

*Research Tells Us:*

# Partnerships Between Schools and Community-Based Organizations are Crucial to High-Quality After-School Programming for All Youth

According to the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice (1998), one of the key elements of a high-quality after-school program is partnerships 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). Recent legislation such as 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.

## Partnerships Improve Programs by Utilizing the Strengths of Both Schools and Community-Based Youth Development Organizations

Schools and community-based youth development organizations have different missions but equivalent goals (Noam & Miller, 2002). Through partnerships, goals can be achieved that could not be achieved separately by capitalizing on each organization’s assets, resources and perspectives (Ashcraft, 2002). Partnerships between schools and community-based youth development organizations can facilitate the creation of continuous comprehensive after-school programming for a greater number of children and youth of all ages including a range of underserved and at-risk populations with special needs.

- Partnerships between schools and community-based youth development organizations support academic achievement not by mimicking schools, but instead by supplementing the schools’ academic focus with a more holistic approach, targeting positive youth outcomes across multiple domains of development (Adger, 2001).
- Evidence indicates that these programs benefit participating youths by decreasing their risk-taking behaviors and supporting the development of a range of non-academic competencies that in turn support academic learning and achievement (Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson, 2003; Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001).
- CBO’s can engage youth that are disenchanted with their school, hard to reach, high risk or most isolated from their community (Kahne et al., 2001; McLaughlin, 2000).
- Youth development after-school programming often focuses on middle and high school children. Older youth are an underserved population with fewer available programs and less variety (Pittman, Wilson-Ahlstrom & Yohalem, 2003; Pittman, Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, & Ferber, 2003; Polatnick, 2002).

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