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## Why Afterschool Programs Are Necessary

We knew we had to do something about students' academic performance in our district—and we knew the time permitted within the regular day was just not enough. We decided to turn to our principals and have them concentrate on our out-of-school hours as an extension of the regular day—but constructed slightly differently. This meant a whole new orientation toward those hours. Results were amazing. In a relatively short period of time, our entire staff galvanized around the program and considered it a part of the regular day, the children enjoyed it, and parents appreciated the results. Our principals were proud. Staff and students benefited, and the community reaped the rewards.

—A superintendent in a small town in the Midwest with a growing number of English language learners

I was worried about my son's attitude toward school. He didn't enjoy it. He didn't feel he had a place there. His grades and test scores were low. I didn't see how an afterschool program would help. We had one, but my son mostly played basketball. But this program worked. Mrs. Calamasta (the

principal) involved the whole school team, and the entire day became better. Joe (my son) didn't lie to me anymore about whether he went to school and participated. Pretty soon he would come home and tell me about his day. And his day included the hours he spent in the afterschool program. Next year I'm going to volunteer.

—Mrs. Madsen, the mother of a fourth grader in a large city on the East Coast

**P**rin cipals who want to raise student proficiency levels, particularly in high-needs schools, see the necessity to change their afterschool programs. This is not completely dominated by principals' realization of the new high-stakes accountability within which they work—although it is a consideration. As building leaders of school reform efforts, principals continually seek ways to extend student learning opportunities. Somehow, there is never enough time in the regular day to fully serve high-needs students.

As a consequence, principals are beginning to think in new ways about that extends student learning beyond the school day that can occur in seamless ways. While they want their programs to have a much more concentrated focus on academics, they realize—along with parents, afterschool leaders, and members of the community—that programs also must permit opportunities for students to participate in activities and just have fun. While principals want to set up the programs so that the academic component is engaging, they also realize that students need to let off steam after the regular day.

Who can argue against afterschool programs? Principals, with an overwhelming degree of consensus, agree that afterschool programs are a good idea (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005). At minimum, parents know where their children are after school if they attend the program—supervised, safe, and sheltered. Traditional programs, at best and when properly implemented, offer enjoyable activities that yield a high degree of interaction with supportive adults and staff at community agencies, leading to enriched daily experiences for high-needs students. These experiences usually revolve around recreation, some homework help, a snack, and afterschool care until parents can pick up children or they can be bused home.

But afterschool programs have the potential to be much more. They can incorporate a strong focus on academics in addition to providing

students with experiences they would not have in their daily lives (such as field trips, museum visits, or special projects). Principals who want to lead reform efforts see this possibility and realize that the ever-rising bar of student proficiency levels under the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), means that they need to be creative to help low-performing students achieve academic proficiency.

As Fashola (2002) pointed out in her review of effective afterschool programs, these two approaches to afterschool programs (e.g., safety, child care, and recreation versus afterschool programs with an academic focus)—splinter into two very different viewpoints on afterschool programs.

## **Principals and Afterschool Programs**

Why are afterschool programs relevant to principals? There are several reasons:

- Afterschool programs are housed in principals' buildings.
- Afterschool programs are a part of the principal's leadership domain and can be considered an integral part of the school improvement plan.
- Afterschool programs offer low-performing students a targeted way to spend more time in a particular content area, taught in an enriching and engaging way.
- Afterschool programs, when well constructed, can help ward off the possibility of supplemental educational services (necessary if a school slips into "schools in need of improvement" [SINI] status for three consecutive years).
- A sound afterschool program, if a school does fall into three consecutive years of SINI status, can become the foundation for in-school supplemental services—preferable to students going out of the school to for-profit firms for tutoring services.
- Viewing the afterschool program as part of a seamless school day helps ensure that high-needs students can receive more attention and more time engaged with learning.

## **The Opportunity and the Mandate**

Principals understand the seismic change that has shaken public schools. The NCLB Act mandates that 100 percent of students reach

proficiency by the school year 2013–2014. This is not rhetoric: it is the law. Sanctions follow if schools do not meet the annual requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The thesis of this book is that afterschool programs, when well constructed, when built in bold new ways that avoid the pitfalls of tradition and the perils of unrealistic hopes, offer considerable promise for helping to raise the proficiency levels of high-needs students. And clearly, any principal has a moral and ethical obligation to his or her students to seize every responsible opportunity to advance the students where there are critical areas of need.

Aside from the requirements of ESEA, there are increasing arguments that extended learning time in schools increases both “time and support” for low-achieving students (Pennington, 2006). One recent report goes so far as to advocate state policy that mandates an extended day, rather than afterschool programs that are voluntary. Although the report focuses on high schools and this book centers on K–8 schools, its recommendations that (a) public policy play a weightier role in extended learning time for high-needs students and (b) a seamless school day has the potential to boost student proficiency levels are additional compelling contentions in favor of afterschool programs with a more robust emphasis on academic achievement.

But now, back to NCLB. Since the bar of AYP requirements is continually raised, no principal can rest easily just because his or her school meets AYP requirements for one year. There is the next year of testing, and the next. Meanwhile, the school population swells, and demographics change. Add to those variables the population of transient students—an additional barrier to adequate measurement.

All of these factors affect student performance on state tests. The old saying “too much is not enough” applies to the ever-increasing responsibilities principals and instructional staff confront. What may seem like too much planning, too much intervention, and too much professional development for one year will most certainly not be sufficient for the next.

Later in this chapter, I will discuss the polling data that support the fact that segments of the public, particularly minority and low-income parents, want an academic component in their afterschool programs. They realize their children need more time with academic material in order to succeed. I also will present the five goals of accountability principals must address when they work with staff to construct a new afterschool program or change an existing program to include an academic focus.

Proponents of increased academics in afterschool programs believe that when properly conceived, a strong academic component

in afterschool programs offers students more time on task and an opportunity to boost sagging proficiency levels, or at minimum the ability to hold their proficiency levels constant, as well as a means of bolstering more adult-student interaction in academics than is usually offered in the regular classroom due to size.

## **The New High-Stakes Climate: Building a Basis of Support**

Unquestionably, the NCLB Act, signed into law in 2002 as the reauthorization of the ESEA, brought a new climate of accountability to the nation's public schools. Nationwide, both veteran and new principals work to implement NCLB's provisions. New principals in particular are thrown into cold water when their knowledge of NCLB's accountability requirements begins to permeate the reality in which they work.

Meeting the needs of all students—particularly in Title I schools that are subject to sanctions if AYP requirements are not met—can be an overwhelming task. Suddenly, all principals confront how high the stakes actually are for their schools—and how widely information about student academic performance is disseminated and used to hold schools accountable. This makes their work transparent to all stakeholders. Every effort is visible. Every success is seen—and every failure can be scrutinized. And while school leaders may agree philosophically with the goals of NCLB, implementing those goals can be a difficult task.

How states determine AYP requirements remains what one data analyst calls “a moving target.” Pity the poor swimmer who has not mastered the basics, does not realize she has leaped off the pier into progressively deeper water, and is perilously close to drowning.

Under NCLB, prior to 2013–2014, states have set intermediate targets for schools to meet through the requirements of AYP. These intermediate targets, or goals, increase incrementally. According to Title I, Part 200.17, these increments were supposed to occur first in the 2004–2005 school year, with each increment following in not more than three years.

An annual testing program of all students in all subgroups, Grades 3–8, in reading and mathematics is mandatory (although there are exceptions, depending on numbers in subgroups). Data obtained through these state assessments are disaggregated by the student's socioeconomic status, disability status, English language learner status, race, ethnicity, gender, and migrant status. To ensure fairness, the state must ensure that its measurable objectives are uniform throughout the state (Title I, Section 200.18).

If one student subgroup fails to meet AYP, the entire school fails, and students can end up in “AYP jail” if the school continues to fall short of the AYP mark. This translates to progressively stricter sanctions for Title I schools labeled in need of improvement (SINI), which occurs if they fail to meet AYP requirements for two consecutive years (Title I, Section 200.32). At this point, students in the SINI school are eligible first for public school choice, and then, in the third year of SINI status, supplemental educational services are provided for those students who choose to remain in the school, at no cost to the student or parent.

If a school identified as in need of improvement continues on the SINI list, sanctions increase. In addition to the choice and supplemental services provisions, corrective action applies.

Additional corrective actions can include

- replacing school staff considered integral to the school's failure to meet AYP,
- instituting a new curriculum (including professional development to accompany the curriculum),
- decreasing management authority at the school level,
- appointing outside experts to advise the school,
- extending the length of the school year or day, and/or
- restructuring the internal organization of the school (Title I, Section 200.39).

What is meant by “supplemental educational services,” to date, is unclear to many states, districts, and schools. In fact, they are a bramble patch of nonregulatory guidance, private providers competing with nonprofit providers, and district and building-level leaders struggling with their provisions—all mired in a welter of good intentions.

Yet supplemental educational services offer the potential to improve student achievement during the afterschool hours and should be considered carefully in terms of their potential to lift student proficiency levels as the principal plans ahead—in the event that the school remains in the “in need of improvement” category by the third year.

## **Increasing Enrollments**

But the current provisions of NCLB are not the principal's only challenge. An additional complication is presented by the increasing

enrollments projected from 2005 to 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005), near-record levels of elementary students were enrolled in the fall of 2005, which included 33.5 million students in public schools and 4.9 million in private schools. Elementary school enrollment rose 14 percent between 1990 and 2001 and was followed by a hiatus or slight decline, depending on geographical area, between 2001 and 2005 (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005). But by 2014, an additional 2.2 million elementary school students are projected to enroll in public schools, a 6 percent increase from 2005. The states expected to experience the highest rises in elementary school enrollment are Nevada, Utah, Texas, Idaho, and California, at over 15 percent between 2005 and 2014.

Undoubtedly, these increasing enrollments will reflect increasing diversity as well as burgeoning numbers of special education students. Both of these factors will have a huge impact on the student subgroups in the school and whether the school will be able to reach AYP requirements.

In addition, Title I schools have the largest number of afterschool programs. Nationwide, Title I schools currently number approximately 50,542 as compared to non-Title I schools at 42,289. This figure includes elementary, middle, and high schools—important to remember since the majority of afterschool programs are housed in elementary schools. Title I *elementary* schools nationwide number approximately 34,668 compared to 14,439 non-Title I schools. Obviously, Title I schools are a hefty proportion of elementary schools and therefore can be expected to have the most afterschool programs that can be tailored to the accountability provisions of NCLB.

What implications do growing enrollments have for students' proficiency levels? As enrollments increase, particularly in Title I schools, principals can expect that the number of students who meet AYP requirements will decrease.

## **21st Century Community Learning Centers and Academics**

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) are a strong federal program that has now shifted to the states. Established in 1994, the 21st CCLCs have funded many, if not most, afterschool programs in high-needs schools nationwide. The original program

goal of the 21st CCLCs did not change until 2001 under NCLB, when it stated the following:

The 21st CCLC Program is a key component of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act. . . . The focus of this program, re-authorized under Title IV, Part B, of the No Child Left Behind Act, is to provide expanded academic enrichment opportunities for children attending low-performing schools. Tutorial services and academic enrichment activities are designed to help students meet local and state academic standards in subjects such as reading and math. In addition, 21st CCLC programs provide youth development activities, drug and violence prevention programs, technology education programs, art, music and recreation programs, counseling and character education to enhance the academic component of the program. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

In a strongly worded statement by then-Deputy Education Secretary Hansen, the 21st CCLCs were criticized for their effectiveness. This resulted from a largely unfavorable longitudinal evaluation commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., that will be discussed in Chapter 6. Hansen went so far as to suggest that the 21st CCLCs receive a drastic cut in funding in the President's 2004 budget.

Hansen stated that the findings supported a need for program changes. Specifically, he argued that afterschool programs should have a new and stronger focus on the following:

- Content. Programs should result in improved academic achievement.
- Behavior.
- Safety.
- Participation. The findings of the evaluation revealed that student participation was low. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003)

The definition of community learning centers supported all of Hansen's contentions, which were made in the context of President George W. Bush's 2004 budget.

The term *community learning center* means an entity that assists students in meeting state and local academic achievement standards in core academic subjects, such as reading and mathematics, by providing the students with opportunities for academic enrichment



activities and a broad array of other activities during nonschool hours or periods when school is not in session (such as before and after school or during summer recess). These activities reinforce and complement the regular academic programs of the schools attended by the students served. In addition, literacy and related educational development services are offered to families of participating students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a.).

Has this been borne out? Many afterschool advocates would argue that it has—pointing to the 21st CCLC evaluations the state requires. But a reality test—the principal’s own observation of the academic content of the afterschool program coupled with the achievement of high-needs students in the school—usually suggests that more strategic action needs to be taken. And making the transition to an afterschool program that has a keen focus on academics means that the principal—in tandem with the school improvement team—must build a web of support within the community, with parents, with staff, and with existing afterschool programmatic staff to ensure that the new direction will be endorsed.

## **Changing or Creating a New Program**

Principals probably already realize that afterschool programs, as they currently exist, are well liked in communities. Although the goals of the 21st CCLCs, in particular, have shifted toward including a stronger emphasis on academics, there are still many afterschool advocates and agencies who see little reason to change current practice. In fact, they fear that students will be overly taxed if an emphasis is placed on academics in out-of-school hours, leaving them tired and subject to the “drill and kill” syndrome.

But this assumes that instruction in afterschool programs will be poorly handled. It also assumes that the principal will abdicate responsibility to a staff not aligned with the regular school day’s instructional mission that has been designed to *engage* students—a clear mistake and one not connected to overall school improvement efforts. And it presupposes that youth enrichment, youth development, and project-based learning will be discarded.

## **Engaged Learning Time**

Instruction needs to be connected to that offered during the regular school day so that students can continue to learn. However, the ways

in which instruction is offered can be project based, activity based, or built around a high-quality set of commercially produced curriculum materials. Learning experiences need to be authentic. And the critical factor is that instructional time—whether it is time during the regular school day or after school—needs to be *engaged learning time* (Newmann & Associates, 1996).

It can be difficult to find a precise definition of *engaged learning time*, since *engagement* has entered the educational vernacular to an extent that, at times, has gutted its meaning. Fred M. Newmann and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin–Madison developed the concept in the mid- to late-1980s and define it as follows in a summary publication of their work authored in the early 1990s: “the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning” (Newmann, 1992, pp. 12–13).

This definition of Newmanns and his colleagues contains interesting statements. Chief among them is the clear delineation between the ability to get high grades and complete tasks versus a psychological investment in learning or comprehending new skills. Another point that often eludes educators is the necessity to view engagement on a continuum of less to more, not as a dichotomy of “engaged” or “disengaged.” This provides principals and afterschool staff an excellent lens to view the program. Are students more engaged with some learning activities than others? What could be some reasons for this? If they are less engaged with other learning activities, what might be some reasons? How might these be ameliorated? If students are totally disengaged, should the learning activity be completely discarded?

## **Drawing Upon Existing Support and Building a New Base**

One strength principals can draw upon when changing the direction of a current program is the support of school staff, parents, school board members, and community members. They need to build this support as part of their overall school improvement plan, but if the proposed change is well presented, success is likely.

Proponents of increased academics following the regular school day need to be specific about what will be taught in the afterschool program, how the content will be taught, and the ultimate goal of this approach. This specificity should emphasize the fact that student learning will be engaging and approached in ways that will not prove overly

taxing to students. Even if the program does not result in dramatically altered academic achievement, it should have some effect and, one would hope, a cumulative effect if the student remains in the program.

When advocating this point of view, principals can easily point out that academics do not need to compose the entire afterschool program, that staff will respect the developmental needs of the child (as they should), and that project-based learning is a way for children to increase their academic proficiency (and can be and is used during the regular school day).

Certainly, principals can draw support from the 2003 programmatic goal of the U.S. Department of Education because it is much more closely tied to the realities within which they work under NCLB. Although a robust, even-handed research base is needed that can show the academic effectiveness of afterschool programs, principals can pioneer in the effort to harness all available resources toward this purpose.

I will discuss evaluation of afterschool programs in Chapter 5, but it is worth noting here that the last achievement gains reported for the 21st CCLCs were in 2002, and they reveal many of the problems in evaluating academic achievement. Evaluations of afterschool programs abound and vary in quality (e.g., Afterschool Alliance; Harvard Family Evaluation Project; Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.; RAND Corporation), but most to date have not focused on academic achievement or they present findings tilted by advocacy. Existing evaluations primarily focus on other outcomes of afterschool programs, such as safety.

## **Making a Case for Academics**

As a result, we have only a slim and emerging research base that points to improved academic achievement in afterschool programs. But there are reasons for this:

- Afterschool programs, as pointed out, have not historically included a strong emphasis on academic achievement, thus making it difficult to evaluate their success in that area.
- Student attendance may be sporadic, presenting yet another difficulty for educators.
- Instruction (where it exists) typically is not aligned with the instructional program of the regular school day.
- Most afterschool staff are not prepared adequately for a focus on academic achievement since their expertise lies in other areas.

- Afterschool staff have not kept (or been directed to keep) a database that extends beyond “soft” variables such as attendance, self-reports, and surveys of parents.

## Changing the Status Quo

The first steps to changing the focus of the existing afterschool program or creating a new program with an academic emphasis are straightforward—the “five R’s”:

**Recognize** and build upon the climate of accountability in which you work that has been created by the provisions of NCLB.

**Realize** that afterschool programs have the possibility to provide a venue to boost student proficiency levels, particularly in low-performing schools with large numbers of low-income, high-needs students.

**Remember** that afterschool programs are going through a painful transition from their original goals to a new goal.

**Relate** the new academic emphasis of your afterschool program in a two-way communications strategy to your school’s instructional staff, the central office, the school board, parents, community agencies, and all other educational stakeholders to ensure maximum buy-in to the changing emphasis.

**Review** the ways in which your program has been successful or problematic; use that information to shape your new program emphasis.

The five R’s of changing or creating the afterschool program present new work for building leaders. If in the past the program has been delegated to others or allowed to operate *de facto* in the school, it is understandable. The regular school day is all-consuming. Frankly, principals have plenty of other work to do—work related to overall school improvement, school management, dealing with parents, supervising instructional staff, making curricular decisions, managing personnel, and communicating with the central office. The value of afterschool programs can be seen in the abstract, but principals may believe—with considerable justification—that they are one more task that has landed on their desks. After all, doesn’t the afterschool coordinator or director have the expertise to handle the program?

But if the program is strengthened *to include a substantive focus on achievement*, the principal realizes that afterschool directors and their staffs may or may not have the credentials that equip them for the task. They might not be accustomed to the school bureaucracy—or may be very skilled at negotiating its problematic areas. Much is dependent on their skills, acumen, and goals.

But if their goals are not aligned with the *principal's* goals, with the goals of the central office, with those of the instructional staff, and with those of the money that funds the program (usually in the form of a grant), only difficulties and snags will result, with the potential of jettisoning the afterschool program. If the program is funded by a grant, it may limp along for the duration of the grant, as staff come and go, and never achieve its desired outcomes.

Principals may, in fact, say that the program is “more trouble than it’s worth.” They may add that they are aligned with the philosophy of the afterschool program, but now that they know what is involved (for example, ongoing tension between instructional staff and afterschool program staff), they could easily forgo the presence of the program in their buildings. They may even feel some bitterness that the school seems like nothing more than a glorified babysitting service for working parents.

For the afterschool program to become much more tightly connected to the instructional component of the school day, particularly for those students who are particularly at risk of academic failure, the principal needs to exert instructional leadership that includes the afterschool program in a two-way communications program. This leadership ensures that the school’s regular instructional staff, the afterschool director, and the afterschool staff are tightly connected with common goals. It also means that the afterschool director and staff must have background in (a) dealing with the school bureaucracy; (b) at least one important content area (reading, mathematics, English language acquisition); (c) knowing how to engage students in content area in ways that are active and fun and that will encourage their continued attendance; and (d) being sensitive to issues of youth development.

Obviously, this ratchets up the principal’s responsibilities and workload. But if the afterschool program can be viewed as nothing less than part of the school day, rather than as an add-on with mixed goals that can range from drug and violence prevention to sports involvement to community service, an integrated approach to school improvement and boosted student proficiency levels can be reached.

## Public and Student Expectations From Afterschool Time

To change the program and tie it more closely to academics, principals need some objective support. To what extent do peers and the public believe afterschool programs should contain an academic component—or emphasize academics?

The results of a 2003 MetLife poll of principals, teachers, and parents underscore the importance of academic achievement.

Principals' priorities ranked "motivation of students and faculty to achieve" at an overwhelming 75 percent (MetLife, 2003, p. 31), followed by "school morale" at only 45 percent—a difference of 30 percentage points.

A 2004 Public Agenda poll of parents' and students' views of afterschool programs, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, found interesting results according to parental income levels and race. An emphasis on academics was most valued among low-income and minority parents. These are the parents whose children are the most likely to be served by afterschool programs, which are usually located in high-needs schools.

By marked percentages, *low-income and minority parents* favored programs that emphasized academics. This is not startling if one considers that higher-income parents are more likely to provide out-of-school academic support themselves, either directly or through tutoring, classes, or other activities and lessons.

The poll's findings included the following:

- Their child needs extra help in school (low vs. higher income: 67% vs. 44%; minority vs. white: 61% vs. 45%).
- An afterschool program that provides supervised homework time is something they would go out of their way to find (low vs. higher income: 52% vs. 28%; minority vs. white: 56% vs. 27%).
- Since schools are placing so much emphasis on standardized tests and higher academic standards, students are better off in afterschool programs that focus on academics rather than on other things (low vs. higher income: 45% vs. 35%; minority vs. white: 55% vs. 33%).
- They would be interested in a summer program that helped students keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade (low vs. higher income: 69% vs. 51%; minority vs. white: 79% vs. 49%).

- They would “very much” like an afterschool program that focuses mainly on academic preparation (low vs. higher income: 39% vs. 24%; minority vs. white: 45% vs. 29%) (Public Agenda, 2004).

Low-income and minority students also resonate with afterschool programs and activities, the Public Agenda poll discovered, that feature learning:

- They would be more interested in a summer program that helped . . . keep up with schoolwork or prepare for the next grade (low vs. higher income: 69% vs. 51%; minority vs. white: 79% vs. 49%).
- They would “very much” like an afterschool program that focuses mainly on academic preparation (low vs. higher income: 39% vs. 24%; minority vs. white: 45% vs. 23%) (Public Agenda, 2004).

These polling results of principals, parents, and students support the growing movement among principals to use hours beyond the school day in astute ways that do not tax the child but that support and extend learning that occurs during the school day. Using these hours productively and in ways that do not burn out students who have already participated in a full day of academic work is the principal’s challenge as well as that of the afterschool program’s staff.

A central office administrator who coaches principals on leadership and their afterschool programs reiterated the challenge when she told me the following:

We are really in an age of accountability. Accountability has frightened some of our administrators and caused them to slow down their thinking outside the box. If the conditions aren’t nurturing in a school community, doing what’s right for kids, staying attuned with research and reform—it’s easy to do whatever you’ve done in the past and call it good. That’s the safer course to chart. But it isn’t the real world. As I think about those schools which are doing what was successful 10 years ago, I’m very suspicious about what their success rate will be in the near future, even today for that matter. (Lockwood, 2003a)

Despite this administrator’s cautionary and somewhat dark words about the “age of accountability,” there are many school

leaders who have found ways to successfully rise to its challenges. Three profiles of success—selected for their specific efforts to incorporate afterschool programs into the regular school day—are presented in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 2, I move to the principal's first steps as he or she constructs or changes the existing program.