

Making the Case

Youth Need After-School Programs

Youth in the United States spend about 80% of their waking hours outside of schools (Noam, Miller, Barry, 2002). Although the exact numbers are unknown, approximately 5 to 7 million youth in the United States are unsupervised After-School on a daily basis (Naughton, 2003; U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). These unsupervised hours After-School are the time when youth are most likely to engage in risky behavior, commit juvenile crimes or be victims of crimes (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). High-quality after-school programming can transform the after-school hours from a time of risk into a time of opportunity for youth to develop competencies that will help them become successful, engaged and contributing adolescents and then adults.

Partnerships between Community-Based Organizations and Schools are Essential

According to the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice (1998), one of the key elements of a high-quality after-school program is an effective partnership between community-based organizations and schools. “Community-based programs that are connected to the schools, not isolated from them, are more likely to assist families and increase student learning and success” (Epstein, 2001, p. 164). The ability to make high-quality, equitable after-school programs accessible to more youth would be enhanced if the resources of community-based organizations were utilized in addition to the resources of the school system (Pittman, Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2003). Recent legislation, notably the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative of the No Child Left Behind Act, encourages schools to partner with community-based organizations in order to provide high-quality after-school programming.

After-School Programming Develops Full Range of Skills and Competencies

There is growing consensus that after-school programming should not be a continuation of the school day (McLaughlin, 2000; Pittman, Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2003). Youth want and need a change of pace once school is out for the day. After-school programming must provide something different in order to keep youth motivated and excited about participating. Community-based organizations that take a positive youth development approach to after-school programming differ from school-time. Larson (2000) argued that non-school settings may be more conducive to the

development of many important life skills. In this type of after-school programming youth are given the “opportunity to work through real world activities that demand their full participation” (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 362). These opportunities for youth to apply their knowledge in real-life contexts enable them to develop the full range of skills and competencies they will need to succeed in adulthood (Wilson-Ahlstrom, Yohalem & Pittman, 2003). Through participation in high-quality community-based after-school programming, youth develop skills that employers are looking for such as: teamwork, problem-solving and communication skills (Miller, 2003).

“An important dimension of the programming that school-CBO partnerships offer is attention to the whole person ... through partnerships with CBOs and other organizations, schools’ academic focus is complemented by partners’ missions” (Adger, 2001, p. 20). Partnerships between schools and community-based youth development organizations support academic achievement not by mimicking schools, but instead by complementing the schools’ academic focus with a more holistic approach, targeting positive youth outcomes across multiple domains of development (Adger, 2001). Specifically, partnerships can provide the means for youth to achieve academically, indirectly through the development of competencies in a range of domains including academic, social, emotional, vocational, civic and physical (Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001).

CBOs Reach Disenchanted Youth

Schools and community-based youth development organizations often have access to and attract different youth. Schools have access to the greatest number of children across all ages and grades and may be best at attracting students who feel a positive connection toward their school. CBOs reach many of these same youth but also engage youth that are disenchanted with school, are hard to reach, and are at high risk or are most isolated from their communities (Kahne et al., 2001; McLaughlin, 2000).

Communities, Schools, Families, and Youth Benefit from CBO Run After-School Programs

Results from existing programs demonstrate that school-based after-school programs that are run by community-based organizations benefit communities, schools, families, and youth. Specifically, there is evidence that these programs decrease juvenile crime and victimization, increase parental involvement in schools, make the school more desirable to parents, and allow parents to work without worrying about their child’s safety (Ferrin & Amick, 2002, Friedman & Bleiberg, 2002). Evidence also indicates that these programs benefit youth by decreasing participating youths’ risk-taking behaviors and by supporting the development of a range of non-academic competencies that, in turn, support academic learning and achievement (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003, Honig et al., 2001). Thus, the development of non-academic competencies during non-school hours help youth achieve academically during school.

To have a real impact on youth, schools and community-based organizations must work together to create and maintain a healthy, positive partnership. In this toolkit, you’ll find many tips, suggestions and resources on how to do this, based on the successes and challenges of current 21st CCLC school-CBO partnerships. You will also find important research information on how CBOs and partnerships between schools and CBOs meet the educational needs of youth.

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