding that includes all primary public and private stakeholders — the city, county, school district(s), private foundations and corporations. School district funding is provided in about 30 percent of all *Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Programs*.

San Francisco passed a youth services tax to generate ongoing financing. San Diego capitalized on tobacco settlement and city funds. Corporate, health care, school district and foundation investments are key sources of funding in rural Tulare County. City government support is invested in Anaheim and San Jose. These communities, and an increasing number of others, recognize the urgency, the opportunity and the wisdom of planning for and investing in long-term program sustainability.

The most successful formula for long-term program sustainability is the 20 percent rule. Within the context of a shared vision, all key local financial stakeholders (school districts, cities, counties, community foundations and businesses) agree to finance at least half of the operational costs of programs — regardless of the number of sites. Each stakeholder commits to investing approximately 20 percent of total local funding from sources that can be maintained over time.

The 20 percent rule can be explained in the following way. Typically throughout the state, one elementary school site serving 100 children requires approximately \$112,500 annually to operate 181 days a year (middle school programs typically cost \$150,000 for the same number of participating students). A combined local investment of 50 percent, or \$56,250, is adopted as the target figure. The school district invests 20 percent (\$11,250), as does each of the other partners. Stakeholders agree to pool financial resources, with investments in cash.

In-kind contributions, such as staff assignments, materials, supplies and equipment and all other resources other than cash are excluded from this process and reserved for strengthening programs once the operational requirements have been satisfied.

Funding partners agree that their invest-

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ments will remain at the same percentage level for each identified site and for all designated sites as the number increases over time. Funding partners enter into a contractual relationship through memoranda of understanding or similar arrangements to secure long-term local funding, with one partner serving as the fiscal agent. By pooling financial resources, a school district investment of 20 percent automatically produces five times that amount locally.

### Leveraging investments

With a 50 percent local funding base, the balance of financial support is secured either at the state and/or federal levels. These funding sources fall into three categories, based on their longevity. Only one source is currently viable as a means for completing the requirements for operational funding and ensuring sustainability over time in concert with local partnership funding.

Administered by the California Department of Education, *Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Programs* provide ongoing funding so long as local programs meet legislative requirements and demonstrate positive outcomes in improved academic performance, positive social behavior and increased attendance during the school day.

Federal *21st Century Community Learning Centers* grants are in the process of being transitioned to state administration. Even so, they are limited to five years in duration and therefore require that funding be replaced for programs to continue after that time. To date, this challenge has been daunting for those relying on this as a single source of financial support.

Similarly, programs that depend on state and national foundation grants to fund operational costs are often faced with one to two year limitations and must spend considerable time and money in ongoing grant writing processes. As a result, it makes sense to treat *21st Century Community Learning Centers* and related, time-specific funding as sources for enhancing the quality of programs rather than funding their base operating costs.

Local partnerships throughout California have demonstrated that the money for community investments is less limited by

the availability of resources than by the willingness of local stakeholders to use resources for this purpose. Despite perceptions to the contrary, every community has the capacity to create the kind of balanced and diversified funding described above.

Sources of funding most commonly come from one or more of the following: Title 1 and Title 1 Supplemental Funding, Pupil Promotion and Retention, Community Bilingual Education Training, Intensive Reading Program, Core Summer School, Mandatory Proficiency Summer School and others. In some cases, dollars earned from increases in attendance that can be attributed to after-school programs are set aside for this purpose, as are monies saved through a reduction in school vandalism.

### Taking a pro-active role

Whatever the source of school district and/or individual school site funding for after-school programs, taking a pro-active role in developing local partnerships makes sense. This approach secures balanced funding for after-school programs while paying both immediate and long-term returns to investors and communities. It is equitable and affordable. It provides a solid foundation for growth and sustainability. It sparks a new way of thinking, a reconsideration of stakeholder roles and responsibilities in the community as a whole, and a different way of doing business. Perhaps most importantly, in a time of serious budget challenges, it is one of the very few local opportunities that produces both significant economic efficiencies and positive social outcomes. ■

*The California AfterSchool Partnership is a public-private partnership of the California Department of Education, the Foundation Consortium for California's Children and Youth and the Governor's Office of the Secretary for Education. The Partnership works with stakeholders across the state to build effective, sustainable after-school programs and to provide a policy voice for the field.*

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