



## **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES THROUGH RESIDENT SERVICES: A PRACTITIONER'S MANUAL**

Volume Two: Enhanced and Comprehensive Resident Services  
Revised and Expanded Edition

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## YOUTH EDUCATION AND SERVICES

*Out-of-school time mentoring and education enrichment programs in housing-based settings are among the most effective efforts to help children enhance learning, complete high school and advance to college or other post-secondary education, according to anecdotal evidence. Over their lifetimes, high school graduates earn roughly \$300,000 more than those who fail to receive a diploma and this number increases significantly for two-year and four-year college degrees.*

# INTRODUCTION TO YOUTH EDUCATION AND SERVICES

Housing-based resident services provide unique opportunities to reach and engage children and older youth where they live. Education enrichment and other youth activities are important to support low-income families whose low-income parents are likely working long hours at low-wage jobs. This section provides guidance on out-of-school time programs that can help children succeed in school, finish high school and move on to post-secondary education in two-year or four year colleges, job training or jobs with advancement potential.

## AFTER-SCHOOL EDUCATION ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

After-school or out-of-school time programs for elementary and early middle school students are often core offerings of housing-based resident services programs. Homework help and educational support are critically needed in low-income communities, where school systems tend to be low-performing, and working parents don't always have the time or ability to help their children with homework.

Parental work schedules can also cause school-age children to be unattended and home alone during the afternoon. A 1990 study found that eighth-graders left home alone after school reported greater use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana than those who were in adult-supervised settings. In a 2001 New York City survey, 60 percent of parents said they missed less work than before their child's enrollment in after-school programs. Fifty-nine percent said that the after-school programs supported them in keeping their jobs.

The resources provided here help affordable housing owners plan for directly providing or connecting children to existing after-school programs.

## YOUTH PROGRAMS

Pre-teens and teenagers have a critical need for strong supports and healthy places to be. This need arises from the unique issues related to young people's physical, social and emotional development. For example, during a child's preteen or early teen years, the external world, beginning with their circle of peers and moving outward to the world at large, has a tremendous effect on the choices they make. The environment and youth programs that housing organizations provide can make a real difference in the lives of school-age children and their futures, providing them with safe, enjoyable social and educational activities as well as positive role models.

Some compelling reasons for affordable housing organizations to provide youth programs are:

- Teens who do not participate in an after-school program are nearly three times more likely to skip classes than teens who do participate.

- Each year more than a half-million youth leave school without a high school diploma, the necessary skills to compete in the labor market or the community supports they need to constructively engage with mainstream America.
- Teenagers consistently experience higher levels of motivation and cognitive engagement from constructive activities that occur outside of school.
- Funding for out-of-school time is targeted much more towards younger children, which leaves pre-teens and teenagers greatly underserved.
- A long-term study of effective youth programs found that youth who stayed in programs for more than two years reported increased self-control and self-respect, less involvement with crime and violence, and greater hope and higher expectations for their future.
- Young people are not the only ones to benefit from after-school programs. After-school programs have been referred to as “the new neighborhood.” Positive effects extend to families, employers and communities. Research indicates that investments in after-school programs for youth are likely to have benefits for them and society that far outweigh the cost.

#### RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THIS SECTION

1. **Starting an After-School Program:** This document will take you step-by-step through the process of starting an after-school program.
2. **Effective Administration and Policies for After-School Programs:** A good administrative structure sets up clear lines of accountability and authority, and should ensure that people both within and outside the organization know who is responsible for what. This document will help you create such a structure for your after-school program.
3. **Developing a Curriculum for an After-School Program:** This document will help you understand how to create a curriculum for an after-school child care program that stimulates children emotionally and intellectually and meets parents’ goals.
4. **Finding Funding for an After-School Program:** It is vital for after-school child care programs to have multiple funding streams to ensure program sustainability. This document will help you find and tap into various funding streams.
5. **Hiring and Developing Staff for an After-School Program:** The exact make-up of any program’s staff will depend on the program’s goals and philosophy, the strengths and skills needed to round out a care-giving team, and the available applicants. This document will take you through the hiring process, staff development and evaluation for an after-school child care program.

6. **Making After-School Programs Effective: Enhancing School Success:** Creating inviting learning spaces and offering engaging, effective learning activities are the hallmarks of successful after-school programs. This document provides information on how to create successful after-school programs and offers case studies from successful programs.
7. **Enhancing Educational Success: Forging Connections Among Family, School and After-School:** This document describes the role that after-school programs, particularly those based in housing communities, can play in promoting connections among all three settings: home, school and after-school. Practices by successful after-school programs from two organizations are included.
8. **Evaluating After-School Programs:** When evaluating the quality of an after-school program, it helps to have uniform standards to use as a guide. This document outlines general standards developed by the National School-Age Care Alliance for various features of after-school programs.
9. **Creating Handbooks for an After-School Program:** A handbook detailing the rules and procedures for your after-school program is essential to maintaining consistency. This document provides an outline that you can follow to build effective handbooks for your after-school child care program.
10. **Designing Programs to Engage Youth:** Successful youth programs can reduce achievement gaps for low-income children by creating a space where family, neighborhood and school values are integrated. This document will help you to design such a program for your young residents.
11. **Encouraging Youth to Stay in School:** The lack of a high school degree often results in poverty, lower earnings and higher unemployment rates. This document will provide you with information and resources that you can use to convince your young residents to stay in school.
12. **Best Practice: Sure Track to College:** In Woonsocket, RI, NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NWBRV) saw its young residents struggling to make the leap from high school to college. This document describes the program that NWBRV developed for elementary school children that put a focus on education and featured college as a very real and reachable goal.
13. **Student Introductory Survey:** This survey helps counselors to get an idea of what their students are doing in high school, their performance and their goals and was used as part of the Sure Track to College Program.

14. **Visioning the Future Worksheet:** This document, used in the Sure Track to College Program, helps young people to create a vision for their lives after school, describing what they want to achieve and how they will do it.
15. **Supporting Youth Employment:** Youth employment can offer teens and young adults an opportunity to earn income and begin developing a range of job skills and experience. Therefore, it is important for young people to learn both specific job-related skills and soft skills (such as understanding workplace behavior and work ethics) in order for them to succeed in the workforce.
  
16. **Summer Can Set Kids on the Right—or Wrong—Course:** This document makes the case for the importance of summer learning for children and youth, especially those from low-income families. This information and the remaining resources in this section were provided by the National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University.
  
17. **Doesn't Every Child Deserve a Memorable Summer?:** This document describes the importance of summer learning, offers facts about the importance, tips on what program providers and others can do to provide summer learning for children and a description of a good summer learning program.
  
18. **Summertime and Weight Gain:** This resource describes research showing that children gain more weight during the summer, what we can learn from it and what it means for children and society as a whole.
  
19. **Parents' Checklist: How to Make the Most of Summer:** Parents can use this checklist to ensure that their children are continuing to learn over the summer. It also provides ideas for activities.
  
20. **Self-Assessment: Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs:** This checklist helps program coordinators to determine if their programs incorporate the characteristics of effective summer learning programs.

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# STARTING AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

This document outlines the steps that your organization will need to take in order to start an after-school program for residents.

## STEP 1: CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

A needs assessment survey is useful for a number of reasons. For one, you can use the survey to convince local “movers and shakers” of the need for services. You can also easily turn the results into a press release and use the release to attract publicity. In addition, the survey will provide you with useful information for designing your housing-based after-school program.

Before you conduct your needs assessment, however, take a look at the data that has already been collected on your community. The current edition of the *U.S. Census of Population and Housing* will have general demographic data, including the number of children by age group, number of parents in the workforce and income characteristics. You can find this publication at your local public library. Check with your regional School Age Child Care Project (the Federal Child Care Development Fund, also called the Child Care and Development Block Grant or CCDBG, is one of the largest funders of after-school programs for children up to age 13 of low-income families), local Department of Public Welfare Office and the community development office in your city or town for statistics and other valuable information for the planning process.

Merely creating and sending out the needs assessment survey, of course, will not guarantee that you will get the information you need. Retrieving completed surveys is the greatest problem in getting reliable information; people don't like to fill out forms. You will get a higher return rate if your questionnaire is brief. The survey should be simple to answer and designed so that you can easily retrieve, compile and summarize the provided information.

One community got an excellent response by passing out surveys to children in the local elementary schools. Upon the return of a completed form, each child was rewarded with a sticker. In some communities a bilingual form, printed in English on one side and in the most common second language in your community on the other side, may obtain the largest response.

Your organization will probably want to design its own needs assessment form, tailored to the specific information you require. Be sure to include a cover letter that states the purpose of the survey and who is responsible. The name and phone number of at least one contact person and a deadline for returns are also important. Make it clear that the survey is in no way a promise that an after-school program will be established.

## STEP 2: INVESTIGATE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Find others who share your concerns, who confirm your perception that the need for after-school programs is pressing and who may also want to start a program. Talk with the local schools, staff of preschool day care centers and community agencies, such as YMCAs and Boys & Girls Clubs. Think broadly and creatively about who might want to be involved. The Junior League, League of Women Voters, Chamber of Commerce and mental health agencies have all played a part in promoting after-school programs in some communities. Parents, youth-serving or social service agencies and schools all benefit from working together.

In one community, a school district provided the space for a program, the Regional School Age Child Care Project provided staff training and development opportunities, the local YMCA offered its facilities for swimming lessons, and a local business offered an employee to assist pro-bono with the bookkeeping. This is one of innumerable examples of partnerships in the field of after-school programs.

Consider the various potential sources of assistance and cooperation in your community—churches, schools, business associations, social service agencies, a recreational facility, regional child care licensing offices, volunteer groups, the Cooperative Extension Service, preschool day care centers, public libraries and foster grandparents. Think about how a community-school collaboration could maximize the use of existing resources.

Remember that you have a continuum of possibilities, from schools that want their own programs to those that are willing to transport children to a center or family day care home after school. It is not necessary to have your program located in a school to collaborate financially with a school. Programs may work in tandem with the schools by sharing transportation costs, purchasing low-cost meals from school-run kitchens, participating in the bulk purchasing of supplies, sharing staff and so on.

## STEP 3: ASSESS YOUR RESOURCES

Do you have the resources—facilities, support and money from projected parent fees or subsidies—that will make it possible to run a good program?

Keep in mind that not everyone who has indicated an interest in the program will use it. In fact, experienced providers have found that only about 20 to 30 percent of those who indicate that they would use such a service actually enroll their child when a program opens.

Find out if there is an existing program that could be changed or expanded to fill the need. The following organizations have all sponsored after-school programs:

- Preschool day care centers
- School departments
- City parks or recreation departments

- Churches
- Youth-serving agencies (YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs)
- Community agencies (ethnic and cultural organizations)

If you do not find an existing agency that seems right, you must decide if you are ready to begin the exciting but difficult process of starting your own program.

#### STEP 4: DESIGN YOUR PROGRAM

In designing the program, you will need to answer each of the following questions, work out the kinks and the details and then let the program grow naturally.

##### **Where will the program be housed?**

If there is one area of the program design that is inextricably linked to all the others, it is the space you choose. When developing new priorities, you may be able to include community space, either incorporated into a building or in a separate nearby facility. Otherwise look for free or low-cost space close by, so that you can save your limited financial resources for other expenses, such as staff and supplies. For example, many after-school programs share a room with a kindergarten, preschool program or art class.

Some options for available spaces include:

- Schools (public, private, no longer in operation)
- Churches and synagogues
- Community or municipal agency buildings (YMCAs, youth centers, libraries, etc.)
- Nursery schools and day care centers
- Commercial properties (store-fronts, space in industrial parks)

##### **Who will attend the program?**

You must decide the ages the program will serve, priorities for enrollment or eligibility (if any) and the maximum number of children you will accept (both at start-up and once the program is fully operational).

To some extent, the size of your program will be limited by the availability of affordable space. You also need to consider group size, the total number of children assigned to a team of adults, counselors or caregivers in an individual room and the staff-to-child ratio—the number of caregivers divided by the group size. This ratio is strictly regulated for child-care funded after-school programs, and it varies by state.

Both staff-to-child ratios and group sizes revolve around issues of cost and quality. Larger groups with lower ratios may certainly be less expensive, but they minimize the individualized attention and the activity choices open to the children. Smaller groups cost more, but allow for more staff attention to each child and a broader range of activities.

**When will the program operate?**

While year-round care covering out-of-school hours may be what most working parents need, you will also have to consider the costs involved in each option and the stipulations of your space agreements.

**How will children get to and from the program?**

Some programs do not provide transportation and are serving the parents and children well; others have extensive before- and after-school routes that cost thousands of dollars per year but are essential to their operations. Analyze your needs and consider the following alternatives:

- Children walk to the program unescorted.
- Children walk to the program escorted by staff.
- Children take public transportation.
- Parents arrange a carpool system.
- Schools transport children.
- The program purchases or leases a van or bus.
- The program shares a vehicle with another agency.
- The program hires a transportation or taxi company to transport the children.

**Who will staff the program?**

The quality of your staff will have a direct impact on the quality of the program. Therefore, you want to pay the highest salaries possible to attract and keep the best personnel. Salaries represent approximately 70-85 percent of program costs.

**What are the costs?**

One of the most difficult struggles in designing your after-school program is the continual pull between your income (parent fees, grants, in-kind contributions, etc.) and your expenses.

When you are opening a new program, you face two kinds of costs, each needing their own budget: start-up costs and operating expenses. Start-up costs are those one-time expenses you incur even before you begin to provide services. Examples of start-up costs include renovation fees, purchasing equipment and supplies, licensing fees and staff salaries during the planning period.

Your projected annual operating budget, on the other hand, is an estimation of your expenses and income for an ongoing program that has achieved some stability. Operating expenses include staff salaries and benefits, rent, equipment, materials and supplies, utilities, food and administration.

**STEP 5: GAIN APPROVAL**

Have a proposal prepared in writing to show that you have a carefully designed program. Remember that legal protection and financial responsibility will be uppermost concerns to those you are approaching. You will need to anticipate questions and know the answers; keep your management, board and partners informed; and keep fundraising, investment and interest in the program going.

The length of the written proposal can range from brief—a few pages—to very long and detailed, depending on the requirements of your board.

#### STEP 6: PUBLICIZE THE PROGRAM

It often takes a long time before an after-school program can operate at full capacity. Many parents adopt a “wait and see” attitude. The best time for opening an after-school program is during the fall. In that case, publicity and enrollment should be taken care of the previous spring. Try to use every possible way to let the community know of the new service and to build trust in its quality.

#### STEP 7: ENROLL CHILDREN IN THE PROGRAM

The enrollment and application process involves communication between parents and the program on a number of issues. You should be prepared to disseminate a number of written materials to parents prior to enrollment, including a statement of philosophy, description of the daily program and policies regarding transportation, fee payment, emergencies and medical care.

Now is the time to make decisions regarding the application process, contact person, information required, pre-registration fee or deposit, required visits or interviews, notification of admission, waiting list procedures and trial enrollments.

You will want to establish a policy on admissions and discharge criteria. Programs that receive public funds or use public facilities may be legally obligated not to refuse applicants with disabilities, for example.

Enrollment policies may be based on the child’s age or grade; neighborhood or school; the family’s employment or other status, such as level of income; children with special needs; or certain ethnic or racial minority groups. Programs receiving public funds will need to comply with the enrollment priorities of the funding source.

Following these steps will help make the process smoother and more efficient. But keep in mind, you will be faced with unforeseen obstacles along the way. It is always a good idea to seek expert advice from after-school support agencies, whether local or online, and professional child care, legal and regulatory guidance as you plan and staff your center.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Afterschool Alliance (<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>) has a variety of resources on start-up and funding a program as well as various public relations and advocacy campaigns and links to research. Their 20-page Action Kit is helpful and available in English and Spanish.

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# EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION AND POLICIES FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Every program has an organizational structure, whether it has been drawn up or simply evolved over the course of many months. A good administrative structure sets up clear lines of accountability and authority, and it should be developed well enough to ensure that people both within and outside the organization know who is responsible for what. This document provides advice on designing effective administrative structures for after-school programs.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

You must first decide who will be the governing body for the program. Your options include the program administrator, your organization's board of directors, a new board of directors for the after-school program or someone from outside of the organization or program. Regardless of whose role it is, these tasks must be carried out early in the program design:

- Establishing a program philosophy and mission
- Determining personnel practices and policies (these policies should be put into writing)
- Determining the program's by-laws, size, parent participation requirements and role in relation to other agencies or partner institutions
- Establishing a governing function and protocol

Parents can be involved in policy setting in different ways, ranging from running the program entirely to serving on an advisory committee that reviews policy. The overall task of managing the program is usually handled by a program director. Multi-site programs also need to have a site director, who may or may not work directly with the children, depending on the size of the program.

Administrators are often active in local or national advocacy or support organizations for after-school and child-care issues. In some areas, after-school program directors have joined together to form an association or support group. Such groups can share information and technical assistance, resources and personnel and provide political and moral support.

Individual programs are more likely to be able to provide specific after-school training for staff by pooling their resources with other programs or agencies in their area. In addition, food, equipment, supplies or transportation might be purchased in bulk. Also, a united group of program representatives makes a compelling showing when it counts. The pooled energies and resources of this group can get parents out to attend public meetings or attract media attention.

## PARTNERSHIPS

One approach to implementing a cost-effective program is bringing in outside resources and forming partnerships. By working with area schools or churches,

you can maximize the use of your organization's existing resources by defraying some of the necessary costs for your program.

In considering how you might collaborate with these community institutions, remember that you have a continuum of choices, from schools and churches that want their own programs to those that are willing to transport children to an outside program. Moreover, a partnership may allow your program to share the costs of transportation, supplies or meals.

Here are five tips for maintaining productive partnerships:

- Be sure lines of responsibility and costs are agreed upon by all and are in writing.
- Make consistency a goal. Everyone involved in your partnership should have at least one meeting at the beginning of the program year, including custodial staff, secretaries and personnel who may be sharing space with you.
- Ensure that there is a procedure for parents to have real, meaningful involvement and offer input.
- Realize communication is the key to success in a partnership effort. Keeping the agency informed is among the most important tasks of the program staff.
- Invite agency personnel into the program area, allowing them to see first-hand the quality of your program.

You should address these four issues at the outset when forming the collaboration:

- Policy for the use of space by outside groups
- Accountability (who is responsible for the program and for any liability in case of injury to child or staff)
- Financial arrangements for use of space and other resources
- The impact of the program on the day-to-day operation of the agency

### SETTING POLICIES

Your program needs to have established policies on a number of subjects, as well as the procedures you will use to carry them out. Some areas that require such policies include:

- Enrollment
- Hours of operation
- Transportation
- Health and safety
- Food
- Behavior management
- Parent involvement
- Personnel
- Finances
- Child abuse and neglect reports

If your program is funded using public money, it is important that your policies reflect those set by your funding agency. Failure to do so could put your funding in jeopardy.

While you will want to develop your own policies, it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel. Check with nearby programs and request copies of their policies and handbooks to use as a guide. You can also check the “Creating Handbooks for an After-School Program” in this section of the manual for more information.

Some additional tips for setting policies and procedures include:

- Set the rules as early as possible.
- Keep the policies broad and simple.
- Be sure the procedures are uniform and created only to solve problems or avoid situations that could be complicated or troublesome.
- Ensure that the reasons for the policies and procedures are valid and justified.
- Create the policies and procedures to stand independently. Do not allow them to be arbitrarily decided by individual discretion.
- Adhere firmly and consistently to the policies and procedures once they have been created and adopted.
- Make exceptions only when the reasons are sound and defensible.
- Develop a flexible mechanism for changing policies and procedures.

Policy decisions should be formally voted upon and adopted by the organization, the director and the staff.

Setting the rules is the next step. In order to be followed, policies and procedures must be disseminated to those whose cooperation is needed: the community, the director, the staff, the parents and the children. A parent handbook, personnel manual and manual of operating procedures are all important tools for making sure that once decided, policies and procedures really work.

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# DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM FOR AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Some programs are only for students in kindergarten and the lower elementary grades. Other programs include or are specifically designed for children in the upper elementary or middle school grades or focus on older youth. Some programs focus on the arts, others on sports, others on field trips, still others on academics; many combine all of these and more. The term “after-school child care” is often used to describe a wide range of programs that are offered to children age five and older during the hours before and after school and during the holidays and vacations when schools are closed. Federal child care funding is available for programs serving children up to age 13 during after-school hours.

But all programs, regardless of their sponsorship or setting, must consider what it takes to provide quality and effective after-school services. When designing your program, it is important to consider the issues outlined in this document.

## **What Are the Developmental Needs of School-Age Children?**

- Children age five and older are beginning to develop a self-identity by comparing themselves with others. Being part of a group can add to the security of an identity. Therefore, school-age children will often mold their behavior to gain the acceptance of those they desire as friends.
- School-age children also build their identity through experience with adults. They need adults who can show them positive ways of coping with the world and role models who share their gender, race and ethnic identity.
- School-age kids are trying to make sense of the world around them and to figure out their place in it.
- School-age children categorize and classify, make rules and test boundaries, all in the interest of making sense of an overwhelming world. They like to collect different objects, make up codes for activities and play, and make up rules.
- Children learn best and have the most fun when they are busy with productive activities that challenge them to learn new skills or try out novel ideas.
- Giving school-age children real tools to perform real tasks will build their sense of competency and reduce the frequency of complaints like, “There’s nothing to do around here.”

## **How Can an After-School Program Meet These Needs?**

- It provides a unique opportunity within an informal learning environment for children of varying ages to live and learn together.
- It is a chance to enrich what happens in school, allowing children the time and place to develop interests and relationships, to venture out in new areas or just to curl up with a good book or a favorite stuffed animal.

- At after-school programs, children can have some time to relax, stretch their bodies as well as their minds and explore their own interests, perhaps finding hidden or previously unknown talents.

### What Are the Components of a High-Quality Program?

The most general description of a high-quality program is one with a positive culture. In more specific terms, this translates into such things as qualified staff and low staff-to-child ratios, a well-designed space and a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Children in quality programs find a home-away-from-home that meets their individual needs while also helping them to feel a valued part of the group. Finally, a quality program is one where rules are simple and fair, and firmly, yet lovingly, enforced.

Here are the basic elements of a high-quality after-school program:

- **Staff:** The adults who work with children are the single most important component of any program, and they must be well trained and skilled in age-appropriate activities that school-age children enjoy. Also, they should have good organizational skills, a strong commitment to their work and a sense of humor.
- **Program space:** Problems with the physical environment are a major barrier to the development of high-quality programming in many after-school programs. Children need to feel a sense of ownership of the program space. If children are to feel that a program is “theirs,” they need a space that can be designed and decorated to reflect their needs, concerns and personalities. For more information, see “Designing and Establishing Space for Resident Services Programs” found in The Design Process section in the first book of this manual.
- **Materials and activities:** School-age children need equipment and materials that will encourage their creativity, give them a sense of accomplishment and allow them to explore increasingly complex ideas. Materials should be made easily accessible. Make sure that all materials used are appropriate for the ages and abilities of children in the program and available in sufficient number. Programs that serve older children will need to pay special attention to the needs of these children, many of whom would prefer to be in a less supervised setting.
- **Schedule:** Children gain a sense of security when their environment is predictable. An established routine will provide the foundation on which staff and children can improvise. A weekly or monthly schedule of activities should be developed by staff with as much input as possible from the children. Of course, children love surprises too.
- **Planning:** Planning is critical to a successful program. Good days don’t just happen. Planning works best when it builds on themes. Children should have the opportunity on a daily basis to:
  - Make choices.
  - Participate in both small- and large-group activities.

- Use a wide variety of materials.
  - Have privacy alone or with a group of friends.
  - Do things that are quiet and things that are active.
  - Explore materials on their own.
  - Participate in adult-directed, structured activities.
  - Have free play.
- **Community resources:** A good program is involved in and knowledgeable about the surrounding community. Programs that involve the community enjoy many benefits, ranging from donations of goods to positive publicity. Community resources include places to go, like libraries, parks, zoos, museums, businesses and farms and local organizations that serve youth, such as the Girl and Boy Scouts. Using community resources also means creating links with other child care and human service programs.
  - **Internet resources:** There are valuable resources on the Internet that can help organizations develop curricula for after-school programs.
    - The After School Alliance was established to increase investment in quality after-school programs and serves as an information resource on programs and resources at <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>. The Alliance was founded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, J.C. Penney Company, Inc., the Open Society Institute/The After-School Corporation, the Entertainment Industry Foundation and the Creative Artists Agency Foundation.
    - Promising Practices in After School Programs was established in 1999 with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to identify and distribute promising after-school program practices. Information can be found at <http://www.afterschool.org>.

### What Role do Parents Play in an After-School Program?

Building strong relations with parents is a necessary and important part of developing a high-quality experience for children and their families. Staff should check in frequently with parents, by phone or in person at the end of the day, and should set up meetings whenever a more in-depth conversation is required.

Parents will be powerful supporters of a program that they understand and care about and will be more likely to help with fundraising, building new bookshelves, sharing their skills with the children and spreading good publicity.

To build parent involvement, programs can:

- Create a monthly parent newsletter.
- Have parent participation on an advisory council.
- Have a parent bulletin board, with notices and reminders.
- Encourage parent visits at any time, and send out special invitations for field trips and events.
- Hold parent-teacher conferences once or twice a year.
- Schedule family events, such as picnics or performances.

- Have regular parent meetings. To increase attendance, start off with a potluck dinner and provide supervision for children during the meeting.
- Invite parents to come to the program and share their special skills or experiences.

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# FINDING FUNDING FOR AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

It is vital for after-school programs to have multiple funding streams to ensure program sustainability. This document will provide you with specific ideas for potential funding sources. When requesting funding, emphasize the importance of after-school child care to the lives of the youth and families in your community.

## SOURCES OF FUNDING AT A GLANCE

Your funding can come from a variety of federal, state or local sources. Here is an overview of those potential sources.

**Federal** (Apply for this federal funding through federal agencies.):

- Department of Education: GEAR UP, Bilingual Education, Comprehensive School Grants
- Department of Justice: Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP)
- Department of Health and Human Services: School Action Grant Program
- Department of Housing and Urban Development: YouthBuild

**Federal** (Apply for this federal funding through state agencies.):

- Department of Education: Title I, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Safe and Drug Free Schools
- Department of Juvenile Justice: Juvenile Justice and Delinquency, Prevention: Allocation to States
- Department of Health and Human Services: Child Care Development Fund, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Department of Agriculture: USDA Snack Money

### State

- State education agency
- State department of health and human services
- Community education office
- Governor's commission related to youth

### Local

- School district
- City or county general fund
- Youth services bureau
- Parks and recreation department
- Sheriff's office

**Private**

- Foundations: national, state and community
- Corporations
- Chamber of commerce
- Police Athletic League (PAL)
- Volunteer center

**In-kind contributions**

- Staff time from a community organization
- Evaluations conducted by universities
- Fundraising consultation from a business
- Free or reduced-cost special events ads in local media outlets

For more information about these funding sources and how to utilize them, visit <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>.

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# HIRING AND DEVELOPING STAFF FOR AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

The exact make-up of an after-school program's staff will depend on the program's goals and philosophy, the strengths and skills needed to round out the team and the individual applicants. This document will help you to think through the hiring and developing of high quality staff members for your after-school program.

## POSITION TYPES

Depending on the size of your program, the positions listed below provide an outline of the staff needed to successfully run an after-school program.

- **Director:** Responsible for the general management of the facility, daily program supervision, staff supervision and administrative operation of the program
- **Group supervisor:** Supervises children, plans curriculum, supervises the activities of assistants and aides and assists the director with designated activities
- **Assistant group supervisor:** Works with the group supervisor to plan and run activities, coordinates daily activities and supervises aides in the absence of the group supervisor
- **Aide:** Helps the assistant group supervisor run daily activities for the children
- **Substitutes:** Pool of workers you can call on when one of the other staff members is sick
- **Volunteers:** Low-cost or free temporary workers

## THE HIRING PROCESS

Since there is no single type of institution or school that provides a degree specifically for after-school staff or even for qualified school-age child care teachers, the hiring process requires both creativity and flexibility. Formal educational preparation that may be helpful includes a degree in any of the following: arts education, physical education, special education, early childhood education, elementary education, human services, social work or recreation.

Follow these steps when designing a hiring process:

1. **Decide who will be involved and how decisions will be made.** The program director need not make these decisions alone. In many programs, parents and existing staff members play an important role in the hiring process. They may, for example, participate in interviews and choose the top candidates or make formal recommendations.
2. **Write a job description.** This clear, concise document should outline the tasks and responsibilities of the position, as well as the qualifications required.

3. **Recruit applicants.** The following methods have been used successfully by many programs:
  - a. Posting job descriptions, with application information, at college and university placement offices
  - b. Advertising or announcing at school meetings, such as the PTA, and on school bulletin boards
  - c. Using word-of-mouth through parents, current employees and others
  - d. Advertising in newspapers
  - e. Listing the position in newsletters or on bulletin boards at information and referral organizations, mental health centers and groups that serve ethnic and racial minorities
  - f. Posting notices in the community wherever potential candidates might see them
4. **Screen candidates.** In sorting through the résumés that you receive you will need to balance experience with education. Consider how the candidate would complement the other program staff in terms of personality, skills, training, cultural, ethnic and racial background and specific needs of the children.
5. **Hold interviews.** Your goal is to be able to compare candidates. Therefore, to the extent possible, the interview format should be formalized and standardized. (See the list of sample interview questions below for help formulating your questions.)
6. **Select finalists.** Select two or three finalists in accordance with your stated hiring procedures and priorities. Check references for each finalist.
7. **Make the final decisions.** The applicant you have selected should be offered the job with a clarification of all the conditions, such as time commitment, pay and benefits. You will need to comply with all licensing requirements.

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This list of sample questions can help you develop a formal structure for interviewing applicants. It can also be tailored to address the specific needs of your program or the type of positions you are interviewing for.

- Please describe your experiences with children.
- What are some basic differences between a 6-year-old child and a 9-year-old child?
- What special skills or strengths can you offer this program?
- Describe your experience in working with others as a team.
- Have you ever been in a crisis situation? How did you react?
- How would you rate your organizational abilities?

- How would you rate your ability to get along with coworkers?
- Please describe your experience working with people of different cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.
- What would you do if:
  - One child accused another of cheating at a board game?
  - A group of friends was teasing a new child in the program by calling him names?
  - A toy was missing from a child's cubby at the end of the day?
  - A child was failing in school?
- How is an after-school program different from school?
- How might you set up the schedule for a typical day?
- Which methods of group management do you use the most when working with children?
- What is your philosophy regarding discipline?
- What specific ideas do you have for involving parents in the program?
- What is your greatest strength in working with children in this age group? What is your greatest weakness?

#### SUPPLEMENTARY STAFF

Having volunteers from the community assist in your program can ensure that you have adequate assistance and can expose children to more positive role models. It is important that you seek out volunteers who can bring something positive to your program.

Sources of supplementary staff include:

- Community residents and neighborhood leaders who have specific skills or interests they can share
- Parents who have children enrolled in the program
- Senior citizens who donate their time to the program
- College students majoring in a related field
- High school students enrolled in child development courses or youth employment programs

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

High quality after-school programs usually have a planned, organized approach to staff supervision and training that includes both frequent, regular staff meetings and training opportunities outside the program.

The components of a successful staff development program are:

- **Supervision:** Individual supervision by directors or site coordinators usually occurs on a weekly or monthly basis.

- **Staff meetings:** Program staff may gather either in teams or as an entire staff, but some regularly scheduled meeting time is imperative for quality programming.
- **Observations:** A great deal can be learned by sharing resources between programs. In a field as young as after-school programming, written materials and academic training may be hard to find.
- **Local training consortia:** In some parts of the country, groups have formed to provide training for staff in a number of centers. Activities include workshops with speakers from different agencies, discussion topics to which all contribute, resource sharing, salary surveys, teacher “exchanges” and, in one case, a field day for staff and children from all of the member programs.
- **Full-day training:** Many programs conduct intensive full-day training at periodic intervals. The whole staff may go on a “retreat” to another location for workshops, meetings and group team-building experiences.

## STAFF EVALUATION

Evaluations based on expectations that are clearly delineated in job descriptions, personnel policies and individual goal statements should take place at regularly scheduled intervals. All supervision is, in a sense, a form of evaluation. Supervision should be given a high priority by setting aside uninterrupted, paid time for sessions with all staff members.

Your evaluation process will help staff learn where they need to improve and how to make those changes. Staff should also have an opportunity to evaluate the program.

Written evaluations are usually completed two or three times per year on standardized forms. Depending on the staff position and the program, they may be evaluated in terms of the following:

- Activities they have planned and led with children
- The arrangement of the space
- Performance in management tasks
- Relationships with children and parents
- Relationships with school personnel
- Ability to supervise others
- Ability to work well with others

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# MAKING AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS EFFECTIVE: ENHANCING SCHOOL SUCCESS

Everyone agrees that young people need safe places to spend their hours after school—places that are supervised by caring adults and provide productive activities that promote their learning and broader development. Participation in after-school programs, however, is voluntary. If children are going to benefit by these programs, they need to participate on an ongoing basis. The challenge for providers is to attract young people to their programs and retain their participation over time. As many providers will testify, if the young people are not engaged by the activities, they will “vote with their feet” by choosing not to attend the program regularly.

The successful strategies described in this resource have been used by two successful, affordable after-school programs, based in housing developments in New Orleans developed by the National Housing Partnership (NHP) Foundation. “Brighten Up” is an arts and education program for children 5 to 12 years of age while the “YES Brigade” serves older youth, age 13 and up. The NHP Foundation’s Operation Pathways manages the Tanglewood Apartments, and the after-school programs are part of its Pathway to Academic Achievement initiative.

## CREATE AN INVITING LEARNING SPACE

Whether you are designing a classroom or a space for an after-school program, it is important that the space is conducive to learning and reflects the young people in the program. It is not unusual for after-school programs to be assigned to the “throw away” space on the facility without the resources to prepare it properly. The quality of the space and the way it is designed clearly communicates how your program regards young people and the priority you place on their learning and development.

- It is helpful to have a dedicated space for after-school programs so coordinators can create a vibrant welcoming place for the children and youth.
- Make the space brightly lit, orderly and clean to show the high standards that the program holds for the adults and the young participants. The degree to which adults communicate high expectations for young people is a critical factor in promoting their health and future success.
- Provide well-maintained equipment and attractive, well-organized learning materials. Participants will appreciate the trust that they will take good care of and make use of the equipment and materials.

- Put up displays—the children’s stories, artworks, experiments, etc.—on walls and surrounding surfaces that prominently acknowledge the children’s accomplishments. Research on youth programs that successfully promote healthy development cite the importance of helping young people develop a positive sense of belonging and displaying their work can contribute to that development.
- Replace single rows of desks with “pods” (tables and chairs work fine) where children can work and learn together. Having a shared work space helps children learn how to work together.

### PRACTICE: INVITING SPACES FOR LEARNING

The “Brighten Up” and “Yes Brigade” programs both benefit from great physical spaces — two formerly occupied two-bedroom apartments, complete with kitchens and multiple rooms to conduct program activities. They have taken full advantage of these assets.

#### **Brighten Up**

When you walk through the door of the Brighten Up program, you immediately notice a combination of order, bright colors and lots of activity. Many things are crammed into the small rooms, but everything is stored in a logical place and all of the learning materials are easily accessible to the children. Several stations provide space for small groups of children to work together, each designed to accommodate different kinds of activities. The walls are painted vibrant primary colors, appropriate to the elementary-age children who use the room. Clearly, someone had a vision and took a lot of care to see it realized.

The colorful walls, however, are a just a backdrop to multiple displays of children’s work that provide a window into the learning that takes place here. If asked, a child in the program might appropriately describe the program space by saying, “It’s about me and my friends. These are our things on the walls.”

The hall is the homework center where children complete their homework and play math games. They can independently access computers and sign on to use a computer-based individualized literacy program.

Group agreements prominently displayed and the many behavior charts bearing the names of participants and rows of earned stars illustrate the expectations that the program’s leaders hold for the young participants. One chart acknowledges children with high attendance. Another has stars, each acknowledging acts of individual responsibility and kindness. Still another identifies individuals’ accomplishments— a stellar job on a project or finishing a large novel.

The prizes? In some cases, individuals earn gift certificates from a local business. In other cases, the individual wins an ice cream party that is shared with the whole group. “In this way, everyone is cheering and encouraging everyone else. When one wins, the whole team wins,” explains the program director.

According to the director, “After-school programs are unique from school and home, and the space should express this difference. We wanted our program spaces to be stimulating and exciting and to communicate the ownership that our young participants feel for this program and the learning that goes on here. And we achieved this in both programs, but they look very different from one another.”

### **Yes Brigade**

The Yes Brigade teen program’s space is very different from the Brighten Up space. Yes Brigade program leaders wanted the teen space to express the preferences of their teens, so they invited their teen group to design the space. What better way of ensuring that the space would be welcoming and promote a sense of ownership and belonging?

After conferring with their peers, the youth began by cleaning out the unused and uncared-for apartment that was going to house the new teen center, including pulling up carpets and cleaning the floors. Then they worked to create an atmosphere similar to a 1950s coffee house or a contemporary teen nightclub. In stark contrast to the primary colors in the Brighten Up facility, everything was painted black and dark purple: the floors and walls, the bathrooms, even the kitchen counters.

The teens prioritized how best to use the individual rooms. What was once a living room became the “soft” space for meeting and socializing. One bedroom became the place for homework and computer research, and the other was transformed into the gaming and recreation room. A small desk in the hallway serves as a workspace for the adult program leaders.

The result of this youth-centered approach: a 100-percent increase in program attendance at the teen center.

### **USING AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM**

When asked what they want from after-school programs, young people often respond that they want to learn new things but in ways that are challenging and interesting. Meeting that need requires learning approaches that draw upon the children’s natural curiosity and “disguises” or embeds the learning in fun activities. It is also important that these approaches can engage children with different learning styles and interests.

Using an integrated curriculum is one way to achieve this. An integrated curriculum uses a theme of interest to the young people being taught to teach across subjects, breaking down the barriers between subjects like science, social studies, history, literature, art, music and more. “Integrated curriculum adds problem-solving, real world application and social consciousness to the learning process, making it a more comprehensive way of educating and of learning. This makes learning more meaningful to children.” (Taken from *Curriculum Integration: Designing the Core of Democratic Education* by James Beane)

An integrated curriculum is effective because it corresponds with the way our brain works physiologically. “Rather than separating knowledge into discrete partitions, the brain creates a complex web of information that recognizes patterns.” (Also from *Curriculum Integration*) According to research, using an integrated curriculum helps young people learn to apply skills, leads to faster retrieval of information, encourages breadth and depth in learning and promotes positive attitudes in students.

## PRACTICE: WHAT AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM LOOKS LIKE

### **Brighten Up’s Virtual Vacation**

The Brighten Up staff wanted a way to expose children to the world beyond their immediate community in ways would pique their natural curiosity and include the things they liked: music, art and storytelling. To achieve this, they developed their own “Virtual Vacation” curriculum, which promotes the literacy skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. More impressively, it successfully integrates the learning of geography, social studies, history, art, music and more.

The “Virtual Vacation” begins with the group selection of a country that it will “visit” over the course of several weeks. The group begins planning for this vacation by locating the country on a globe and world map. They then move to maps of the chosen country to locate major cities and attractions.

“We learn about the country from the perspective of a family living there. We learn about what they do, what they eat, their language and customs, their history and their holidays,” the program director explains. “The learning is reinforced because we ourselves enact what we are learning about. We build word walls as we learn words in the native language and new terms related to the country. We cook and eat the native dishes, listen to the native music, read their myths and stories of their history, play their sports and attempt to re-create the indigenous arts and crafts.”

The children’s work on the walls reflects what they have learned on their “vacations”: paintings that resemble famous European works, drawings of Greek gods, colorful paper mache masks of Egyptian pharaohs and three-dimensional dioramas representing the local landscape. Mounted alongside are maps of the world and of the countries visited, each with pushpins and notes marking their travels and word walls that climb to the ceiling. “Everyone is excited and learning together, even the adults,” the director says. “Think about it: how many 8-year-olds can locate Egypt on a globe and explain who King Tut was, recount the myth surrounding a Greek god and describe an Impressionist painting?”

A past lesson plan, based on a virtual vacation to Brazil, documents what the children did:

- Chose Portuguese names for themselves and decorated name tags with their chosen name

- Located Brazil on a map and globe, and were given a brief introduction to its culture
- Painted a large map of Brazil and the surrounding water and land borders
- Made fritters by blending blackeyed peas and vegetables in a food processor, practicing fractions and learning about cups, ounces and other measuring terms while preparing them
- Constructed a rainforest out of tissue paper and pipe cleaners
- Learned to read Portuguese numbers and colors
- Designed their own dresses and shirts, using traditional Brazilian patterns
- Listened and danced to Brazilian music, while playing clackers (which they had painted) to the rhythm of the recorded music
- Listened to Capoeira music and learned about the martial arts form and its function in Brazil.
- Learned about the types of butterflies that live in the Amazon, which included creating outdoor mobiles of hanging butterflies

### **Yes Brigade Sets Goals**

Like the younger children, the teens are also interested in learning new things that focus on the larger world, which in their case centered on career and work.

This process begins with a staff member interviewing each young person to learn their interests, hopes and dreams for the future. Using that information, each young person develops personal goals that involve exploring career options and gathering related skills and experiences. The staff helps each participant to formulate a customized plan and find resources that will help the participant achieve his or her goals. Each teen has a mailbox where staff members place topical articles or announcements of upcoming events, educational opportunities and other resources that relate to his or her goals, or sometimes, just a note of encouragement. Staff members meet periodically with individual teens to help them assess progress and update their goals.

The staff also works with the large group to identify issues they want to learn more about or skills they want to develop as a group. In response, the staff schedules speakers and teen workshops at the center, which are led by experts from the larger community. The group also commits to giving back to their local neighborhood through community service projects.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**The Office of the Surgeon General** offers a guide, *Introduction to Risk and Protective Factors*, that describes the risk factors that children and youth may encounter growing up as well as the protective factors that can be put into place. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/chapter4/sec1.html>

**The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine** published *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, which offers recommendations for policy, practice and research to ensure that programs are well designed to meet young people's developmental needs.

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# ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS: FORGING CONNECTIONS AMONG FAMILY, SCHOOL AND AFTER-SCHOOL

Research tells us that a child's positive development is best facilitated when there are meaningful connections and communication among those adults who are providing for the child's care and education. Good communication affords all parties a richer understanding of a child's specific needs, the ability to establish a shared set of behavioral expectations and better coordination of care, especially in times of increased need. When the adults understand what the others are doing, they are able to reinforce and support common goals, such as the child's school success.

Traditionally, the primary adults in children's lives have been those from the home and the school. Today, however, there is a critical "third place": after-school programs.

## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

In this resource, we discuss the role that after-school programs, particularly those based in housing communities, can play in promoting connections among all three settings: home, school and after-school. Practices by successful after-school programs from two organizations are included.

**AHC, Inc.** is a private, nonprofit developer of affordable housing in the mid-Atlantic region that provides quality homes for low- and moderate-income families. Their after-school program provides a nurturing and educational environment for more than 125 elementary children throughout Arlington, Va., where the organization is based. The program focuses on building literacy and math skills, along with plenty of fun activities and healthful snacks.

**HOPE through Housing (HOPE)** is the social services foundation of the developer, National Community Renaissance. Located in California, HOPE is committed to improving communities and residents' lives by providing services including after-school tutoring, computer centers, senior wellness classes and more. In addition to offering pre-school programs on-site at many of their properties, HOPE is dedicated to providing quality after-school programs.

## HOW AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS PROMOTE SCHOOL SUCCESS

There is broad agreement that supporting young people's school success is everyone's responsibility, including family members and leaders of after-school programs. Much has been studied and written about the specific role and contributions of after-school programs to children's success at school. Some of those contributions include:

- **Offering Complementary Learning Opportunities:** In order to prosper, young people need to develop competencies in multiple domains:

intellectual, social, emotional and physical. This requires the contributions of formal and informal learning settings. According to the Harvard Family Research Project, “Schools cannot do it alone. Children need multiple opportunities to learn and grow—at home, in school and in the community. After-school programs can provide a diverse set of learning opportunities through sports, the arts, community service and mentoring.”

- **Reinforcing Classroom Learning:** Programs can reinforce what children learn at school by providing focused academic supports such as homework assistance, and if the after-school staff is qualified, specific subject tutoring. Programs can also provide learning remediation if they have trained teachers on hand.
- More generally, programs can offer reinforcement by aligning after-school activities with school-day learning. This could take many forms: reading books, doing projects or scheduling field trips that relate to the content being studied in school, especially in social studies or science; increasing children’s time reading books and listening to stories; playing math games that align with the math skills being practiced in school. This requires that the after-school staff have some knowledge of the classroom content through relationships with their schools or understanding state academic standards.
- **Extended Learning Time:** Children benefit by increased time in structured learning settings, both formal and informal. An important contribution of after-school programs is the extended learning time they offer children. This can be significant when taking into account programming that takes place over school breaks and during the summer months when the schools are closed and when low-income children often suffer loss of learning.
- **Promoting Support for Education in the Home:** According to research, children perform better academically when their parents and guardians are more involved in supporting their education. After-school programs can employ several strategies to support home involvement. (See page 37.)

**About Academic Outcomes:** It is important to note that in the past, after-school programs have over-reached in taking responsibility for improving academic outcomes. We know from nearly all evaluations of institutional after-school programs that, given the time, resources and workforce that they bring, they can contribute to but do not by themselves significantly affect academic outcomes, such as standardized testing.

After-school programs, however, have been shown to increase school attendance, support children in completing their homework and enable students to build meaningful relationship with peers and adults, which can translate to re-

relationships at school with peers and teachers. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from housing-based after-school programs are showing greater impact than institutionally based programs on children and youth's academic achievement and high school graduation rates.

#### FORGING CONNECTIONS: ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

After-school program practitioners in the field report that establishing the initial connection with schools and families is not always easy. Schools are skeptical of outside organizations. "Most principals are so overworked and overwhelmed they can't find the energy to understand who we are, even if investing that energy would take a huge load off their shoulders," says one practitioner. Practitioners provided this advice:

- **"Be culturally competent."** In order to approach the families, you have to be able to gain their trust. After-school staff have to be available, approachable and most importantly, multi-lingual to bridge the language barriers with families.
- **"Bring them all together."** When children are participating in culminating projects and performances, invite families and also teachers. Some of the teachers really will show up. And those that don't still appreciate being invited.

#### STRATEGIES FOR FORGING CONNECTIONS AMONG SCHOOL AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

These promising practices from AHC and HOPE provide examples of ways for after-school programs to forge connections with schools and homes.

##### **Connections Among School and After-school Programs**

**Building Relationships with School Personnel:** AHC staff view the beginning of the school year as a key time to connect with schools. Staff visits the schools of their students and meet with the teachers, introducing themselves as a resource to the school and community. This sets up a relationship where staff can email a teacher to share concerns about a child, and provide back and forth referrals.

**Tracking School Performance Progress:** Both the HOPE and AHC staffs use their children's school performance data to inform their program activities. The HOPE staff asks youth participants to bring in report cards. This provides just one more piece of information about the youth and gives schools and families the message that there is a third party invested in their child's academic and emotional success.

Similarly, upon registration, AHC has parents fill out a permission form allowing the after-school program to receive a copy of student report cards. This enables program leaders to monitor student grades and look for areas of opportunity as well as track student improvement.

**Teacher/After-school Homework Log:** As young people enroll in the after-school program, the HOPE staff immediately sends a letter to each of the child's teachers, introducing themselves and the services they provide. They invite teachers to communicate with them regarding the students' progress in school using a homework log.

This document travels back and forth between teacher and after-school staff. Teachers and after-school staff can make comments and share notes about the students' needs, progress or circumstances that may come up either in school or at home. This gives students an extra set of supports. Sometimes teachers send supplemental worksheet packets to give a child extra help in a particular area or share homework assignments. HOPE sees a 20 percent success rate with this process.

While this number could be higher, they find that students who receive this focused attention tend to improve in their schoolwork, are more engaged and interested in school and are willing to talk about what they have learned in school.

**Building Internal Capacity to Support School Success:** Each fall, AHC offers a series of professional development opportunities to their staff. These professional development trainings range from youth development theory to educational strategies. AHC noticed that having their staff trained in the methodology the schools use to teach math, reading and writing was a major benefit to the students.

Bringing school staff into professional development offerings helps with programming strategies as well. Visiting teachers discussed specific math curricula or particular reading and writing strategies. They offered interesting math games that youth could do after they finished their homework. This allowed the staff to use the same vocabulary and strategies that the teachers are using, further supporting the students' understanding of the material.

AHC has been able to retain many of their staff for three to 10 years. This low turnover has enabled them to maintain deep relationships with their residents and school personnel. How do they maintain such low turnover? Many factors impact staff retention. One important component is the ongoing professional development opportunities AHC offers its staff. The trainings enable staff to continue to develop their skills and expertise and to keep the job fresh and energizing.

**Establishing a Presence in the Schools:** After-school programs can strengthen their connections to their children's schools by actually establishing a physical presence in the schools. In five of the AHC centers, after-school staff work in their students' schools for one hour per week and are additional resources that the school can deploy to support their academic goals. Usually the schools pick out the most logical placement for the staff, such as a classroom that has the most students from the housing facility.

By becoming a visible part of the “school team.” after-school participants begin to see their AHC staff as “real” teachers. AHC believes this approach improved the attendance at their after-school program and promoted a confidence that the AHC staff would know the “right” way to help the children with their homework.

**Making Use of AmeriCorps Volunteers:** How can programs with small budgets and part-time staff afford to deploy after-school staff at school sites? HOPE recently secured a grant from AmeriCorps for four of their sites to be staffed by a combination of AmeriCorps volunteers and part-time workers. In this way, the housing properties were able to send their AmeriCorps staff into schools where they spent time with teachers, volunteered in the classrooms and built deep relationships with the youth they worked with regularly.

**Measuring School Relationships:** In a program’s first year, making itself known to school personnel is important. A simple survey to local schools provides a quick read of where the program stands in the schools. HOPE’s after-school director designs the survey to answer the following questions:

- Do teachers know this program exists?
- Do they know which kids from their classrooms are in our after-school program?
- Do they know what our program is about and what services we provide?

As programs become more established and connect to the school community more deeply, they can measure the frequency of interactions between the after-school program staff and teachers. They can also compare programs with frequent interactions with similar programs lacking such interactions to demonstrate the value of these partnerships.

### **Forging Connections Between Home and School**

In the education field, it is known that parent involvement in their children’s education is related to young people showing increased motivation and performance at school, as well as greater success in making school transitions. After-school programs can play an important connecting role by serving as a liaison between the school and the child’s parents and guardians. This might take the form of:

- Helping transport adult family members to school events, such as an open-house or teacher-parent conferences.
- Serving as a family advocate or translator during sessions.
- Inviting school personnel to meet parents and guardians at orientation sessions hosted in after-school program facilities.

Programs can also provide parent education forums for parents and guardians on how to support their child's completion of homework and ensure that their child is ready for school each day.

**Report Card Readings:** For many schools, the report card is the major method of communication, without which parents and teachers have no vehicle for communication. AHC hosts an open house to help families understand their children's report cards. For immigrants who do not understand the American system of reporting or need language translation support, this is sometimes the only way they can understand how their children are doing in school.

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# EVALUATING AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

When evaluating the quality of an after-school program, it is helpful to have a set of uniform standards to use as a guide. This document contains general standards, developed by the National School-Age Care Alliance, for various features of after-school programs. It identifies a very thorough list of items to review. You can use some or all of these as the basis for creating your own evaluation forms and procedures.

## RELATIONSHIPS

1. Staff members relate to all children and youth in positive ways.
  - a. Staff members treat children with respect and listen to what they say.
  - b. Staff members make children feel welcome and comfortable.
  - c. Staff members respond to children with acceptance and appreciation.
  - d. Staff members are interacting with the children.
2. Staff members respond appropriately to the children's individual needs.
  - a. Staff members know that each child has special interests and talents.
  - b. Staff members recognize the range of children's abilities.
  - c. Staff members can relate to a child's culture and home language.
  - d. Staff members respond to the range of children's feelings and temperaments.
3. Staff members encourage children and youth to make choices and to become more responsible.
  - a. Staff members offer assistance in a way that supports children's initiative.
  - b. Staff members assist children without taking control, and they encourage children to take leadership roles.
  - c. Staff members give children many chances to choose what they will do, how they will do it and with whom.
  - d. Staff members help children make informed and responsible choices.
4. Staff members interact with children and youth to help them learn.
  - a. Staff members ask questions that encourage children to think for themselves.
  - b. Staff members share skills and resources to help children gain information and solve problems.
  - c. Staff members vary the approaches they use to help children learn.
  - d. Staff members help children use language skills through frequent conversations.

5. Staff members use positive techniques to guide the behavior of children and youth.
  - a. Staff members give children positive attention for cooperating, sharing, taking care of materials or joining in activities.
  - b. Staff members set appropriate limits for children.
  - c. Staff members do not use harsh discipline methods.
  - d. Staff members encourage children to resolve their own conflicts, intervening only if needed and then help the children to discuss the issues and work out a solution.
  
6. Children and youth generally interact with one another in positive ways.
  - a. Children appear relaxed and involved with each other.
  - b. Children show respect for each other.
  - c. Children usually cooperate and work well together.
  - d. When problems occur, children often try to discuss their differences and work out a solution.
  
7. Staff members and families interact in positive ways.
  - a. Staff members make families feel welcome and comfortable.
  - b. Staff members and families treat each other with respect.
  - c. Staff members share the languages and cultures of the families they serve and the communities they live in.
  - d. Staff members and families work together to make arrivals and departures between home and the after-school program go smoothly.
  
8. Staff members work well together to meet the needs of children and youth.
  - a. Staff members communicate with each other while the program is in session to ensure it runs smoothly.
  - b. Staff members are cooperative with each other.
  - c. Staff members are respectful of each other.
  - d. Staff members provide positive role models of adult relationships.

#### INDOOR ENVIRONMENT

1. The program's indoor space meets the needs of children and youth.
  - a. There is enough room for all program activities.
  - b. The space is arranged well for a range of activities: physical games and sports, creative arts, dramatic play, quiet games, enrichment offerings, eating and socializing.
  - c. The space is arranged so that various activities can go on at the same time without much disruption.
  - d. There is adequate and convenient storage space for equipment, materials and the personal possessions of children and staff.

2. The indoor space allows children and youth to take initiative and explore their interests.
  - a. Children can get materials out and put them away with ease.
  - b. Children can arrange materials and equipment to suit their activities.
  - c. The indoor space reflects the work and interests of the children.
  - d. Some areas have soft, comfortable furniture where children can relax.

## OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

1. The outdoor play area meets the needs of children and youth, and the equipment allows them to be independent and creative.
  - a. Each child has a chance to play outdoors for at least 30 minutes out of every three-hour block of time.
  - b. Children can use a variety of outdoor equipment and games for both active and quiet play.
  - c. Permanent playground equipment is suitable for the sizes and abilities of all children.
  - d. The outdoor space is suitable for a wide variety of activities.

## ACTIVITIES

1. The daily schedule is flexible, and it offers enough security, independence and stimulation to meet the needs of all children and youth.
  - a. The routine provides stability without being rigid.
  - b. Children meet their physical needs in a relaxed way.
  - c. Individual children move smoothly from one activity to another, usually at their own pace.
  - d. When it is necessary for children to move as a group, the transition is smooth.
2. Children and youth can choose from a wide variety of activities.
  - a. There are regular opportunities for active, physical play.
  - b. There are regular opportunities for creative arts and dramatic play.
  - c. There are regular opportunities for quiet activities and socializing.
  - d. Children have a chance to join enrichment activities that promote basic skills and higher-level thinking.
3. Activities reflect the mission of the program and promote the development of all of the children and youth in the program.
  - a. Activities fit the children's styles, abilities and interests.
  - b. Activities are well suited to the children's age range.
  - c. Activities reflect the languages and cultures of the families served.
  - d. Activities reflect and support the program's mission.

4. There are sufficient materials to support program activities.
  - a. Materials are complete and in good repair.
  - b. There are enough materials for the number of children in the program.
  - c. Materials are developmentally appropriate for the age range of the children in the program.
  - d. Materials promote the program's mission.

#### SAFETY, HEALTH AND NUTRITION

1. The safety and security of children and youth are protected.
  - a. There are no observable safety hazards in the program space.
  - b. Systems are in place to protect the children from harm, especially when they move from one place to another or use the restroom.
  - c. Equipment for active play is safe.
  - d. A system is in place to prevent unauthorized people from taking children.
2. The program provides an environment that protects and enhances the health of children and youth.
  - a. The indoor and outdoor facilities are clean.
  - b. There are no observable health hazards in the indoor or outdoor space.
  - c. There are adequate supplies and facilities for hand washing.
  - d. The heat, ventilation, noise level and light in the indoor space are comfortable.
3. The staff members try to protect and enhance the health of children and youth.
  - a. Staff members are responsive to the children's health needs.
  - b. Staff members protect children from communicable diseases by separating children who become ill during the program.
  - c. Staff members protect children from potential hazards such as: caustic or toxic art materials and cleaning agents, medications and hot liquids or overexposure to heat or cold.
  - d. Staff members and children wash hands frequently, especially after using the toilet or before preparing food.
4. Children and youth are carefully supervised to maintain safety.
  - a. Staff members note when children arrive, when they leave and with whom.
  - b. Staff members know where the children are and what they are doing.
  - c. Staff members supervise children appropriately according to children's ages, abilities and needs.
  - d. Staff members closely supervise activities that are potentially harmful.

5. The program serves food and drink that meet the children's health needs.
  - a. The program serves healthy food.
  - b. Drinking water is readily available at all times.
  - c. The amount and type of food offered is appropriate for the ages and sizes of the children.
  - d. Snacks and meals are timed appropriately for children.

#### ADMINISTRATION

1. Staff-to-child ratios and group sizes permit the staff to meet the needs of children and youth.
  - a. Staff-to-child ratios vary according to the ages and abilities of children, as well as by state. In general, the ratio is between 1:10 and 1:15 for groups of children age 6 and older. The ratio is between 1:8 and 1:12 for groups that include children younger than age 6.
  - b. Staff-to-child ratios and group sizes vary according to the type and complexity of the activity, but group sizes do not exceed 30.
  - c. There is a plan to provide adequate staff coverage in case of emergencies.
  - d. Substitutes are used to maintain ratios when regular staff members are absent.
2. Children and youth are supervised at all times.
  - a. Arrivals are supervised.
  - b. Departures are supervised.
  - c. Staff members have a system for knowing where the children are at all times.
  - d. Staff members plan for different levels of supervision according to the level of risk involved in an activity.
3. Staff members support families' involvement in the program.
  - a. There is a policy that allows family members to visit any time throughout the day.
  - b. Staff members offer orientation sessions for new families.
  - c. Staff members keep families informed about the program.
  - d. Staff members encourage families to give input and to get involved in program events.
4. Staff members, families and schools share important information to support children's well-being.
  - a. Program policies require that staff and family members communicate about the child's well-being.
  - b. Staff members, families and schools work together as a team to set goals for each child; they work with outside specialists as necessary.
  - c. Staff members and families share information about how to support children's development.
  - d. Staff members and families join together to communicate and work with the schools.

5. The program builds links to the community.
  - a. Staff members provide information about community resources to meet the needs of children and their families.
  - b. The program develops a list of community resources. The staff members draw from these resources to expand program offerings.
  - c. The staff members plan activities to help children get to know the larger community.
  - d. The program offers community service options, especially for older children.
  
6. The program's indoor space meets the staff's needs.
  - a. There is enough room in the indoor space to plan various program activities.
  - b. Staff members have access to adequate and convenient storage space.
  - c. The indoor space meets or exceeds local health and safety codes.
  - d. Written guidelines are in place regarding the use and maintenance of the program facility.
  
7. The outdoor space is large enough to meet the needs of children, youth and staff.
  - a. There is enough room in the outdoor space for all the program activities.
  - b. The outdoor space meets or exceeds local health and safety codes.
  - c. Staff members use outdoor areas to provide new outdoor play experiences.
  - d. There is a procedure in place for regularly checking the safety and maintenance of the outdoor play space.
  
8. Staff, children and youth work together to plan and implement suitable activities that are consistent with the program's philosophy.
  - a. Staff members ask children to share their ideas for planning so that activities will reflect children's interests.
  - b. The program's daily activities are aligned with its mission and philosophy.
  - c. Staff members keep records of their activity planning.
  - d. Staff members plan activities that will reflect the cultures of the families in the program and the broad diversity of human experience.
  
9. Program policies and procedures are in place to protect the safety of the children and youth.
  - a. Staff and children know what to do in case of a general emergency.
  - b. The program has established procedures to prevent accidents and manage emergencies.
  - c. The program has established policies to transport children safely; it complies with all legal requirements for vehicles and drivers.
  - d. A system is in place to prevent unauthorized people from taking children from the program.

10. Program policies exist to protect and enhance the health of all children.
  - a. There is current documentation showing that the program has met the state and local health and safety guidelines and regulations.
  - b. There are written policies and procedures to ensure the health and safety of children.
  - c. No smoking is allowed in the program.
  - d. The staff members are always prepared to respond to accidents and emergencies.
  
11. All staff members are professionally qualified to work with children and youth.
  - a. Staff members meet the requirements for experience with school-age children in recreational settings.
  - b. Staff members have received the recommended type and amount of preparation. They meet the requirements that are specific to after-school programs and relevant to their particular jobs.
  - c. Staff members meet minimum age requirements.
  - d. Enough qualified staff members are in place. Qualified staff members are hired in all areas: to administer the program, to oversee its daily operations and to supervise children.
  
12. Staff members are given an orientation to the job before working with children and youth.
  - a. A written job description that outlines responsibilities to children, families and the program is reviewed with each staff member.
  - b. Written personnel policies are reviewed with staff.
  - c. Written program policies and procedures, including emergency procedures and confidentiality policies, are reviewed with staff.
  - d. New staff members are given a comprehensive orientation to the program philosophy, routines and practices. They are personally introduced to the people with whom they will be working.
  
13. The training needs of the staff are assessed and training is relevant to the responsibilities of each job.
  - a. Staff members receive training in how to work with families and how to relate to children in ways that promote their development.
  - b. Program directors and administrators receive training in program management and staff supervision.
  - c. Staff members receive training in how to design the program space and activities to support the program's goals.
  - d. Staff members receive training in how to promote children's safety, health and nutrition.

14. Staff members receive appropriate support to make their work experience positive.
  - a. The program offers the best possible wages and working conditions in an effort to reduce staff turnover.
  - b. Full-time staff members receive benefits, including health insurance and paid leaves of absence. Staff members are also given paid breaks and paid preparation time.
  - c. Staff are given ample time to discuss their own concerns regarding the program.
  - d. Staff members receive continuous supervision and feedback. This includes written performance reviews on a timely basis.
  
15. The administration provides sound management of the program.
  - a. The financial management of the program supports the program's goals.
  - b. The administration oversees the recruitment and retention of program staff.
  - c. The director involves staff, board, families and children in both long-term planning and daily decision-making.
  - d. Administrators assist with ongoing evaluation. They aim for improvement in all areas of the program.
  
16. Program policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of children, youth and families in the community.
  - a. A written mission statement sets forth the program's philosophy and goals.
  - b. The program makes itself affordable to all families by using all possible community resources and sources of subsidy.
  - c. The program's hours of operation are based on families' needs.
  - d. It is the program's policy to enroll children with special needs.

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# CREATING HANDBOOKS FOR AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

This document provides an outline for developing handbooks that state the rules and procedures for an after-school program. Such handbooks are essential to maintaining consistency. Handbooks can also act as a compliance measure, ensuring that your program meets the requirements and regulations created by your funding agency.

## OPERATING PROCEDURES HANDBOOK

Your program's operating procedures handbook should contain these sections:

1. Program description
2. Organizational chart
3. Philosophy and services provided
4. Licensing
5. Sources of funding
6. Purpose of the manual, including procedures for revision
7. Health and safety
8. Admissions policy and procedures
9. Service delivery

## PERSONNEL HANDBOOK

Your program's personnel handbook should contain these sections:

1. Purpose of the handbook
2. Personnel practices
  - a. Recruitment
  - b. Hiring
  - c. Probation
  - d. Evaluation
  - e. Discipline
  - f. Grievance
  - g. Termination
  - h. Equal Opportunity guidelines
3. Financial information
  - a. Payday and pay periods
  - b. Salary ranges
  - c. Salary review
4. Leave accrual and use
5. Time and attendance policy
6. Pay and benefits
7. Ethical standards
8. Orientation and training
9. Use of facilities
10. Communication
11. Job descriptions
12. Sample staff schedules

## PARENT HANDBOOK

Your program's parent handbook should contain these sections:

1. Program philosophy
2. Description of services and general policies
  - a. Hours and type of service
  - b. Curriculum and program activities
  - c. Release of children
  - d. Enrollment procedures
  - e. Discipline and setting limits
  - f. Meals and snacks
3. Financial issues
4. Parents' roles and responsibilities
  - a. Communication
  - b. Volunteer involvement
  - c. Clothes, food, etc.
5. Health and safety
6. Emergency and disaster-related procedures
7. Transportation and escort service policies
8. Snow days
9. Vacation and long days
10. Staff and board
11. Day care calendar
12. Discrimination and civil rights policies

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# DESIGNING PROGRAMS TO ENGAGE YOUTH

Successful youth programs can help reduce achievement gaps for low-income children by creating a space where family, neighborhood and school values are integrated. Youth programs can meet needs that schools often can't, such as sufficient personal attention from adults, a positive peer group and activities that hold young people's interest and build their self-esteem.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF PRE-TEENS AND TEENS

The following physical, social, emotional and cognitive characteristics of pre-teens and teens are important to bear in mind when developing a youth program.

### Physical characteristics

- Body changes are occurring at a pace second only to that of infancy.
- Energy levels are as likely to be high as they are to be low.
- Sporadic growth spurts, accompanied by the onset of puberty and hormonal changes, leave many feeling awkward and uncoordinated.
- Feelings of sexual identity and desire are emerging and this can cause confusion.

### Social and emotional characteristics

- Family control and influence are lessened.
- The values of the peer culture are increasingly incorporated into the youth's value system.
- Adult role models outside the family are depended upon for support and approval.
- The peer group determines what's "in" and what's "out."
- Peers' perceptions become all-important.

### Cognitive characteristics

- Thinking becomes less concrete and they are increasingly able to incorporate the abstract.
- They can modify their preconceived notions as they more fully reflect and imagine other options.
- They need information and facts to help them understand the developmental changes that are taking place in their bodies.
- They need to learn skills and competencies that will prepare them for work and life management, and generally help them transition into the adult world.

## PROGRAM OFFERINGS FOR YOUTH

When designing programs for young people, you should make sure that the program:

- Provides a welcoming space for both informal and organized activities.
- Supports their educational goals.
- Provides social and recreational opportunities.

## PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

It is important that your program's philosophy is designed with the youth you are serving in mind. Your philosophy should:

- Stress open and honest communication among staff members and participants as a way to enhance trust and mutual respect.
- Encourage discussions on topical issues to help clarify misinformation and break down stereotypes.
- Ensure that competitive situations in sports, games, intellectual achievement or other areas are designed based on the participants' vast span of developmental competency.
- Ensure that staff are trained and sensitive to the potential feelings of failure that less adept participants are likely to feel.
- Seek ways to encourage participants to acquire skills that will help foster their sense of self-worth and accomplishment.
- Foster opportunities for children to socialize and participate in activities that are not under direct and constant supervision of adults; insist that leaders are always available for assistance and that they stay alert for where students are and what they are doing.

## CURRICULUM

When designing your program's curriculum, be sure to:

- Include opportunities for ongoing clubs and activities that span weeks, even months.
- Encourage creative outlets and opportunities to try out new and emerging roles through drama, dance and the arts.
- Provide opportunities for community service (such as helping younger children; volunteering in nursing homes, hospitals or soup kitchens; helping to clean parks or repair vandalized play equipment).
- Evolve your programs in large part from the ideas, interests and skills of the students themselves.

## PROGRAM SCHEDULES

The most successful program schedules are those that:

- Are flexible and easily adapted to capture the current interests and needs of the students.
- Have been developed to ensure that the kids have a choice between structured or open-ended projects as well as between active, physically vigorous activities and more reflective, quiet activities.
- Incorporate enough time to share food as an opportunity for relaxed social interaction.

- Facilitate time for the young people to talk about anything and everything, including issues of concern or excitement.
- Ensure that total group gatherings and sharing of information is built-in and that children have the opportunity to talk in private with each other and with the staff.
- Permit time for homework and time for specialists, friends, speakers or other guests to introduce new ideas or skills.

## STAFFING

There is more to working with youth than an awareness of developmental needs—staff must have a genuine appreciation for this age group. Be sure to look for individuals who really like to work with teens and pre-teens, and who aren't afraid of being challenged. Look for people who are flexible and adaptable, who welcome changes in activities and schedules and who seek opportunities for learning and growth.

This developmental period is a very important stage of identification and role modeling. Thus, it's important to identify staff that the kids can easily relate to. If possible, hire staff that share similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds with the children. Recruit qualified staff from your community or surrounding area whenever possible. In addition, invite other community professionals to come into the classroom and share their knowledge, talents and experiences. These kinds of guest “teachers” broaden the atmosphere and sphere of learning for both the students and the staff.

## WHAT WORKS WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Use this advice when planning a program that appeals to pre-teens and teens.

### **Create a separate place or time for the older children.**

- Develop clubs exclusively for the older children, and dedicate a staff member to working with the pre-teens or teens.
- Create a “commissary” kitchen for the program that is run by the older youth.
- Make sure that the older children's activities are different from the younger children's activities.

### **Use older kids as assistants.**

- Work with the older children to plan and cook lunches and snacks, set up sports schedules, decorate bulletin boards, etc.

### **Create opportunities for choice.**

- Offer the older children a variety of activity options, such as taking part in personal growth workshops, cooking or first-aid classes; participating in community projects; or creating a newspaper or newsletter.
- Offer the older children a variety of recreation options, such as table-top games or mixed-gender outdoor sports.

**Help staff to understand and support the older children.**

- Try using the staff as facilitators, letting leadership come from the young people in the program.
- Provide appropriate supplies and equipment to enable staff to plan engaging activities for the older children.
- Provide staff with information sessions on normal behavior in young adults, giving them an opportunity to work together to solve problems and generate new ideas.

**Work with parents.**

- Negotiate with parents for realistic requirements for homework, sports and other activities.
- Negotiate with parents for a combination of days at home and days at the program.
- Have children call parents to “check in.”
- Provide parents with information sessions on children’s development and other important issues affecting their youth.

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## ENCOURAGING YOUTH TO STAY IN SCHOOL

The lack of a high school degree often results in poverty, lower earnings and higher unemployment rates. Despite many decades of effort to overcome it, the gap in achievement between rich and poor children still persists. No single factor causes this gap; it comes from a combination of individual, family and social circumstances. But resident services coordinators can help to bridge the gap by encouraging young residents to remain in school, obtain their high school diploma and prepare themselves for future learning and employment opportunities.

It is important that your residents understand that having a high school diploma or a GED certificate has become a basic prerequisite for obtaining a decent job in today's economy. However, additional skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving and communications skills also rank high on employers' lists of necessary qualifications, even for entry-level jobs. After-school programs provide young people with opportunities to build upon both their academic and life skills. Together, staying in school and participating in after-school programs are two of the best guarantees that your young residents will succeed later in life.

After-school and youth programs can help young people stay in and succeed at school. They offer opportunities to acquire skills through tutoring and additional time for students who need to work on English and math skills and a welcoming, quiet and comfortable space to do homework or use computers. Programs can also offer intangibles that may be even more valuable—the opportunity to engage in activities that help young people realize that they have something to contribute to a group; the opportunity to work with diverse peers and adults to create projects, performances and presentations, venues and activities for which they can receive accolades from their families and the community; and the opportunity to develop a vision of life's possibilities that are attainable, with payoffs for commitment and persistence. All of these qualities help young people understand the value of education and prepare them to succeed.

### **Top Ten Qualities Employers Look for in a College Graduate:**

1. Verbal and written communication skills
2. Honesty and integrity
3. Teamwork skills
4. Interpersonal skills
5. Motivation and initiative
6. Work ethic
7. Analytical skills
8. Flexibility and adaptability
9. Computer skills
10. Organizational skills

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources provide information that teenagers should consider before deciding to quit school. You may find these resources helpful when talking to your younger residents about their future.

- “Top Five Reasons to Stay in School,” National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N): This document offers five reasons why students should graduate from high school, mainly based on the dim prospects that dropouts face. [http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/family\\_student/reasons.htm](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/family_student/reasons.htm)
- “Value of Education Calculator,” New York State Department of Labor: This calculator lets students calculate their annual earning without a high school diploma, with a high school diploma and with various degrees. <http://www.labor.state.ny.us/workforceindustrydata/cen/calc1.asp>
- “School Engagement Reduces the Risk of Teen Childbearing,” PPFY Network: This short article examines the effects of school engagement and quitting school on the risk of a girl becoming pregnant while still in her teens. <http://www.wested.org/ppfy/engagement.htm>
- “Why Go To College,” The ACT Test Site: This website page offers four good reasons for students to continue on to college. <http://www.actstudent.org/college/index.html>
- “Information Sheet on Dropping Out of School: 10 Things You Need to Know About Dropping Out of School,” About.com: This compelling list may make students think twice about dropping out of school. <http://teenadvice.about.com/od/factsheetsforteens/a/10thingsdropout.htm>

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## BEST PRACTICE: SURE TRACK TO COLLEGE

In Woonsocket, R.I., NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NWBRV) saw their young residents struggling to make the leap from high school to college. NWBRV decided to help and developed a program geared towards elementary school children that put a focus on education and featured college as a very real and reachable goal.

The Sure Track to College program encourages children to start thinking about college, helps them to choose the necessary courses and offers a stronger guidance program than the local high school provided.

### PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Before it developed the program, NWBRV talked with several of the colleges that students were considering attending in order to better understand their requirements. They found that:

- Most students lacked the credits necessary for acceptance into a four-year college or university.
- Most of the students were discouraged from taking the SAT, which is a necessary requirement when applying to college.
- Local high school requirements for math, science and foreign languages were lower than what most colleges required.
- There was a gap between the high schools' passing grade of 60 percent and what colleges required, which was at least a 70 percent.
- While most of NWBRV's students found themselves pushed towards vocational or academic tracks, four-year colleges did not accept most vocational courses and none of the academic courses as core-class requirements.

### The Program

NWBRV believes that preparing children to think about college should begin when they are young and Sure Track to College is predicated on that belief. When NWBRV's children are entered into their youth programs, parents sign a release form that gives NWBRV access to the student's grades, enabling them to begin acting as guidance counselors when the children are still in elementary school.

When children reach the eighth and ninth grades, NWBRV sets up individual meetings with them to talk about college. The counselor goes over a checklist that necessary coursework, the necessary grade averages, and electives. Staff also schedules meetings with their parents to discuss the process.

Over the next two years, the counselor continues to check in with students, monitoring their grades and discussing their education options. Students are heavily encouraged to make use of NWBRV's education center, which offers enrichment classes and access to computer labs and tutoring, at least three times per week.

In the students' junior year in high school, the meetings become more frequent and more directed. The counselor uses another worksheet to make sure students are meeting all their requirements and sending in all the required paperwork for each college the student is applying to. NWBRV assists the students with fee waivers when they take the SAT and apply to colleges.

### **Funding**

NWBRV receives a large portion of their funding from the state housing finance agency, Rhode Island Housing, which provides money for youth services. The only additional cost was for one staff counselor who was competent at navigating the local school system and who was available to students in the education center.

### **Outcomes**

NWBRV's program was entering into its fourth year in 2008 and has seen these positive results:

- One-hundred percent of its seniors have been accepted by four-year colleges in the last two years.
- Students' grades have risen and they are more interested in college.
- Younger students have become more excited about going to college as they see older peers head off to school and come back with stories about their experiences.
- NWBRV has been able to help students find financial assistance, helping them fill out the paperwork and link them to financial aid and scholarships. Most of the funding comes from local sources. Some students received funding from Latino Dollars for Scholars. Most students receive significant funding if not full funding for college.
- Parents who never attended college are now becoming inspired by their children to pursue a higher education. Three parents have come in to receive counseling and are now attending colleges.

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# STUDENT INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic or College Prep Track? \_\_\_\_\_

What classes are you currently taking? \_\_\_\_\_

What activities are you involved-in in high school? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your interests/What do you like to do? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your favorite subjects in school? \_\_\_\_\_

In what ways have you volunteered in the community?

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### QUESTIONS FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS

Have you thought about college and which one(s) you would like to attend?

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What would you like to study in college?

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Have you taken any steps toward applying and the college process?

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# VISIONING THE FUTURE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## You can do almost any **WHAT** if you have a big enough **WHY**

My vision for life after high school is...

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I think it is important to address this vision because...

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What action steps will help make progress toward achieving my vision?

Action Step	What is the deadline?	What resources do I need?	What are the costs?	Who can help?

For each action step, what are the challenges that may arise?

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How will you measure the success of each action step?

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How will you measure the success of your vision?

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After you have achieved your vision, what can you do to continue your success?

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What have you learned from achieving the vision?

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# SUPPORTING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Employment can offer teens and young adults an opportunity to earn income and begin to develop a range of job-related skills and experience. Resident service coordinators can play a key role in helping young people take their first step into the workforce.

Even if your city does not offer a large-scale youth jobs program, your resident services program can help your local teens to:

- Cultivate interests and skills and relate them to current and future employment opportunities.
- Promote activities that help build experience for and knowledge about different careers.
- Build job-readiness “soft” skills.
- Get and keep jobs.
- Stay in school and further their education.

There are many ways that your resident services program can help young people to achieve the aforementioned goals. One of the most successful ways for kids to learn about work is by being exposed to a variety of workplaces and seeing firsthand what it is like to work and what people actually do at work. Preparation for employment can begin when children are as young as 11. This document outlines the range of choices for helping young people to experience the world of work, including job shadowing, mentoring and volunteer experiences.

Not all options may be available in your community. We suggest that you identify what’s out there, evaluate and assess, select partners based on your findings, develop partnerships with those selected, then agree to work together to measure and document outcomes. Refer to the workforce development tool (“Assessing an Employment Services Provider” in the Employment Services section) on evaluating and selecting a workforce partner. After selecting your list of qualified and interested partners, deciding the best program for each individual will depend on who your final referral partners are, and what they have specifically to offer according to the interests and learning goals of each youth. All of these approaches can provide positive vocational learning opportunities for young people, and any of the individual options below will be effective toward the overall goals.

## JOB SHADOWING

Job shadowing pairs young people with a worker in order for the young people to see what a particular job is like. Young people “shadow” their assigned employee for a day or more to watch them at work and talk with them about the background and skills needed for the job.

## CAREER AND JOB MENTORING

Mentoring involves a long-term, one-on-one relationship between a mentor in the workforce and a young person. The mentoring often occurs on the job. Mentors can provide young people with information about a career or give support and constructive feedback to help teens with their current work, including providing advice about next career steps. Because of the personal relationship and amount of time involved in mentoring, commitment on the part of both the teen and the mentor is crucial.

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

Volunteering provides young people with an opportunity to explore new industries, learn to work as a member of a team and develop leadership skills. Volunteer opportunities exist in many different industries and in both the private and public sectors.

## WORK-BASED LEARNING

Young people can combine temporary jobs with specific learning objectives, providing them with work experience. Many communities offer summer youth work programs through government agencies, community organizations or public schools. Vocational or technical schools may also offer work programs for young people.

## VOCATIONAL OR TECHNICAL CLASSES

Teens who participate in high school vocational or technical classes significantly increase their employability and earnings potential after high school. Some high schools offer school-to-career programs. You can help your teenage residents to:

- Develop a complete list of work-related classes at their school, other local educational institutions or vocational/technical schools.
- Review these educational options (involving parents and, if available, a mentor in their desired field).
- Schedule appointments with high school counselors or contact schools for information on tours or enrollment.
- Guide them as they enroll in and complete the program they choose.
- Find community-based work experience.
- Evaluate their experience and determine what their next steps could be.

## DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Many young people are interested in developing their own businesses, but don't know where to start. A number of studies show that two factors in particular have a positive effect on the development of young entrepreneurs: relationships with mentors who own small businesses and early entrepreneurial education.

Entrepreneurial education is most successful when economic and business information is combined with information on developing the positive attitudes and motivation needed to become a successful entrepreneur. You can help your

budding entrepreneurs by organizing career exploration activities such as informational interviews, job shadows or work experiences with small business owners.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Much of this resource was adapted from the Casey Family Foundation Programs document, *It's My Life: Employment—A Guide for Transition Services*, available online at: <http://www.casey.org> or <http://www.casey.org/resources/publications/ItsMyLife/Employment.htm>. The guide includes a broad range of additional resources and information, including assessment tools for life skills, work skills, interests and career directions; methods for building job readiness skills and information on helping young people get and keep jobs.

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## SUMMER CAN SET KIDS ON THE RIGHT—OR WRONG—COURSE

When school doors close for the summer, what do kids face? For some, it's a world of interesting vacations, music lessons and library trips. For others without enriching summertime opportunities, the break can lead to serious academic consequences—and the disparity can be dramatic.

Research conducted by Johns Hopkins sociology Professor Karl Alexander and his colleagues shows that low-income youth suffer significantly from a loss of academic skills over the summertime. And the losses pile up, contributing to an achievement gap that can make the difference between whether students set out on a path for college or decide to drop out of high school.

The Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University talked to Alexander about the research, what it means for young people and the need for a strategic and focused response.

### **What led you to look into the relationship between summer learning opportunities and academic success?**

Initially, my colleagues and I weren't particularly interested in summer learning. That came about in a roundabout way. We were interested in early schooling and patterns of social inequality. For example, we wanted to compare the school experiences of lower-income with higher-income kids and minority with majority youngsters.

### **What did you find?**

We discovered that about two-thirds of the academic achievement gap between disadvantaged youngsters and their more advantaged peers can be explained by what happens over the summer.

I also want to point out that the higher performing group isn't necessarily high income, but simply better off. In the context of the Baltimore City school system, that usually means solidly middle class, with parents who are likely to have gone to college versus dropping out.

Statistically, lower-income children begin school with lower achievement scores, but during the school year, they progress at about the same rate as their peers. Over the summer, it's a dramatically different story. During the summer months, disadvantaged children tread water at best or even fall behind. It's what we call "summer slide" or "summer setback." But better off children build their skills steadily over the summer months. The pattern was definite and dramatic. It was quite a revelation.

### **What method did you use to make this discovery?**

We launched a study in 1982 where we recruited almost 800 children in Bal-

timore City and monitored their academic progress from first grade well into adulthood. Achievement tests were administered in the spring and fall over an extended period of time and we tracked and analyzed those achievement test patterns. We also conducted interviews with the children and with their parents.

**How do you explain the achievement gap's relationship to income? What do higher-income children get over the summer that lower-income children don't?**

We didn't look at specific programs, but we did explore some possible explanations and we found some definite differences.

I don't want to break it down into a check list but some differences seemed relevant. For example, better-off children were more likely to go to the library over the summertime and take books home. They were more likely to engage in a variety of enrichment experiences such as attending museums, concerts and field trips. They were more likely to take out-of-town vacations, be involved in organized sports activities or take lessons, such as swimming or gymnastics lessons. Overall, they had a more expansive realm of experiences.

**What are the implications of this research?**

It helps us to realize how important summer learning—or the lack of it—is to academic achievement. And it helps us to recognize that this often breaks down along social lines. In the more recent work, we were able to pose questions about the consequences of this achievement gap. We found that summer learning loss accounts for about two-thirds of the difference in the likelihood of pursuing a college preparatory path in high school. And that matters a great deal in terms of what happens later on. Forty percent of the children we picked up as first graders left high school without diplomas. It's a problem of monumental proportions. So these early patterns of out-of-school learning have profoundly important repercussions that echo throughout the years.

**Can summer programs help?**

We need to provide children with strategically planned, structured summer experiences, and that's especially true for those who don't have access to enriching, home-based learning. And, of course, summer programs can be an important part of that strategy by providing a variety of experiences that challenge children, develop their talents, keep them engaged and expand their horizons.

**What are the next steps?**

I'd like to see the work we've done motivate others to carry the torch forward and try to help us understand what sorts of summer experiences best support year-round learning for all children—and there's a particular need to help understand the conditions that will help disadvantaged children. We need a detailed, on-the-ground perspective. We know that children need enriching summertime experiences, but we need to know what makes up the best mix of experiences. Then we need to act, develop resources and move ahead.

**Any final words?**

I'd like to thank my colleagues and co-workers Doris Entwisle and Linda Olson, as well as the families and children who participated in the study. They indulged our inquiries over many years, and without their cooperation, this study would not have been possible.

**Did You Know?**

- During the school year, lower income children's skills improve at close to the same rate as their more advantaged peers.
- Over the summer, middle- and upper-income children's skills continue to improve, while lower-income children's skills do not.
- Summer learning shortfall experienced by low-income children over the elementary grades has consequences that reverberate all throughout children's schooling and can impact whether a child ultimately earns a high school diploma and continues on to college (Alexander, Entwisle and Olson, 2007a).

**What Program Providers Can Do**

- Use the research. When reaching out to funders, decision-makers and partners, share the research to demonstrate the need for and effectiveness of high-quality summer learning.
- Get the word out. Work with the media and parents to share the issues young people face during the summer and how your program is designed to make a difference.
- Enlist support from community partners. Host meetings to discuss how you can work together to support young people in your community during the summer.

**Principles in Practice—Summerbridge Pittsburgh**

- Students at Summerbridge Pittsburgh take six weeks of summertime classes in math, reading, writing and public speaking.
- The program uses a high-energy and hand-on approach to learning and leadership.
- Summerbridge recruits youth from under-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods with high dropout rates. However, 92 percent of Summerbridge youth graduate from high school and 80 percent go on to college.

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## DOESN'T EVERY CHILD DESERVE A MEMORABLE SUMMER?

To succeed in school and life, children and young adults need ongoing opportunities to learn and practice essential skills. This is especially true during the summer months. Many Americans have a wonderful image of summer as a carefree, happy time when “kids can be kids” and take for granted the prospect of enriching experiences such as summer camps, time with family and trips to museums, parks and libraries.

Unfortunately, some youth face anything but idyllic summer months. When the school doors close, many children struggle to access educational opportunities, as well as basic needs such as healthy meals and adequate adult supervision.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- All young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer. Research spanning 100 years shows that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer (White, 1906; Entwisle and Alexander 1992; Cooper, 1996; Downey et al., 2004).
- Most students lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains (Cooper, 1996).
- More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (Alexander et al., 2007).
- Children lose more than academic knowledge over the summer. Most children—particularly children at high risk of obesity—gain weight more rapidly when they are out of school during summer break (von Hippel et al., 2007).
- Parents consistently cite summer as the most difficult time to ensure that their children have productive things to do (Duffett et al., 2004).

### THE PROMISE OF SUMMER LEARNING

Numerous studies show that summer learning opportunities improve academic outcomes for youth. Early and sustained summer learning opportunities lead to higher graduation rates and better preparation for college. Summer programs have also been shown to positively affect children’s self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

High-quality summer programs keep students engaged in learning, teach them new skills and allow them to develop previously unseen talents. They allow children to form relationships with caring adults, help them stay fit and active and foster creativity and innovation.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

##### **Program providers should:**

- Get the word out and use the research. When reaching out to funders, decision-makers, partners and the media, share the research to demonstrate the need for and effectiveness of high-quality summer learning opportunities.
- Enlist support from community partners. Host meetings to discuss how you can work together to support young people in your community during the summer.

##### **Policymakers and funders should:**

- Prioritize summer as a key component of funding for out-of-school time.
- Provide funding for organizations that operate and support high-quality summer programs.

##### **Business leaders should:**

- Invest in summer learning programs for children of employees and those living in the communities they serve.
- Provide summer internships and support programs designed to equip young people with the skills they need to be competitive in the global economy.

##### **Parents should:**

- Demand more options for, and better access to, high-quality summer learning programs from local leaders.
- Support legislation and elected officials that make summer learning programs a priority.

#### SPOTLIGHT ON RESULTS

Project Morry is a tuition-free summer sleepaway camp and year-round program in White Plains, New York, that focuses on academic enrichment, recreation and youth development for children from disadvantaged communities in New York City. Since its inception in 1996, all of the Project Morry graduates have completed high school, 80 percent enroll in institutions of higher education and 100 percent of the students who enrolled in college have remained in college.

SuperKids Camp has served more than 10,000 Baltimore City children since 1997. In addition to sailing in Baltimore's Inner Harbor and visiting museums, elementary students in the six-week program hone their reading skills. Evaluations reveal that over 80 percent of participants maintain or improve their literacy skills.

Summerbridge Pittsburgh, a two-summer, tuition-free program, helps at-risk middle school students increase academic performance while building confidence and life skills. Since 1994, Summerbridge Pittsburgh has served more than 1,000 children and has a high success rate: More than 90 percent of its participants graduate from high school and 80 percent have gone to college.

### **"It re-ignited my passion for learning"**

While other kids in the neighborhood were hanging out all summer, Charity was learning Spanish, French and Shakespeare at Summerbridge Pittsburgh. Her teachers prompted her for the first time to actually analyze subjects such as American history, not just recite facts. The summer experience gave the previously shy Charity the confidence to speak up in class—or raise her hand when she didn't understand something—and before long she was leading skits and classroom discussions. In short, she recalls: "It re-ignited my passion for learning."

And this story doesn't end there. Charity became an outgoing leader in high school and taught for two summers at a Summerbridge program. She has since graduated from Harvard University and attends Harvard Medical School.

## OUR MISSION

The Center for Summer Learning's mission is to create opportunities for high-quality summer learning for all young people. Based at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, the Center is committed to expanding summer learning opportunities for disadvantaged children and youth as a strategy for closing the achievement gap and promoting healthy youth development.

The Center works to:

- Improve the quality and availability of summer programs by providing professional development and evaluation services to providers.

*The Center trains over 2,000 summer program providers annually, reaching more than two million children each year.*

- Build awareness and support for high-quality summer learning programs through outreach and communications.

*Summer Learning Day and our annual national conference are just two of the events organized by the Center to bring together program providers, researchers and policymakers from across the country.*

- Generate increased public investment in summer programs for young people in high-poverty communities.

*In 2007, the Center's efforts helped generate more than \$14 million in public investment spent directly on summer programs for youth.*

Through its national network of providers and partners, the Center works to make summer learning a priority in communities across the country. Using research-based approaches and models of effective practice, the Center strives to ensure that all children have access to high-quality learning opportunities during the summer months.

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## SUMMERTIME AND WEIGHT GAIN

More and more children in the United States are obese—and overweight children tend to become overweight or obese adults, leading to a host of health problems. Many people blame schools, but research shows the opposite. In fact, children gain weight three times faster during the summer months, gaining as much weight during the summer as they do during the entire school year, even though the summertime is three times shorter. The Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University spoke to Ohio State University statistician Paul von Hippel about the research, what we can learn from it and what it means for children and society as a whole.

### **What led you and your colleagues to study childhood obesity?**

The United States has three times more overweight children than it did 20 years ago. A lot of people blame the schools—school lunches, school vending machines, school exercise programs. In this study, we looked at whether the schools were really the problem.

### **What did you find?**

Children gain weight two or three times faster during summer vacation than during the school year. So it looks like the schools aren't the problem after all, or at least not a big part of the problem. Children would weigh a lot more if they weren't for the time that they spend in school.

We used survey data to look at weight gain in a sample of 5,000 children in 300 schools. If schools were the source of the problem, we would have expected to find that children gain weight more quickly during the school year than during summer vacation. But we found just the opposite.

### **Isn't it normal for kids to gain weight?**

Absolutely. But a lot of them are gaining too quickly, and most of that excess weight gain is taking place during the summer.

### **What is going on during the summer that makes it such a dangerous time for weight gain?**

The data don't provide much detail on kids' home lives, but if you have some Tom Sawyer idea that kids are climbing trees all summer and only eat when called to dinner, that doesn't square with the fact that they're gaining weight so quickly. The other stereotype—that kids are watching TV, playing video games and eating chips out of a bag—may be closer to the truth, at least for kids who are overweight.

**What are the implications of this research?**

For years, the public debate over childhood obesity has focused on what schools are doing wrong and how we can fix them. This study shifts the focus to what schools are doing right and what we can learn from schools to improve kids' lives.

**What are schools doing right?**

As I'm talking to you, at 2:30 on a Friday afternoon, we can be pretty confident children are in school and they haven't eaten much since lunchtime. During the summertime, there are no such guarantees. Schools provide a structured environment where children are constantly supervised, have limited opportunities to eat and get physical exercise at least a few times a week.

**What might the consequences be if we do nothing?**

The rate of obesity will continue to rise unless we shape behavior, which is easier to do earlier rather than later on.

**Can summer learning programs help?**

It makes sense that the right kinds of summer programs will help if they provide structure, limit opportunities to eat, schedule time for exercise and make sure children aren't unsupervised for long stretches of the day.

If parents are home during the day, they can also provide more structure. Speaking for myself, I lost 10 pounds when my mother sent me to summer camp at age 9. I said it was because of the lousy food, but realistically, it was because I was playing tennis and swimming instead of eating between meals.

**You also found some differences between kids of different races.**

Yes, that's not a new finding. We've known for years that certain ethnic groups—Hispanics and African-Americans—are more prone to obesity. What's new in our study is the finding that those at-risk ethnic groups are the ones that benefit the most from school. School does more to restrain the weight gain of at-risk groups than it does for other children. But that finding isn't limited to black and Hispanic children. If you look at overweight white or Asian children, you find that they, too, gain weight much more slowly during the school year than during the summer months.

**What are the next steps?**

I think we need a public health campaign, similar to the anti-smoking campaign, to change out-of-school behavior and get kids to eat healthier during the summer. I also think that the research community needs to shift their focus away from schools to what kids are doing outside of school that is making them gain weight so quickly.

**Any final words?**

I'd like to thank my coauthors at Indiana University and Ohio State University: Brian Powell, Doug Downey and Nicholas Rowland. I'd also like to thank the Department of Education for collecting the data and the National Institute of Child Health and Development for funding the study. We'd know a lot less about children's health if it weren't for government-funded research.

**Did You Know?**

- Children gain body mass index (BMI) nearly twice as fast during the summer as during the school year (von Hippel, Powell, Downey, and Rowland, 2007).
- Black and Hispanic children, and children who are already overweight, experience healthier BMI gain during the school year. (von Hippel et al., 2007).
- According to the Food Research Action Council, only 1 in 5 children in 2006 who received free or reduced price meals during the previous school year did so during the summer.

**What Can Program Providers Do?**

- Provide structured activities.
- Provide nutritious food and nutrition education.
- Engage youth in a variety of physical activities, including exercise.

**Principles in Practice: Energy Express**

- Energy Express is a six-week summer program promoting the school success of children living in rural and low-income communities across West Virginia.
- At Energy Express, AmeriCorps members serve as mentors and children share breakfast and lunch served family style.
- Every day includes learning activities, physical exercise and nutritionally balanced meals.

Learn more at: <http://www.energyexpress.wvu.edu>

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# PARENTS' CHECKLIST: HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF SUMMER

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO KEEP KIDS SHARP OVER THE SUMMER

- **Locate a summer program.** There are high-quality summer camps and programs in almost every price range. Camps offered by schools, recreation centers, universities and community-based organizations often have an educational or enrichment focus.
- **Visit the library.** Find out what interests your child and select books on that subject. Participate in free library summer programs and make time to read every day.
- **Take educational trips.** These can be low-cost visits to parks, museums, zoos and nature centers. When planning vacations, consider those with educational themes.
- **Practice math daily.** Measure items around the house or yard. Track daily temperatures. Add and subtract at the grocery store. Cooking is a chance to learn fractions. Everyday experiences can be fun and interesting, while giving kids opportunities to learn the skills they need.
- **Get outside and play.** Limit TV and video game time, just as you do during the school year. Intense physical activity and exercise contribute to healthy development.
- **Do good deeds.** Students learn better and “act out” less when they engage in activities that aid in their social-emotional development, such as community service.
- **Keep a schedule.** It makes sense to continue daily routines during the summer and to continue to provide structure and limits. The key is providing a balance and keeping kids engaged.
- **Prepare for fall.** Find out what your child will be learning during the next school year by talking with teachers at that grade level. Preview concepts and materials over the summer.

Find out more at: <http://www.summerlearning.org>

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# SELF-ASSESSMENT: CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

Instructions: Read the “We” statements below to gauge how well your organization has integrated each characteristic into your current programming. Decide whether you strongly agree, agree, are unsure or disagree. If you agree with the statements listed under a characteristic, think about the practices that support your answer. If you disagree, think about how your organization might change some practice dynamic or develop a partnership that would bring you closer to agreement. If you are unsure about whether you agree or disagree, write down the information you need to make a decision.

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Notes
<b>1. International Focus on Accelerating Learning:</b> Does your organization intentionally focus on accelerating learning?					
We assess a young person’s skills, set appropriate learning objectives and develop strategies to ensure that he or she meets those objectives.					
We focus on quality instruction and intentionally reinforce and accelerate academic skills.					
We provide extensive opportunities for enrichment.					
We offer a variety of well-organized learning activities to meet young peoples’ developmental needs and to accommodate different learning styles.					
We hold and communicate high expectations for all young people in our programs.					

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Notes
<p><b>2. Strong Commitment to Youth Development:</b> Is your organization committed to youth development?</p>					
<p>We provide opportunities for young people to gain skills, attitudes, knowledge and experiences that prepare them for both the present and the future.</p>					
<p>We support young people in their development and in meeting their basic personal and social needs: to be safe, feel cared for, belong, be useful, feel competent, be valued, and have influence.</p>					
<p>We provide regular and ongoing opportunities for young people to give us feedback and we incorporate their feedback into our programs.</p>					
<p>We maintain a participant-to-staff ratio of 15: 1 or less to allow kids to interact frequently with caring adults.</p>					
<p><b>3. Proactive Approach to Summer Learning:</b> Is your program proactive and preventative in its approach to summer learning?</p>					
<p>We understand the implications of research on summer learning loss and provide opportunities for all young people to advance their skills over the summer.</p>					

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Notes
We provide programs over multiple summers and offer a continuum of services.					
We consider the needs of all kids, especially those from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds.					
<p><b>4. Strong, Empowering Leadership:</b> Is the leadership of your organization committed to, and supportive of, summer learning? Does the leadership empower staff to act effectively?</p>					
We feel supported by the leaders of our organization.					
We share a common vision for success and are empowered by our leadership to act in support of our vision and mission.					
We have a voice in organizational decisions and organizational leaders solicit and value our opinions.					
We value professional development and create a culture of ongoing learning at all levels of our organization.					

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Notes
<p><b>5. Advance Collaborative Planning:</b> Does your organization plan collaboratively well in advance of your program's start date?</p>					
<p>We begin planning for the following summer at least six months before our program begins, and we have a process for clearly defining and securing necessary resources.</p>					
<p>We involve partners and community stakeholders, including our customers, in our planning process and gain broad support for our strategies.</p>					
<p>We have a strategic plan that provides a vision for our organization and programs, and we regularly assess our progress and make adjustments when necessary.</p>					
<p>We work to enhance the mission and vision of each partner organization.</p>					
<p>We actively involve families and communities in our programs</p>					
<p>We have clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for each of our partners.</p>					

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Notes
<p><b>6. Extensive Opportunities for Staff Development:</b> Does your organization offer extensive opportunities for staff development?</p>					
<p>We provide adequate opportunities for staff development before the start of our summer program and throughout the summer. We also provide staff development opportunities throughout the year.</p>					
<p>We consider the needs of our diverse staff (full-time, seasonal, experienced educators, volunteers) and target staff development appropriately.</p>					
<p><b>7. Strategic Partnerships:</b> Does your organization partner strategically?</p>					
<p>We are familiar with the landscape of potential partners and form mutually beneficial relationships.</p>					
<p>We understand and can articulate what we hope to gain from a partnership, as well as what our partner hopes to gain.</p>					

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Notes
<p><b>8. Rigorous Approach to Evaluation and Commitment to Program Improvement:</b> Is your organization committed to evaluation and continuous program improvement?</p>					
<p>We know what outcomes we hope to achieve and have identified indicators to measure our performance.</p>					
<p>We regularly collect data to track our performance.</p>					
<p>We have a process for reviewing the data, assessing our performance, and making necessary adjustments to the program.</p>					
<p>We continually search for ways to improve our services and are open to change.</p>					
<p>We share results with our stakeholders.</p>					
<p><b>9. Clear Focus on Sustainability and Cost-Effectiveness:</b> Does your organization plan for sustainability and cost-effectiveness?</p>					

Characteristics and Supporting Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Unsure	Notes
We agree on a vision for sustainability and can articulate: (1) what that vision means for our organization and (2) how it aligns with our strategic plan.					
We understand our individual staff roles in sustaining our program.					
We foster and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, decision makers, funders and partners, and we regularly communicate program outcomes.					
We have strong fiscal processes that help us to determine and convey our financial needs and concerns.					
We actively seek to diversify program funding and could sustain the program if we lost the support of a major funder.					