A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING
EXEMPLARY PRACTICES
IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

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RESPONSES FROM THE FIELD

"The practices laid out in this Guide have made such a difference in our ability to develop a first-rate, nationally recognized program. We can't thank you enough!!"
   -- Laurie Isham, Executive Director, Pro-Youth/HEART

"Your approach not only makes great sense, it really works! We've come a long way because of your insights and support!"
   -- Leanne Negron, Director, Realizing Amazing Potential Afterschool Program

"This may well be the most important contribution to the afterschool field written so far. It's brilliant!"
   -- Patsy Kanter, PFK Consulting, New Orleans

"What a good compilation of a lot of great information. Bravo! I deeply appreciate having so much that's so important in one place."
   -- Carla Sanger, President and CEO, LA's BEST

"Wow! I love this! I really like the reality check sections in each chapter. This is an incredibly useful tool for program development. Fantastic work!"
   -- Rocio Abundis-Rodriguez, Regional Lead/Afterschool Programs

"This is an amazing contribution to the field. It's easy to read and easy to understand and can make a real difference in how programs approach their work wherever they are."
   -- Jay Acock, Director, Community Education, Department of Elementary and
     Secondary Education, Missouri

"It's critical that the professionals who work with children in their out-of-school time have the tools and resources to deliver quality programming and care. The ideas in this book provide a foundation for building lasting and effective programs that positively impact the development of children and youth."
   -- Darci Smith, Executive Director, California School-Age Consortium / NSACA affiliate

"This Guide offers a much needed practical approach to program development. Great work!"
   -- Cynthia Billings, CEO, PlusTime, New Hampshire

"This Guide is a wonderful tool to help program directors focus on the elements that will make their afterschool programs successful. Because it's grounded in the learning communities of afterschool programs that became outstanding, program directors and site directors can use it with confidence!"
   -- Kathy Lewis, former Deputy Director, California Department of Education

CONTENTS

> Powerful visions underlie all good program practices. They capture our hearts and ignite our passions. They inspire us to do our best by telling us what we really stand for, where we're going and why it matters. By creating a compelling vision, you'll be able bring people with diverse interests, backgrounds and experiences together in a common purpose to create the future of your program together.

> No matter what it says in your job description, as a leader you're responsible for keeping your program focused on achieving its vision, moving it forward toward the accomplishment of its goals, motivating people to do their best work and holding everyone accountable for results. Doing this well means learning to lead strategically, act intentionally and work collaboratively.

> The purpose of staff development is to build a high performing team that's empowered to do its best work – and does! Empowerment isn't about giving people authority and responsibility and walking away. It's about knowing your staff as people and not just employees and providing them with the support they need to be successful. Do this through a combination of training, coaching and mentoring and you'll create a team that resonates with excitement about the value of everyone's work, stays committed to your program and makes a real difference in the lives of children and young people.

> Managing for the best possible results means meeting the operational requirements of your organization and the social and psychological needs of the people who work for and with you. When you learn to develop effective systems and create an environment in which structures and functions support people rather than dominate them, you'll get the results you want.

5.   **CREATE A PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY
SAFE ENVIRONMENT** 55

Safety is more than taking precautions to ensure the physical well-being of children and young people. The most successful programs ensure that this happens – and much more. They know that for children and young people to achieve their potential they must feel emotionally as well as physically secure. By developing approaches that strengthen feelings of both physical and emotional safety, you'll have a strong foundation for achieving positive student outcomes.

6.   **BUILD AND MAINTAIN SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS** 71

There's overwhelming evidence that the presence of supportive relationships is one of the most critical factors in the positive development of children and young people. In the research on childhood resiliency, it ranks as the leading indicator in predicting whether they'll become healthy and productive adults--regardless of their economic circumstances or other risk factors. Being intentional in the way you go about developing and maintaining supportive relationships between and among adults and students will make a lasting difference in students' lives.

7.   **ENSURE MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION** 83

Meaningful youth participation gives every child and young person opportunities to set goals, create plans, design projects, solve problems, make decisions and take actions in areas that directly affect them. By systematically developing gateways for participation and ensuring that this leads to a sense of personal belonging, ownership, investment and skill building, you'll go a long way toward helping children and young people achieve their potential.

8.   **CREATE CHALLENGING AND ENGAGING LEARNING
EXPERIENCES** 91

Engaging and challenging learning experiences provide young people with opportunities to expand their understanding and knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live. They help students master new concepts and skills, motivate them to try new activities, increase their enthusiasm for learning--and are the key factor in attracting and retaining students in afterschool programs. Learning to do this well is essential to your success.

9.   **STRENGTHEN STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT** 103

In an era of high stakes testing, No Child Left Behind legislation and comprehensive budget cuts, the purpose of afterschool programs is being redefined. Programs are increasingly expected to provide children and young people with a safe, positive learning environment—and reinforce learning, support student academic achievement, increase attendance during the school day and help reduce grade retention. By creating authentic partnerships with schools, hiring academic coaches and creating classroom connections, you'll measurably strengthen student academic performance.

Exemplary afterschool programs are seen as an integral part of their communities and receive strong, broad-based support from parents, local residents, community organizations and civic leaders. They draw on community resources to offer a wide range of opportunities for children and young people and know that community involvement is too important to leave to chance. Approach community engagement systematically and you'll develop powerful long-term connections that will dramatically improve the quality of your program.

The most outstanding programs support the healthy social, cultural and cross-cultural development of all participants, teach and model values of respect and inclusion of all people and offer programming that helps reduce social disparities and inequities. This is reflected in their vision, values and leadership, and in their relationships with their staff and with children, and young people and their families. It's embedded in staff development, integrated into their program's content and approaches and apparent in their everyday environments. This isn't only the right thing to do – it's vital to building a high quality program.

A growing body of research and experience tells us that high quality programs are making a real difference in the lives of children and young people. Most of us intuitively know this but face serious challenges coming up with evidence that can confirm it. High quality, afterschool programs recognize the importance of measuring the right things in the right way and managing outcomes in real time. Learn to do this well and you'll have the tools you'll need to continually strengthen your program.

As a leader one of your most important responsibilities is to create authentic partnerships to support your efforts in building a high quality, sustainable program. Partnerships come into being when people are inspired by the possibility of going beyond doing something to influencing the way things are done. They make things happen through a shared vision, personal and professional relationships and actions that produce real and meaningful results. Take your program to the next level by learning how to do this efficiently.

Whether your program achieves its potential ultimately depends on your ability to secure adequate, sustainable funding. Follow the example of highly successful programs by learning how to build a strong investment portfolio of balanced and diversified funding and it will go a long way toward ensuring the long-term success of your program.

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PREFACE

The world of afterschool has changed a great deal in the last several years. Federal funding has reached a high level, with just under a billion dollars supporting thousands of programs throughout the country. Combined with state and local investments, millions of children are not only safer during the afternoon hours; they have wonderful opportunities to strengthen their skills in every area of their lives. And we, through this Guide, have wonderful opportunities to strengthen our skills in leading afterschool programs.

Over the years of these dramatic changes I've had the pleasure of developing, working with and learning about afterschool programs throughout the United States, and been privileged to have the opportunity to help initiate the first private/public partnership between the U.S. Department of Education and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation for support of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. During the early days of that federal afterschool program, a very important toolkit was published by the U.S. Department of Education's North Central Regional Education Laboratory. Beyond the Bell was designed to answer the question so many new program leaders were asking: Where do we start? It provided excellent insights and specific tools for beginning programs and it still does.

This new Guide is an answer to a different question: What have we learned over the past few years about what makes some programs much more successful than others? It focuses on 14 field-tested practices that really make sense. This is the first time I've seen so much good information in one place on how outstanding afterschool programs are developed, no matter who runs them or how they are funded!

Written by Andi Fletcher and Sam Piha, two very knowledgeable and experienced afterschool professionals, and based on the hard work of the leaders of fourteen developing programs serving 243 sites, the Guide offers invaluable information on how to develop community connections, build strong partnerships and secure sustainable funding – all of which are vital to developing quality programs. It integrates approaches to youth development and student academic achievement in a convincing, practical way that will be welcomed by all advocates of children and youth.

I've known Andi and Sam for a long time and seen the high quality of their work and their commitment to improving the lives of young people. This Guide is clearly a labor of love – and a sharing of deep experience. It can and will make a real difference in the way we all, program directors, site directors and afterschool technical assistance providers, approach our work--and in the results we achieve!

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Marianne Russell Kugler
Sacramento, California
February, 2005

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INTRODUCTION

The single most important message in this Guide is that you can make a bigger difference in the lives of children, young people and your community than you think! Whether your program is just starting out or well established, as a leader in a relatively new and rapidly changing field you have a unique opportunity to create the future and leave a more important legacy than you imagine.

In less than a decade the potential of afterschool programs has been radically redefined. No longer limited to childcare or recreation, high quality programs are providing children and young people with a safe, positive learning environment – and doing much more. Across the country, a growing number of programs are leading the way in supporting youth development, strengthening student academic achievement, offering engaging and exciting learning experiences and reconnecting neighborhoods with schools.

They're providing meaningful employment opportunities, bringing millions of dollars of new revenue into their communities and saving taxpayers millions of dollars in costs that would otherwise be incurred through grade retention, low school attendance and crime. They're changing lives and improving our society in dramatic ways.

We know it's possible for you to do the same! Over the last several years, our organizations have worked closely with hundreds of afterschool programs, community-based organizations and Beacon's Centers at all stages of their development. What became clear to us was that *high quality, sustainable programs share 14 exemplary practices in common that support the achievement of their organizational, educational and youth development goals.*

A Research-based, Field Tested Approach

In January 2002, we launched a three-year joint venture to systematically field test these practices. With funding from the Walter S. Johnson, David and Lucille Packard and Charles Stewart Mott Foundations, the Foundation Consortium for California's Children and Youth and the California Department of Education, we brought 14 multi-site urban and rural programs together in a Learning Community.

When the process began, participating programs had operated for at least two years and included a total of 243 sites, 1,760 staff members and over 30,000 elementary and middle school students. Cities, school districts, county offices of education, the YMCA and community-based organizations served as their fiscal agents. Funded by federal, state and private foundation grants and local investments, their annual budgets ranged from a few hundred thousand dollars a year to several million.

Over the course of two and a half years, we met for two days every six weeks. Program directors, site directors and members of our teams shared their knowledge and experience, learned from each other, explored the most current research and observed practices in

action. Throughout the process our respective teams worked closely with programs and supported their movement from promising to exemplary levels.

Although the rate of progress varied, the results across programs were remarkable. In the past year, several have become Regional Learning Centers, or world-class learning labs supporting the development of hundreds of new and emerging afterschool programs and partnerships.

How this Guide Can Help You Achieve Your Goals

The purpose of this Guide is to familiarize you with the practices that make the most difference, provide you with many of the tools you'll need to implement them and help you measure and manage your progress along the way. Designed for program directors, leadership teams and site directors, it will provide you with a *framework* for approaching your work and a *foundation* upon which the outcomes you want can be achieved.

Although much of what we talk about refers to multi-site, school-based or school-linked programs, we've found these practices to be extremely useful in any afterschool setting. The *Reality Checks* throughout the Guide will help you reflect on your program's current strengths and areas where improvement can and should be made. A set of self-assessment tools at the end of each chapter will assist you in tracking your progress.

We know that developing a high quality, sustainable program takes time, dedication and hard work. We've also learned that by adopting these practices as your own, you'll be able to move faster and go farther than you ever thought possible – if you approach your work thoughtfully and systematically. We strongly recommend that you read each chapter in the order in which it's been written. You'll discover that while each practice is important in and of itself, the real power of this approach is in the way they build on each other.

We deeply value the people who've contributed to a deeper understanding of these practices and are honored to have been able to provide coaching, mentoring, consultations and workshops that have helped build the capacity of hundreds of programs to become increasingly successful. We encourage you to contact us if you need help, or even just moral support, as you embark on this exciting and worthwhile journey!

SECTION 1

EXEMPLARY PROGRAM-WIDE PRACTICES

The most fundamental difference between programs that achieve their potential and those that come up short is the presence of strong, capable leaders who:

- Create a powerful vision that blends different perspectives, viewpoints and interests into a common purpose,
- Lead intentionally, think strategically and work collaboratively,
- Go beyond training to establish a comprehensive system of staff development, and
- Manage their programs and their staff in ways that produce the best possible results.

In short, they create a culture of excellence. They set meaningful goals, develop successful strategies for achieving them, continually assess their progress and hold everyone accountable for what happens. The first section of this Guide focuses on how you can do this – and why it's so important.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #1
CREATE A POWERFUL VISION AND CLEAR PURPOSE

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of high quality, sustainable afterschool programs is a powerful vision that brings people with different experiences and interests together in a common purpose and drives them toward excellence. No matter whether you're just starting to develop your program or it's been in existence for some time, you have an incredible opportunity to create the future you imagine!

When you see things in terms of what could *be* rather than what is, you'll feel much more in control of your program's destiny. When you really know what you want, you'll have a sense of purpose that goes well beyond having a job and getting a paycheck. If you, your leadership team and your staff and partners are clear about where you're going and why, you'll get there much faster.

> The most compelling visions are far-reaching, exciting and easily understood.

The most compelling visions are far-reaching, exciting and easily understood. They capture our hearts and ignite our passions. They inspire us to do our best by telling us what we really stand for, what we're trying to do and why it matters. They paint a clear picture of what could be, set a process in motion for making it happen and create a sense of urgency and excitement about getting there. They're rooted in reality and focused on the future. They add value and meaning to everything everyone does!

When your vision is shared throughout your program, it will provide a common language, a sense of belonging and an excitement about the value of everyone's work. It will make a huge difference in everyone's ability to think more strategically, act more intentionally and work more collaboratively to achieve your program's goals.

Create a Vision, Not Just a Vision Statement

One of the biggest mistakes programs make is trying to create a *vision statement* before they really have a vision. The problem is that statements originate in thoughts, not emotions. They're almost always the product of what people think their programs should do rather than the *essence* of what they want to have happen. Consider, for example, the vision statements of two of the many afterschool programs we've worked with:

1. Our vision is to provide a variety of interesting and enriching opportunities for children that strengthen their academic and social skills and help them learn to make good choices in school and in life by developing a caring staff that honors diversity and is committed to providing supportive relationships.
2. Children in our program are achieving their potential.

While both visions tell us something, the first was created by people who had the best intentions but missed the mark. It's too complicated to remember, has too many ideas to be emotionally captivating and places too much emphasis on the program rather than the children. The second is clear, concise and credible – and it focuses on something *everyone* cares about.

> **If your vision statement doesn't capture people's imagination or isn't emotionally compelling, toss it out!**

Save the *details* of what you want to have happen in your program for designing activities, setting goals, developing budgets, measuring and managing results and other critical areas. If your vision is more descriptive than inspirational, it won't be remembered. If your staff and partners can't tell you what your program's vision is or if it doesn't capture their imagination and motivate them to make it a reality, do everyone a favor and toss it out.

If your vision isn't a living reminder of what's important and what can be achieved, it won't serve its purpose. Let your heart be your guide in creating a vision that you're truly passionate about and committed to and it will inspire and attract people in ways that would otherwise never be possible.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your program have a powerful vision or just a vision statement?*
- *Is your vision captivating, compelling and easily understood?*
- *Is it easily remembered?*
- *Does it embody what's most important and meaningful to you?*

Communicate for Emotional Buy-In

Powerful visions originate with one or two people and are co-created by others over time. When we talk about visions capturing people's hearts and igniting their passions, we're talking about individuals. A *shared* vision is about many individuals embracing the same future and experiencing the same feelings about that future. It's a process that takes time and is well worth the effort. Until everyone shares a similar vision of the future and truly believes that what they're doing *together* is much more valuable than what anyone could do alone, your program may accomplish something – but never as much as it could.

As a leader, you have much more influence on how this unfolds than you may think. People want to believe that what they're doing is important, and they want to be part of something they feel is worthwhile. It's up to you to create the conditions for this to happen. The way you approach this will make all the difference in the responses you get and the time it takes for people to truly embrace your vision as their own.

> **People buy into a leader before they buy into a vision.**

Keep in mind that people buy into a leader *before* they buy into a vision. If you're confused or uncertain, or have a hard time talking about what you believe in or why it's important, they'll lose interest or doubt your sincerity. If you're really excited, enthusiastic and committed, your staff and partners will begin to feel this way too. If the words they use aren't exactly the same as yours, who cares?

Learn to Talk About Your Vision in a Minute or Less

Powerful visions rarely exceed a few words and yet speak volumes. The more complex they are, the less emotional impact they'll have and the more likely they'll be forgotten. We live in a time when 15-second television commercials are the norm. To be really effective, you'll have to learn to talk about your vision in a minute or less – and capture the essence of what it means, not the things you're doing, in that amount of time.

> Give people the freedom to interpret your vision through the filter of their own emotions.

Focus on what will change for children and young people by highlighting how you're already having an impact and will continue to do so in the future. In the example given above, letting people know that children are achieving their potential because they're performing better in school is much more meaningful than telling them that students are getting assistance with their homework. It's much more interesting to hear that young people are becoming better problem solvers than that your program offers cooperative learning projects that help make this happen – even though this is probably true.

Give people the freedom they need to interpret your vision of the future through the filter of *their* emotions, perspectives and experiences. It will help them recognize and appreciate how what *they're* doing supports something much bigger than they imagined. They'll begin to value everyone's work more and see how it combines to produce something much greater than could be achieved by each person acting independently.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Can you talk about your program's vision in less than a minute?*
- *Does it capture people's emotions?*
- *Does it allow them to interpret what it means from their own perspectives and experiences?*

Focus on the Future and Stay Grounded in Reality

Great visions focus on the future. They paint a picture of what could be and launch a process for making it happen. Great athletes preview their games in their minds before

they play. The best actors transform themselves into their roles before they go on stage. Great speakers see an enthusiastic audience before they walk to the podium.

> Focus on the future, stay grounded in reality, and work hard to create the future you imagine!

In the same way, our visions keep us focused on where we want to go and what we want to have happen. It's essential to our success, but it isn't the same thing as being there. As a novice skier, you can spend hours or days or even years imagining yourself skiing down an expert run, but you'll probably get hurt or seriously injured if you don't have the skills, mental toughness and physical prowess it takes to make it down safely.

The same thing is true for program development. Dream big, and do what it takes to bring your vision into reality. Create a sense of urgency in getting there, but don't expect it to happen overnight. Focus on the future, stay grounded in reality and work hard to create the future you imagine.

As a leader, your vision will ultimately determine your destiny and the destiny of your program – if your actions consistently support your words. If what you say and what you do aren't the same, you're in trouble. When they're the same, people will understand, internalize and act on the message you're sending *and* they'll be more confident about moving into new territory with you.

> Be the kind of model that makes it easy for people to follow your lead and be thrilled with the journey!

Show up and stand up for what you believe in every day and you'll inspire people in amazing ways. Every time you speak about your vision give people something to feel, something to remember and something to do. Be the kind of model that makes it easy for them to follow your lead and be thrilled with the journey!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is your vision focused on the future and rooted in reality?*
- *Is it achievable as well as inspiring?*
- *Can you clearly visualize what it looks and feels like?*
- *Are you committed to doing everything you can to bring it into reality?*

Make Your Vision a Living Contract

As your vision becomes more widely shared, use it as a living contractual agreement. It will provide a sense of direction and hold you and everyone else accountable for what happens as your program develops. It will provide a simple way to connect everyone's actions with the impact they have on children and young people, on each other and on your community.

> Use your vision to connect everyone's actions with the impact they have on children and young people, on each other and on your community.

If your vision is to build the capacity of children to succeed, use it as a standard against which performance at all levels of your organization can be measured. If your staff is doing a great job building supportive relationships with children and young people, you can be confident that it's helping bring your vision into reality. If your partners are making financial investments to ensure your program's long-term sustainability, you're much closer to achieving your vision.

On the other hand, if your staff isn't able to translate what they learn in training into practice, your staff development plan isn't supporting your vision – it's working against it. If you're committed to creating an emotionally safe environment and find that your staff is sending mixed messages about the ground rules for behavior, there's a real problem. These kinds of challenges, and many others you'll undoubtedly encounter, are much easier to overcome when everyone is in a position to ask themselves *and* each other whether what you're doing *or* not doing is really building the capacity of children to succeed, helping them achieve their potential or moving you closer to or farther away from your vision – whatever it is.

Using your vision as a living contract is a remarkably effective tool for creating benchmarks, identifying and celebrating successes and building and sustaining momentum – all of which are vital to keeping everyone engaged and excited. When people know that what they're doing is making a difference and that their contributions are recognized and valued, their enthusiasm and commitment soar!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your vision hold you and everyone else personally accountable for what you're doing – or not doing?*
- *Do you use your vision as a way of assessing your program's progress and celebrating everyone's accomplishments and sustain momentum?*

Co-Create the Future with Your Team

When people know where they're going, fall in love with the destination and see that you're able to lead them there, they'll join you as a full partner in co-creating your program's future. Embrace a vision that's bold and far-reaching and you, your leadership team, your staff and your partners can and will change the world – and you'll have a lot of help along the way.

A powerful vision is a magnet. It will attract the right people at the right time to help you achieve your goals. It will bring people together in an exciting, worthwhile and lasting endeavor. Your ability to take full advantage of this depends on how you answer a simple question: Are you really passionate about creating the future you imagine? If you are, you're way ahead in developing a high quality, sustainable program!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #1:
CREATE A POWERFUL VISION AND CLEAR PURPOSE

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as a self-assessment for you as a program director, member of your program's leadership team or site director, and to be used by your staff and partners to identify areas in which this practice is especially strong and areas where it can be improved.

KEY:

1.   We're just beginning to work in this area.
2.   We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3.   We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4.   We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5.   We're clearly outstanding in this area, and everyone would agree.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	Our vision excites us, captivates our hearts as well as our minds and ignites our passion.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Our vision acts as a living reminder of what's important to us.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Our vision is focused on the future, grounded in reality and achievable.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Our vision is clearly understood and embraced by our staff, our partners and our community.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We're able to describe our vision in a powerful and convincing way in a minute or less.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We use our vision as a way to create a sense of urgency and build momentum toward the achievement of our goals.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Our vision serves as a living contract and holds us accountable for our actions.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Our vision keeps us focused on creating the future we want for children and young people in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #2:
LEAD STRATEGICALLY, WORK COLLABORATIVELY AND ACT INTENTIONALLY

Leaders of outstanding afterschool programs know they're responsible for *making things happen.* No matter what it says in their job descriptions, their real work is about keeping their program focused on achieving its vision, moving it forward to the accomplishment of its goals, inspiring people to do their best work and holding everyone accountable for results.

Doing this well requires leading strategically, working collaboratively and acting intentionally. It means looking beyond what you're doing to the impact you're capable of having. It asks you to focus your time, energy and efforts not just on any thing, but on the things that will make the greatest difference. And, it means developing positive relationships, supporting and empowering the people who work with and for you and leading in a principle-centered way.

How you approach what you do is as important as the decisions you make and the actions you take. If you're more intrigued by what could be than what is, you'll find creative ways to continually develop and strengthen your program. If you set meaningful goals, you'll move much more quickly toward their accomplishment. If you thoughtfully consider the implications of the strategies you might adopt, you'll be better able to make informed decisions.

If you meet the needs of your staff and partners as well as the organizational interests of your program, you'll be seen as a real champion. If you provide the support they need to be successful and honor their contributions, people will enthusiastically follow you. If you learn to continually connect what you do with the results you want, you'll create a strong foundation for long-term success. And, if you lead in a principle-centered way, you'll make a real difference in the world!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you more intrigued by what could be than what is?*
- *Do you inspire people to do their best work?*
- *Do your staff, partners and stakeholders see you as a real champion for your program?*
- *Would you follow you?*

Set Meaningful Goals

All good performance starts with the establishment of meaningful goals. Just the act of setting them will make a huge difference in focusing your attention, channeling everyone's energy in the same direction and helping you, your staff and your partners stay on track.

We've consistently found that high quality programs share seven goals in common. They focus their attention and resources on:

- Developing and retaining a high quality staff,
- Designing exciting and engaging program components,
- Attracting and retaining students and strengthening their skills,
- Creating an effective management system,
- Building authentic community partnerships,
- Linking activities with results, and
- Securing adequate funding to support quality and sustainability.

One of the most important things you can do to set yourself up for success is to take time to reflect on how you define these goals and what they mean in your own program. The more you involve your staff and partners in this process, the more success you'll have. Start with the goals you've already established. In some cases, they'll be very similar to those identified above although the words you use may not be identical.

> People will work harder for what they believe in – and they believe in what they've helped create.

Be alert to the fact that discussions may center on narrow objectives rather than broader goals and what people say won't always reflect what they really have in mind. For example, your staff may tell you the most important goal is to have more training when they really mean they want to be more competent, feel more confident and be more effective in their work. Adding a few workshops can be helpful, but it will take a comprehensive approach to staff development to achieve their real goal.

As a partner, a principal may say that the most important goal is for students to complete their homework when their real goal is improvement in student academic achievement. Providing time for homework and offering assistance is vital but, as will be discussed later, it isn't sufficient in and of itself to strengthen student academic performance. It's up to you to listen – and to guide the process in a direction that ultimately reveals the goals that are the most highly valued by the people involved in establishing them and responsible for carrying out the work needed to accomplish them.

Prioritize Your Goals

Once you've done this, prioritize your goals by asking which two or three are the most important right now. Knowing what these are will determine where your time and energy, and everyone else's, can be best spent. For example:

- If you're in the first year of a five-year grant that provides enough funding to cover your program's operating costs, it makes sense to focus

more on investing in staff development and program design than on fundraising.

- If your program has as many children and young people as your funding supports and your sites have waiting lists, it means that securing additional financial support should move to a higher level of urgency.
- If you've built solid community partnerships but haven't taken time to put a system in place to measure and manage results, directing your efforts toward this goal makes a lot of sense.

Review your goals regularly and readjust your priorities when it's called for. Think big and be realistic. It will take time to accomplish your goals – and it will make all the difference in developing a high quality, sustainable program.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *What are the two or three most important goals you're working to achieve right now?*
- *How did you decide on these?*
- *Why do you believe these are the most important?*
- *How do they fit into the process of bringing your vision into reality?*

Be Sure Everyone Understands Your Goals

No matter where your program is at this point in time, your ability to move to the next level will depend on the extent to which the people who work with and for you are aware of your program's goals, understand what they mean in the context of their own work and are clear about what they're expected to do to help achieve them.

If one of your goals is to improve student academic achievement, be specific about what this means. Is it about improving test scores or creating an enthusiasm for learning or having homework completed correctly or raising grades or increasing student attendance during the school day or all of these? Be absolutely certain your staff knows what you're talking about and what they're responsible for.

If your goal is to develop a high quality staff, be sure everyone has the same thing in mind. If you define this as getting to a level where people work exceptionally well as a team to build supportive relationships with each other and with students and are knowledgeable about and effective in building youth development and academic skills but your staff sees it as showing up at work on time, attending a few workshops and working independently with children, there's a real problem.

If you interpret securing adequate funding for your program as creating a balanced portfolio that includes a variety of state, federal and local investments and your partners think it means having you write more grants, there's a real disconnect. Without shared goals, very little if anything of real importance will happen and a lot can go wrong. By

clearly defining your goals, you have a much better chance of achieving them – and you'll avoid a lot of frustration, anxiety and confusion.

Most people have a hard time understanding how their specific job responsibilities support larger program goals. If you think this may be true in your own program, spend a few minutes on the phone with a few members of your staff and your partners. Ask them what your program's goals are and how what they're doing right now is making a real difference in moving your program closer to achieving them.

> Most people have a hard time understanding how their specific job responsibilities are connected with the larger goals of their programs.

You may be surprised by the vagueness of their responses, or the difficulty they have responding at all. Or, you may find that their understanding of what your goals mean is very different from what you have in mind. If this is the case, it's a clear signal that more work needs to be done in this area.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you set clear, meaningful, achievable goals in your program and at your sites?*
- *Do your staff and your partners really understand what these goals are and what they mean?*
- *Does your staff really understand how their own work is directly connected to the accomplishment of your program's goals?*

Support Your Goals with Core Values

When you support your goals with core values, people will not only work much better together, they'll share a sense of common purpose and responsibility. Begin by discussing what you really care about and believe in as individuals. Get to the heart of what matters most, what everyone is willing to commit to in their relationships with each other, and how they intend to work together.   Consider using the examples below as a starting point for developing your own core values:

- We take personal responsibility for achieving our program's goals.
- We honor and celebrate the investments each of us makes to the success of our program.
- We insist on honesty and openness in all of our communications.
- We place a high value on productivity.
- We stay open to new ideas and ways of doing business.
- We value everyone's suggestions and take them seriously.
- We share a spirit of "*We're all in this together.*"

Go Beyond Job Descriptions to Performance Agreements

One of the most effective ways to ensure that your staff understands the relationships between their own work and your program's goals is to move from job descriptions to creating performance agreements. A job description identifies formal roles and responsibilities and sets specific requirements of employment. A performance agreement is a tool for managing expectations about roles, responsibilities *and* goals.

By clearly linking the activities your staff and partners are engaged in with the results you want to achieve, you'll help everyone know what's expected of them *and* how vital they are to the success of children, young people and their community. You'll be surprised at how effectively this will connect their work with your program's goals. The best performance agreements:

- Involve staff in defining expectations,
- Specify agreement on desired results,
- Clarify the support that will be available to help people meet these expectations, and
- Include a provision that makes it clear that staff members must ask for help when they need it.

Create performance agreements both verbally and in writing. Use language that is clear, specific and easily understood. Avoid words that can't be readily translated into actions or are open to differing interpretations. If, for example, your program or site has adopted a particular curriculum as part of its goal of strengthening student academic achievement, be sure to include an expectation that each program leader working directly with children and young people commits to fully understanding how this is to be used, how often and for what purpose. Be clear about how progress will be assessed – both for students and staff members.

> Performance agreements make life easier – for everyone!

Once agreements have been reached and signed by you and each staff member, commit to hold everyone, including yourself, personally accountable for carrying out what you've agreed to. It will make your job and theirs much easier!

Never Underestimate the Importance of Relationships

Regardless of the structures you put in place or the systems you create as you develop your program, nothing will matter as much as the relationships you build. Your ability to develop the kinds of relationships that really matter depends on your appreciation for the individuals you work with and your enthusiasm about spending time with them as people and not just employees.

Being available builds trust, credibility and empathy. When people know that you understand how demanding *their* jobs and their lives really are, what they're really up against, what's working for them and what's not, it will make a real difference in their

> If you focus on what you can put into people rather than what you can get out of them, you'll create a solid foundation for success.

commitment. Wander around and visit them where they're working. Create opportunities for informal conversations and talk with them about their ideas and interests. Learn what excites them, what challenges them and what's important to them. It will make a real difference!

The better you get to know the people you work with, the better equipped you'll be to provide the kind of support they'll need to be successful. The more aware you are of what's happening in their own environments, the better prepared you'll be to offer suggestions that make sense to them intellectually *and* emotionally. People respect, and often love, a leader who puts them first and cares about their individual needs. If you focus on what you can put into people rather than what you can get out of them, you'll create a solid foundation for success.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you take time to know your staff as people as well as employees?*
- *Do you really know what your staff is doing and how they feel about their work?*
- *Do you really know what day-to-day life is like for them?*
- *Do they really trust you and appreciate you as their leader?*

Empower Your Staff to do their Best Work

All of us work best when we have a clear understanding of what's important, the freedom and autonomy to carry out our work and the opportunity to use our skills and talents to the best of our ability. From a leadership perspective, this means helping your staff excel by giving them *ownership* over what they do and *empowering* them with the authority and responsibility to do their jobs well.

> Empowerment is about supporting people, removing barriers and providing them with what they need to be successful.

Empowerment isn't about giving people authority or responsibility and walking away. It's about supporting them, removing barriers and providing them with what they need to be successful. Think of yourself as a guide-by-the-side for the people you work with – their side, not the sidelines.

Encourage them to make decisions and solve problems, and be there for them when things don't work out as well as they or you had hoped. Reward them for thinking creatively, being innovative and making investments in themselves and each other that pay dividends for your program. By partnering with people, supporting their development and valuing

their contributions, you'll accomplish much more than you could in any other way – and they'll appreciate your support more than you might think!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you provide the support people need to be successful in their work?*
- *Are you comfortable gradually releasing responsibility and empowering people to act on their own?*
- *Do you encourage your staff to be actively engaged in problem solving and decision-making?*
- *Do you see your staff as full partners in the development of your program?*

Learn to Think with the End Result in Mind

Strategic *thinking* is a process that begins with the *end* in mind. It forces us to look beyond what we *do* each day to the *impact* we're *capable* of having now and in the future. It allows us to frame not only *what* we will do, but *how* we will do it. Learning to be a strategic thinker takes time and practice – and it's well worth the effort.

> Strategic thinking allows us to frame not only what we'll do but how we'll do it to have the greatest impact.

The process begins with addressing in advance how the actions you and your team are considering will impact your program's goals, performance and results as a whole – not in isolation from each other. There are times when this is relatively straightforward and easily accomplished. Replacing a site staff member is a case in point because the impact of not doing so causes immediate harm to the integrity and viability of that site. The potential ramifications of many of your decisions are likely to be much less obvious but just as important.

As a leader, it's up to you be sure that what you and your staff are considering or actually doing is really moving your program toward the achievement of its goals. Learning to think strategically will help you focus on the right things and accelerate your progress. Your ability to make *informed* choices will greatly improve if you engage in a series of *if…then* questions that will help you discover how far you'll need to go to get the results you want.

For example, if improving student academic achievement is one of your goals, ask yourself this question: *If* you set aside time for homework and your staff assists students with it, *then* will students improve academically? Most people assume that the answer is yes. But is it? As you probe more deeply, you'll find that while there's no doubt that it's important and should be included in your program, the truth is that homework time and assistance may or may not lead to the achievement of your goal.

As we'll discuss in a later chapter, whether homework translates into improved academic performance depends on having a staff that's: 1) trained in and familiar with the language arts and math curricula used during the school day, 2) has access to homework packets in advance, and, 3) is able to follow up with teachers to be sure homework is done correctly and turned in on time.

Before you commit to particular strategies, be sure you've explored them as thoroughly as you can. It will help ensure that you're not overlooking what may be the most important things you can do to achieve your goals. If you act prematurely, you may find yourself and your program inadvertently moving farther away from what you really want. Learning to think strategically will help you make *smarter* choices.

✓ ***A Reality Check…***

- *Do you think strategically, with the end in mind?*
- *Do you thoughtfully consider the ramifications of strategies you might adopt before you implement them?*
- *Are you confident that what you're doing is moving you closer to achieving your program's goals?*
- *What evidence do you have that this is really happening?*

Create Short-term Wins and Build on Early Successes

One of the most serious challenges programs face is that it takes quite awhile to achieve goals that are really worthwhile – and it requires a serious investment of time, energy and money. It's easy to forget that early successes can and do make a real difference in keeping you, your staff and your partners excited and enthusiastic about the work you're all doing. Concrete successes, no matter how small, are the building blocks for bigger achievements.

Take time to identify smaller wins along the way to achieving bigger goals. Recognize and applaud your successes as they happen. If one of your objectives is to raise $200,000 in the next year as part of your larger goal of securing adequate and sustainable funding, make a huge deal out of the first $20,000 grant you receive. Who cares if it's only 10 percent of what you want? It's a major step in the right direction!

Celebrate with everyone. Have a party and buy 20 helium balloons for your office. Give your staff hand written thank-you notes expressing your appreciation for the hard work they've done that's convinced funders to support your program. Go out to dinner at a great restaurant and give yourself and everyone else a lot of credit. Do the same thing when you get to $50,000 and on up. Even if you don't reach the ultimate goal you've set, recognize and appreciate every accomplishment along the way!

> Concrete successes, no matter how small, are the building blocks for bigger accomplishments.

Learn to Act Intentionally

> If you're feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone – but neither are you in very good company.

Just as you want your staff to be successful, they want you to be successful – and they're counting on it! They depend on you to make good decisions, solve problems, raise money and move your program toward the achievement of its goals. In a very practical way their future is tied to yours. It's up to you to create that future by learning to work smarter, not just harder.

Working smarter means establishing priorities and giving yourself time to concentrate on getting the most important things done. If you're feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone – but neither are you in very good company. Given the responsibilities and opportunities you have as leader, you can't afford to compromise yourself or your work by allowing yourself to become so stressed out or bogged down that you aren't able to focus on what matters most. *Allowing* is the operative word. You may think you don't have choices about what you do and when you do it, but you do!

The way you use your time will go a long way towards helping you learn to work smarter. It will also help you become more intentional about what you do. If a lot of your time is spent fighting fires or responding to what's urgent rather than important, a simple exercise can help. Spend a week writing down what you actually do in the course of each day – in real time. Be specific. Make notations about how you're feeling. At the end of the week, review your journal and ask yourself three questions:

1. What really changed as a result of what you did or didn't do?
2. Are you feeling better or worse?
3. Did you really make the best use of your time – or not?

If continual interruptions keep you from doing what's most important, commit to only reading e-mails or answering phone calls during a specific time of day. Touch every piece of mail only once. If it requires an immediate response, do it right then. If you find you're moving from one project to another without anything getting completed, change your habit. If you're attending a lot of meetings that don't lead to immediate action, take them off your calendar. If you don't have a list of what's really important at the start of each day, create one and check off each priority as it's done.

Decide what only you can do, and delegate the rest to others. Ask yourself what the probable consequences are of doing or not doing something today, tomorrow, next week or never. If you're really thoughtful about this, your answers may surprise you. And, if you act on them, they may well make your life, and everyone else's, much easier!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you really know how you're spending your time?*
- *Is what you're doing getting you closer to achieving your program's goals?*

- *Do you feel overwhelmed or in control and confident?*
- *Are you really making the best use of your time?*
- *How do you know?*

Lead the Way!

There's only one way to move your program from good to great. You have to *lead change.* Nothing short of this will work. Your partners, your staff, your community and the children and young people in your program want and deserve the best from you. Using the practices used by highly successful afterschool program directors, leadership teams and site directors will help you do this.

- Commit to being open to thinking and acting in new ways.
- Set explicit goals that everyone agrees on and really understands.
- Think strategically to develop high impact approaches.
- Work collaboratively to build a real partnership and co-create your program with your staff.
- Support and empower the people who work for and with you to do their best work.
- Learn to work smarter by using your time wisely.

As a leader, you'll set the bar on the heights to which you and your team will go. Set it high enough to really make a difference *and* wide enough to be sure everyone is involved in developing your program to its fullest potential! Lead more strategically, act more intentionally and work more collaboratively. You'll be well on your way to developing an afterschool program that achieves its goals and makes a lasting difference in the lives of children and young people and the quality of your community!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #2:
LEAD STRATEGICALLY, ACT INTENTIONALLY
AND WORK COLLABORATIVELY

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as a self-assessment for you as a Program Director, a Site Director or a member of your Leadership Team, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas of strength and those in need of improvement.

KEY:

1. I'm just beginning to work in this area.
2. I've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. I've made significant progress and am doing reasonably well.
4. I've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. I'm doing extremely well in this area, and everyone I work with would agree.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	I stay focused on the big picture by continually aligning my actions with our program's vision, purpose and goals.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I inspire confidence and motivate others to do their best work.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I work closely with our team to set clear, achievable goals that everyone agrees with and understands.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I think strategically, with the end in mind.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I work collaboratively with my staff and partners and see them as co-creators in our program's future.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We've created a culture of excellence based on shared core values and expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I get things done – not just *any* things but the *right* things.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I continually seek new and better ways to do things.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I work hard to create the conditions that will enable people to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I empower our staff to carry out their work, and they do so responsibly and effectively.	1	2	3	4	5

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
11	The people I work with know that I value them, respect them and support them.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I'm committed to continually improving the quality of our program.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I've learned to work smarter by using my time wisely.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I hold myself, and those who work for and with me, accountable for achieving our program's goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #3
USE STAFF DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD A
HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

Successful afterschool leaders define staff development as a *system* that goes beyond technical assistance and training to guiding and shaping the attitudes and behavior and developing and strengthening the skills and self-confidence of their staff. They make a serious investment in people, focus on their personal as well as professional growth and do their best to ensure that everyone:

- Understands and embraces their program's vision, purpose and goals,
- Buys into shared norms and expectations for working together,
- Has opportunities to participate in problem solving and decision-making,
- Feels free to communicate openly and honestly,
- Handles conflict and disagreements well,
- Becomes increasingly skilled, effective and self-assured in their work,
- Is excited about the value and importance of what they and their colleagues are doing,
- Really likes being a member of a team that's making a difference in the lives of children, and young people and their community, and
- Does great work and has fun!

Successful leaders are committed to building a high performing team that resonates with common purpose and uncommon synergy – where people feel really connected, supported, confident and empowered. As this happens, the outcomes for children and young people are significantly better and staff retention rates are much higher.

Training is Critical – and Not Enough

The most frequent explanation staff members give for not being as successful as they could be is that they don't know *what* they're supposed to do, *why* they are supposed to do it or *how* to do it. Nine times out of ten, this can be changed by shifting from an emphasis on training, to a system of staff development.

Training is essential, but no matter how well received a workshop is or how knowledgeable and exciting the trainer, it's very rare for *real changes* in staff behavior to occur through workshops alone. The problem is that very few people who attend workshops really know why they're there or what's expected of them – other than that it's a requirement of their job.

This is compounded by the fact that people don't really buy into new information unless they see the *personal benefit* of doing so. A workshop on behavior management won't make much difference unless people can connect what they learn with their own personal styles, past experiences and belief systems. What's presented has to be emotionally as well as intellectually convincing or staff members will continue to do what they're most familiar and comfortable with.

Most importantly, even if they're initially excited and committed, most staff will have a hard time translating new ideas into concrete actions without follow-up guidance. If they don't get the help they need, little if anything that they've learned will be applied in real life settings. Formal training is a starting point, not an ending point. Learning how to apply what is learned in workshops almost always requires modeling and coaching.

> Even if they're excited about a workshop, most staff will have a hard time translating new ideas into practice without support.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your program spend a lot of time and money on formal training?*
- *Does your staff really know why they are asked to attend trainings and what is expected of them as a result of their participation?*
- *Do you make a practice of following up after a training to find out how much of what was learned has actually taken hold?*
- *What percentage of your staff really applied what they learned in a workshop they attended six months ago?*
- *How do you know?*

The Best Materials are Essential – and Not Sufficient

The quality of afterschool program materials has improved a lot in the last few years. Many resources now link enrichment with academic standards, integrate youth development principles with activities and support creative approaches to learning. When materials are used in the ways they're intended, they have a positive impact and can make programming much easier – especially when people have recently been hired. There are several things to keep in mind, however:

- Having access to high quality materials doesn't guarantee that your staff will know how to use them appropriately or effectively – a lot of money is spent on materials that aren't used well or used at all.
- Relying exclusively on packaged curricula can limit the ability of your staff to use their own talents and skills in creative and productive ways – the very things that are most likely to keep them excited and committed over time.

- It's easy to delude ourselves into believing that if the right materials are in place we'll get the results we want, when this simply isn't true.

As will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, a whole constellation of things has to happen to produce the outcomes we want for children and young people. Most of these have more to do with approach than content. In addition to the materials and training we provide to staff, to really learn students must feel emotionally as well as physically safe, have a sense of belonging and be able to participate in ways that are meaningful to them. They must be enthusiastic about what they're doing and recognize their own progress as they master new skills. The availability of high quality materials is essential to all of this, but it's not sufficient in and of itself.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you invested in the best materials and resources available?*
- *Is your staff using them effectively?*
- *How do you know this is really happening?*
- *How much money have you spent on materials that aren't being used?*
- *How much freedom do you give your staff to create their own activities?*
- *What support do you offer to ensure that the materials available to your staff are achieving the results you and they want?*

Spend More Time with Your Staff

Surprisingly few program and site directors spend enough time with their staff. Take care to avoid making this mistake and get out of your office! No matter how many reports you write, memos you send or meetings you attend, you'll never develop the kind of relationships and trust it takes to build a high performing team without being with the people who work for and with you.

> The only way you can understand people's aptitudes, attitudes and performance is to observe them in their actual job settings.

There's no way you can understand people's aptitudes, attitudes or performance without observing them in their actual job settings. Being there enables you to assess situations, uncover problems and offer solutions that would be impossible at a distance. It allows you to identify what's working, what's not and what can be done to build on their strengths and shore up areas in need of improvement. The better you know your staff as individuals, the more effectively you can target your support to what's important for each person and what will make the greatest difference to your program.

Learn to recognize and appreciate what makes individuals different – what motivates them, what holds them back, what makes them happy and what frustrates them. Tailor your approaches to their individual interests and needs. Everyone is different. Everyone brings

something of value to your team and everyone has areas in their work that can be improved.

Not everyone will hear what you say in the same way or interpret it with the same meaning. Some of your staff are likely to be great listeners. Others won't be. Some are naturally able to translate words into actions. Many will have a hard time. Some will figure out how to do something, but not understand why it's important or how it fits into the bigger picture.

> Never forget that your success depends on the success of your staff.

Build people's self-confidence by telling *and* showing them you believe in them and care about them being successful. If staff members are having trouble, listen intently to discover real concerns and respond with patience and empathy. If they're doing well, take the time to tell them so and be specific with your praise. Remember that confidence counts in a big way!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you spending enough time getting to know your staff as people?*
- *Do you spend enough time with them in their own work environments to really understand how they're doing and what support they may need?*
- *Have you really let them know you're there for them?*
- *Do you truly understand that your success depends on their success?*

Learn to be an Effective Coach

Coaching is an ongoing, people-centered, forward-looking approach. It begins with meeting people where they are, providing direction and support and gradually releasing responsibility as they become more knowledgeable, capable and self-confident. It's essential to building a high performing team and a high quality program.

Successful coaching is about communicating and demonstrating not only what needs to be done, but why it's important and how to do it most effectively. It requires providing information and guidance in ways that people really understand and then helping them until they become skilled enough to work successfully on their own.

When something makes sense and matters to them personally *and* they can count on the support they need to apply the knowledge they're acquiring in their own work settings, your staff will be much more likely to be open to learning and to ask for assistance when they need it. If you have any doubts about whether you're providing enough support, listen to the grapevine.

Take notice of how willingly and enthusiastically staff members support your requests. Ask yourself whether you get more good news or complaints about your staff from their

colleagues, principals, teachers, parents, students or community partners. Ask your staff whether you are supporting them as effectively and meaningfully as you could. Listen intently and openly and respond immediately to what you hear – for better or worse!

The best coaches understand that no matter how valuable the information they may be able to provide, nothing is as important as the relationships that they build. They consciously involve people in the process of finding solutions to their own challenges by telling them and showing them what to do and letting them decide how to do it for themselves.

> Commit to being a guide-by-the-side and you'll see a real difference in your staff's attitude and performance.

They also know, however, that introducing new ideas rarely results in their whole-hearted acceptance and implementation. People need enough time to understand, appreciate and see the value of accepting advice before their full agreement and action can be expected. Give them good reasons why they should do something, based on the worthiness of the effort and the results that are likely to occur. Make clear connections between particular actions and probable outcomes, based on real experiences and concrete examples. Commit to being their guide-by-the-side and you'll see a real difference in their attitude and their performance.

Ten Steps to Becoming a Successful Coach

Coaching is a learned behavior. Some of us are natural coaches, but many of us have to learn the skills it requires. Fortunately, so much has been written about effective coaching in the last few years that we already know what's involved and what is important. Several proven approaches are worth keeping in mind:

1. Be clear about your expectations – never assume the person you're coaching knows what you want.
2. Commit to being supportive and positive – no matter what.
3. Offer suggestions and encouragement in ways that are easily understood.
4. Give feedback in ways that are descriptive, not judgmental.
5. Build confidence as well as competence.
6. Create an attitude and environment of trust.
7. Stay focused on aligning people's personal interests with your program's interests.
8. Learn to be flexible and focused at the same time.
9. Never forget that your success depends on their success.
10. Make coaching a way of life, not an activity.

In the beginning, you're likely to be most effective when you concentrate on specific actions that have a high probability of a significant return on your investment of time and
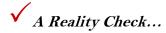
financial resources. Focus on telling and showing people what to do and how to accomplish what you want them to do by modeling, coaching and discussing how they're coming along. Help them discover and uncover their own talents and abilities and build their self-confidence. As they become more skilled and self-assured, they'll become more capable of doing their work really well on their own.

Keep the Dialogue Open

For coaching to be successful, the flow of information has to be two-directional. Information sharing allows us to hold ourselves, and those with whom we're working, accountable for progress toward the achievement of mutually agreed upon goals. It's the mechanism through which progress can be tracked and managed. Real communication is vital to:

- Creating and maintaining trust,
- Reducing anxiety,
- Minimizing frustration and disappointment,
- Helping people stay focused on the achievement of mutual goals, and
- Keeping them engaged and excited about the process.

Communicating at this level requires you to use active listening skills to discover real concerns and to respond to people with patience and empathy. It means being truly present in each situation and available when their support is needed. And, it means being honest, forthright and consistent. All of this takes time, commitment, flexibility and caring – and it's well worth the investment!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you willing to work shoulder to shoulder with your team, or do you believe you are head and shoulders above them?*
- *Are your expectations for your staff accompanied with the support they need to achieve them?*

Reward Your Team with New Opportunities

As staff members become more competent and confident, reward them for their efforts by seeking out new areas where their skills can be used. Keep in mind that they're uniquely well positioned to become coaches for new employees, to open and develop new sites, to expand and strengthen the staff development process throughout your organization and to help institutionalize a culture of excellence in your program. Give them additional responsibilities and pay them for their services!

Don't limit the number of people who have the opportunity to become involved in new ways. Stay alert to identifying staff members who are ready to take the next step and become their mentor as they transition into their new roles. Not only will you build the capacity of your program to become increasingly successful, you'll avoid the danger that the culture you have created will fall apart when people who strongly exemplify it leave or you move on to something else.

Make a Serious Financial Investment in Staff Development

The most successful afterschool programs commit as much as 20 percent of their annual budgets to the kind of staff development discussed in this chapter. If this seems high to you, consider the alternatives. The hidden costs of under-investing can be staggering. The actual dollars lost because of staff turnover can be as much as $3,000-$5,000 per person when you take into account all of the time/wages that go into advertising, interviewing, doing background checks, putting people on the payroll and getting them up to speed to do their work.

> A serious investment in staff development can dramatically reduce the financial and social costs of staff turnover.

Multiply this by the number of people you have to replace in a year. It's likely to be *much* higher than you thought. Time and again we have found that the kind of staff development we've discussed in this chapter is *the* most effective way of minimizing staff turnover and saving countless precious program dollars.

Equally importantly, we all know that the *social* costs of staff turnover are extremely high. Not only is it almost impossible to develop a high performing team when there are constant changes in personnel, it prevents us from providing children and young people with the consistent, supportive relationships with adults that are critical to positive youth development. The stakes are simply too high on all fronts not to make a significant financial investment in staff development. Developing a high quality program depends on it!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *What percentage of your budget do you invest in ongoing staff development and coaching?*
- *Do you really know what the return on your investment is?*
- *What was your staff retention rate last year? What accounted for this?*
- *What impact did staff turnover have at the site level? At the program-wide level?*
- *How do you know?*

Create a Culture of High Expectations

It takes a lot of time, consistency and intentionality to move employees to a place where they can become a real *team* and not just a *group of individuals*. People working together can and do accomplish much more than any one individual could do alone – but only when they have a shared vision and common purpose that transcends their own personal interests and priorities. This won't happen without your guidance, hard work and commitment. The essence of staff development is getting people to work together to become the high performing team you know they can become.

> When you treat team members as capable individuals who can perform at the highest levels, they'll do their best to prove you're right!

When you treat team members as capable individuals who *can* perform at the highest levels, they'll do their best to prove you're right. They'll become a) increasingly self-managed, self-disciplined and self-motivated; b) focused on achieving shared goals; c) intentional in the way they bring about positive results; and, d) excited about their work.

When you have high expectations you're also likely to be much more interested in and anxious to make the investments needed to make this happen. When you really care about your staff as people and not just employees, you'll be willing to provide them with frequent and valuable feedback, more challenging goals and more in-depth coaching – all of which are critical to their success *and* the success of your program.

Commit to making the financial and time investments required to develop a comprehensive staff development system and you'll see real improvement in skills, confidence and retention of your staff, the quality of everything you do and the outcomes for children and young people in your program!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #3:
USE STAFF DEVELOPMENT TO BUILD
A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as a self-assessment for you as a program director, site director or member of your leadership team, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which your program is especially strong and those where it can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're doing extremely well in this area, and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	We recognize that building the capacity of our staff to succeed is essential to our program's success.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We take time to know our staff as people as well as employees.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We focus our efforts on the personal as well as professional development of our staff members.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We meet individual staff members where they are and support them as a guide-by-the-side.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We provide first-rate training and materials for our staff.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have a system in place that enables us to provide ongoing coaching, mentoring and support for our staff.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We assess the impact of workshops and other formal training on our staff by observing changes that reflect what they've learned.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We provide our staff with meaningful opportunities for decision-making and problem solving.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
9	Our staff is clear about expectations, shares our program's vision and holds themselves accountable for results.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Our staff is competent and confident.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Our staff feels valued and valuable.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Our team has a high level of enthusiasm and commitment.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Our program makes a significant financial investment in staff development.	1	2	3	4	5
14	We have a high level of staff retention.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #4
MANAGE FOR THE BEST POSSIBLE RESULTS

It's impossible to develop a high quality afterschool program without an effective management system. Different funding streams have different reporting requirements. Budgets must be carefully developed and expenditures judiciously tracked. Personnel policies and procedures must be in place. Expectations must be clearly stated and performance regularly assessed. These processes, and everything else involved in what we call management, must be understood and used appropriately if they're going to produce the results we all want – a high level of responsibility and accountability *by everyone*.

> Successful managers know that management is a tool, not an end in and of itself.

Among the most successful afterschool programs, management is a system that *supports* people in carrying out their work. Their managers, or people in positions with this kind of responsibility, are keenly aware that what they do will either help or inhibit everyone's progress toward the achievement of their program's goals. They see management as a tool, not an end in and of itself.

They do much more than monitor what's happening in their programs. They know that management styles can be creative and dynamic, or rigid and controlling. They understand that they have the power to impact people's lives and sway emotions in serious ways – for better or worse. They keep *people*, not things, at the center of their attention and come from a world-view that their mission in life, and in their work, is to serve in ways that make great things possible.

Take the 10-Minute Test

As a manager, you can make it easier or harder for people to build the quality of your program. You can create an environment in which structures and functions support people rather than dominate them. You can simplify things or make them more complicated. You can focus more on people or on paper. The choice is yours and so are the consequences.

Your answers to the four questions below offer a starting point for learning to manage in a way that supports the achievement of your program's goals *and* brings out the best in people – both of which are essential to developing high quality programs. Take ten minutes to really think about and respond to these questions:

- What are you managing *and* for what purpose?
- Is your management system people-centered or paper-centered?

- What impact do your management practices and style have on the attitudes and performance of your staff?

- Do your management practices support or inhibit the ability of your staff to achieve the purpose, vision and goals of your program?

After you've done this, seriously consider sending out a survey with the same questions to everyone who works in your program or at your site. Insist that they be candid in their answers and respond anonymously. If you're reluctant to do this, ask yourself why – it may the best reason for going ahead with it!

Allowing yourself to be vulnerable in this way will make a real difference in the confidence your staff has in you and the way people feel about the commitments you're asking them to make. If the answers they come up with are close to the same as yours, and positive, you'll know you're on the right track. If you think all is well and they don't, it's time to find out more – and immediately act on what you learn!

Adopt Best Practices in Management as Your Own

Best practices in management in both the public and private sectors have changed dramatically in the last several years. Command and control hierarchies have been replaced with self-directed teams. Rules and regulations have given way to core values, operating principles, performance agreements and performance reviews. Drawing on all of this, the managers of highly successful afterschool programs:

- Empower rather than supervise,

- Support rather than monitor,

- Remove barriers in the way of successful job performance,

- Honor and value people as individuals and understand the demands placed on them in their everyday work and their lives,

- Focus on solutions rather than problems,

- Share information and encourage active participation in decision-making and problem solving,

- Reward creative ideas and innovative approaches, and

- Expect and insist on personal responsibility.

It's no surprise that people working in environments where managers take approaches like these are happier, more committed and more excited about what they've done. Follow their lead and you'll be amazed at how quickly you're able to bring out the best in your staff, increase their personal responsibility and accountability and move your program towards excellence!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is your management approach more hierarchical or team-based?*
- *Are you solution-oriented or problem-focused?*
- *Is your emphasis on promoting personal responsibility or monitoring people's behavior?*
- *Does your management system make it easier or harder for people to do their best work?*
- *How do you know?*

Establish Operating Principles

The success of your program depends largely on your ability to develop a management system that brings out the *best* in people for the *right* reasons. And the right reasons are always acting *responsibly* to achieve your program's goals and bring its vision into reality.

> You can't force people to be responsible, but you can develop approaches that promote responsibility.

Responsibility is a personal ethic. No matter how many policies or procedures or rules and regulations you have in place, you can't *force* people be responsible. You can, however, develop approaches that *promote* responsibility. One of the most effective ways to begin this process is to create a set of program-wide and site-based operating principles.

As an expression of your core values *in action*, operating principles define how everyone is expected to work with each other. A few examples will give you a frame of reference for creating your own:

- We make our thoughts visible and our actions transparent.
- We treat people fairly, consistently and compassionately.
- We communicate among ourselves and with others in a manner that builds relationships and demonstrates respect.
- We ask for help when we need it.
- We resolve differences in principled ways.
- We consult with our team members and partners before taking actions that impact them.
- When we have questions or concerns, we go to the source rather then complaining to others.
- We deal with issues in real time.
- We honor our commitments in a timely manner or renegotiate them.
- We work independently and jointly to achieve our program's goals.

When operating principles like these are shared, they create a *living contract*. They'll provide you with a way to hold people personally accountable for what they do or don't do. They'll minimize confusion, conflict and misunderstanding. And, they'll encourage people to become increasingly self-managed.

This will give you and your staff a sense of security and go a long way towards creating an exciting and positive work environment. Most importantly, it will enable you to spend more time working to achieve your goals and less time dealing with problems. Develop your operating principles collaboratively, review them with your staff frequently and be sure new employees are familiar with them when they begin their work.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you established a set of operating principles that reflect your program's core values?*
- *Are people in your program and at your sites becoming more personally responsible and self-managed?*

Match Job Titles with Expectations

From a management perspective, it's extremely important that job titles reflect what you have in mind, and not just what comes to mind, or what is officially prescribed by local education agencies, cities, counties or nonprofit organizations. Titles are powerful. They have an impact well beyond what you might imagine. They not only convey information, they elicit gut-level responses from the individuals who hold them, everyone you work with and the broader community.

For example, at the program level, perceptions of the roles, responsibilities, influence and credibility of an administrator or a supervisor are *very* different from those that come to mind for a director. If you're charged with setting and achieving important goals, managing a budget, developing and supporting staff, creating authentic partnerships and securing sustainable funding, you're directing – not just administering or supervising!

> Job titles are much more powerful than we think. They're intimately tied to public perceptions and individual performance.

The same thing is true at the site level. The term *site supervisor* conveys a superior/subordinate relationship *between* people. Is this really what you want? How about *site coordinator?* Do you want people in these positions to coordinate work *or* to lead by hiring, coaching and mentoring their staff; reconnecting neighborhoods with schools; aligning afterschool activities with state content standards; overseeing site budgets; providing resources; ensuring smooth operations; and, measuring and managing results? If this is what you really want, it makes much more sense to call them site directors.

Similarly, are staff members working directly with children and young people line staff or youth workers, or are they doing much more than would be implied in either of these titles? Are they expected to develop positive working relationships with classroom teachers, provide academic assistance to students, create and implement engaging enrichment components and participate in the measurement and management of student progress? If so, their titles should reflect all of this.

No matter what *official* job titles are designated by the organization that employs you and your staff, in most cases you can reach an agreement to use other titles *in public* if you can make a compelling case for why it matters. For example, if the City is your employer and the category your position falls into is Senior Recreation Supervisor, retain this internally and change it to Program Director for everything else – including your business cards and letterhead. See yourself as a director, and you'll act like a director. When others see you this way, they'll treat you differently as well!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you taken time to get in touch with how titles make you, and your staff, feel about the work you and they do?*
- *Are your titles sending the messages you want to your staff, your team and the public?*
- *Are the titles you use in your program consistent with performance expectations?*

Establish Clear Performance Agreements

As discussed in an earlier chapter, performance agreements go a long way toward ensuring that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, and connects their actions with their program's goals. They also help to address the three most common reasons people don't succeed in their work:

1. They don't understand *what* they're supposed to do.
2. They don't understand *why* they're supposed to do it.
3. They don't know *how* to do it.

When people come up short for these reasons, it's usually more about us as leaders than them as employees. It's *our* responsibility as to be certain that staff members are clear about the *what, why and how of their work* – and support them the best we can. A job description won't do this. A performance agreement will. Performance agreements:

- Involve staff in defining performance expectations,
- Specify agreement on desired results,

- Identify what positive and negative consequences might follow from achieving or failing to achieve these expectations,
- Clarify the support that will be available to help people meet these expectations, and
- Include a provision that makes it clear that staff members are expected to ask for help when it's needed.

Once agreements have been reached and signed by you and each staff member, commit to hold everyone, including yourself, personally accountable for carrying out what you've agreed to. It will make your job and theirs much easier and produce much more positive results!

Use Performance Reviews for the Right Reasons

Performance reviews are excellent tools for assessing, managing, applauding, improving and changing behavior and for making tough decisions when employees aren't working out – when they're used for the right reasons and in the right ways. First and foremost, they should be designed to *strengthen* performance, based on the agreements you've already established.

If you're spending enough time with people in their own environments, you'll have plenty of opportunities to informally review their performance with them in real time. This is critical – but it's not enough. Formal reviews should be scheduled at least twice a year for all staff members. When they're doing well, tell them so. If they aren't doing as well as they could or should, the first step is to get at the *real* explanation.

Review the original performance agreement with the person involved to be certain that he or she knows what's supposed to be done, how to do it and why it's so important. In many cases, this may be enough to improve the situation. If not, look for one of these explanations: 1) He or she may not *care enough* to do their job well, 2) He or she may not *want to do it*, or 3) He or she may not *be capable* of doing it.

If any of these describe the situation, don't wait to take action. Negative behaviors not dealt with right away *will* persist and probably deteriorate quickly. The attitudes that usually underlie them are toxic. They can and will sabotage your efforts, create havoc with your team and undermine your program's ability to achieve its goals. If people aren't capable to doing their jobs well, they're just not a good match with your program.

> The purpose of a performance review should be to applaud what's being done well, improve what needs to be changed and terminate an employee when it's necessary.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you taken the time to develop a performance review system?*
- *Do you use it regularly to applaud successes, improve performance and hold people accountable for their performance agreements?*
- *Are you really able to distinguish between the possible causes of less than satisfactory performance?*
- *Do you act quickly and decisively when you've determined that a staff member should be terminated?*

Hold Yourself and Every One Else Accountable

As a manager, one of your most important goals should be to encourage personal and professional accountability across your program, which results in self-management. You'll learn to do this much more effectively when you:

- Model the behavior you want to see in your staff,
- Focus more on relationship building than paperwork,
- Create and maintain clear operating principles,
- Provide the support people need to be successful,
- Deal with issues in real time,
- Commit to acting decisively, consistently and fairly,
- Use performance agreements and reviews to clarify expectations and hold everyone accountable for their actions, and
- Do your very best to ensure that everything you do serves to support and enhance the vision, purpose and goals of your program!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #4
MANAGE FOR THE BEST POSSIBLE RESULTS

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as a self-assessment for you as a Program Director, Manager, member of your Leadership Team or Site Director and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which you're especially strong and those where you can improve.

KEY:

1. I'm just beginning to work in this area.
2. I've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. I've made significant progress and am doing reasonably well.
4. I've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. I'm doing extremely well in this area, and everyone would agree.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	My approach as a manager is more people-centered than paper-centered.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I focus on removing obstacles that make it easier for our staff to do their best work.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Our staff members fully understand and share my expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Our staff members willingly and enthusiastically support my requests.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I focus on solutions rather than problems.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I insist upon personal responsibility and accountability for myself and for staff members.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We have developed program-wide and site-based operating principles with our staff members.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We use performance agreements to hold our staff and ourselves accountable.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Our staff is increasing self-managed.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Our staff knows I am available to help them be successful in their work.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
11	I use regular performance reviews to reward and improve staff attitudes, behavior and skills.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I ensure that the titles of positions reflect the work people in our program actually do.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I am fair and consistent in my actions.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I ensure that management practices throughout our program are designed to support the achievement of our program's goals.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I immediately talk to staff members when I have concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I immediately acknowledge their successes when staff members are doing things well.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

SECTION 2

SITE-BASED PRACTICES

The most distinguishing characteristics of successful afterschool sites are their ability to integrate youth development and educational goals into a cohesive whole, develop high performing teams, link activities with outcomes and create a culture of excellence that produces positive outcomes for children and young people. They set meaningful goals, develop successful strategies for achieving them, continually assess their progress and hold everyone accountable for what happens in five critical areas:

- Creating a physically and emotionally safe environment,
- Building and maintaining supportive relationships,
- Developing challenging and engaging learning experiences,
- Ensuring meaningful youth participation,
- Strengthening student academic achievement,
- Promotes diversity, equity and inclusion, and
- Measuring and managing outcomes.

The next section of this Guide focuses on how you can do this – and why it's so important. It's designed for program directors who are responsible for ensuring consistency across sites and for site directors who are responsible for developing exemplary practices at their individual sites.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #5
CREATE A PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Many afterschool programs think of safety in terms of the precautions they take to ensure the physical well-being of children and young people, such as minimizing dangers in the environment, providing adequate adult supervision and being well prepared to address emergencies. The most successful afterschool programs ensure that this happens – and much more. They know that for children and young people to achieve their potential *they* must feel secure. A program can provide a safe physical environment and still be experienced by young participants as unsafe. For young people to experience a program as safe, they must feel personally safe – both physically and emotionally.

> Physical and emotional safety are supported when youth know they're protected by a set of fair and consistently applied rules or agreements.

The experience of *physical safety* means that young people feel safe from physical harm and confident that the surrounding adults will protect and assist them if they are feeling threatened – whether by their peers or by other adults. The experience of *emotional safety* means that children and youth are confident they'll be valued and accepted by others and that they can fully participate in a program without being afraid they'll be teased, harassed, or bullied. They need to know that differences between individuals are embraced. In an environment that promotes emotional safety, young people feel safe to try and sometimes fail because positive risk-taking is supported and "mistakes are OK." Both physical and emotional safety are supported when youth know they're protected by a set of fair and consistently applied rules or agreements.

Together, a sense of physical and emotional safety provides the foundation upon which youth development and academic achievement can thrive. No matter how well designed your program is, or how exciting the activities and opportunities you offer are, your program won't achieve what it could without addressing these issues in your day to day approaches.

Focus on Safety First and Learning Second

Most afterschool programs are committed to strengthening young people's academic performance. What program leaders often overlook is that children and young people's *ability* to learn is directly linked to their *feelings* of safety. Recent research into brain function reveals that the experience of safety is an important component in a person's readiness to learn. When people feel unsafe, their brain activity actually changes. Higher-level brain functions such as learning, cognition, and language ability are reduced or shut down as attention is diverted to a "fight-or-flight" response.

Feeling unsafe can actively interfere with learning and the integration of new information. If children feel threatened by their peers, they simply can't focus on anything else that's going on no matter how engaging or exciting it might be to others. If young people are worried about whether they'll have a safe passage home, they'll shut down well before it's time for them to leave. Reducing their concerns is vital to *their* success and to the ability of *your* program to achieve its goals.

A sense of safety is key. We know in order for children to learn, they have to be willing to take risks that may involve making mistakes. They have to feel certain they won't be ridiculed or laughed at when they try something new and it doesn't work out as well as they'd hoped. They need to know ahead of time that it is safe to take chances and that they will be supported for doing their best.

> For children and young people to learn, they have to be willing to take risks that may involve making mistakes.

Ensuring that every child feels secure and safe within your program is not an easy task. We know this by the number of children who, when asked, report they do not feel safe in their programs. However, creating an environment of physical and emotional safety for all participants is possible. You can begin now by actively working on the following strategies:

- Make safety a priority.
- Focus on community building.
- Create opportunities to explore and appreciate diversity.
- Work with young people to establish a clear set of expectations and agreements.
- Establish procedures and policies that support the practice of safety.
- Involve youth in on-going assessments to see where your program can improve.

Make Safety a Priority: Create an Environment of Trust

Many programs have structures in place that support physical safety, yet are less likely to focus on emotional safety. We've found that programs need to be proactive in creating an environment of trust. When it's clear that it is a priority to include everyone in an emotional safety net, children and young people feel safe sharing more of themselves with others.

Establishing your afterschool program as a safe place in the eyes of your participants brings numerous immediate benefits, both for program participants and for your staff. Promoting a sense of safety and acceptance serves to reduce "acting out" behaviors and underlying anxiety and helps young people feel more secure and trusting of others. As this happens, they're more likely to open up and talk about what they're *really* thinking and feeling. As you and your staff gain a deeper understanding of students' opinions,

feelings and desires, you'll be much better equipped to meet their needs, anticipate potential problems and build positive, supportive relationships.

> A feeling of safety among participants can reduce conflicts among young people, and when they do arise they're resolved more readily.

It's critical that young people in your program know where to turn if someone, whether a peer, staff member, or someone outside the program, is making them feel unsafe. Staff members need to take seriously any reports of bullying, teasing, abuse, harassment or other unsafe behavior and let the young person who feels unsafe know what steps will be taken to ensure his or her safety.

A feeling of safety among participants can reduce conflicts among young people; and when conflicts do arise, they are resolved more readily. In successful programs, young people and adults speak respectfully to each other even when disagreeing. Conflicts are managed with words, and young people help each other or ask for adult help in managing conflict as necessary.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you clear about the connections between learning and feelings of safety?*
- *Have you made physical and emotional safety a priority?*
- *Are you and your staff consciously and consistently building an environment of trust with all of the participants with whom you and they interact?*
- *Does your staff take bullying and teasing seriously?*
- *Do youth feel they can go to staff with issues or help with a conflict?*
- *Are you involved enough with your staff to be sure that they're treating participants fairly, equitably and consistently?*

Create a Climate that Values Diversity

Creating emotional safety is about creating a climate that values diversity. The goal is for every child to feel comfortable with and accepted for who he or she is. Children are born loving, curious and open to the world. They start to notice differences in gender, race, class, and family structure as early as age three, and they turn to the adults around them for clues about what those differences mean.

In the absence of positive, affirming cues from their role models, they learn what they can on the playground and from mass culture. Sadly, many of the messages they receive are full of subtle and not-so-subtle biases and stereotyping which is communicated thoughtlessly if we aren't careful. Bias can be evident in what we say as much as what we do – tolerating loudness from boys but not from girls, making assumptions about a child's interests or skills based on his/her race or posting images on the walls that leave some young people out. It is important for everyone to have a good understanding of bias and how it works if you're going to work to eliminate it in your program.

Learning the biases of others hurts young people. They try to resist it and want to remain open, loving and kind. Help them by modeling acceptance and by addressing all types of slurs and stereotypes whenever they occur. Remember also to be mindful of the young person displaying the bias. Strive to respect the context in which they developed their beliefs, while making it clear that behavior and words that hurt others are unacceptable.

In an age-appropriate way, you can also help them learn how bias works and how to recognize it. Many programs put in place a policy of zero tolerance for bias, discrimination and prejudice. Clearing the air of bias and stereotypical messages sends a strong message of inclusion – and it makes a profound difference in children and young people's lives and futures. For everyone in your program to really feel emotionally and physically safe, they must feel comfortable with and accepted for *who* they are, not what they are.

> Clearing the air of bias sends a strong message of inclusion – and makes a profound difference in children and young people's lives and in their futures.

There are many strategies to embrace diversity. Create displays celebrating young people's accomplishments so that everyone is represented at one time or another. Put images on the walls that represent the participants' racial and ethnic diversity, and present diverse role models. Make sure that books on the shelves and other program materials are equally representative of the participants' diversity. Be sure there are adults on your staff that represent the diversity of the children enrolled, and that everyone is well informed about the cultural backgrounds of the young people in your program.

As youth and adults interact authentically and respectfully with others, they learn acceptance of differences and gain the ability to work and play with people from backgrounds different from their own.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff clear about the connections between bias and emotional safety?*
- *Are you attentive to the subtleties of bias as well as those that are overt?*
- *Have your staff participated in trainings to build skills and strategies for promoting inclusive environments and do they receive ongoing support?*
- *Do you have a zero-tolerance policy for bias, discrimination and prejudice in your program?*
- *Are you sure it's being carried out?*

Integrate Community-Building Sessions into your Program

Another key strategy in supporting emotional and physical safety is to focus on building a sense of community within your program. Being a member of an ongoing community provides a safe and meaningful place to encourage children and young people to take on

increasing responsibility, both individually and as a group. It offers an arena in which participants can openly express their feelings and concerns *and* support each other in positive ways. Community activities foster collaboration, increase participation, build trust and promote empathy – all of which are vitally important. Proactively create opportunities to build community by facilitating team building activities, conducting community events or having community discussions.

> Community activities foster collaboration, increase participation, build trust, and promote empathy – all of which are vitally important to positive youth development.

For instance, community discussions can provide a place and time for anyone to raise issues and become actively involved in answering a variety of questions that may be of great importance to them. If, for example, you ask what should be done about stealing or the presence of bullying in the program, participants will have input and strategies. If you ask youth who they could talk with if a staff member did something that they thought was unfair, some will have ideas for what to do. This process has a powerful impact and can make a real difference in promoting feelings of safety and security. It is important to be consistent. Whether community discussions are held once or twice a week for an hour or so, or for 15 or 20 minutes of each day, young people need a place to reflect and listen to each other.

Because these strategies are youth-centered, the success of community building depends largely on the way they're *facilitated and supported* by staff. However, we've found it's rarely if ever enough to provide staff with facilitation or team building training and materials alone. This is an area in which coaching really matters. Support your staff until they become competent *and* confident. The process will evolve over time. As children and young people become more engaged, your staff's self-confidence builds and everyone's ability to work collaboratively significantly increases.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you developed strategies for community building in your program?*
- *Is your staff trained and coached to be successful in facilitating and supporting this process?*
- *Are participants engaged and excited by the opportunities this process provides?*

Create Emotional Safety Through Expectations and Agreements

For young people to feel safe, they need to know that there is a set of clear rules or agreements that govern behavior and that they will be applied consistently by adults who are committed to treating young people fairly. This includes all program staff, security, administration, janitorial staff, volunteers and any other adults who might come in contact with young people in your program.

Children and young people feel safest when they have a sense of routine. Continuity and consistency are crucial. No matter what their age, they need to know what to expect *and* what's expected of them and others. Contrary to what they may tell you, they *want* a set of agreements that govern behavior and are applied consistently and fairly by your staff. The question isn't whether to do this, it's how to do it.

High quality afterschool programs engage participants in establishing agreements governing behavior in a way that encourages a sense of ownership and personal accountability. In fact, they are called *agreements* because everyone is included in generating and *agreeing* to a set of expectations. Staff know that they won't get the kind of buy-in they need if adults simply write the agreements or even if they adopt those used during the school day. Programs are much more likely to achieve accountability when young people are engaged in the process of developing them.

> High quality afterschool programs engage participants in establishing agreements governing behavior in a way that encourages a sense of ownership and personal accountability.

Begin by asking young people what agreements are important and should be included. They're very likely to come up with a long list of what *shouldn't* be done, because most often children are told what not to do. Once you've done this, be sure everyone really understands *what* the agreements mean and *why* they're important to them. A first grader might say that not hitting people is important because if you do someone could get a big bump. A seventh grader may say that put-downs shouldn't be allowed because they hurt people's feelings.

The next step is to ask your participants which ones they think might be combined. This gives them an opportunity for collaboration, problem solving and decision-making – all of which are important in youth development. With a little support, they'll probably reach agreement on five or six, a number which makes a lot of sense and is manageable.

> For children and young people to follow the agreements, they have to be clear about what they mean and what is expected of them.

While it might be tempting to stop here, remember that if you want behavior to be positive, the language you use has to be positive. Yet it's important to do this without changing what young people really had in mind. For example, changing *no hitting* to *respect each other* may lose some of its emotional impact and clarity unless they agree that to respect each other includes not hitting someone.

Encourage everyone to be clear about what behaviors you want rather than just listing all of the many things a person should not do in the program. Take enough time to be certain this happens. For children and young people to follow the agreements, they have to be clear what they mean and what is expected of them. By giving everyone a chance to *participate* in this process, you'll *empower* them in a way that wouldn't otherwise be possible.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you established a process for generating agreements with participants?*
- *Are the agreements you've developed easily remembered and understood?*
- *Are they framed in positive language?*
- *Are these agreements followed by everyone?*

Link Consequences with Personal Responsibility

One of the most valuable gifts your program can give children and young people is the opportunity to learn to accept *personal responsibility* for their actions. You can do this in lots of ways, one of which is to help them understand that their behavior has consequences – for themselves and for others. Once they've reached agreements on behavior, ask *them* what they think should happen if the agreements are broken.

The consequences they come up with may be different than the ones you'd choose. Whatever the consequences are, they have to be explicit and match the "weight" of the infraction. It's not uncommon for fourth graders to say that someone should be thrown out of the program for something you might not think is all that serious. Conversely, an eighth grader may not think an occasional racial slur or sexist remark means anything, but you may consider it a real violation. Help them find a consequence that is justified given the agreement that is broken. Leaving a lot of room for interpretation creates anxiety and reduces the very emotional security you're aiming for. Instead, focus on communicating equity and fairness by consistently upholding agreements and consequences.

> Leaving a lot of room for the interpretation of consequences creates anxiety and reduces the very emotional security you're aiming for.

The process of having children and young people develop the agreements will give them a lot of ownership over them. Their understanding of consequences will make a real difference in whether the agreements are followed. But neither will automatically result in young people accepting personal responsibility for their actions unless there's a strong *incentive* for them to do so.

The most successful afterschool programs recognize this and go one step farther by creating *written contracts* that explain the agreements and the consequences and are signed by each participant, his or her parents or primary caregivers and program staff. The purpose of this is to make absolutely sure that *everyone* understands the behavior that's expected and what will happen if the agreements are broken. It takes the pressure off your staff by making it easy to refer to something that's already been mutually agreed to when a rule is broken. Signing a contract also shifts responsibility from your program leader to the young person and from the individual to the behavior – both of which are essential in youth development programs.

This practice also helps draw parents into the process of becoming better partners with their children and with your program. And, it holds staff accountable for upholding the agreements and carrying out the consequences appropriately and consistently. Remember that your ultimate goal is to encourage the kind of *personal responsibility* that creates a physically and emotionally safe environment for everyone!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you established consequences that everyone understands and agrees to?*
- *Do you have written contracts in place that specifically identify the agreements of your program and the consequences for breaking them?*
- *Have participants, parents and program leaders signed off on these?*
- *Have you made the importance of consistency absolutely clear to your staff through training and coaching?*

Know What's Going on in Your Community

Knowing the community and neighborhood in which your program is located is critical. Being familiar with the local history and relationships between different groups represented in your program can help you determine which strategies can best be used to build trust and reduce conflict. This will also help your efforts create an inclusive environment and honor the diversity in your program.

> Parents and community members are important resources for creating solutions to a variety of problems.

Knowing your community is also important for reasons of physical safety. For example, find out if you're situated in gang territory and if children and young people have to cross the lines of rival gangs when they come to or leave your program. Reading the local newspaper and watching local television news can keep you and your staff informed about events that may well impact the emotional and physical security of participants in your program the next day.

Parents and community members are important resources for providing insight into the historical and cultural background of the community, and in creating solutions to a variety of problems. Some programs have formed parent "safety committees" that look at various safety issues and work together to find solutions. When seeking community input, be sure to include a balance of the different groups represented in your program and a community police officer, a member of the Police Athletic League or someone who is knowledgeable from a law enforcement perspective.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *How much do you really know about the neighborhood in which your program is located?*
- *Do you work with parents and community members to get input, find solutions and share resources?*
- *Do you use the information you have to strengthen your program in ways that promote physical and emotional safety?*

Limits on Confidentiality

As you get to know students in your program and they develop trust with you, many may share personal information and assume it will be kept confidential. Older youth in particular may feel safer knowing that you can and will keep their conversations secret. However, there are certain times when you will not be able to do this – such as when a young person lets you know that someone is hurting them, or that they are going to hurt someone else. Children and young people need to understand that you respect their privacy, but that there are limits to how far you and your staff can go.

When your staff become aware of a situation that may require professional help, they should know exactly whom they are expected to report it to. Some issues may require reporting to authorities, while others may require professional consultation. Most schools and organizations have clear protocols for responding to these situations. It's crucial that your staff receive training on their legal responsibilities for reporting when a child is in danger and protocols for whom they should seek out for consultation when they have a concern about a child.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff clear about the importance of and limits to confidentiality?*
- *Do you have a clear policy in place to address issues in this area?*
- *Do you provide guidance to your staff on how to handle issues?*
- *Are these policies really carried out?*
- *How do you know?*

Management Practices Matter

The policies and procedures used in high quality afterschool programs to ensure physical safety are remarkably consistent. In school-based programs, a number of these stand out.

Monitoring Attendance... In order to attend afterschool programming, participants are required to attend school during the day and to be formally signed in to their programs in the afternoon. Attendance is taken in the first 15 minutes and cross-checked with the front office to confirm who should be present. Procedures are in place to follow up immediately if someone is missing. The importance of this can't be overstated. While there's often a simple explanation for a child not arriving on time, such as being picked up by a parent who forgot to inform your staff, there's also the possibility that the child is really in danger and time can make all the difference in the outcome.

Signing Participants In and Out of Your Program... Parents or their designees are required to pick up their children and sign them out at the end of the day. Although we've heard countless excuses why this won't work, it is a hallmark of high quality programs. When people value your program for what it offers their children and provides for them, they're willing to take on this responsibility. If your program is offered free of charge, make a point of explaining to parents that their children are receiving the equivalent of a *scholarship* worth several thousand dollars a year.

Keeping Current Records... High quality programs make a practice of keeping participant records current, complete and easily accessible. Registration forms include school identification numbers, emergency contact information and other relevant information that might be needed to ensure their children's well being. Staff members routinely call parents to keep them informed about how their children are doing – and ensure that phone numbers are accurate and in service.

Maintaining Low Youth to Staff Ratios... Resources need to be directed to support as low a youth to staff/volunteer ratio as is possible. Activities and spaces need to be adequately supervised and program leaders need additional adults available so they can help out when situations require one-to-one interactions. It's also important to have enough trained adults around to address issues of emotional safety when they arise and to form the kinds of trusting relationships that allow young people to feel truly safe. This also means ensuring continuous adult supervision. There needs to be a system for ensuring that substitutes are available when they're needed and a pool of potential employees to fill vacancies is maintained. Prioritize efforts to minimize staff turnover. This includes providing training to everyone and following it up with coaching and mentoring as part of a comprehensive approach to staff development.

Creating Safe and Accessible Spaces... If your program is located at a school, be sure that you have the use of classrooms (a subject that will be discussed in a later chapter). If you have more latitude in the design and use of facilities, ensure that your activities and spaces are safe, reliable and accessible. This means keeping the program spaces clean, keeping equipment and materials in good repair, making sure the layout of the space and furniture allow adult staff to keep children in view and creating space for adult staff and young people to have one-to-one discussions.

Aligning Emergency Policies and Procedures with the School Day... High quality programs align their policies with those established by the school to ensure that the emergency procedures participants are familiar with are the same in both settings. This helps avoid confusion, simplifies responses if and when they occur and creates a sense of physical security.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that children and young people in your program are physically safe?*
- *Are they followed consistently and accurately?*
- *Do you have current contact information for each participant?*
- *Do you have a system in place that ensures that substitutes are available when staff members are absent?*
- *Are your equipment and spaces safe, reliable and accessible?*
- *Are your policies and procedures aligned with those used during the school day?*

Ensure a Sense of Safety for Everyone in Your Program

Safety is most effective and meaningful when it is modeled at all levels of your program. This means that all staff members, parents, and volunteers have the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe in the program too. Adults who don't feel safe will have a hard time helping young people feel safe. This means addressing everything from physical safety on the grounds to making sure there is a way for program staff members to freely share their thoughts and concerns. Fortunately, much of the learning that goes into making a safe program for children and young people will also make it safer for everyone.

> All staff members, parents and volunteers have the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe in the program too. Adults who don't feel safe will have a hard time helping young people feel safe.

As discussed earlier, training and coaching are key strategies for supporting staff in knowing what to do and when. For instance training in conflict management, positive discipline, and group management will give your staff important skills and strategies for working with youth – and with each other. They also need to be trained on implementing your safety policies and procedures and on the legal and ethical guidelines for caregivers of children. Hands-on coaching which includes modeling how to work with youth, observing staff and giving feedback is critical in ensuring that safety is indeed a consistent program priority.

Take Time to Get Regular Feedback

We know that both physical and emotional safety are complex topics that require a great deal of attention and planning. An ongoing program improvement process is one way to be sure that safety issues don't fall through the cracks. This means doing regular reflection as a team and then creating action plans or strategies to address gaps. It's important to set aside time to talk with your staff, your partners, classroom teachers, classified staff and volunteers. This may mean re-examining program activities and design, the roles youth play in the program or the ways staff and young people spend time together.

It's also important to take young people's input into account. The most reliable way to assess for emotional safety is to ask them about their own experience of the program. They can tell you if they feel safe – or not. The list below provides a sample of the statements you can pose in a survey and have them respond to.

- I feel safe when I'm in the program.
- It's okay for me to make mistakes here.
- I learn things here about people who are different from me.
- People respect me and like me.
- I helped set agreements for the program and understand what will happen when people break the agreements.
- I feel like I belong here and I make a difference.
- I feel comfortable talking with a staff member about things that are happening in my life.
- I have lots of friends here.
- If I didn't show up, people would miss me.

The responses on these surveys will tell you what children and young people are experiencing, but they won't explain why they feel this way or that an aspect of the program needs changing. To understand the meaning of these responses, your staff first needs to genuinely honor and value what the young people have to say. Second, they should facilitate discussion groups with participants to share back some of the responses and ask them why they think some responded as they did.

Managing the process to ensure that everyone participates is vital. What your staff learns in these sessions can *and* should be used to develop and implement a continuous quality improvement process that purposefully integrates youth ideas and support. This might mean anything from re-examining program activities or design to strengthening staff development or reassessing the role volunteers play in providing additional support. Whatever the focus, input from children and young people in your program is a crucial resource for strengthening program quality and keeping children and youths engaged.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is an environment of safety a priority in your program?*

- *Do adults in your program have opportunities to give input on concerns they have or whether they feel safe in the program?*

- *Have you spent enough time training and coaching your staff to be confident that they have the skills they need to support safety in all its forms?*

- *Have you established a process for gathering input from young people on their experience of feeling safe in the program?*

- *Are you getting positive feedback from students and their parents regarding the program?*

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #5:
CREATING A PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessment for you as a program director or site director, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which you are especially strong and those where you can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're doing extremely well in this area.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	We are clear about the link between safety and learning and have made safety a priority in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We focus on creating an environment of trust by taking bullying and harassment seriously and supporting appropriate conflict resolution.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We partner with young people to learn to appreciate, respect and build on diversity and to address bias and intolerance when it is evident.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We provide opportunities for community building within the program, which includes youth and adults.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We have a process in place to ensure that young people participate in generating agreements framed in positive language addressing how people should treat each other.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Young people take personal responsibility for their actions by helping to determine consequences for their actions and signing an individual contract.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We spend time getting to know the immediate neighborhood and involve parents, school and community members in establishing a safe environment for youth.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
8	We are clear about the importance of and limits to confidentiality and ensure staff have adequate resources to address issues outside of the scope of their program.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Policies and procedures are posted, well known and consistently upheld by children, young people and staff under all circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We have systems in place for the attendance, sign-in and sign-out of all students and always know who is present in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Activity space, equipment and materials are appropriate, accessible and safe for all ages and ability levels.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We have procedures in place to ensure consistent and adequate staff coverage when absences occur.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We offer training for staff on safety policies and procedures as well as their ethical and legal responsibilities in ensuring the safety of children.	1	2	3	4	5
14	We offer training and coaching for staff in promoting safety in areas such as group management, conflict resolution and embracing diversity to ensure staff are consistent in their actions.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We ensure a sense of safety at all levels of the program and promote a work environment that is physically and emotionally safe for all staff members, volunteers and other adults.	1	2	3	4	5
16	We regularly gather and act on input from young people on their experience of physical and emotional safety in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record the subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in the Practice Area, Sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #6
BUILD AND MAINTAIN SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

There is overwhelming evidence that the presence of caring, supportive relationships between young people and adults is one of the most critical factors in the healthy development of young people.   In the research on childhood resiliency, it ranks as the *leading* indicator in predicting whether young people will be healthy and productive adults – regardless of their economic circumstances or other risk factors. We also know that the quality of relationships between adults and young people, as well as relationships between peers, greatly impact learning.

High quality afterschool programs are intentional in the ways they go about developing and maintaining supportive relationships. Site directors and staff members work together to ensure that:

- Every student feels known, accepted, and valued,
- Everyone is treated with respect and trust level is high,
- Communication is open, authentic and supportive,
- Young people are comfortable approaching adults for guidance and advice,
- Boundaries are known and respected,
- Young people have the skills to resolve conflicts when they arise,
- Young people work effectively in small teams and larger groups, and
- Everyone shares a positive sense of belonging.

By providing opportunities for relationship building, you'll ensure that your program is contributing to the important developmental needs of the young people you serve. It's important to remember that relationship building is also a critical factor in whether children and young people experience a sense of physical and emotional safety, a subject discussed in the previous chapter.

> Young people consistently report that the quality of their relationships with adults and peers is the most important factor in their having positive experiences.

Young People Agree: Relationships Are Key

What are children and young people looking for in afterschool programs? This is an important question if programs are to attract and sustain their participation, especially with older students who can "vote with their feet" if they don't have a positive experience. When asked, young people consistently report that one of the most important factors in whether they attend and remain in an afterschool program is the quality of their relationships with

adults and their peers. Not surprisingly, supportive relationships are also vital to creating the kind of environment that's essential to developing a high performing team of adults!

Make Relationship-Building a Program Priority

People assume that supportive relationships between adults and children, and between the children themselves "just happen". But, according to those who have studied the quality of relationships in afterschool programs, this isn't the case. To ensure that supportive relationship building is happening, begin by making this an explicit goal of your program. Unless relationship-building becomes a clearly defined, understood and expected practice within your program, individual staff members will interpret what it means in very different ways, depending upon their own past experiences, values and habits. Until a high level of consistency is established, meaningful relationships will be difficult to develop.

> Begin by making supportive relationship building an explicit goal.

Commit to embedding this practice in every aspect of what you do. Placing a high priority on relationship building will allow you to think more strategically, act more intentionally and work more collaboratively to accomplish this goal. As a leader, you can greatly promote or impede the ability of your staff to build supportive relationships with young people – from the choices you make in hiring staff to the design, development, implementation and evaluation of your program.

Build Young People's Relationships Skills

The ability of children and young people to form and maintain supportive relationships with adults and peers requires skills that you and your staff can help develop and improve. Ask your staff to consider what kinds of skills are needed. Their answers may include active listening, how best to express one's needs, conflict resolution and working as part of a larger team. Next, consider what kinds of activities can be initiated to build and practice these skills. Commit to incorporating these into your program and site as an on-going part of everything you do in.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you made relationship-building a top priority in your program?*
- *Are you intentional about how you're going about doing this?*
- *Have you taken enough time to think about what relationship building really means in terms of how you establish goals and create strategies for achieving them?*
- *Have you taken enough time to discuss the importance of relationship building with your program staff and thought through its implications for program design?*

- *Has your staff decided on the relationship skills needed for young people to develop and selected activities and approaches to help build these skills over time?*

Establish Group Agreements and Rituals

Building trust takes time, particularly for groups – it doesn't happen overnight. Groups develop in clearly recognizable stages, a process that can be supported with the use of team-building games and activities, as well as skillfully facilitated discussions. Your program staff may benefit from workshops on the stages of group development and how to move their groups though this process.

> **Building trust takes time – especially when it takes place in a group setting.**

Creating group agreements or guidelines for how people in the program will treat one another is an important first step in encouraging relationship building in your program. Brainstorm agreements as a group, and be sure everyone in the group feels that the rules are fair. Once agreements are established, post them prominently and refer to them often. Having young people make an agreements poster will get them more involved. As discussed in the previous chapter, it's crucial that all adults in the program enforce agreements consistently.

Young people respond very positively to knowing they can depend on certain opportunities to "voice" their arrival and presence, especially as they make the transition from one peer setting to another, such as from the school day to an afterschool program. They also appreciate having times when they can receive recognition from others and reflect on their own experiences in your program. By providing opportunities for them to be acknowledged, individuals don't have to find negative ways to be acknowledged and obtain attention.

Beginning the program with small group circles for "check-in" is a great way to give young people opportunities for voice, recognition and reflection. Initiate the process by sitting in a circle and let each person respond briefly to a simple, open-ended age-appropriate question. You might ask a group of second graders what they like to do with their friends, or seventh graders a favorite activity on the weekend.

> **Small group check-ins are great ways to give students opportunities for voice, recognition and reflection.**

Be careful to ask questions you're completely confident everyone can answer. Don't expect them to talk about their favorite movie if they haven't seen one or to talk about their brothers or sisters if they're an only child. Over time, the range of questions can be expanded to asking about what happened during the day or how well the group is working together. Increasingly, questions can come from children and young people themselves.

To encourage students to be respectful of each other, it's useful to have a special item, such as a "talking stick" to pass around the group. A talking stick clearly identifies who should be speaking and sends a message to others not to interrupt or carry on side conversations. If someone doesn't want to talk, let them pass. As their familiarity with the process grows and their self-confidence increases, they'll begin to participate. Honor their feelings and let this happen when they are ready – not when you think they should be ready. A community circle can also be an excellent place to publicly recognize individuals for their accomplishments and contributions to the group.

> **Honor students' feelings and let them move forward at their own pace.**

When staff members, volunteers and program participants enter or leave your program, do all you can to make careful, smooth transitions. Whenever possible, give the students a chance to welcome newcomers or say goodbye to those who are leaving. In programs where relationships are given a high priority, the coming and going of adults can be difficult for everyone, particularly the children and young people. Closure with those who are leaving will ensure that everyone has the same understanding of what's happening and will decrease possible feelings of abandonment.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your staff understand the stages in which groups develop?*
- *Have they had the opportunity to participate in workshops on group development and learn how to use games and activities to support this process?*
- *Have they developed group agreements with children and young people?*
- *Are these agreements posted and referred to frequently?*
- *Do you have a way to acknowledge staff and students who join or leave the program?*

Ensure that Everyone Feels Known, Accepted and Valued

Every child and young person in your program should feel known, accepted and valued. By learning to recognize and appreciate what makes each unique – what motivates them, what holds them back, what makes them happy and what frustrates them – you and your staff can draw on these individual strengths. You'll be better able to help them overcome challenges and let them know they're really valued and accepted for who they are as a person.

At a staff meeting, go over your attendance list. Is there someone on staff or a volunteer who's connected with each young person? Have some children or youth "slipped through the cracks"? If the answer is "yes", decide who will make a special effort to get to know them. It's a good goal to be sure that each young person has one-to-one time each week with an adult. Some programs build time into their schedules that provides opportunities for informal social interactions between adults and young people. This makes a real difference.

Offer Praise

Everyone appreciates praise. Try to say five words of praise for every word of correction. Don't just save your praise for big accomplishments, but notice all the steps along the way, saying things like "Keesha, you're working so hard on that painting!" and "Look, the Red Team got all their equipment out so quickly. Now we're ready to play!" When you praise, make sure your words are true and you're praising a real accomplishment (although it may be a small one). For young children, praise is also a way to refocus negative behavior without scolding and singling out individuals. Instead of "Sit *down* Robert!" try "Almost everyone is sitting quietly in the circle. We can begin soon."

> Don't save your praise for big accomplishments – notice all the steps along the way!

If some children appear to be having a bad day, find the time to sit alongside them while they are working. You may want to ask about the work they're doing at the moment or how their day has been. Discover what approach works best with each child and young person. Learn when to be a teacher, a coach, a mentor or a counselor depending on the situation.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is there time when staff can discuss individual children in your program – their strengths and areas of challenge? Can you identify some children who have "slipped through the cracks" – the ones no one really knows much about?*
- *Do you have a system in place to ensure that every child and young person in your program has at least one staff member he or she feels connected with?*
- *Do young people receive authentic praise from your staff and their peers for their accomplishments?*
- *Are there times in your program schedule that provide opportunities for informal social interactions between adults and young people? (These are times when staff members are free to sit down and engage on a one-to-one basis with the students.)*

Be Genuine, Honest and Sincere

Young people respond very positively to honesty and sincerity. Younger children are excited when they have a glimpse of the real person behind the adult leader role. Older students want to get to know you and love hearing about your childhood experiences once in a while. Let them know a little bit about your likes and dislikes, funny habits or hopes for the future. For adolescents, when adults are honest and sincere, it communicates that adults value and respect them. It's helpful to remember that real relationships take time to develop – don't expect instant connections, but be confident that developing them will matter.
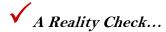
Be Open – and Establish Clear Boundaries

Children and young people are excited when they have a glimpse of adults as real people – they want to get to know you and your staff. Be careful, however, that neither you nor your staff goes too far. Setting appropriate boundaries is crucial. Sometimes this is obvious. It's never alright, for instance, to reveal poor judgments you made in your own life or to agree that another staff person isn't a very nice person even if you think it is true.

The importance of establishing clear boundaries isn't always fully understood by staff members, especially for staff or volunteers who are young themselves, and want to be liked or considered "cool". In many cases, the difference between sharing something about yourself outside of the program and providing inappropriate personal information is a thin line. It's an important topic to be discussed in the orientation of new staff and to be revisited during staff meetings and coaching sessions

Know Your Limits and Know the Law

There will be times when young people in your program bring personal problems to staff as a way of seeking guidance or reaching out for help. There will be other times a child tells a staff person about a serious situation that another child is involved in. There are clear legal and ethical responsibilities that every staff member needs to understand. This is discussed in detail in the previous chapter on physical and emotional safety and should be kept in mind.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff clear about the importance of the adults setting clear boundaries in their interactions with the participants?*
- *Have you established policies and procedures related to the ethical and legal responsibilities of your staff?*
- *Are they being carried out?*
- *How do you know?*

Hire Staff Who Reflect the Community

It's important that your program staff reflect the diversity of the community it's serving. The presence of staff who share the culture and language of program participants and who relate positively to the local youth culture is an important factor in whether young people report feeling known and understood and whether they feel comfortable speaking with an adult about a personal problem. More will be said about this in Chapter 11.

It's also crucial to have enough adults available to encourage relationship building. How many is enough depends on your young people and your program. There's a limit to how many relationships one staff member can sustain while facilitating program activities and

ensuring respectful behavior among program participants. Plan ahead for situations when a young person needs immediate one-on-one attention. Most programs ensure a staffing plan with a ratio of at least one staff to 20 students and work toward involving volunteers to achieve a 1 to 15 ratio.

Pay Attention to the Physical Environment

Opportunities for relationship building can be greatly affected by the nature of your program's physical space. Successful school-based programs have access to the multi-purpose room *and* classrooms *and* computer rooms. Ask yourself a series of questions: What is the nature of your space? Is it dependable and reliable each day? Does it communicate respect for program participants and program staff? Is there a comfortable place for program participants to participate in meetings? Is it quiet enough, free enough from interruptions and distractions, for young people to express themselves, feel heard and listened to? Does the space allow for small groups of young people to work on projects, and for adults and young people to talk quietly one-to-one if needed?

Programs that have managed to secure dedicated, appropriate space are able to create a positive identity for their programs – a powerful tool in recruiting participants. These are places where you will find program staff and children and young people meeting and working together, youth leaders working on their own projects and parents coming in to learn more about the program.

Ensure Consistency

Young people, especially adolescents, need to trust that staff members will be there for them before they can allow relationships to develop. This means that when staff are unable to come to work, you have to have a way to ensure the safe continuation of positive programming. Research has shown that the turnover among adult staff can be deeply felt by children and young people who invest themselves in relationships with adults. Organizational leaders and program staff should consider how to implement practices and policies that support the recruitment and retention of qualified staff and volunteers.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do your recruiting and hiring practices ensure that staff and volunteers reflect the community served by your program and have the ability to communicate with families in their native languages?*
- *Does your staff-to-child ratio allow children and adults to build supportive relationships?*
- *Is the physical space used by the program dependable day-to-day, and is there appropriate space to hold group meetings and conduct group projects?*
- *Does your program have dedicated space including the use of classrooms?*

- *Does your program have a back-up plan when staff members do not come to work to ensure safety and consistency?*
- *Does your program work to minimize staff turnover, especially in the middle of the program year?*

Provide Opportunities for Relationship-Building at all Levels

Efforts to encourage supportive and respectful relationships are most effective and meaningful when they're promoted and modeled at all levels of the program and school. This means that all staff members, parents, and volunteers have opportunities to get to know each other, to receive practical support, and to receive guidance from more experienced people when necessary. Working with young people in an afterschool program, like parenting, is emotionally draining, and program leaders and volunteers need support from their peers and from you!

Staff members who feel isolated will quickly burn out and leave. Many programs provide opportunities for staff to build supportive relationships through staff and program-wide social events, regular staff meetings and group and individual check-ins. Other ways to support staff in building relationships include holding regular meetings, structuring work so that it's done in teams and sending staff members to outside trainings where they can connect with their professional colleagues.

Relationship building requires a range of staff skills.

Relationship building with students requires a range of skills on the part of your staff and attention to individual and interpersonal dynamics. These skills include communication, group development, positive discipline, facilitation, conflict resolution, active listening and strategies that promote team building and cooperation. Staff members also need to have time to communicate with each other and with you about what's really going on with young people.

Ask Students About Their Own Experiences

The most reliable way to judge whether your program is successful in relationship building is to ask young people about their own experiences and feelings. The input of their family members can also provide invaluable information. Staff members are often surprised by what they find out when they take the time to ask. This can be done in small groups or through confidential surveys or a combination of both. The list below provides a sample of the statements you can pose to young people on a survey and ask the extent to which they would agree or disagree:

- People here pay attention to what is going on in my life.
- People here say something nice to me when I do something good.
- There are rules here for how people are supposed to treat each other.

- Rules about how to treat each other are enforced consistently and fairly by adults and students.
- I get chances here to learn about young people who are different from me.
- I feel respected by staff here.
- The staff really listens to me.
- I have good friends here.
- I feel respected by other kids here.
- Someone here would say something to me if something in my life wasn't going right.
- There is someone here who I could go to for help in a crisis, or if I needed to talk about personal problems.

The responses on these surveys will tell you what young people are experiencing, but they won't explain why they feel this way or identify an aspect of your program that might need changing. To understand the meaning of these responses, you must first genuinely honor and value what the young people have to say. Second, you and your staff must facilitate discussion groups with students to share back some of the responses and ask why they think some responded as they did.

Managing the process to ensure that everyone participates is vital. What you and your staff learn in these sessions can *and* should be used to develop and implement a continuous quality improvement process that purposefully integrates youth ideas and support. This might mean anything from re-examining program activities or design to strengthening staff development or reassessing the role volunteers play in providing additional support. Whatever the focus, input from children and young people in your program is a crucial resource for strengthening program quality and keeping children and youth engaged.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your staff uphold expectations for themselves and program participants?*
- *Are these expectations well communicated and known by all involved in the program, including school personnel and participants' family members?*
- *Does your staff promote supportive and respectful relationships among all adults?*
- *Does your staff have the training and on-going support they need to meet all expectations?*
- *Does your staff ask children and young people about the experiences they have with your staff and their peers?*
- *Are changes, if needed, made based on what is learned through these assessments?*

Reap the Rewards of Positive, Supportive Relationships

As the experience of mutual respect and trust increases between program leaders and students, you'll see real differences in *everyone's* attitudes and behavior. It becomes easier for both staff and young people to voice their ideas and opinions. When people, young and old, learn to communicate effectively, they're much better equipped to engage in learning experiences together and resolve conflicts when they arise in healthy and respectful ways. And they feel safer knowing that they can solve problems and can get help if they need it.

> As mutual trust increases, you'll see real differences in everyone's attitudes and behavior.

When students have opportunities to talk about how they want to be treated and to listen to what others have to say, they not only have a chance to express their own feelings but also to reflect on their own behavior and how it impacts others. As they become more aware of the needs and feelings of others and link these to their own, they're able to develop the kind of empathy that's essential for them to really connect with others on an emotional level throughout their lifetimes. Develop this practice in a consistent way and you'll discover that the quality of your program will improve dramatically!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #6
BUILD AND MAINTAIN SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessment for you as a program director or site director, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which your program is especially strong and those where it can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're doing extremely well in this area, and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	Supportive relationship building is an explicit goal in our program and at our sites.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We treat every young person as an individual and ensure that he or she is known, valued and accepted.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We engage program participants in establishing group agreements regarding how we want to be treated and will treat others.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Group agreements are posted, referred to regularly and enforced fairly and with consistency.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We intentionally help children learn the skills they need to build healthy, productive relationships with adults and their peers and to keep the group agreements.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Our program provides young people with ongoing opportunities to reflect on and be recognized for their accomplishments and those of others.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Our program takes time to acknowledge individuals, adults and children, who are new to our program or preparing to leave our program.	1	2	3	4	5

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
8	Our program has a system in place to ensure we know each child as a person and not just as a participant in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
9	We provide ways for young people to get to know and respect each other through check-in circles and similar approaches.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Our staff is aware of the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries with our young people.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Our staff is culturally reflective of the communities we serve and can communicate in the first language of many of our families.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We provide site staff with time to personally engage with youth participants and to respond to requests for guidance and support.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We have very few staff absences and low turnover, ensuring the continuity of relationships between adults and young people.	1	2	3	4	5
14	We maintain an adult to child ratio that ensures the safety of participants and promotes the development of supportive relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We regularly gather and act on input from participants about whether they feel respected by peers and adults, feel safe to draw on adults for guidance and support and feel known by their peers and program staff	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #7
ENSURE MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Most afterschool programs equate student participation with attendance and let it go at that. If the number of places they can fund is filled and students are present on a regular basis, they consider themselves successful. Others provide opportunities for *some* students to become leaders by establishing councils that allow a few students to make decisions on behalf of the larger group or creating peer mentor or counselor teams.

High quality programs go well beyond this. They define participation as a practice that gives *every* child and young person in their program opportunities to set goals, create plans, design projects, solve problems, make decisions and take actions in areas that directly affect them. They systematically develop gateways for participation and ensure that this leads to a sense of belonging, ownership, investment and skill building.

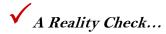## Use Participation as a Tool for Empowering Students

Meaningful youth participation is a critical avenue through which students develop and strengthen their skills, self-confidence and self-reliance – no matter what activities they're engaged in. Leadership, which is an outcome of participation, comes in many forms and happens in many ways. Although we often associate it with team captains, class presidents, student councils, peer mentors or students in high visibility positions, this definition automatically limits the number of children and young people who can become leaders. Not all them are going to be able to take on these kinds of roles, or want to or should have to.

A more encompassing interpretation of participation includes everyone from the child who passes out materials to a young person who intervenes with peers to mediate a disagreement, serves on a committee that plans a party or helps a friend with his or her homework. It's about creating situations in which students are increasingly empowered to take on greater responsibility for their learning, their attitudes and their actions – both individually and with others.

Getting to this level requires a strong belief in the potential of children and young people and a commitment to helping them achieve it. It also means acknowledging the trade-off that will be required when this happens. The quality of a performance of the movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* that's directed by a sixth grader won't be as good as one directed by a staff member who's taking theater arts courses in college. The sets won't be as attractive or well constructed if they're designed and built by fifth graders and the playbills won't look very professional if they're put together by fourth graders. The real issue is *so what?* If the quality of the production counts most, there's no doubt you'll give responsibility to one of your staff members. If developing problem solving, creative thinking, decision-making and collaboration skills matters most, you'll give students the opportunity to develop these skills through their active participation in and responsibility for the process.

It requires a great deal of thought and planning to make this happen – and may require your staff to approach their work differently. Those who don't have a lot of experience with this are likely to confuse empowerment and leadership strategies with the absence of rules and boundaries, or simply turning full responsibility over to students. This isn't what it means and at best doing this is likely to be very frustrating for them and for the children and young people involved.

As discussed in Chapter 3, empowerment is about providing support, guidance and training and relinquishing control appropriately and gradually. Students can't assume responsibility if they don't know how to and most won't be eager to actively participate until their level of self-confidence and your trust allows them to feel comfortable taking risks. Just as your staff needs you to be a guide-by-their-side to do their best work, so also do children and young people need your program leaders to be the same for them..

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *How do you and your staff define youth participation?*
- *Have you gone far enough with this to really provide opportunities for all children and young people in your program to fully participate?*
- *How do your staff members really feel about empowering students to take on greater responsibilities for their learning?*
- *How do you know?*

Link Youth Participation with the Outcomes You Want

The real value of participation is that it creates a sense of personal efficacy – or feeling of effectiveness, usefulness, value and the ability to do something that makes a difference no matter how small or large it may be. Over time, children and young people learn to develop and internalize this sense on their own, but this isn't likely to happen in the beginning.

Regardless of their ages, students can feel valued just by helping others with a project they have some experience with or knowledge about – when what they do is recognized by staff members and their peers. They'll know they've made a difference, but it won't be as real to them until someone they respect or admire tells them so. While it's equally important for both a second grader and an eighth grader to become active participants and leaders, the kinds of things they'll be able to, want to do or feel valuable in doing, obviously won't be the same. The younger student may well think of himself or herself as a leader when he or she is chosen to do something as simple as taking a message to a site director, or distributing supplies or singing at a convalescent home.

Neither of the first two will have much impact on an older student and might be thought of as a chore rather than an opportunity for leadership. Receiving notes of appreciation from old folks may well make a difference because they connect community service with being

useful and valuable and having influence over how other people feel. Creating opportunities for participation is critical – and so is doing this in ways that are the most meaningful to children and young people and not just to you or your staff.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff clear about why participation defined in this way is vital to the development of children and young people in your program?*
- *Do you understand the importance of connecting participation with the critical youth development outcome of developing a sense of personal efficacy?*
- *Are you sure that the avenues you're providing for this to occur are really meaningful to students?*

Create a Solid Framework for Participation

A solid framework for increasing meaningful participation includes a combination of what we call fading facilitation and cascading leadership. Fading facilitation happens when your staff *allows* their direct involvement to recede into the background as children and young people become more prepared to *and* capable of taking on greater responsibility.

Cascading leadership occurs when young people pass their leadership onto others coming up after them. Staff members can learn to support cascading leadership by giving younger or less experienced members of the group opportunities to learn leadership skills, and by encouraging older or more experienced members to pass on their skills to others. In both cases, students are apprentices. Sometimes they'll need more support and sometimes less. To do this effectively, your staff must:

- Be clear about their expectations,
- Create an environment of trust by not being judgmental,
- Offer suggestions and encouragement in ways that are easily understood and relevant to students,
- Give feedback in positive, constructive ways, and
- Recognize *each* student's progress and identify successes as they occur.

They'll have to become increasingly proficient at knowing when to become more involved and more directive and when to move aside and allow the process to unfold on its own. Staying on top of the ebb and flow of this process is critical. The important thing is for staff to gradually release responsibility – but not walk away.

When your staff members see themselves as coaches, they'll be better equipped not only to provide support in appropriate and beneficial ways, but also to hold themselves accountable for the kind of progress that's made toward truly authentic youth participation. When their communication with students is open, ongoing and authentic, they'll know what's

working and what's not. They'll be able to anticipate impending problems and act before things fall apart, opportunities are missed or potential successes are undercut. And, they'll be able celebrate successes in real time when it's most meaningful, appreciated and inspiring.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is your staff trained and supported in understanding what fading facilitation and cascading leadership really mean, regardless of the words you use to describe these processes?*

- *Do they understand how important it is for them to meet individual students and groups where they are and help them take on more responsibility as they become more competent and confident in what they're doing?*

- *Are you there to provide the support, guidance and encouragement your staff may need to do this well?*

Be Sensitive to Different Styles and Experiences

Learning styles, personalities, past experiences and ages make a big difference in the kinds of participation that work best for individual students. Different cultures define participation in different ways. In some, participation is demonstrated through quiet attention and in others action counts most.

Some children are most easily engaged by listening, while others won't really connect until what's happening is physical. Some may feel much more comfortable sitting quietly and learning before they step up to take an active role. Others won't hesitate to leap right in. It's important for you and your staff to be aware of and honor these different styles.

The wise and well trained and supported member of your staff will also make use of the natural leadership ability of the class clown, the leaders of group opinion and fashion and even the one who regularly voices group resentments. Keep in mind that young people are sometimes labeled trouble-makers when they're really just energetic or expressing a need to assert their independence. When young people lack positive opportunities for leadership, they'll take on negative leadership roles. Have your staff try giving them a position of responsibility. If they're older, let them help a younger group of children with an activity, put them in charge of a project or let them teach something to their peers.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your staff take a one-size-fits-all approach to participation or are they sensitive to individual differences in the style, approach and receptivity of the students with whom they're working?*

- *Do they look for underlying causes or motivations for different kinds of participation, both positive and negative?*

- *Do they know how to deal with these?*

Offer Opportunities Students Wouldn't Otherwise Experience

Many students in afterschool programs live in families that don't have the financial resources to offer their children the kinds of experiences that those who are more affluent take for granted. Their mothers aren't soccer moms and their fathers aren't Little League dads. They aren't enrolled in karate classes and they're not taking piano lessons. They don't take vacations to exotic places and they don't attend concerts or go to the movies very often. Many haven't been to zoos in their communities or traveled 20 miles to see the ocean or a national park.

Providing these kinds of experiences expands the horizons of children and young people in critical ways. Not only do students observe more of the world around them, they learn how to navigate in a much wider variety of situations and circumstances – a key factor in building their self-confidence and encouraging them to take risks that help them grow and develop.

For example: when students who have never been away from home participate in an overnight camping trip, a whole new world opens up to them – both externally and internally. They learn to confront and overcome their fears of the unknown and they appreciate the importance of learning to work together in different ways and see connections between themselves and others through new lenses.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you regularly offer opportunities for children and young people to participate in experiences that are new to them away from your site?*
- *Do you recognize the value this has for them in building their self-confidence and becoming more familiar with the world around them?*
- *Do you prepare students for these experiences in advance, support them during the process and talk with them afterwards about how they felt and what it meant to them?*

Provide Opportunities for Students to be of Service to Others

Everyone feels more important and valued when they are able to use what they know and how they feel to be of service others – whatever this may involve. It's when we, and children and young people, don't have these feelings that we become more isolated and discouraged. Our self-esteem is built on our personal assessments of our own worth as human beings, and as contributing members of our families, communities and society. If we don't feel connected, we won't be able to develop empathy with others and we won't be able to fully realize our potential.

Being of service to others is critical to each of us as individuals. Providing opportunities for children and young people to have these experiences is essential to developing high

quality programs *and* to producing outcomes that reflect positive youth development. Service can take any number of different forms and occur in a variety of different ways. It can be as simple as an eight-year-old helping a second grader with homework or as complex as designing a series of community-based activities that will improve the quality of the environment in your community.

It can be as easy as giving a kindergarten child the opportunity to hand out crayons or as challenging as preparing older students to speak at a city council or school board meeting. Setting up e-mail communications with children in other countries who are less fortunate or giving students a chance to help young people who are going though crises, such as what's happening in South and Southeast Asia, Iraq, Sudan and other parts of the world can help children and young people feel that they can participate globally as well as locally.

The important thing is that children and young people have opportunities to give of themselves in ways that make a difference and begin to incorporate this in the way they see themselves in relationship to others. They'll rise to the occasion, whatever it may be, and it will make a real difference in their lives now and in the future. By redefining the way you approach student participation, you'll be moving your site to a much higher level of program quality!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #7
ENSURE MEANINGFUL YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as a self-assessment for you as a Program Director or Site Director, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which your program is especially strong and those where it can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're doing extremely well in this area, and everyone would agree.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	We define participation as a practice that gives *every* child and young person in our program opportunities to set goals, create plans, design projects, solve problems, make decisions and take actions in areas that directly affect them.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We systematically develop gateways for participation and ensure that this leads to a sense of belonging, ownership, investment and skill building.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We use participation as a process through which students become increasingly empowered to take on greater responsibilities in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We create opportunities for students to develop and internalize a sense of personal efficacy.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We understand the concept of fading facilitation and use it appropriately.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We provide opportunities for every student to develop leadership skills.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We understand and practice cascading leadership in ways that provide new opportunities for younger children.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We're aware of and sensitive to the different learning styles and experiences of each individual student in our program.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
9	We create a wide range of approaches that address different learning styles in the activities in which we're engaged.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We're sensitive to the different cultural interpretations of appropriate participation and honor these.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We recognize and applaud the many ways in which students participate in meaningful ways and tell them so.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We provide opportunities for students to participate in both individual and group activities.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We have close connections and positive relationships with organizations and individuals in our community and use these to expand opportunities for student participation.	1	2	3	4	5
14	We recognize the value of community service and the positive impact helping others has on students, and we provide opportunities for this to happen.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We involve young people in the design and implementation of ongoing program assessments	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circle Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #8
CREATE CHALLENGING AND ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

High quality afterschool programs recognize that engaging and challenging learning experiences provide young people with opportunities to expand their understanding and knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live and master new concepts and skills. They know that enrichment and recreational activities are engaging when they tap into the young participants' natural curiosity and interest in discovery and when they serve to motivate, rather than discourage, their eagerness to try new activities. They understand that activities are challenging when they require participants to stretch beyond their current range of knowledge and test their skills. They design experiences in ways that:

- Motivate children and young people to learn because the activities interest them,
- Give them opportunities to develop, strengthen and expand their skills, knowledge, and abilities, and
- Help them internalize a personal sense of mastery and competence.

As this happens, children and young people become more attentive and receptive to learning and excited about the process. When these opportunities are coupled with the support students need to succeed, their accomplishments take on an importance larger than the particular skill they've learned – they contribute to their perceptions of themselves as able learners and create a *can do* spirit. This serves to fuel their desire and motivation for future successes *and* inspires them to take active responsibility for their own learning.

Offer a Variety of Learning Opportunities

The most successful afterschool programs offer a broad spectrum of learning opportunities that allow children and young people to explore new subjects and disciplines that might otherwise not be available to them *and* create an environment in which they showcase talents that may not previously have been recognized or appreciated in other settings.

You'll find that by doing this you'll attract children and young people who have different learning styles, including those who haven't had much success in traditional classroom settings. As their interest increases and they have more opportunities to experience success, their confidence will grow and they'll become more enthusiastic about learning in all areas of their lives – including school.

Ensuring that activities are age-appropriate and based on young people's needs and interests and their stages of development is essential. When children and young people are

interested in and succeed at something, they have a genuine sense of pride and accomplishment, a readiness to share their learning with others and an excitement about doing more.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your program offer a wide enough range of activities to capture students' interest?*
- *Are the activities you and your staff have developed really exciting, challenging and engaging to children and young people in your program?*
- *Do they provide students with ongoing opportunities to be successful?*
- *How do you know?*

Incorporate Student Interests in Program Activities

Promoting positive learning experiences begins with focusing on student interests, needs and abilities – and then incorporating this knowledge into decisions about how best to engage them in activities that will achieve broader goals. Regardless of the teaching and learning methods you employ, it's important to incorporate young people's interests in your program.

> Regardless of the teaching and learning methods you use, or the approaches you take, it's important to incorporate students' interests in your program.

One way to do this is to survey the young people in your program about their interests, and then work to incorporate opportunities to learn academic and life skills into activities that reflect these interests. You can also build on their existing knowledge and skills. When introducing a new topic or project, begin by allowing young people to show what they already know. There may be some true *experts* among them. By building off the momentum of their knowledge and prior experiences, you can help them both test and deepen their present understanding.

Be sure that the activities you include are relevant to them. Don't second-guess whether this is the case. It's crucial for your staff to understand students' life contexts, including their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and to have the flexibility to design activities that make sense to them. Hiring staff from the community, involving neighborhood volunteers and parents, and drawing on their expertise can help you shape a more culturally sensitive and effective program – and one that's meaningful to students.

When you ask young people about the activities they want, let them know up front what financial limitations, if any, there may be. If they come up with ideas that can't be implemented, give them honest reasons why. If they want a DJ club or a hip-hop dance class and you don't have the funding needed to make this happen, recognize that it may be more difficult to engage them. Trust that they will understand your constraints and work

hard to raise the money or create the kinds of community partnerships that can make this happen.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you know what students in your program are really interested in?*
- *Has your staff incorporated student interests into program activities?*
- *Are you and your staff sensitive to the importance of providing programming that's relevant to student's lives?*
- *Are you responsive to students' interests and honest with them about what's financially possible and what's not?*
- *Are you continually seeking new funding sources to support the activities students are most interested in?*

Draw on Your Staff's Talents and Strengths

Just as it's important for you to draw on student interests, it's essential that you give your staff opportunities to use their skills, talents, expertise and experience in designing program activities. Not only will this help them feel more confident, competent and valuable, it will also serve to expand the awareness and the knowledge of students who may not yet have been exposed to things that might become very important to them now or in the future.

If a program leader is an experienced woodcrafter, it's a real mistake not to include this as one of your program components. If a staff member has spent several years with a ballet folkloric troupe, don't miss the chance to expose children and young people to this and give them a chance to learn. If someone is an amateur photographer, include this as one of your offerings. If there's a golfer on your team, add this to the list.

> If a member of your staff has performed with a ballet folklorico troupe, don't miss the opportunity to include this activity in your program.

If members of your staff love working with kids but don't have any special skills or talents they think they can bring to your program, provide them with resources and materials that make it easy for them to work with children in exciting and engaging ways in the areas in which students have expressed interest. Many packaged afterschool materials are readily available and can be used by almost anyone – and several of these are listed in the section on Resources. The important thing is to be sure that your staff is knowledgeable about and interested in what they're doing!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you taken the time to discover and uncover the talents and skills of your staff?*

- *Are you using their skills to create exciting learning opportunities for your students?*
- *Are you providing the resources, materials, training and support your staff needs to develop activities that are meaningful and appropriately challenging?*

Link Activities with the Development of Life Skills

When planning programs, staff members often go straight to lining up activities to fill a determined period of time without thinking through what the specific learning goals are or how what they will do might impact their program as a whole. Instead of focusing exclusively on the content of activities, work with staff to determine what kinds of knowledge and skills you want students to acquire or strengthen over time through their participation in your program. These might be academic skills or study skills or leadership or team skills – but these are typically too vague to be easily understood or integrated into an activity or a project learning experience.

Focus instead on *specifics*. Begin with a discussion about the emotional, social, cognitive and physical skills children and young people really need to be successful in school and in life. Ask your staff to identify what they believe are the most important of these. It's very likely they'll come up with a list that includes problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking, getting along well with others, empathy, perseverance, a positive attitude, self-confidence, self-esteem, verbal and written communication skills, a sense of humor, personal responsibility, resiliency, goal setting, small and large motor skills and more.

> In the long run, it's much more important for a 5th grader to learn to carry a project through to completion than to learn to build a castle.

Almost all of these can be significantly developed and strengthened through project learning, and at least some can improve through any kind of meaningful activity. The point is not to leave this to chance. Keep in mind that in the long run it's much more important for a fifth grader to learn to carry a project through to completion than it is for him or her to learn how to build a castle or know more about medieval times. It's much more valuable for a seventh grader to increase his or her self-confidence than it is to simply have an opportunity to be a member of a cheer leading team. And, it's much more important for kids to learn to relate well with each other than it is to get a little better at playing basketball. By linking activities with outcomes, you'll be making a real difference in the lives of children and young people in your program. Take the time to do this. It makes a huge difference in building their capacity to acquire life-long skills and it distinguishes high quality programs from those that fall short.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is your staff clear about the importance of building life skills as well as helping students acquire new knowledge?*

- *Is the focus of what your staff does on activities alone, or does it link activities with outcomes?*
- *Have you taken time to work with your staff on developing these kinds of connections?*
- *Have you assessed the difference it's making?*

Address Different Learning Styles

We all learn in different ways. Some of us are visual learners. We need to see things to really absorb and connect with them. We remember more when we read a book than when it's read to us and follow instructions better when they're in writing rather than when they're explained verbally. Others of us are auditory learners. We process information best through oral explanations. And still others of us are kinesthetic learners. We respond best to physical, hands-on experiences. Most of us learn through a combination of these, with preferences for one or more over the others. The same is true for children and young people in your program.

To address this, begin by intentionally integrating different learning styles into all of your program activities. Keep in mind that Sesame Street has a powerful impact not just because it's professionally produced by some of the most creative writers in children's programming, but because it deliberately engages every viewer by addressing every learning style. By doing the same thing, you'll not only engage the students you're working with, you'll create opportunities for each to shine!

> In a cooperative learning model, students learn they can reach their goals if and only if other students also reach their goals.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your staff understand that children and young people learn in different ways?*
- *Are they attentive to addressing a variety of learning styles in the approaches they use?*
- *Do they have the support they need to become increasingly competent and confident in making this happen?*
- *How do you know?*

Strengthen Cooperative Learning Skills

Both cooperative learning and project-based learning provide opportunities for children and young people to work and learn together, to spend time learning new things and to acquire a better understanding of how they learn. This is especially important in an era

when the imperatives of *No Child Left Behind* legislation and school reform are increasingly focused on structured, teacher-driven instruction.

Cooperative learning is also vital to helping students develop real world skills that will prepare them for their future in the workplace. Not only will this benefit them in learning how to get a good job and hang on to it, it will provide them with the attributes that almost everyone seems to agree are the most important in the 21st Century – the ability to communicate effectively, to get along well with people, to solve problems and make decisions and to think critically and creatively.

Afterschool settings offer the kind of flexibility that makes it possible for students to learn in alternative ways and to value working together rather than in competition with each other. In a cooperative learning model, students learn that they can reach their goals if and only if the other students in their groups also reach their goals. The essential elements of this process can be described in this way:

- Children and young people actively participate,
- Staff become learners at times and students sometimes teach,
- Respect is given to every member of the group,
- Projects and questions that arise interest and challenge students,
- Diversity is celebrated and everyone's contributions are valued,
- Students learn skills for resolving conflicts when they happen,
- Group members draw upon their past experience and knowledge,
- Goals are clearly identified and used as a guide,
- Research tools such as Internet access are made available,
- Students are invested in their own learning, and
- Every group member has an important role to play.

Cooperative learning has been shown to be a highly effective way for young people to achieve their learning goals by engaging with a diverse group of participants with different views, backgrounds and ideas. It's also an important approach for helping all students strengthen their academic performance and develop the interpersonal skills they'll need to be successful in a multicultural world.

Incorporate Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is a widely used and highly effective approach to cooperative learning. Students work collaboratively over a period of time to investigate a topic area, develop or construct a product, create a performance or solve a problem related to real-world issues. It can also be an effective way to reinforce what's going on during the school day. It can also connect students with the wider community and increase their knowledge as well as their life skills.

Your staff can solicit ideas for projects by brainstorming with program participants, designing their own approaches or expanding on published materials or other resources – or a combination of all of these. Topics should be closely related to students' everyday experiences or interests. This allows them to raise relevant questions and offers the added value of enabling them to share what they may already know or use their talents and skills in new ways. This process requires that children and young people:

- Develop strong communication and teamwork skills,
- Are able to consider and incorporate different points of view, and
- Learn to make decisions and solve problems in a positive, constructive way.

It's important to have a system in place to provide guidance and support in each of these areas. This demands sound planning on the part of your staff to ensure that when students are tackling their projects they have a framework within which to work – as well as the freedom to organize the process and activities necessary to achieve something that's meaningful and important to all of them. This usually involves helping them organize their activities, conduct research, solve problems and synthesize information across disciplines. It requires both training and coaching for most staff to be able to do this effectively.

Most projects lead to some sort of culminating experience or exhibit. When this happens, and is known in advance, it serves to motivate participants to develop a high quality product *and* offers them an opportunity for recognition and celebration. It also tends to make them much more enthusiastic about learning. The following statements were made by students in an afterschool program and are typical of the positive experiences students have with project-based learning, both at the elementary and middle school levels:

- We got to choose what to work on.
- We learned that we can make a difference.
- We had to do something and we did it!
- We weren't afraid to try things we didn't know because we could do things over until we got them right.
- Everyone felt needed and had a part – nobody got left out.
- We didn't need to use our texts, and we were really doing things and learning something.
- We were using skills we knew we would need in our jobs, like using time wisely, being responsible and not letting the group down.
- There was an audience for the product we made and we knew we had to meet the deadline and present it to them.
- We learned that when the real world evaluates what you do you'd better have your act together.

Each of these responses demonstrates that children and young people value what they learn through this kind of process and that they're clearly aware of the *value* the experience had for them. Notice that not a word was said about the actual project itself!

Reinforce and Expand on Classroom Learning

Increasingly, afterschool programs are being asked to support school day learning. This can be accomplished without losing a youth-friendly afterschool environment or trying to replicate the learning methods of traditional classrooms. Begin by becoming knowledgeable about the curricula and build on this by including themes, projects or activities that enrich young people's interest and understanding of what they're being exposed to during the school day. Keep in mind that classroom teachers are wonderful resources for coming up with ideas and providing planning resources and materials.

Academic standards, which will be discussed in greater length later, are also a great resource for strengthening student skills in a variety of critical areas. Typically published by state departments of education, these describe what students should know and be able to do at specific grade levels including reading, writing, math, social science, fine arts, performing arts and physical fitness. Not only will your knowledge of these standards provide ideas on how to enrich your program activities, they'll also give you and your staff a common language and framework that principals and certificated teachers will appreciate.

> Students are much more likely to be excited about school when what they're learning is personally meaningful.

What's important is that you and your staff don't miss the chance to help students gain a greater understanding of what they're learning formally by providing them with opportunities to experience these things in contexts that are real and meaningful to them. For example, in some states fourth graders are expected to know how to use two-dimensional coordinate grids to represent points and graph lines and simple figures. They're much more likely to value this process if they're able to apply it in area that makes sense to them, such as tracking sports or weather statistics or the population growth of their own communities. If seventh graders are studying the U.S. Constitution, they'll probably be more intrigued if they learn something about how the backgrounds and experiences of the framers influenced their thinking.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff aware of what's going on during the school day?*
- *Are you able to build and expand on this to making learning more relevant and exciting to students?*
- *Have you and your staff taken the time to learn about state standards and align your activities with these?*

- *Do you encourage your staff to be creative about how they go about doing this and have you supported them along the way?*

Help Students Recognize Their Accomplishments

Children and young people are intrinsically invested in making progress and achieving their goals. You and your staff can play a major role in doing this by helping them learn to set and achieve their own goals, measure their progress and refine and improve their work. By providing on-going feedback and recognition for their accomplishments, and their efforts, you'll help reinforce their sense of achievement.

> When students are recognized for their achievements, their self-confidence soars!

This will also be strengthened if people outside of your program share in this process. This can take place through performances, exhibits or presentations of completed projects, or assemblies where each student has a chance to showcase the new skills and talents that he or she has acquired through experiences in the program and is acknowledged for his or her special contributions. You'll also find that when students know in advance that this will happen, their sense of accountability for deadlines and excellence in what they're doing soars. After a successful event, the effect on a group's sense of community and on each individual's experience can be profound.

Creating journals, portfolios or files can also be an important record of student progress. For younger children, this might include something as simple as a series of monthly self-portraits or personal journals. For older youth who might be developing a set of skills over time through the arts or technology, communicate your project learning goals and ask them to develop personal goals that are important to them. At the end of an activity or project, make a practice of having your staff sit down with students to review their accomplishments and express their own feelings about what has happened and what it means to them.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you and your staff established a variety of ways in which students are recognized for their accomplishments?*
- *Do you take time to be sure that students personally are aware of and acknowledge the good work they've done?*

Assess What's Working and What Needs Improvement

There are three ways to assess the extent to which your program is really providing exiting, engaging and appropriately challenging learning experiences. The first is to track attendance carefully. If students consistently participate and your biggest challenge is to

secure additional funding to include children and young people on waiting lists, you can be fairly certain that this is happening. If you discover that students are dropping out, find out whether this is happening in particular groups with particular staff members or if it's occurring across your program – and address these issues quickly and appropriately.

> The only way you can really know what's going on is to spend a lot of your time with Program Leaders and students.

Second, spend time observing what's really going on. It's not enough to have copies of your staff's lesson plans or brief summaries of project-based learning topics. The only way you can really know whether what you think is happening really is taking place is to spend time with program leaders and each group of students. If you approach this positively, both staff and students will feel valued and eager to show you what they're doing and let you know how it's going. And, they'll be more open to asking for your assistance and support if they need it.

Third, one of the most reliable ways of knowing whether your program is achieving its goals in this area is to ask children and young people what *they* think. High quality afterschool programs make a commitment to regularly gather input from participants on how they're experiencing what's happening for them. Consider a survey that asks students to respond to a variety of questions in a simple, straight-forward way by telling you how they feel. These can be used as a starting point:

- I learn how to do new things here.
- The activities here are fun.
- I am learning things that I'm interested in.
- I get to do things here that I don't get to do anywhere else.
- I get to learn how to do things I didn't think I could do.
- People care if I do my best.
- I'm getting better at doing things I care about.
- I can set my own goals around the things I learn here.

The input you receive should be used as a key component of a process of continuous quality improvement. In some cases, you may need to re-examine the activities that are being offered and perhaps even redesign the content and approaches that are being used. In others, you may discover that your goals are really being achieved – and even exceeding your expectations!

When you and your staff motivate children and young people to learn because the activities you offer interest and engage them, it will make a real difference in the quality of your program. When you give students opportunities to strengthen and expand their skills, knowledge, and abilities, they'll rise to the challenge. And, when you help them internalize a personal sense of mastery and competence, you'll see amazing and lasting results!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #8
CREATE ENGAGING AND CHALLENGING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessment for you as a Program Director or Site Director, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which your program is especially strong and those where it can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're doing extremely well in this area, and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	We assess the interests of program participants and to the extent possible design activities to meet their interests.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We value the talents, expertise and skills our staff brings to our program and use these as effectively as we can.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Our approaches and the materials we use are designed to reflect the many ways in which young people learn.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We intentionally link learning activities to positive outcomes in life skills.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We intentionally build on and expand upon what's being taught during the school day	1	2	3	4	5
6	We offer ongoing opportunities for young people to learn diverse skills and explore new subjects and disciplines they might not otherwise experience.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We ensure that young people have ongoing opportunities to establish their personal goals and assess their progress over time.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
8	We emphasize both individual and collaborative learning skills and provide opportunities for young people to work and learn together in small groups and with peers of different backgrounds and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
9	We offer activities that are linked to young people's personal experiences, identities, histories, cultures and communities.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We offer project-based activities that include culminating experiences that promote a sense of completion and accomplishment.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We intentionally embed learning opportunities into program activities in ways that reinforce and strengthen academic skills.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We structure activities in ways that build decision-making, problem solving and critical thinking skills.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We regularly gather information and act on input from participating youth that tells whether they are learning new things	1	2	3	4	5
14	We regularly gather information from students that demonstrate that they believe the activities we offer are appropriately challenging and engaging.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We consistently have a high level of attendance at our site.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Students who are not enrolled want to be, and we have an active waiting list at our site.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #9
STRENGTHEN STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

In an era of high stakes testing, *No Child Left Behind* legislation and comprehensive budget cuts, the purpose of afterschool programs is being redefined. Programs are increasingly expected to provide children and young people with a safe, positive learning environment – *and* reinforce learning, support student academic achievement, increase attendance during the school day and help reduce grade retention.

While this may seem overwhelming, the *value* of doing this and doing it well shouldn't be underestimated. Academic performance is only one indicator of a young person's success, but it's undeniably one of the most important. The question isn't *whether* we should support children and young people in this way, but *how* we can create authentic partnerships with schools and develop approaches that are student-centered, appropriately challenging and fun!

Expand Rather than Extend the School Day

Programs with the best results in supporting student academic achievement *expand* rather than extend the school day. They know that consistent participation is the key to building skills, and that what they offer students must be exciting and engaging for this to happen.

They purposefully design their programs in ways that strengthen cognitive skills *and* spark an enthusiasm for learning. They support students in becoming good problem solvers, decision-makers and critical thinkers. They build their self-confidence and provide opportunities for them to experience and internalize a sense of personal growth, progress and success in all areas of their lives.

They align afterschool activities with the school day and go beyond what's formally taught to offering creative, hands-on ways for students to *apply* what they've learned through real-life experiences that interest them. They develop learning strategies to help students strengthen and reinforce their skills. They integrate approaches and create balanced programs that make learning relevant and rewarding.

> Successful programs integrate academic approaches in a balanced and exciting way.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you clear about the importance of strengthening student academic skills?*
- *Is your programming an expansion or an extension of the school day?*
- *Are you willing to do what it takes to develop a balanced program that builds student academic skills and youth development skills?*

Focus Your Efforts on Eight Priorities

High quality afterschool programs focus their efforts in eight priority areas. In combination, these have consistently proven to make the most difference in developing the kinds of relationships, systems and approaches that help strengthen student academic achievement. These include:

1. Developing strong, positive relationships with principals,
2. Hiring an Academic Coach,
3. Providing meaningful homework assistance,
4. Establishing and maintaining connections with classroom teachers,
5. Using approaches that engage and excite students,
6. Aligning program activities with state content standards,
7. Measuring and managing student progress, and
8. Continually working toward making a shared vision a reality.

Build Positive Relationships with Principals

No matter where your program is in its development, it's critical to find out what principals really think is important, what motivates them and what concerns them. The only way to do this is to spend time with them and ask open-ended questions that encourage them to speak freely and frankly. Some may see your program as an opportunity for remedial work with their lowest performing students. Others may view it as a chance for children and young people to access the kinds of enrichment experiences no longer available during the school day or limited by the financial resources of their families. Still others may regard it as childcare or as a chance for students to have help with homework and not much more.

> Don't overstate how much your program can do to strengthen student academic achievement -- and don't undersell the possibilities of what can happen.

The important thing is to *meet principals where they are.* If their top priority for your program is academic achievement, ask them what strategies they are using and how your staff might be of assistance. Honor their expertise and experiences and let them know you value *and* need what they and their teaching staff can bring to your program.

Don't overstate how much your program can do and don't undersell the possibilities of what can happen. Don't miss the opportunity to point out that students who attend high quality programs three hours a day, five days a week during the school year have the equivalent of *90 additional days a year* of educationally enriching experiences. If your program hasn't yet achieved the results identified below, let them know that there's solid research and experience, which demonstrate that:

- Students who have consistent high quality assistance with their homework are much more likely to learn more and get better grades,

- Students who regularly attend high quality programs measurably improve their standardized test scores,

- English Language Learners develop oral and written communication skills much more quickly than their peers not enrolled in programs, and

- Truancy, disciplinary actions, grade-level retention and school vandalism significantly decline – saving schools and districts countless dollars in lost revenue and avoidable expenditures.

Many principals are concerned about the opportunities that children and young people are missing because of the emphasis on core subject areas. If this is the case, reinforce the importance of exposing students to a variety of new ideas and opportunities that help them become more knowledgeable and enthusiastic learners. If they talk about the importance of having a safe, positive place to be during the hours they're most at risk, reinforce this and add a few of the ways that your program reconnects neighborhoods with the school and supports parents in becoming better partners in their children's education.

Once you've initiated this process, stay connected! Principals want to be informed and they want to provide guidance. Establish a regular time to meet with them and respond immediately to any and all of their requests or concerns. This will build trust and pave the way for the development of positive working relationships and the creation of a shared vision and authentic partnership.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you spend enough time cultivating positive relationships with principals?*

- *Are you attentive to their needs, interests, concerns and hopes?*

- *Are you prepared to explain how your program can forward the achievement of their goals?*

- *Are you clear about why their involvement is vital to the achievement of your program's goals?*

Invest in an Academic Coach

Hiring a credentialed teacher to serve as an academic coach for afterschool staff is the *one action* that seems to consistently produce positive results in the area of student academic achievement. The approach is practical, easily implemented and relatively inexpensive. Typically paid about $4,000 a year for five hours a week or so of consulting services, academic coaches are responsible for:

- Aligning afterschool activities with the school day language arts and math curricula and state content standards,

- Training, coaching and mentoring afterschool staff members in providing homework assistance, academic support and behavior management, and
- Advocating for programs and trouble shooting when problems arise with their faculty colleagues over the use of classroom space, missing items and the like.

> Hiring an academic coach is the one action that consistently produces positive results in strengthening student academic achievement.

The key is to work with principals to select certificated teachers who *really* understand the value of balanced programming and integrated approaches, relate well with paraprofessionals and can identify what's working, what isn't and what needs to be done. Through direct observations, academic coaches can assess situations and offer solutions. They can uncover problems that are not obvious to most afterschool staff and recommend changes that should be made. They can be invaluable guides-by-the side and bridges to the kind of partnerships with schools that are well worth developing.

In addition to being extremely helpful to your staff, including an academic coach as a member of your afterschool team is appealing to principals and faculty members because it underscores the importance you place on academics and demonstrates that you value credentialed teachers as experts. This can and will make a huge difference in developing positive relationship with schools and creating a shared vision – both of which are vital to the success of your program.

Rethink the Way You Provide Homework Assistance

Students deserve the best assistance they can get with homework. In many cases, educational levels, living conditions and language barriers in their families make it difficult for them to get the help they need when they go home. Most children and young people truly appreciate the time they have to do their homework and the help they receive in your program. It builds their self-confidence, sets a pattern of personal responsibility in motion and often improves their grades. It also makes a big difference to their parents and reduces stress at home.

Unfortunately, not all homework assistance leads to measurable improvement in academic skills. Across programs, math skills tend to improve more than language arts but neither is strengthened as much as might be anticipated *unless* the kind of support provided is consistently aligned with the curricula used during the school day.

> Without knowing how to provide appropriate homework assistance, your staff can unintentionally confuse students and limit their progress.

There's a simple and important explanation for this. The chances are very good that what your staff were taught when they were in school and what's going on now is very different –

even if they haven't been out of school very long. The most commonly used textbooks, including *Open Court, Houghton-Mifflin, Harcourt, Success for All, Scholastic, Math Land* and others, take very different approaches, use different terminology and emphasize different ways of learning. Without knowing how to provide *appropriate* support, your staff can and often will unintentionally confuse students and hinder rather than accelerate their progress. Your staff must have adequate knowledge of the school day curricula to be truly effective. An academic coach can provide the training and support needed to make happen.

Because students will finish their homework at different times, it's important for them to have access to learning materials that they can use independently or in small groups. This allows them to pursue their own interests and still be involved in things that strengthen their skills. Be sure reading materials such as books or magazines or computer or board games are available and are diverse and representative of the cultures, gender and abilities of students.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is your staff knowledgeable about the language arts and math curricula used during the school day?*
- *Do you have a system in place that provides ongoing support and coaching for your staff?*

Establish and Maintain Classroom Connections

The most successful afterschool programs have created authentic *partnerships* with schools. They recognize that their staff is dependent on teachers to offer the use of their classrooms, provide homework packets, give feedback on student progress and offer insights into their strengths and areas in need of improvement. In turn, teachers know that information about what's happening in students' lives outside of school and how this is impacting them and their performance in the classroom is likely to be more available to your staff than to them. Don't anticipate that *all* teachers will come on board in the beginning, but be confident that some will – and that they'll become advocates when they see the benefits your program brings.

Keep in mind that the same challenges of school reform and *No Child Left Behind* imperatives that impact principals also weigh heavily on teachers. Your goal should be to become a partner in helping them achieve *their* goals by reinforcing, strengthening and expanding on what students learn during the school day, providing homework assistance and giving children and young people opportunities they otherwise might not have to develop and strengthen their skills.

> Your goal should be to become a partner in helping teachers achieve their goals by reinforcing and strengthening what students learn during the school day.

Start with introductions and move quickly to setting up a formal communication process. This can be as simple as a five-minute weekly check-in or written messages exchanged

through the front office. The important thing is to establish and maintain regular communication through informal conversations and a formal classroom connections process.

Work with principals, academic coaches and teachers to come up with creative ways to limit the impact of classroom use on individual teachers by rotating every three months or so. Replace anything missing from their classrooms immediately and with more than it was worth. Send thank-you notes throughout the year and have your staff and students express their appreciation as often as possible. Arrange a time to come to a faculty meeting and express your gratitude for the support you're receiving. Gradually, you'll move to the partnership you want – and it will make a real difference in the quality of your program and the outcomes for children and young people!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you have the support of teachers in the use of classrooms?*
- *Have you established a way for your staff and classroom teachers to communicate regularly?*
- *Do teachers willingly offer support and assistance to your staff?*
- *Does your staff keep teachers informed about what's happening in the lives of children outside of school?*

Align Program Activities with State Standards

Aligning afterschool activities with state standards makes a lot of sense. State standards identify grade-level learning competencies in a variety of areas. They tell us what kids should be able to do at certain times in their elementary, middle and high school educations. Using these as benchmarks will accelerate learning and focus your efforts on widely accepted goals.

The challenge is translating standards into language that's understandable to your staff and can be integrated into their work. The example below is taken from a section of the California Department of Education's Math Standards for students completing seventh grade.

> *1.1 Read, write, and compare rational numbers in scientific notation (positive and negative powers of 10) with approximate numbers using scientific notation.1.2 Add, subtract, multiply, and divide rational numbers (integers, fractions, and terminating decimals) and take positive rational numbers to whole-number powers. 1.3 Convert fractions to decimals and percents and use these representations in estimations, computations, and applications.*

Most of us have never heard of a terminating decimal and don't have a clue what comparing rational numbers using scientific notation would look like. We've long since

forgotten what an integer is and rarely if ever thought of a number as rational. We probably can convert fractions to percents but never imagined the answer would be called a representation. Fortunately, academic coaches or other certificated teachers will be happy to *translate* these into words that are understandable. Language arts standards can be approached in the same way. California State Standard 1.0 states that students completing the third grade should:

> *1.1 Know and use complex word families when reading (e.g., -ight) to decode unfamiliar words. 1.2 Decode regular multi-syllabic words. 1.3 Read aloud narrative and expository text fluently and accurately and with appropriate pacing, intonation, and expression. 1.4 Use knowledge of antonyms, synonyms, homophones, and homographs to determine the meanings of words.*

> Working standards into enrichment activities isn't as hard as it might seem – and it makes a big difference.

Translated into everyday language, this means that by the end of the third grade a student should be able to read an age-appropriate book out loud, understand what he or she is reading and be able to figure out what unfamiliar words mean in the context of what's happening in the story. Almost anyone can work this into an enrichment or recreation activity. How about a gardening project coupled with shared reading and a discussion of *Jack and the Beanstalk?* Or golf lessons combined with reading a magazine article about Tiger Woods when he was their age?

It's important that we understand what state standards are and equally important that educators help us out in making this possible. It's probably the best example we can think of for why *partnerships* with principals and teachers are vital. For us to really reinforce and strengthen student academic skills we need their help – and they need ours.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff aware of state standards and their importance to student achievement?*
- *Do you and your staff understand what they mean and how they can be successfully integrated into your program?*
- *Do you provide the support staff members need to do this effectively and confidently?*

Make Learning Exciting to Students

While most afterschool programs focus on activities, those that have the best track record in improving student academic performance intentionally use project-based learning experiences to produce positive outcomes. For example, newspaper production and publication can be used to strengthen language arts, math and problem solving skills with a little additional effort. Designed well, this project provides students with opportunities to gather information, conduct interviews, take pictures, write articles, learn about design

and lay-out, solve problems, think critically, make decisions, work collaboratively, operate under deadlines and respond to feedback from their peers – all of which build their skills and broaden their knowledge without the explicit teaching that characterizes much of what happens during the school day.

This requires *advance* planning but not *daily* planning. It allows staff to go with the flow as long as they keep expectations of what should be accomplished in each week during a four or six week period in mind. This provides the kind of freedom and flexibility that encourages creativity and enables students to work at a pace that makes sense for them, and keeps the process moving forward to a targeted completion and publication date. Most importantly, it creates enthusiasm for learning!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are your program's enrichment components designed around project-based learning?*
- *Are your staff members able to link activities with outcomes?*
- *Do they get the support they need to be effective at doing this?*

Track Your Progress

Successful afterschool programs are distinguished by their commitment to measuring and managing outcomes. Although student academic achievement ultimately will be measured by standardized test scores and school-based assessments, this doesn't reduce the importance of using additional tools to determine student progress, build on what's working and make program adjustments as they may be needed.

> Successful programs measure and manage student outcomes in a variety of ways.

Some measures are easy to administer and assess. Reading fluency, for example, can be determined by the number of words a student can correctly read in one minute. Baselines can be established for each child early in the program and followed-up at regular intervals. Target rates can be determined through a simple formula: the number of words a student should be able to read is equal to the student's age times ten. A fluent eight-year old should be able to read 80 words a minute; a fourteen year-old should be able to read 140 words a minute, and so on.

Work with academic coaches and classroom teachers. Ask them how they measure student performance and what they think would be most appropriate in an afterschool setting. Taking the time to make regular assessments is well worth the effort and will be discussed in depth in Chapter 12. It's the only way you'll really know whether you're headed in the right direction or need to make changes before it may be too late!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you have a system in place that allows you to track student academic progress?*
- *Do you manage as well as measure change and act quickly to make adjustments where they are needed?*
- *Are principals, academic coaches, classroom teachers, students, parents and your staff on board with these processes?*

Move to an Authentic Partnership and Shared Vision

Over the last few years, we've seen a rapidly growing number of authentic partnerships with schools that reflect a shared vision and a real enthusiasm for working together to achieve common goals. The easiest way to identify how far you've come is to talk informally with principals, teachers and classified staff members. Listen to the words they use, the depth of their understand and their commitment to a common purpose and shared goals.

- Do they say *our* program or *your* program?
- Are they not only aware of what is happening in your program, but what they can do to help make this time productive and exciting for students?
- Do they go the extra mile and voluntarily support you and your staff?
- Are they real champions for what you're doing?
- Do they openly credit your work with helping improve test scores, grades, student attendance and a reduction in referrals for disciplinary actions during the day?

Getting to this place isn't easy. It requires a lot of effort and commitment – and it's vitally important. For your program to fully realize its potential, *everyone* must work together to build the capacity of children and young people to become increasingly successful and confident in all areas of their lives – and success in school is one of the most important of these!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #9
STRENGTHEN STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed to be completed by you as a Program Director or Site Director, and by your staff, principals and the school's instructional staff, to build on what's working and strengthen areas that can be improved.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're clearly outstanding in this area, and everyone would agree.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	Our school site principal and faculty and classified staff understand and share our vision for our program and enthusiastically support it.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I meet regularly with our principal to keep him or her informed about our program and build our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I attend faculty meetings to keep teachers informed and to ask for counsel and advice.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We have a formal process that provides ongoing communication among program staff and certificated teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Our staff has access to homework packets and clearly understands how to provide assistance in ways that support the school day curricula.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Our staff is supported by teachers in the use of classrooms and computer labs.	1	2	3	4	5
7	A certificated teacher serves as an academic coach for our staff and an advocate for our program.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We provide both workshops and follow-up coaching to our staff, resulting in the effective translation of knowledge into practice.	1	2	3	4	5

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
9	Our staff is familiar with state content standards and able to effectively align activities with these.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Our staff is knowledgeable about the academic levels and needs of the students with whom they work.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We work closely with certificated teachers, parents and students to assess student progress and make changes as appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We use disguised learning approaches that are exciting and engaging to students, strengthen their skills and increase their enthusiasm for learning.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Our staff understands and successfully implements project-based learning.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Our School Board Members and Superintendent are knowledgeable about and actively support our program.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Our District provides us with objective measures of student academic improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Improvement in academic performance is documented and widely disseminated in progress reports to our staff, stakeholders and funders.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, Sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #10
CREATE AND MAINTAIN STRONG
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

Successful afterschool programs appreciate the importance of strong community connections. They know that young people greatly benefit when their communities are valued and engaged as resources to support their learning and growth. They also know that it is crucial that young people be given opportunities to both contribute to and be appreciated by members of their own communities.

Research on childhood resiliency and youth development, as well as studies on the prevention of high-risk behaviors, affirms the importance of young people feeling a positive connection to their communities. Further, involvement in service to others in their communities builds important life skills and is associated with higher self-esteem, enhanced moral development, increased political activism, and the ability to create and maintain complex social relationships.

Recognize the Many Benefits of Community Involvement

In addition to contributing to young people's learning and broader development, promoting positive involvement within communities can also help programs meet their most immediate objective – sustained student participation. Through their community involvement, young people can learn about topics they find highly relevant and interesting – topics not addressed during the classroom day. When young people see the connections between the afterschool activities and the communities in which they live, their interest and motivation to participate are enhanced.

> Activities that involve service to others allow children and young people to feel valued for the contributions they make.

As they meet and learn about people in the community who are different than themselves, they develop a greater understanding and appreciation for diversity. Youth-led community service projects allow participants to learn and master new and important life skills, such as presentation and communication skills, problem solving, decision-making and the many collaborative skills necessary for successful teamwork. Activities that involve service to others allow young people to feel valued for the contributions they make.

Young people are not the only ones who benefit when they engage in meaningful ways with community residents and organizations. When adults and community members have positive exchanges with young people, they are able to revisit their stereotypes of youth. As a result, adults are more likely to hold a positive view of young people, voice their support for publicly funded youth services and even decide to play an active role such as serving as a volunteer or mentor.

When we provide opportunities for community involvement, young people become important assets to the communities in which they live. California Tomorrow, a leading research organization focused on equity and access issues, wrote:

> *Equity for diverse groups in society depends – both in the short term and in the long term – on young people from all backgrounds (and especially those from marginalized groups) having the tools, knowledge and ability to analyze and act on the world around them. Within families and communities, this means that they find ways to build strong relationships, contribute positively to their environments, value themselves and those who are different from them, and question and transform the status quo when necessary. At the most comprehensive level, education and youth development work is just not about inward growth, but also about strengthening communities and society.*

Finally, by reaching out and engaging parents, local residents, community organizations and civic leaders as valued resources, your program will be recognized as an important asset worthy of on-going community support.

Reflect on Your Underlying Beliefs About Children and Young People as Assets

It's important for your staff to reflect on their underlying beliefs about children and young people and their readiness and interest in serving your community. One study found significant differences between how youth and adults think about these things. On one hand, adults worried about all of the needs and problems that young people had and how adults could remedy them. The young folks, on the other hand, focused on their desire on how to contribute and do more. They expressed a strong yearning for purpose and for meaning, for ways to be useful to the wider community, especially in non-patronizing, intergenerational efforts.

In wanting to protect and teach young people, adults often overlook opportunities for young people to assume roles that can bring them a sense of value. These opportunities promote an important "I can do it. I make a difference!" attitude. How does your adult staff view young people? Do they see young people as problems about to happen, as a resource to be developed for future use, or as a community resource that can make a difference now? If you're not sure, find out!

✓ *A Reality Check…*
- *Have you and your staff reflected on your underlying beliefs and assumptions about the readiness and capacity of our young people to help others in your community?*
- *Have you and your staff discussed the important benefits that come from forming connections with your surrounding community?*

- *Have you and your staff discussed the important benefits that come from making community involvement a significant part of your program?*
- *Have you and your staff listed the skills that community involvement can promote?*

Engage Students in Defining Community

Begin by working with the young people to create a geographic definition of what you mean by "community." Once you all agree on this, it's important to remember that people's experience of this geographic community may be very different. For instance, young people who are recent immigrants and who primarily interact with neighbors and business establishments that share their cultural background may have a very different experience of community than young people who are native-born English-speakers. When planning for community involvement, consider the many different affiliations young people may have and allow time to explore these differences.

> Engage young people in group discussions about how they experience their community – you may be surprised by what you learn!

Before considering ways to increase young people's involvement with the surrounding community, it's a good idea to conduct some group discussions about how different people experience their community. What are the different affiliations your young people have? Their communities may be organized around music scenes, sports teams, clubs, or the recreational activities they feel help define them. How does this differ from those of your adult staff?

Remember that people of different ages will also define community and community needs differently. It's not surprising that a group of older youth in Alameda, California mounted a successful public support campaign to build a new kind of public park – an outdoor skateboard park. Imagine how different the outcome would have been if senior citizens or parents of new infants were given the charge of designing a new park for the community.

Do Some Resource Mapping

It can be very useful to create a resource map identifying areas of your community that young people are most and least familiar with and those they would like to learn more about. Some may have visited museums, art centers, parks and zoos. Others may not have. Don't overlook the resources that "insiders" of different groups can share, such as clubs, small theatres used to preserve a group's culture and traditions or music and dance troupes or groups working on particular community or neighborhood issues.

> Families are an important resource and can keep the idea of community alive at home.

Ask your staff, your partners and students and their families whether there are ways to introduce informal resources, such as specialty stores and restaurants in particular ethnic areas. Find out about local residents who may have amazing stories to tell or special talents that few people know about and invite them to talk with students.

To the extent possible, involve families in these discussions about community, in planning for community involvement and as participants in activities as you carry them out. They're an important resource and can keep the idea of community alive at home. By beginning with what young people and their families know, you've honored them in an important way and helped them appreciate the many forms your community takes and the varied opportunities and challenges it offers.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you and your staff actively engaged children and young people in defining the ways in which they experience community?*
- *Have you asked them to identify community resources and opportunities that are important to them but might not be known to you or your staff?*
- *Have you included family members and neighborhood residents in this process?*

Create Opportunities for Young People to Make a Difference

All too often community involvement is narrowly defined as something that staff members plan and young people do. This approach fails to draw upon the perspectives and interests of young people and limits the impact it's likely to have on their personal growth and development. When ideas come from them, they're much more interested and motivated – and their involvement ensures that community service projects will be relevant to them.

Being alert to ways you can connect their interests with community interests will help build a natural momentum. Help young people find out what existing community groups are already doing to tackle particular problems and identify strategies that have already been tried. This will give them a chance to strengthen their research skills *and* it will increase the likelihood of a project being successful. When young people learn to take a thoughtful approach to addressing community problems, they're better prepared to:

- Function as leaders in creating effective solutions,
- Practice their communication, problem solving, decision-making and creative thinking skills,
- Work together effectively and collaboratively, and
- Believe they can make a real difference in their communities.

> Community Connections Summits can result in exciting new and powerful opportunities.

By consciously connecting opportunities for community service with interests expressed by the children and young people in your program, you and your staff are honoring their

ideas. By acting as both a team leader and a guide-by-the-side in helping young people conduct research and carry out interviews, you're setting them up for success. And, by helping them recognize that what they think is important may not always be the same as what the recipients of their service have in mind, they'll have a better appreciation for what's really happening in their community.

Hold a Community Connections Summit

One of the most effective ways to initiate new partnerships and collaborations is by holding a one-day Community Connections Summit. With funding from the James Irvine Foundation, the Center for Collaborative Solutions developed and piloted this process over an 18-month period with 10 afterschool programs in eight communities. It brought diverse local organizations, public agencies, businesses and community foundations and afterschool programs together to share information and resources. And, it resulted in hundreds of exciting new opportunities for children, young people and their families and created invaluable connections at very little cost or no cost to participating programs.

The power of this approach is in its structure. The format enables afterschool program and site directors and community stakeholders to communicate their interests, identify their resources and actually form partnerships with each other in *real time* and significantly increase community awareness of and support for participating afterschool programs. Don't forget to ensure that young people have a role in this process! More information on this process, and how you can use it to build new relationships in your community, is available on the Center for Collaborative Solutions website (www.ccscenter.org).

Enlist the Support of Community Partners

By enlisting the participation of community members and organizations in service projects, young people can learn from adults with valuable experience and knowledge. If, for example, middle school youth in a photography class in your program are learning to take pictures that reflect their perspective on what's happening in their neighborhoods, giving them a chance to work with local newspapers to learn more about how pictures support and interpret articles and capture people's attention and interest can and will be very important. Their eagerness to fully participate in their own learning will be much more compelling if they know their pictures will be published if they're good.

Spend enough time with prospective organizations, agencies and individuals to ensure that they truly understand the importance of what they're becoming involved in and not just what they might be able to provide. Help them understand that a service learning opportunity is about service (theirs and that of the child or young person involved) and learning (for both of

> Prepare young people for their experiences, support them in their efforts and hold them accountable for their attitudes and behavior.

them). Stay in close contact and follow up with what's happening. In addition to learning new skills, young people will also build important relationships with community members. These people may inspire a whole new view of the future, serve as an important character reference or years later provide them with their first paid job or college application.

Remember that your primary goal is for young people to participate in ways that will make a difference in their lives. This means that organizations and individuals will have to see the added value it has for them as well. Prepare young people for their experiences, support them in their efforts and hold them accountable for their attitudes and behavior.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you considered hosting a community summit?*
- *Have you and your staff developed service-learning opportunities for young people in your program?*
- *Do you make a practice of working closely with agencies and organizations to work toward the achievement of shared goals?*
- *Do you hold young people accountable for their attitudes and behavior during their service learning experiences?*

Use Community Involvement to Promote Deeper Understanding

Getting young people involved in considering the needs of their communities provides an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying issues their service is meant to address. They'll bring their own set of beliefs, assumptions, experiences and knowledge to the projects in which they're involved. By looking at the issues in more depth, they'll be able to test their assumptions – a process that can be very beneficial to their personal development as well as their relationships with the larger community.

> By looking at the issues in more depth, students will be able to test their assumptions.

Interviewing people before going very far into a project can make a huge difference. In one program, for example, young people discovered that their original idea of collecting canned food for people in a homeless shelter wasn't what was most needed. They learned this through interviews with shelter residents who told them that their more pressing need was for warm clothing, especially coats and gloves, for the coming winter – something that had not occurred to young people or to staff members. With this new information, the focus of their project changed and everyone benefited!

Even when young people decide to do something as simple as helping clean up a local playground, it's important to have them spend some time exploring questions such as why the litter is there in the first place, what impact it has on the neighborhood and

how it might be affecting the health of children who are playing there. This will help young people learn to consider community issues from a different frame of reference than they may be used to doing.

Link Project-Based Learning with Community Service

Opportunities for young people to engage in community service come in a variety of forms. One of the most effective of these is to integrate community service with project-based learning strategies that are already underway in your program. For example, if you have a six-week gardening project, consider having young people literally give away the fruits of their labor to people who are less fortunate. Once they've determined who these people are, they can begin to establish contact by introducing themselves, sending pictures as their garden grows, writing notes about what they're learning along the way, inviting them to visit if possible and making baskets to deliver their harvests in person.

If mural painting is one of the projects young people are interested in undertaking, consider working with your city's graffiti-abatement division or the appropriate office to find a location that will enhance the quality of the street on which it will be located and discourage future graffiti writing. We've seen this work extremely well, and give children and young people a feeling of making a real contribution to their neighborhoods and communities.

Although links between project-based learning and community service tend to be the most meaningful to students and community members, one-day projects are also important. Have them plant flowers at a local park, speak out at a public forum on a youth or community issue, visit elders at a senior center or participate in a neighborhood fair – the possibilities are endless! Try to match projects to the interests of the young people, and look for ways to help prepare everyone for a meaningful experience.

No matter what projects you select, children and young people need time to understand and explore the issues, plan activities and approaches, learn skills that may be needed to carry them out successfully and reflect on what happened after projects are completed. They also need reasonable timelines and consistent staff support throughout the process. It's up to your staff to serve as both team leaders *and* guides-by-the-side. Keep three things in mind:

> It's up to your staff to be team leaders, coaches and mentors.

- If the project is too ambitious, young people will be intimidated.
- If it takes too long to produce concrete results, they'll get discouraged or lose interest.
- If changes are needed to make the project work and staff is slow to respond, participants will feel frustrated.

Review projects with your staff and stay on top of what's happening to ensure that the projects are as successful as they can be. Keep in mind that children and young people will

be inspired if your staff lets them know that their help is needed in the community and the contributions they're making are valuable and valued. Be sure their work is widely publicized in local newspapers, television and newsletters!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you and your staff considered ways in which community service can be integrated into existing or proposed project-based learning?*
- *Does your staff understand that the success of these projects depends in large part on their role as a guide-by-the-side?*
- *Do they create one-day projects as well as longer projects?*

Bring the Community into Your Program

> Invite community members to share their talents, interests and experiences – and their enthusiasm!

In addition to providing opportunities for young people to be involved in their larger communities, it's important for community members to have a chance to become involved with your program. There are many ways to do this. One is to invite community leaders to share their talents, expertise and experiences with young people – either formally or informally. Another is to invite local residents to introduce young people to their cultural histories and traditions.

We've found that the greatest impact often occurs when guests participate in project-based learning activities. For example, if young people are working on a science project, bringing in a local scientist makes a lot of sense and can be very inspiring. If studying animals, inviting a seeing-eye dog and his or her trainer is an obvious choice. If young people are in a cooking class, asking a parent or chef in a local restaurant to join you for a session can be a very worthwhile experience. If they're studying butterflies, a local entomologist can bring exotic examples and talk about why he or she became involved in the field.

Guest speakers can also be important ways for young people to learn about subjects that aren't usually part of the school day curriculum or are only touched upon briefly. For example, local performing artists and successful athletes are often happy to have the chance to talk with young people about how they were drawn to the field, what they did to get where they are and what it's like for them now. If young people are learning about the Civil Rights Movement, invite neighborhood residents who lived through those days to talk about what it was like. Community colleges, museums, parks, volunteer centers, community centers and even the phone book are all good places to start looking for speakers.

Keep in mind that personal relationships and references count for a lot. And, the community connections process described earlier can make a real difference in getting the *right* people involved. Be sure your staff prepares guests in advance with

information about the children and young people with whom they'll be speaking or working and the projects in which they'll be involved.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you and your staff providing opportunities for community members to bring their experiences and expertise to your program?*
- *Have you approached this systematically – in a way that builds on and expands and strengthens current offerings in your program?*
- *Do young people respond positively to these experiences?*
- *How do the adults involved feel about their experiences?*

Offer a Variety of Off-Site Learning Experiences

An amazing number of children and young people in afterschool programs have never ventured out of their communities or had opportunities to experience the breadth of what's going on in their hometowns. Get them out of the building! Any time you leave the things that are familiar to them you're creating a way for them to expand their horizons.

Take a field trip to a regional park or museum. Visit a local establishment, service or branch of government to learn how it works. Attend a program or activity at a local non-profit organization such as the Red Cross or Sierra Club, a social justice or civil rights organization or a local arts center or library. If they're available in your area, take young people to a National Guard Armory, local airports, symphonies, aquariums, college campuses and restaurants. Arrange for them to attend children's theater performances or go the movies. Be sure your staff prepares young people for the event and follows up with them afterward.

In most cases, local organizations will provide these opportunities at no expense to your program – just for the asking. If there is a cost involved, small businesses and other groups are usually delighted to underwrite it if they see the experience as valuable and worthwhile. When possible, give parents and older brothers and sisters a chance to participate as volunteers to improve the adult to student ratio and provide opportunities they might not otherwise have.

Work with school districts, cities and private transportation companies to reduce transportation costs and, when appropriate, use public transportation to help children and young people become more familiar with this system. Use the internet or other resources to help them work with you to figure out how to get where you're going.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your staff provide opportunities for young people to experience your community in a variety of different ways?*

- *Is this having a positive impact on young people in your program?*
- *How do you know?*

Invest in Community Volunteers

Done well, an investment in volunteers pays off in big ways. It reduces student/staff ratios and expands community-building opportunities. Exemplary afterschool programs understand how critical it is to involve volunteers and to have a *system* in place to ensure that they have a worthwhile experience. By being attentive to the needs and demands of your staff and responding in ways that make the involvement of volunteers meaningful and supportive, everyone wins.

> Done well, an investment in volunteers of all ages can make a real difference in the quality of your program.

By spending spend time with volunteers before they begin their work, during the time they're involved and when they decide to leave, you'll gain invaluable information that can be used to continually improve the experience for them, for your staff and for young people. Don't overlook the fact that many high schools have community service requirements that your program or site can draw upon, or the value of including older siblings and recent program graduates as tutors or mentors. Consider raising funds through private foundations to offer college scholarships for high school young people who participate as mentors three or four times a week for at least a semester. Many small businesses and nonprofit organizations find this an attractive way to invest their money. An award of $500 a semester can make a big difference to young people and a strong incentive for continuing with higher education!

Reconnect Neighborhoods with Schools

In the last several years there has been a real disconnect between many schools and the neighborhoods in which they're located. This is especially true in low-income areas with large numbers of limited English speaking families, but it exists in other areas as well. High quality afterschool programs intentionally build bridges with local residents and help bring the *public* back into public schools. Several approaches work very well.

- Hire staff from local neighborhoods,
- Create opportunities for parents, staff and young people to talk with each other at the end of the day,
- Invite families of participating young people and local residents to special program events,
- Include neighborhood leaders in advisory groups,
- Work with local residents to create meaningful community service projects for young people, and

- Offer opportunities for them to volunteer both during their programs and at off-site events.

Local residents often bring specialized knowledge, wisdom, new perspectives and experiences to programs and can serve as indispensable resources for staff and young people. Many also appreciate an evening out at a program performance and enjoy celebrating the talents of young people in art, theater, dance, music and whatever else you're offering. They're usually pleased and honored to serve on advisory committees and happy to suggest community service projects that will benefit their communities. And, when time permits, they contribute and gain a great deal from volunteering during your program or at special off-site events.

Is it Working? Take the Time to Ask

To ensure that your program is effective in building connections with your community and providing worthwhile opportunities for children and young people, you'll need to develop an ongoing assessment process that generates input from young people and the community organizations, volunteers and other individuals involved. Periodically ask young people whether they find community involvement projects meaningful and rewarding to them personally. A simple questionnaire can be revealing if young people respond in these ways:

- I get to go places that I don't usually go.
- I've learned a lot more about things I can do in my community.
- I know more about what is going on in my community.
- I know more about how to get things I need in my community.
- I've learned ways I can make things better in my community.
- I've had a chance to do things to help people in my community.

At the same time, create a system that allows you to closely track the number *and* quality of the connections your program has with community organizations, volunteers, service learning agencies and businesses. Stay in close contact and ask for honest feedback on what's working and what could be improved. Use this information to strengthen the community connections you've already made and to expand into new arenas, and it will make a real difference in the quality and sustainability of your program!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *If you enlist the help of volunteers, do you have a system in place to ensure that they have the support they need to have both a positive experience and impact on the program?*

- *Have you considered raising funds to offer college support for high school volunteers?*
- *Have you implemented strategies to reconnect the community to the school?*
- *Do you hire staff from the surrounding community?*
- *Do community members and parents have opportunities to contribute to the program in some way?*
- *Do you have a process to gather information from young people on their experience of community involvement?*

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #10
CREATE AND MAINTAIN STRONG COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. It's designed to be completed by you as a program director or site director, and by your staff and partners, to build on what's working and strengthen areas that can be improved.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're clearly outstanding in this area, and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	Our staff and stakeholders are knowledgeable about the characteristics, opportunities and challenges of the neighborhood and community in which our sites are located.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Our staff has reflected on our underlying beliefs and assumptions about the readiness and capacity of our young people to help others in the community.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We've developed and implemented strategies to increase our connections to the larger community.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We offer children and young people in our program a variety of opportunities to gain a greater understanding of the larger community in which they live.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We engage young people in defining what community means to them.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We involve young people in mapping important resources in the community.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We use community service as a means for helping young people develop and strengthen their life skills.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We offer service projects and events that give young people an opportunity to give back to their community.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
9	We use service-learning projects to promote a deeper understanding of issues underlying the community problems they are seeking to address.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We have a system in place to attract and retain community and neighborhood volunteers.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Our staff includes a variety of people with diverse talents, experiences and socioeconomic characteristics and reflects a cross-section of our community.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We invite community members to participate in our program, sometimes as speakers or performing artists.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We take our participants off site to take advantage of valuable resources in our community.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Our staff knows the parents and primary caregivers of children and young people with whom they work and we have implemented strategies to help them form positive connections to the school.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We provide parents, primary caregivers and neighborhood residents with a variety of avenues to connect with our program.	1	2	3	4	5
16	We have a process to gather information from young people on their experience of community involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers above and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #11
PROMOTE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Our society is becoming more diverse and more complex. According to the U.S. Census, almost 40 percent of our nation's school-age children are considered racial and ethnic minorities. Close to 25 percent have at least one immigrant parent and millions speak a language other than English at home. With this come greater challenges and new opportunities.

Afterschool programs are well positioned to build relationships and create environments that support children and young people in developing the attitudes and skills they'll need to be able to successfully navigate within a rapidly changing world. Programs that make a conscious commitment to take advantage of the opportunities available, and to create new ones, are making a real difference by bringing people together in a vision of what *could be*, rather than what is.

> Promoting diversity, equity and inclusion isn't just the right thing to do -- it's vital to ensuring quality.

The most successful program directors, leadership teams, site directors and their partners spend time reflecting on the strengths of their communities and the areas in need of improvement. They delve deeply into their own feelings about diversity and go beyond words to a real understanding of what equity and inclusion for *everyone* really means. They support the healthy social, cultural and cross-cultural development of their students, staff, partners and communities. And, they model values of respect and inclusion and offer programming that's designed to reduce social disparities and inequities.

The recent research findings of a *California Tomorrow* study make it clear that the commitment of high quality programs in this area isn't superficial. It's reflected in their leadership approaches, their policies and procedures and their relationships with their staff, and with children and young people and their families. It's embedded in staff development, integrated into their program's content and approaches and observable in their everyday work environments.

We've consistently found that the most outstanding programs understand that not only is this the right thing to do – it's vital to achieving their goals and bringing their vision of a high quality, sustainable program into reality. They systematically remove barriers that might deny access to or make it difficult for children and young people to fully participate in their programs. They hold high expectations for all students and staff, treat everyone fairly, and honor and respect their individual differences. They work collaboratively with their partners and team members and with children and young people to create the future they imagine – together. They'll be the first to tell you that their journey isn't easy – and the first to let you know that it's essential to their ability to achieve a high level of quality in their programs!

Begin By Exploring Your Own Attitudes and Beliefs

Begin by taking time to examine your own attitudes and beliefs. Ask yourself whether the relationships you build, the decisions you make and the actions you take *really* honor diversity and promote equity, access and inclusion. Take a serious look at the goals you've set, the strategies you've developed and the ways they're being implemented. Explore your own feelings and the way you express them, whether consciously or unconsciously. Discover your own strengths in these areas, and consider where you may need to improve.

Once you've done this, make a commitment to lead more intentionally, act more strategically and work more collaboratively to ensure that this practice really comes alive in your program and at your sites. Become what you want your staff to become and lead the way! Remember that you have much more influence on the people who work with and for you than you may think. If you're passionately committed to social change, your enthusiasm will be contagious. If you're consistent in your words and actions, the people around you will internalize and act on the messages you're sending and follow your direction. If you hold high and equitable expectations for everyone, it's much more likely that they will too.

> Are the relationships you're building, the decisions you're making and the actions you're taking really honoring diversity and promoting equity, access and inclusion?

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *When was the last time you really thought about your own attitudes and beliefs about diversity, equity and inclusion?*
- *Do your decisions and your actions make it obvious that you truly value all of these?*
- *Would your staff and your partners agree?*
- *How do you know?*

Approach Your Work Strategically

We've consistently found that the most successful programs promote diversity, equity, access and inclusion through several strategies that combine to produce powerful, positive results. Eight of these stand out as being especially effective. These include:

- Recruiting staff who reflect the characteristics of their student and neighborhood populations,
- Hiring staff from the neighborhoods where their programs are located,
- Establishing clear policies and expectations,

- Investing in staff development that results in personal and professional growth and leads to greater awareness and understanding of issues in these areas,
- Adopting culturally sensitive approaches to learning,
- Selecting materials that interest students and reflect their own cultural heritages and experiences,
- Engaging parents and community members in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Recruit a Staff that Reflects the Student Population

When your staff reflects the racial, cultural, linguistic, and gender *diversity* of the broader student population at a school site or in a neighborhood, the benefits to children and young people are significant. Participants in your program are much more likely to feel physically and emotionally secure in the presence of adults who look like them, speak the same languages as they do and share a variety of experiences in common. It will make a real difference in their sense of belonging and their commitment to attending and remaining in your program over time.

> Students are likely to feel more physically and emotionally secure in the presence of adults who look like them and speak their languages.

This kind of staff configuration is also a critical factor in attracting and retaining a cross-section of children and young people. If most or all of your staff are Hispanic and the school's population is evenly divided among Hispanic, African-American, Caucasian and Asian students, it's extremely likely that the percentage of Hispanic students in your program will be disproportionately high *and* may reach a tipping point where virtually all students are Hispanic. The same is true for any racial or ethnic group that's noticeably out of balance with the broader student population. Similarly, although more women than men tend to be attracted to positions in afterschool programs, successful programs do their best to include an approximately equal number of men and women in their staffs.

Don't leave this to chance – or think it can't happen! The more intentional you are in developing a strategic approach to hiring, the better your results will be. This doesn't mean creating a quota system, but it does mean working collaboratively with your partners, community members and neighborhood residents to actively seek out people whose characteristics reflect those of students in the general school population.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gender characteristics of your staff reflect those of the whole student population at your school site or in the neighborhood in which your program is located?*

- *Do your staff recruitment approaches include systematic efforts to attract a diverse staff?*

Hire from Local Neighborhoods

While most programs focus on building the capacity of children and young people to become increasingly successful in school and in life, a growing number have expanded their vision to include the same aspirations for adults in the neighborhoods in which their sites are located. There are several advantages to this approach. Not only will staff already reflect the racial and ethnic characteristics of students, we've also found that they're much more likely to:

- Understand the backgrounds, experiences and languages of students and their families,
- Connect with families and students outside their programs,
- See the positive impact their program is having on the quality of life in their own communities,
- Have the capacity to reconnect neighborhoods with schools, and
- Remain in programs over time.

Beyond this, programs that are really committed to reducing social inequities in their communities understand that this depends largely on overcoming economic disparities. Five things are worth keeping in mind:

1. Although earnings in afterschool programs are not what they should be, neither are they at a minimum wage level.
2. In high quality programs, staff members have a wide range of opportunities for personal and professional growth, decision-making and problem solving and upward mobility – none of which is typically available in jobs that pay more or less the same amount in other sectors.
3. In many cases, significant savings are realized when staff members have their own children in programs where they work – an option that is available in many large corporations but not in the kinds of jobs they would otherwise be likely to have.
4. Opportunities for part-time afterschool employees to become instructional assistants in the schools where they're working and to attend community colleges at no or very little cost are often possible.
5. The experience of working in a high quality program often motivates people to continue with higher education and make this a priority for their children as well.

Establish Clear Policies and Expectations

Your ability to develop this practice to its fullest extent will depend on the degree to which the people who work with and for you are aware of your program's policies and expectations, understand what they mean in the context of their own work and are clear about what they're expected to do to help achieve them.

> Be specific about what your expectations are and certain that everyone knows what they mean in the context of their own work.

For example, if one of your expectations is that your staff will treat all students fairly and equitably, be specific about what this means *and* certain that each person knows what you're talking about and what they're responsible for doing. If you support this expectation with a policy of having written agreements between individual students, parents and program leaders that define agreed upon rules of behavior and consequences for breaking these rules, be sure that each staff member has completed these agreements and is upholding them consistently. If preferential treatment is given to some students and not to others, your policy and their agreements are not only worthless, it will undermine your program's credibility.

If your expectation is that your program will be fully in compliance with regulations governing the Americans with Disabilities Act, as it should be, then be sure everyone is familiar with your policies and has the same thing in mind. If you define this as working closely with the school staff to carry out Individual Education Plans during the afterschool hours and your staff sees it simply as giving physically or educationally challenged students extra time for homework, there's a real disconnect.

By clearly defining your expectations and making them explicit, you'll have a much better chance of achieving them. You'll avoid a lot of frustration, anxiety and confusion – and you'll be able to hold people accountable for what they do, or don't do. This is a first and critical step in the process of embedding this practice in your program, but it obviously takes more. It will take a solid investment in the personal and professional growth and development of your staff.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you established clear policies and expectations in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion?*
- *Is your staff fully aware of and committed to upholding these policies and carrying out these expectations?*
- *Do they understand what they have to do in the context of their own work to support these policies and meet these expectations?*

Invest in the Personal and Professional Growth of Your Staff

In our experience, most programs offer at least one workshop on diversity and include references to laws related to access and inclusion in their policies and procedures handbooks. What they rarely do is involve their staff and partners in authentic discussions on these topics. And, if they do, they often find that people aren't really comfortable if the conversation moves from abstract to personal levels.

If this has happened in your program or at your site, it can be one of the most serious obstacles in the way of achieving your goals. Until you approach this practice in an honest, open way, your program won't be able to achieve its potential. It will always come up short in developing the kinds of attitudes, belief systems and relationships that make a real difference.

> It's not enough to offer a workshop and expect meaningful change to take place.

It's not enough to offer a workshop or two on any topic related to this practice and expect meaningful change to take place. To get to a level where diversity, equity and inclusion are embedded in the day-to-day activities and approaches in your program, your staff must:

- Be convinced emotionally as well as intellectually that it's important for them to become more aware of the issues and the opportunities involved,
- Believe that this will make a real difference for the students they're working with, and
- Be confident that benefits of doing this outweigh continuing to do what they're already most familiar and comfortable with and is easiest for them.

As we discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this Guide, a combination of training, coaching and ongoing staff development can make a big difference in how fast and how effectively this process moves forward. By drawing on the resources, knowledge and insights of your staff and your partners and encouraging frank and open discussions among them, you'll get there even faster.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you integrate diversity, equity, access and inclusion into your staff development, training and coaching?*
- *Do you spend enough time observing your staff in their work environments to know whether they're competent and confident in working with students in appropriate ways?*
- *Do you consistently model the attitudes, approaches and relationships you want and expect of your staff?*

Adopt Culturally Sensitive Approaches to Learning

> The ways children and young people communicate are strongly influenced by the family experiences, peer relationships and cultural identities.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* increasingly defines student success, or failure, in relation to students' acquisition of English reading and writing skills and their ability to comprehend meanings based on the dominant culture. While there's no question that children and young people should and must become proficient in Standard English, it's also important to remember that the purpose of language is communication – and the *ways* in which children communicate are strongly influenced by their family experiences, peer relationships and cultural identities.

One of the greatest challenges we've found in afterschool programs is that staff have difficulty meeting students where *they are* because they aren't familiar with cultural differences that impact learning, attitudes and behavior. This goes beyond the question of whether students are visual or auditory or kinesthetic learners to:

- The influence cultural norms and expectations have on what children and young people think of as acceptable ways of relating to and interacting with others and with adults,
- The vocabularies children and young people acquire and the way they use words to express their feelings, and
- The impact this has on their willingness to be open to new ideas, concepts and relationships.

Prejudices and stereotypes of all kinds are learned before children enter school and they negatively impact levels of trust and openness, generate fears and anxieties and influence feelings of physical and emotional safety. Breaking down these barriers isn't easy, but it's essential to developing a successful program and a fair and equitable society. Acknowledging that these exist, understanding what they are and creating ongoing opportunities for students of different colors, backgrounds and cultural identifies to interact in positive ways will go a long way toward making a difference.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Is your staff knowledgeable about and sensitive to the cultural influences that impact the ways in which students in your program learn and relate with each other and with adults?*
- *Are they able to apply this knowledge in their everyday activities and relationships?*
- *Are they increasingly successful in breaking down the barriers of stereotypes, prejudice and bias?*
- *How do you know?*

Use Culturally Appropriate Materials

Having access to materials that reflect the personal interests and heritages of students in your program is important not only as a means for engaging them but also as a way of honoring their backgrounds and experiences. It's vital to both equity and inclusion. It helps students gain a greater understanding of the richness the contributions each group has made and is making to our society as a whole. It increases their awareness of challenges that children and young people are facing – and overcoming. And, it makes a real difference in helping them become more empathetic in their feelings towards others. Fortunately, most of the high quality curricula currently available make a point of doing this.

> Culturally sensitive materials help students develop the kind of empathy that breaks down stereotypes and biases.

Take time to review materials before purchasing them to ensure that they're appropriate for the students in your program and at your sites. Involve your staff in making these decisions – they're the ones who will have to learn to use them in their work with children and young people. The greater their involvement in the beginning, the more committed they'll be in the long run!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are the materials your staff is using engaging, interesting and appropriate for the students in your program?*
- *Do you make a practice of reviewing new materials as they become available?*
- *Do you make decisions about the selection of materials collaboratively with your staff members?*
- *Are you careful to ensure that materials are racially and culturally appropriate?*

Reach Out To Families in Appropriate Ways

One of the greatest advantages of afterschool programs is their ability to establish positive, ongoing relationships not only with children and young people but also with their parents, primary caregivers and other family members. High quality programs create a variety of opportunities for doing this.

> Successful programs use a variety of approaches to communicate with families.

Many set aside 15 minutes or so at the end of the day for staff members to talk informally with family members about the positive experiences they're having with their children, what they're doing especially well and how they enjoy being with them during the afternoon hours. This builds positive relationships, reinforces the value of your program, boosts children's self-esteem and self-confidence and makes family members proud of their children.

Spending time this way can also provide your staff with invaluable insights about home environments and situations that impact the attitudes and behavior of students. This is much more likely to happen when staff members look like and speak the same languages of family members. It's another important reason why having a diverse staff matters – a lot!

In addition to spending time with parents and primary caregivers, it's also important to keep them informed in other ways. Choosing the most appropriate approach makes a difference in how information will be received and the impact it's likely to have. Four realities are worth keeping in mind:

1. Communicating exclusively in writing has serious disadvantages if the reading skills of parents are limited, even if the materials are translated into different languages.

2. Communicating by telephone is preferable, but only if both your staff member and the person he or she is speaking with are proficient in the same language.

3. Sending messages, invitations or other materials home with students gives them an opportunity to talk with their families and provide additional explanations if necessary.

4. Whenever it's possible, meeting with families in person is likely to have the most positive impact and get the best responses, whether it's at a program orientation, a special event or at the end of the day.

A combination of these approaches sends a clear message that you respect and honor differences and that you really care about communicating effectively. It will go a long way towards building positive relationships and strengthening the quality of your program.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you sensitive to the differences in educational levels and English language proficiencies among families of the students in your program?*
- *Do you and your staff use a variety of approaches in communicating with them?*
- *Do you have a system in place that allows this to happen?*
- *Is it working?*

Commit to Making a Real and Lasting Difference

As a leader, you have an incredible opportunity to make a real and lasting difference in the lives of the children and young people in your program, the success of your staff and the quality of your community. When people know where they're going, fall in love with the

destination and see that you're able to lead them there, they'll join you as a full partner in co-creating your program's future. Embrace a vision of diversity, equity and inclusion that's bold and far-reaching and you, your leadership team, your staff and your partners can and will change the world!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #11
PROMOTE DIVERSITY EQUITY, AND ACCESS

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessment for you as a program director or site director, and to be used by your staff and partners, to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which you are especially strong and those where you can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're clearly outstanding in this area, and everyone would agree.

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
1	We're clear about what we mean by diversity and equity and can explain their importance in the context of our program.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We're committed to supporting the healthy social, cultural and cross-cultural development of all participants, to teach values of respect and inclusion of all people and to offer programming that helps reduce social disparities and inequities.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We actively model what it looks like to put our values and principles into practice.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Our staff understands, values and respects the various backgrounds and experiences of participants and their families and our community.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Our staff reflects the racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender and community characteristics of our students.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Our leadership and staff hold high and equitable expectations for all of the students in our program.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Our program provides activities and experiences that increase young people's knowledge and sense of connection to their cultural, language, gender and other identity groups.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
8	We consciously work to build respect and trust across boundaries of race, culture, gender, class and other areas of diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Our program activities are fully accessible to children and young people of all cultural and language backgrounds and physical and learning disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Our program's outreach and communication with families and the public is culturally and linguistically appropriate and inclusive.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We work intentionally to create a community that promotes equal opportunity and full social, economic, educational and political participation.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Our program is making a real difference in reducing social disparities and inequities in our community.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #12
MEASURE AND MANAGE OUTCOMES

A growing body of research and experience tells us that high quality programs are making a real difference in the lives of children and young people. Most of us intuitively know this, but face serious challenges coming up with evidence that can confirm it. This isn't surprising. In the past, afterschool programs were considered successful if they kept their doors open, attracted a fair number of young people each day and provided a safe place to play. Today, they're asked to do much more. They're expected to clearly identify program and student outcomes, or ways in which they're really making a difference in children and young people's lives, and to collect and asses data over time that can answer the question of whether the results they predicted were actually achieved.

This is compounded by the fact that different funding streams have different outcome requirements, some of which overlap with each other and others that don't. In many cases, the data needed to make valid assessments are difficult to access and hard to analyze. Formal evaluations are costly and outdated by the time they're published. And, results that can be *directly* attributed to programs aren't easily determined. High quality, sustainable afterschool programs recognize that these are tough challenges, but not insurmountable barriers.

Decide What to Measure

For many programs, desired outcomes are predetermined by the funding streams that support them. In others, they are largely influenced by the needs, interests and priorities of their communities. In most, it's a combination of both. In any case, you'll find that *what* you focus on will have an impact on the direction your program takes and how it's perceived internally, by your community, your funders and sometimes even a larger audience. Because of this, there are a number of important decisions and considerations that you'll need to make *before* you begin to establish a system for measuring and managing results. The most critical of these are:

- Selecting the right outcomes – ones that are realistic given your program's resources *and* are well matched with the interests of your stakeholders and funders,
- Identifying indicators that, when measured, accurately capture the impact your program is having on students in the areas of assessment you've selected,
- Determining whether the kinds of activities and approaches being used in your program are aligned with and capable of producing the outcomes you desire, and

- Assessing whether the attendance recordkeeping you have in place will really let you know how often and how long children and young people are participating and what level of attendance and length of participation are needed for improvement to actually be demonstrated.

When programs achieve the results they want, it's usually because they've developed the practices described in this Guide and established systems that enable them to track, measure and manage their progress. When programs fail to meet their outcomes, it isn't necessarily because they're of low quality, however. It may be that:

- They haven't implemented the kinds of activities and approaches that could be confidently expected to lead their stated outcomes, or
- They didn't realize how closely the frequency, consistency and duration of student participation impacts expected results, or
- They weren't aware of what indicators should be used to assess progress.

Use Results as a Starting Point, Not an Ending Point

Results are snapshots in time. They tell you *what* happened and should give you the answers to two questions: What changed and for whom did this change occur? For example, you might find that 95 percent of the students participating in your program completed their homework and 86 percent got better grades. You also might discover that 78 percent are more self-confident, 85 percent are getting along better with others and only 10 percent were referred to principals for discipline problems. On the surface this sounds like great news – and it may well be. The problem is that you don't really know what these results really mean. What if homework was completed but wasn't turned into teachers or wasn't done correctly? What if better grades were attributable to better behavior rather than improvement in academic performance?

> Measure the right things – and be sure you really know what the results mean.

What if you're assessing improvement in youth development and find that disciplinary actions are still more common for young people in your program than for the *general* school population? What if children were getting along better with their peers during your program, but not during school? These examples are real. They come from programs we've worked with over the years. Be careful not to fall into a similar trap. Measure the right things *and* follow through with enough information to be certain that you really know what the results mean!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you looked closely at the indicators you're using to measure student improvement?*

- *Do you know whether they're reliable?*
- *Have you taken the time to probe deeply enough to know whether the results you're getting can really be attributed to student participation in your program?*

Academic Achievement

With *No Child Left Behind* legislation and education reform, afterschool programs are increasingly expected to provide additional support that reinforces and strengthens student academic achievement – and demonstrate positive results. Widely accepted indicators of *student academic achievement* include teacher and parent reports of progress, improvement in homework completion, grades, school attendance and reductions in grade retention. Increasingly, state and federally funded programs are also expected to use standardized test scores to gauge student progress.

Student Attendance During the School Day. For obvious reasons, attendance during the school day is vital to academic success. The chances are very good that students *are* attending school more, especially if this is a requirement of participation in your program. What you really want to know is:

- Are students attending school more regularly than they did in the past?
- Are they attending more than students not enrolled in your program?
- Are those who previously had high absentee rates increasing their attendance by more than their peers in your program?

Obviously, accurately documenting attendance is critical and creating a *system* to record the level of each student's participation is vital. This means knowing much more than how many students are enrolled and the total attending each day. You'll have to know this for *each individual student.* Based on this, if you discover that attendance during the school day is increasing it's a significant finding. If you can go beyond this to demonstrate that this is leading to improvement in student academic performance, you'll be well-positioned to make the case that your program is strengthening student academic achievement.

If you find that what you thought was happening isn't, use this information to discover why. Ask yourself and your staff whether attendance recordkeeping needs to be strengthened, whether patterns of student participation are uneven and whether students who are coming to your program are actually attending school during the day. If your tracking systems aren't adequate, make changes in them right away.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you have a system in place for monitoring and reporting individual daily student attendance?*

- *Do you have a system in place that let's you know in real time whether students were in school each day they attended your program?*
- *Do you have a system in place that makes it easy to know which students have been in your program for at least six months or more?*
- *Do you have a system in place that allows you to compare student attendance with academic indicators such as standardized test scores, grades, etc?*

Homework Completion. As discussed earlier, it's not uncommon for programs to make the assumption that if homework assistance is provided, it automatically leads to homework being done correctly, and that students understand what they've learned, that materials are turned into teachers when they're due and that this leads to improvement in academic performance.

> Having a system in place to track student progress isn't a luxury – it's a necessity.

The problem is that this may or may not be happening. Conducting a survey among staff members and teachers may produce very different responses. Staff may accurately report that 97 percent of their students are finishing their homework during your program, when teachers will tell you that only 60 percent of the students in their classes are consistently turning it in, or that the homework they're receiving is being completed correctly or that students are becoming more knowledgeable and successful because this is happening.

For results to be meaningful, connections must be solid. Only when staff and teachers *agree* that the same positive things are happening for students will you know the systems you have in place are working and that evidence of the connection between homework completion and improvement in student academic performance is reliable. If your goal is to build the capacity of students to become higher academic achievers, you must have a *system* in place that provides the support your staff members need to be able to offer *appropriate* homework assistance. It also means that the *classroom connections* process described in Chapter 10 must be working to ensure that information about students is continually shared between your staff and certificated teachers.

Test Scores. End of the year test scores are an established standard in measuring student achievement and the effectiveness of our schools. It's important to note that there's a fair amount of debate in the fields of education *and* afterschool as to whether these are the most appropriate indicators of the educational success of children and young people. Nonetheless, among the approaches used to assess academic performance in afterschool programs, test scores and other quantitative performance data are on the rise.

The real question is how to use test scores in a way that makes the most sense. To date, we've found that while many approaches are valuable, one stands out: the use of *matched-pair* assessments of test score data. Although it takes a little more time, this methodology will allow you to compare *changes* in the test scores of students who are attending your program with those students who are in the same *classroom* during the school day but aren't enrolled in your program. The importance of this comes from the fact that teachers play the

most important role in student learning and that some are much more effective than others. By holding this variable constant you can learn a great deal more about the actual impact of your program on test scores than would be possible otherwise.

> A matched-pair approach can be extremely effective in demonstrating the impact of your program on student academic performance.

One more thing to keep in mind is that the gains made by students at the lowest levels are likely to be significantly greater than those at higher levels, and this should be taken into account by going the additional step to compare individual students who have roughly the same baseline scores.

If *most* participating students are doing better than their peers in classroom after classroom, you can demonstrate pretty conclusively that it's attributable to the additional support they're receiving in afterschool programs. If they're not, it's a heads-up that something in your program needs to change.

As you enter into this process, remember that not all children and young people in your program will be part of the testing process. This may include students at certain grade levels, English Language Learners and some Special Education students. Other measures will have to be used to assess their progress, and principals, classroom teachers and academic coaches can be very helpful in this area.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you have a system in place for getting the data you need to use test scores as a measure of student academic achievement?*
- *Have you developed positive working relationships with district accountability offices?*
- *Have you established a measure of improvement for students who don't participate in standardized testing?*
- *Do you have a principal, teacher or academic coach on your team who can help you get the information you need to carry out matched-pair analyses?*

Report Cards. Report cards are commonly used as indicators of how well students are doing in school. A child who's getting mostly A's is considered highly successful, while another who's receiving mostly D's isn't. *Improvement* in grades, which frequently happens when students regularly participate in afterschool programs, can be a powerful indicator of the success of your program and it's certainly important in building self-esteem and self-confidence, increasing enthusiasm for learning and encouraging students to like school more.

> Improvement in grades can be a strong indicator – when you're sure it genuinely reflects student academic achievement.

For these reasons, it's useful to include grades as a measure – if you can get the information. Even a sample of students can provide important information and be extrapolated to a larger number if it's done appropriately. Although confidentiality laws

make this challenging, it can happen. We've discovered a real problem in the reliability of this information, however. In all too many cases, especially in low-performing elementary schools in high poverty areas, grades are given on the basis of student *attitudes* rather than student *performance*. We've found that grades can be good indicators, but only when you're confident that they really reflect student achievement.

A random sample comparing grades with test scores will give you a strong sense of what's really happening. If you find that students with average test scores are also getting average grades, this strongly suggests that grades are correlating with performance. If you discover that students with very low test scores are getting very high grades, there's a problem and you may not want to use this indicator as part of your overall assessment of the impact of your program on student academic achievement.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Can you demonstrate improvement in grades for students participating in your program?*
- *Do you have a process in place that provides you with access to a random sample of the report cards of students participating in your program?*
- *Do you have a high level of confidence that these reflect academic achievement?*
- *Are you using grades as part of your evaluation process?*

Grade Retention. Children and young people who consistently attend high quality afterschool programs have the advantage of as many as 90 additional days of structured learning opportunities and support during the school year. For underperforming students, this *should* be enough in and of itself to reinforce and strengthen their skills and accelerate their progress *toward* reaching grade level – and keep them from being retained in the same grade for another year. It's not enough to guess whether this is actually happening and it can easily be determined with the help of principals and academic coaches.

Since the number of retentions is typically not very large, the process of comparing lists of students enrolled in your program with those not advanced to the next grade level takes as little as 10 or 15 minutes and often less. Beyond this, it's important to ask principals to help you determine the impact your program is having by asking three questions:

- Does the profile of students in your program represent a cross-section of students in the general school population?
- Is the *percentage* of students in your program being retained lower than that for students who are not participating?
- Are students in your program who were *at risk* of being retained being promoted more frequently than those who are not enrolled?

Answering these questions is important from the perspective of demonstrating academic improvement, giving you information about the impact your program is having and making the case that your program is saving taxpayer dollars.

Drop Out Rates. The directors of every program we've worked with want to be able to say that their program has helped reduce drop-out rates – and most will tell us that they believe it has. They're probably right, but without being able to support their claims with definitive evidence, what they say won't have much credibility. Determining whether your program is having a real impact in this area almost always requires a combination of data, some of which is general and some of which is specific to individual students.

Equally importantly, drop-out rates rarely apply to elementary school students and therefore are only really useful in higher grade levels – when a lot more is going on in young people's lives that could contribute to their staying in school or dropping out. We've found that it's quite reasonable and effective to compare drop out rates for middle school, junior high and high school students who have been and/or are continuing to be enrolled in your program with those who haven't participated. Your ability to track this depends on how strong your relationships are with your district and individual schools and the support you receive from them.

Assessing Youth Development and Program Quality

The most common indicators of *positive youth development* include improvement in problem solving, decision-making, interpersonal and communication skills and an increased ability of students to get along well with others, to work collaboratively and to assume leadership responsibilities. Social behavior indicators typically include reductions in disciplinary actions and drop-out rates and increases in attendance during the school day. High quality programs use a variety of approaches to determine where they are at any given point in time, assess their progress and make adjustments that may be needed to produce the kinds of positive youth development outcomes they want most.

Student Surveys. As we've discussed throughout this section of the Guide, one of the most important ways of assessing progress in areas of youth development is to ask students about what they're learning, what skills they're developing, what's changing in their lives and how this is impacting them. All too many programs bypass this in favor of asking adults these questions and relying on their judgment for the answers.

High quality programs supplement adult surveys with student surveys. They engage older students in developing and reviewing the measurable indicators of youth participation, safety, positive relationships, challenging learning experiences and opportunities for community involvement that are important to them personally. They ask students what these terms mean, what they would look for to measure program quality in these areas and what they think is important from their own perspectives.

> High quality programs supplement adult surveys with student surveys and gather a variety of information.

The feedback you get when you do this will ensure that questions you're posing are framed in language that's appropriate, make sense and get to the heart of the issues you, and they, believe are critical. Don't think of the surveys you use as "satisfaction surveys", but rather as ways to gauge the quality of your program. Get student perspectives on what they're

learning, what skills they're developing, and what difference this is making. All too many programs bypass this process in favor of asking adults questions and relying on their answers. Don't make this mistake!

Facilitated Small Group Assessments. Youth surveys provide a snapshot of what children and young people experience, but it's very unlikely that you or your staff will be able to explain why this is the case without getting more information directly from students themselves. High quality programs involve students in facilitated group discussions to learn more. Limited to 10 or fewer participants in each group, these can provide one of the most effective ways to discover how your program is doing and what impact it's having.

> A lot can be learned in small group discussions that wouldn't necessarily show up in written surveys.

Invite community leaders to serve as facilitators of these discussions. This provides an avenue for them to learn more about your program and in virtually every instance we've seen it increase their interest in and support for what you're doing. A lot can be learned that wouldn't show up on written surveys. The key is to determine questions for discussion in advance, keep them open-ended and allow participants to respond in whatever ways they think are most appropriate. Ask facilitators to provide written summaries to you after these sessions have been completed. Involving children and young people focus groups will provide you with extremely valuable insights into the quality of your program. It will also reveal at least some things that may not have occurred to you or your staff. We've found that many people are amazed at what they didn't know about their own programs. In one case, a staff member was startled by what he learned from a student he asked: "Why didn't you tell us that before?" The child responded: "You never asked." Below are examples of what programs have learned through this process – each of which demonstrates how important it is to listen to students

In one afterschool program, young people reported that they didn't feel safe. When asked to explain why, staff learned that to go to the bathrooms they had to travel down a long, poorly lit hallway and young people found this to be a scary experience. The program responded by creating an escort system where younger children could buddy up with older students. The result was a marked increase of feelings of *physical safety* – a key factor in supporting youth development.

In another program, a site director learned that students didn't believe that the rules governing behavior were either widely known or consistently enforced and that they couldn't predict how each day would go. Having this information resulted in a serious re-examination of existing policies and changes in the way they were being carried out – and it dramatically improved students' feeling of *emotional security.*

Still another program was surprised to learn that older students didn't feel like staff members really knew who they were or cared about them. They were so busy moving them from "productive activity to productive activity" that they never took the time to really talk with students in a meaningful way. Once this was known, this program actually

changed staff responsibilities to ensure that they had time to talk and hang out with these students and even paid some staff to stay on after the program activities ended so they could sit on the steps outside the building – the place where the youth congregated before going home. The result was a significant improvement in *supportive relationships* – a result that is vital to positive youth development.

Use these approaches to identify areas of strength and areas in need of improvement and to implement a program improvement strategy that integrates youth ideas and support. Whatever you find, use the input you get from children and young people to help set the direction for the continuous improvement in the quality of your program and the outcomes for students!

Staff Evaluations of Student Progress. Your staff members are invaluable resources for assessing student progress in their social, emotional and behavioral growth. When they work with children and young people every day, they can *observe* changes that wouldn't be possible at a distance or even through surveys or small group discussions. The difference between doing this well and coming up short lies in the extent to which your staff formally tracks these changes by identifying them in written form.

This can easily be accomplished by asking your staff to keep journals. What they include can be as simple as noting that a first grader who was reluctant to speak up in a community-building session is now eager to share information, or that a fourth grader who lacked the confidence to read out loud is now happy to do this in front of the whole group. It can be about a child who had a hard time making friends but now has many, or a young person who was a bully and has stopped this kind of behavior. All of these, and many more, capture changes that indicate that students in your program are developing in positive ways. When they're recorded in writing in real time they carry much more weight and are likely to be much more accurate than relying on recollections later on.

Parent and Primary Caregiver Assessments. Don't overlook the value of what parents and other primary caregivers have to say about changes in the attitudes, behavior and performance of their children. If what you're doing is really meaningful, you can expect that it isn't isolated to just what's going on in your program. Parents will be the first to tell you their children are doing better in school, that stress in their homes has decreased because battles over homework have been eliminated, or that the fact that they're not worried sick about what's happening to them when they're at work has made a big difference in their lives.

> Don't overlook the value of what parents and other primary caregivers have to say about changes in the attitudes, behavior and performance of their children.

They'll also probably tell you that *they* are learning more because their children are learning more, that they know more about current events or that they've expanded their knowledge. Perhaps most importantly, they'll tell you about differences in the willingness and ability of their children to assume responsibility, carry projects at home through to completion, and be more respectful. All of this matters a lot, and it can be documented.

Use a combination of personal conversations and surveys to get the information you want. In many cases, we've found that written surveys tend to be of limited value if your student population is culturally and linguistically diverse or if parents and primary caregivers have limited reading or writing skills. And, like most of us, if they're too busy they won't take the time to respond thoughtfully to a survey or return it to your staff. The information you gather will be much more valuable if you take the time to talk with parents and primary caregivers in person at the end of the day when they're picking their children up or at special events. Just be sure to document what you discover!

Commit to Continuous Quality Improvement

As we discussed in the beginning of this chapter and have emphasized throughout this Guide, a growing body of research and experience tells us that high quality programs are making a real difference in the lives of children and young people – in every area of their lives. Successful programs know the importance of measuring the right things in the right way and make a commitment to managing outcomes in real time and over time.

They use what they learn to build on what's working and change what isn't. They're committed to the continuous improvement of their programs and to make certain that the outcomes they want for the children and young people are achieved. By learning to develop this practice, you'll move much more quickly and effectively toward the achievement of your own goals and the quality and sustainability of your program!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #12
MEASURE AND MANAGE OUTCOMES

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessments for you as a program director, a site director, a member of your leadership team or a partner, and to be used by your staff to provide you additional information about those areas in which your program is especially strong and those where it can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're clearly outstanding in this area, and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	We understand and value the importance of measuring and managing outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We use a variety of tools to assess student progress in developing their social and emotional skills.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We use a variety of tools to assess student academic progress.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We have access to the data we need to assess student progress in academic performance.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We have a strong, positive working relationship with the school district accountability office.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have access to classroom teacher assessments of the performance of students attending our program.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We have developed tools for assessing the progress of children and young people in developing youth development skills.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We regularly involve students in assessments of their own progress and the impact of our program on their progress.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
9	We have a system in place that allows our staff to assess student progress in areas related to academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We have a system in place that allows our staff to assess student progress in areas of youth development.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We have a system in place that involves parents and primary caregivers in assessments of the progress of their children.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We're clear about the validity of our findings.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We use results to continually strengthen our program.	1	2	3	4	5
14	We provide our staff and partners with appropriate and timely information about our findings.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We formalize our findings in executive summaries and widely disseminate these to staff, stakeholders, partners, funders, parents and others.	1	2	3	4	5
16	We produce annual reports that document the results we have achieved and make these available to staff, stakeholders, partners, funders and parents.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers and divide by the number of indicators.						

SECTION 3

COMMUNITY-WIDE PRACTICES

High quality, sustainable afterschool programs continually assess their progress and hold everyone accountable for what happens. They create and maintain partnerships that are committed to concrete actions that support bringing their vision into reality. And, they secure solid, ongoing funding that enables them to financially support high quality programming over time. They:

- Build authentic partnerships that make things happen through a shared vision, personal and professional relationships and actions that produce concrete results, and
- Develop balanced and diversified funding that ensures financial viability and sustainability.

The final section of this Guide focuses on how you can do this – and why it's so important. It's designed for program directors, leadership teams and partners who have authority and responsibility in these areas.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #13
CREATE AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS

As a leader, one of your most important responsibilities is to create an *authentic* partnership to support your efforts in building a high quality, sustainable program. The way you think about partnership development is directly related to your ability to do this effectively. The first step is to understand that partnerships and collaboratives aren't the same.

While both are important, the difference between the two is critical. Partnerships come into being when people are inspired by the possibility of *going beyond doing something to influencing the way things are done.* Their purpose is to *make things happen* through a shared vision, personal and professional relationships and actions that produce concrete results. They're typically small in size and committed to *leading* change. The real advantage of partnerships is their ability to:

- Provide you with access to key policy and decision-makers,
- Enhance the credibility of your program and your efforts,
- Offer expertise in key areas,
- Help you secure financial investments, and
- Position your program as a leader in your community and beyond.

Collaboratives come into being when people bring individuals and organizations together in loose, voluntary affiliation with each other. Their purpose is to create a forum for expressing ideas, offering viewpoints, discussing issues and sharing information and resources. They're usually large in size and often organized around committees and task forces that generate ideas and recommendations and *propose* plans. The advantages of collaboratives are their ability to:

- Expand awareness,
- Create community contacts,
- Offer a sounding board, and
- Provide feedback.

In our experience, reaching out to and embracing and learning from a large number of people and diverse organizations is essential to *long-term* success. The question isn't *whether* this should happen, but *when.* The best advice we can give comes from the most successful afterschool programs: focus your efforts on partnership development *first,* and collaboration-building second.

Spend *more* time with people who are excited about achieving clearly defined objectives, invest their time strategically, link their reputations with their actions and make things happen. Spend *less* time developing collaboratives that may reflect widespread support,

but lack the authority to make decisions and or the capacity to move forward quickly to achieve tangible results.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are your efforts focused more on creating a partnership or building a collaborative?*
- *Are you getting what you need from the people and organizations you're working with?*
- *Is this producing the results you want for your program?*
- *Would everyone agree?*

The Importance of a Champion

Having a champion is indispensable to your program's development, growth and sustainability. This must be someone who can bring people to the table to support your program at the highest levels – not just any people, but those with exceptional credibility, skills, knowledge, connections, influence, authority and access to financial resources.

This person is frequently a mayor, city council or school board member, corporate executive or county supervisor – but it doesn't have to be. The most important considerations are the individual's *willingness* to serve as your champion and *ability* to influence other prominent community leaders to partner with you. He or she should be uniquely well positioned to convince colleagues of the importance of what you're doing and the *privilege* of being chosen to be part of it.

> Get the right people on board to position your program as a leader in your community.

This isn't about asking people to be involved in the details of program design or implementation. It has nothing to do with creating a task force or bringing people together in a lot of meetings. It *is* about getting the right people to help *position* your program as a leader in your community – and this begins with a prominent leader who can develop a Guiding Team.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you have a champion to lead this effort?*
- *Is he or she credible, influential and committed to action?*

The Value of a Guiding Team

Having a core group of influential advocates who can make the case for partnering with you will make a huge difference in your success. Because of their credibility, they're much more likely than you to be able to convince their colleagues that your program has the

potential to meet *their* interests in ways they may never have considered. Keep in mind that the *messenger* can be as important as the message.

- When your mayor tells city council members that as your program grows local investments can *leverage* state and federal funding and bring in hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars of outside money into your community, it has a real impact.

- When a county supervisor engages department heads in conversations about how your program can create new jobs, increase workplace productivity, reduce childcare costs and stimulate local economic development, it matters.

- When a school district superintendent discusses the ways your program can reduce school vandalism, grade retention, neighborhood crimes, absences during the school day and drop out rates, Board Members and educators pay attention.

- When a corporate executive talks with his or her associates about the way your program can support the development of problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking and communication skills in children and young people, they immediately connect this with their own future workforce.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Does your Guiding Team include elected officials, school district superintendents, county executives, private foundation directors and corporate leaders?*

- *Do you understand how important this is to your program's immediate and long-term success?*

Strengthen Buy-In through Emotions

Partnership development operates on both intellectual and emotional levels. Emotions activate behavior, provide meaning, directly influence choices and strengthen motivation – all of which are vital to securing commitments *and* creating a sense of urgency that prompts people to become engaged. If your program has already achieved a level of success, take members of your Guiding Team on a site visit. This will not only increase their familiarity with what you're doing and why it's important, it will bring them more deeply into the process *emotionally.*

> Make site visits a key component of your partnership development plan and it will pay huge dividends.

Invite three or four people to visit a site together. The shared experience will create a bond between them and with your program. Be sure they have time to really *see* the neighborhood in which the site is located. Tell them what you know about the demographics *and* the

conditions in which children and families are living. Structure the experience to be sure they have an opportunity not only to observe your program in action, but also to speak directly with students, program staff, the principal, teachers *and* parents.

Make this a regular part of your approach to partnership development and it will pay huge dividends. These experiences have a profound emotional impact on most people. They go well beyond what is possible to achieve in other ways – if they're done well. Take time to ensure that you, your staff and everyone else are well prepared. After the visit, follow-up right away by expressing your appreciation to visitors for their taking time out of their busy schedules to learn more about what you're doing and why it's making a difference. Ask for their thoughts and suggestions. Have students write short thank-you notes!

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you regularly schedule site visits with prominent community leaders and policy-makers?*
- *Do you take the time to fully prepare yourself, your staff, students, principals, teachers and parents for these experiences – and thank them afterwards?*
- *Do you view site visits as important opportunities to broaden and deepen support for your program?*
- *Do you follow up immediately to reinforce what visitors have experienced and express your appreciation to them and suggest ways they can become more involved?*

Stay in Close Contact

Once you've created a Guiding Team, stay connected and available. Frequent conversations will help you develop solid relationships and keep folks involved, engaged and excited. Schedule a face-to-face meeting with each person at least every month in the beginning. Be respectful of their time. If you're well-prepared, 20 minutes will be enough for you to provide an update on how things are going in your program, learn what they've done and respond to questions that are likely to come up. In the interim, keep in touch by phone. Your success in getting members of your Guiding Team to stay connected and enthusiastic depends largely on their trust and confidence in you.

Hold up your end of the bargain. It's impossible to create a high quality, sustainable program without the support of influential community leaders, adequate financial resources and solid positioning. It's just as impossible to attract investors, policy-makers and other key supporters and keep them committed without developing a high quality program that demonstrates tangible results that meet their interests and helps them achieve their own goals. Above all, your responsibility as a leader is to ensure that this happens.

It won't be long before you begin to see results. You'll be personally introduced to people you may not know now but who can make a real difference in supporting your efforts. You'll hear ideas you never thought about and approaches that might have seemed beyond your reach.

> Members of your Guiding Team will fulfill their commitments and move quickly to provide the kind of support that will help you achieve your program's goals.

You'll find that members of your Guiding Team will fulfill their commitments, provide support and help your program achieve its goals. This will create a strong foundation for attracting a larger number of influential partners *and* securing the local financial investments that are essential to your program's viability and sustainability.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *How do you really feel about working with high-level policy-makers and prominent community leaders?*
- *Do you maximize the use of their time when you're with them?*
- *Do you have a system in place that enables you to stay connected and available?*
- *Do you understand how important building personal relationships are to keeping people motivated and committed?*

Use Quarterly Progress Reports to Highlight Successes

As you do this, keep in mind that people and organizations like to be on a *winning* team. Early and continued successes, no matter how small, build confidence, trust and commitment and sustain enthusiasm. When they're concrete, recognizable and meaningful, they create a sense of optimism and renew and expand commitment. Without tangible successes, most people will lose interest. Those who are not fully committed will become increasingly skeptical and may consciously or unconsciously undermine your efforts no matter how lofty your goals or important your purpose. Identifying and widely publicizing short-term accomplishments is central to building credibility, resources and momentum because it:

- Provides positive feedback about the validity of everyone's efforts,
- Gives us all an emotional boost,
- Builds faith in what we're doing and attracts new partners, and
- Takes power away from cynics.

> Use Quarterly progress reports to demonstrate the growing success of your program and its impact on your community.

There's a lot you can do to be sure your partners are aware of and excited by your program's successes. In addition to staying in close personal contact, writing *Quarterly Progress Reports* and *Executive Summaries* is essential. Use Quarterly Progress Reports to highlight your program's accomplishments. If you've received

new funding or special recognition, increased the number of students and staff or expanded to include additional sites, this is the place to make these successes known. If you have documented evidence that students are doing better academically be sure to include this information.

Be sure you make the *connections* between what you're telling them and the *impact* it's having on your community. Use what you say to demonstrate the growing strength of your program. Limit your reports to a maximum of two pages and have them reviewed by members of your Guiding Team before releasing them to a wider audience of partners, stakeholders and staff members.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Do you keep your partners informed through Quarterly Progress Reports?*
- *Are these documents having a significant impact on your actual and prospective partners?*
- *How do you know?*

Keep Your Partners Informed through Executive Summaries

Although Executive Summaries are usually thought of as abbreviated forms of longer documents, they don't have to be. In fact, we recommend that you begin with them and expand them into something more comprehensive later on. The purpose of an Executive Summary is to familiarize a wide range of *decision-makers* and *potential investors* with your program.

> The more concisely your Executive Summary is written, the greater impact it will have.

Be sure the format is professional and the language is clear and compelling and delivers specific message points that explain *why* what you are doing is having an *impact* that's important to partners, community leaders, potential funders and stakeholders – including your staff! The more concisely your Executive Summary is written, the greater the chances that it will get people's attention and motivate them to become involved and invested. Keep your Executive Summary to no more than four pages. The important thing is that it's read and responded to enthusiastically. Write a draft and then ask yourself if what you've highlighted matters a lot to you but may not matter to people outside your organization.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you taken the time to write an Executive Summary that's informative and compelling?*
- *Is it having the impact you want?*
- *How do you know?*

Enlist Partners in Helping You Create Community-wide Support

Through their connections, your partners can be of invaluable assistance in opening doors that will make regular speaking engagements, local television and radio appearances and ongoing newspaper coverage possible. They'll help put you and your program in the spotlight – a place where you must be if you're to create the level of community-wide support you'll need for your program to achieve its potential.

Once your partners have bought into your vision, your program and your goals, they'll want you to succeed. They've put their reputations on the line to help make this happen! If you're anxious about speaking or being interviewed in these venues, they'll help you build your self-confidence by giving you advance information, suggesting approaches, ensuring that their colleagues make things as easy as possible for you and in some cases joining you in appearances.

After a few radio talk show programs, television interviews, editorial board meetings and city council or school board presentations, you'll be amazed at how much easier things become. Intimidation will give way to enthusiasm and what may be frightening in the beginning will ultimately be a lot of fun. Ask for assistance in scheduling these opportunities and take the plunge. You'll get better all the time!

Keep the Momentum Going

Once you've begun to develop a partnership that's bringing powerful new resources into your program, keeping you in the limelight and helping you achieve your goals, it's easy to become complacent. Don't! There's a huge difference between building a partnership and *institutionalizing* it.

Having the strong support of a mayor, a district superintendent, a county supervisor and corporate and other community leaders is essential – but it's not the same as having the support of the city government, the county government, the school district, a corporation or a leading nonprofit group over time. Your real goal should be to ensure that once elected or appointed officials are out of office or corporate executives go on to other jobs, their organizations continue to be strong, effective partners!

> Don't let up!
> There's a big difference between creating a partnership and institutionalizing it!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #13
CREATE AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessment for you as a program director or member of the leadership team, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which you are especially strong and those where you can improve.

KEY:

1.   We're just beginning to work in this area.
2.   We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3.   We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4.   We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5.   We're clearly outstanding in this area, and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	We understand the difference between partnerships and collaboratives.	1	2	3	4	5
2	We have a real champion who leads the way in developing a partnership that supports our program's efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We are supported by a Guiding Team of influential, high-level policy-makers.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We stay in close contact with members of our guiding team and our partners.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We use a targeted approach to attract new partners by demonstrating ways in which our program meets local priorities and interests.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We are clear about and can effectively communicate the ways in which our program brings new revenue into our community and results in cost savings.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We frequently take high-ranking decision-makers on site visits.	1	2	3	4	5
8	We develop Executive Summaries that effectively describe our program and the impact it is having in our community.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
9	We keep partners and key stakeholders informed through Quarterly Progress Reports.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We have developed a comprehensive public relations strategy.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We have a strong, positive relationship with the media	1	2	3	4	5
12	We use speaking engagements as a way to reach a larger audience, inform people about the work we are doing and attract new partners.	1	2	3	4	5
13	We create opportunities to appear on local television and radio shows and in media events to expand awareness of our program.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Our partners are strongly committed to ensuring that our program is successful and sustainable.	1	2	3	4	5
15	We hold up our end of the bargain with partners by continually improving the quality of our program.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Our partnership is institutionalized.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers and divide by the number of indicators.						

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #14
SECURE BALANCED, DIVERSIFIED AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Whether your program achieves its potential ultimately depends on your ability to secure balanced, diversified and sustainable funding. Most people understand this but don't know how to go about doing it. The first step is to recognize that building a solid investment portfolio is absolutely essential if your program is going to be successful in the long run. Consider the following:

- As important as in-kind contributions and federal, state and foundation grants are, they won't adequately support your efforts to strengthen quality and expand opportunities for children and young people in your community *over time.*

- Programs that are the best positioned to be sustainable have secured roughly equal amounts of federal, state and private funding *and* the pooled financial investments of cities, counties, school districts and corporate and community foundations.

Begin by Focusing on the Return on Local Investments

Cities, counties, school districts, corporations and foundations are increasingly asked to do more with less. Unfortunately, persuading people to become partners because it's the right or noble thing to do or because it will make a difference in the lives of children and young people isn't as compelling as it used to be. To get and keep people's attention, you'll have to convince them that what you are doing will help them achieve *their* goals.

> The return on local financial investments in afterschool programs can be as much as 1000 percent a year.

This begins with understanding that there are powerful incentives for cities, counties, school districts and community foundations to become financial investors. Evaluations conducted by the California Department of Education, the University of California, Irvine, the University of California, Los Angeles and the Rose Institute confirm that:

- Local investments *leverage* state and federal funding, bringing hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars of outside money into communities.

- Increases in workplace productivity and employment and reduced childcare costs *stimulate local economic development.*

- Reductions in school vandalism, grade retention, neighborhood crime, absences during the school day and drop out rates lead to *significant cost savings.*

- The *return on investments* in afterschool programs typically exceeds the cost of doing business in other ways by as much as 1000 percent.

These are powerful incentives for doing what it takes to support the quality and sustainability of your program. Depending on how far along you are, you can make this argument in one of two ways. If your program has been in existence for some time, the best evidence is already available in your community. If you're just starting out, it's perfectly legitimate and reasonable to draw on the well-documented experiences of other communities that are comparable to yours.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you knowledgeable about the economic impact your program can and does have on your community?*
- *Can you link the importance of your program with the interests of potential investors in a powerful, convincing way?*

Link Potential Investments with Benefits to Cities and Counties

> The cost of incarcerating a young person is 40 times higher than having the same person in an afterschool program for a year.

The value of afterschool programs as a source of state and federal revenue that would not otherwise be available has become increasingly important. Cities and counties that position themselves to take advantage of new funding opportunities will have an unprecedented opportunity to bring literally millions of new dollars into their communities.

Cost savings are equally important. Documented reductions in juvenile crimes, gang involvement, vandalism and child victimization save money *and* make communities more attractive places to live. A quick analysis of the annual cost of funding a student in an afterschool program compared with the cost of a single crime committed by a young person is instructive.

A number of studies suggest that the average cost per child attending an afterschool program five days a week, three hours a day for a year ranges between $1,200 and $2,000 annually. The average expense incurred from the time a crime is committed to the end of a one-year incarceration in a juvenile detention hall is often at least $42,000 – or *30 to 40 times higher!* If an afterschool program keeps just three children or adolescents from entering the juvenile justice system, it will pay for itself.

As the number of afterschool programs increases, new local employment opportunities become available. In addition to reducing unemployment, jobs in high quality programs strengthen skills and promote personal and professional development, raising the quality as well as the size of the workforce.

For parents of participating students, workplace productivity between the hours of 3:00pm and 6:00pm significantly increases. The availability of free childcare creates discretionary income that adds to local economic growth. A decline in child victimization during the late afternoon hours reduces the number of children and young people placed in harm's way and lowers child welfare and intervention costs to cities and counties.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Are you clear about the specific interests of city and county policy-makers?*
- *Have you done an assessment of how much new money your program has brought in, or is capable of bringing in, to your community?*
- *Do you have at least an estimate of the cost savings that can reasonably be attributed to the existence your program?*
- *Can you put this information together in a compelling written and oral argument?*

Don't Overlook the Cost Savings to School Districts

High quality afterschool programs support the interests and goals of school boards, districts and schools in concrete ways. Student academic performance improves, often as much as two to three times more than for those not enrolled in these programs. Attendance during the school day increases by two to three weeks a year among students with previously high absenteeism. Disciplinary actions are reduced. Grade retention is lowered. English language learners strengthen their skills at a much faster rate. Student attitudes and behavior improve. Children and young people report liking school better, are more enthusiastic about learning, and are less likely to drop out.

> One act of school vandalism typically costs more than the total cost of an afterschool program serving 100 students for a year.

If you think of these as educational advantages, you're right. But don't forget that they also represent *significant cost savings.* School vandalism often costs upward of $100,000 – or just $12,500 less than the *annual* budget of afterschool programs serving 100 children every day for an *entire* school year. Absenteeism reduces state reimbursements to schools and grade retention costs taxpayers millions of dollars a year. Failure to meet the requirements of *No Child Left Behind* can trigger a whole host of problems, many of which have serious financial ramifications.

✓ *A Reality Check…*

- *Have you taken the time to identify specific ways in which your program contributes to cost savings for school districts in which it is located?*
- *Have you compiled this information in a way that is easily understandable to school board members, district superintendents and principals?*

- *Are you prepared to make the case in individual meetings and public presentations?*
- *Do you have champions and advocates who will support you in this effort?*

Align with Corporate and Private Foundation Interests

Private foundations and corporations understand the importance of leveraging resources to produce positive outcomes in high priority areas such as youth development, community connections and the quality of the future labor force. They recognize the dangers of the digital divide, the increasing numbers of people living below the poverty level and the importance of young people developing strong communication, problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking and interpersonal skills.

They also increasingly look to experts in the field to provide counsel and advice on investing their money. They're committed to making choices that produce real social and economic dividends *and* meet the needs and interests of their program officers and board members. As a result, pooling their investments to ensure a more strategic and comprehensive impact is becoming more and more attractive.

> Private Foundations are committed to making choices that produce real social and economic dividends and meet the needs and interests of their program officers and board members.

Don't second guess what corporations and private foundations really want or how open they might be to thinking differently about their investments. Check their websites, talk with their community relations directors and learn as much as you can about what they are interested in, what they have funded and what the results have been.

Once you're confident you understand their interests and objectives, tailor your messages in ways that demonstrate your familiarity with them and the ways your program serves mutual goals. Remember that *your* primary interest is in convincing them to join others in becoming *long-term* investors.

Adopt a Proven Formula for Creating a Solid Funding Base

Over the last several years, we've found that the most successful formula for securing the level of balanced, diversified and sustainable investments that ensure program quality and sustainability is the *20 percent rule*. Put simply, cities, counties, school districts, foundations and businesses agree to combine their resources to finance *at least half of the operational costs* of programs (the other half will come from state, federal and other grants). Each commits to investing approximately 20 percent of this amount of the half from sources that can be maintained over time. The other 50 percent is secured through state and federal sources.

This formula secures a balanced budget while paying both immediate and long-term returns to investors. It's equitable and affordable. It provides a solid foundation for managed growth and long-term sustainability and produces both significant economic

efficiencies and positive social outcomes. The 20 percent rule can be explained in the following way:

Step 1: The process is almost always initiated by a community champion who holds a position of influence and decision-making authority, such as a mayor, a prominent city council member, a county executive, a school district superintendent or a non-profit leader. Preliminary discussions focus on the impact afterschool programs are having on their community and how their interests can better be met by combining their efforts.

Step 2: Potential partners meet together to review the cost of financing programs at the level needed to support both quality and sustainability. Generally, one school site serving 100 elementary school children requires approximately $112,500 annually (middle school programs typically cost $150,000 and high school programs $200,000 for the same number of participating students). A combined local investment of 50 percent of the total for each elementary school site, or $56,250, is adopted as the target figure. Each stakeholder considers the advantages of investing 20 percent, or $11,250, of that amount.

Step 3: Stakeholders agree to *pool* their resources in *unrestricted cash.* In-kind contributions, such as staff assignments, materials, supplies and equipment and all resources other than cash are excluded from this process and reserved for strengthening programs once the operational requirements have been satisfied.

Step 4: Stakeholders agree that their investments will remain at the *same percentage level* as the number of sites increases over time. For example, the school district pledges to invest 20 percent of the total operational budget as programs add new sites and/or new students are enrolled at existing sites. If the initial investment is for 10 sites, the 20 percent figure is $112,500. If the number of sites increases to 15, the investment increases to $168,750. And so on.

Step 5: Funding partners enter into an open-ended contractual relationship through memoranda of understanding, a joint powers agreement or similar arrangement to secure long-term local funding, with one partner serving as the fiscal agent.

> By pooling their resources, each local investor leverages five times the dollar amount they put in each year.

By pooling investments, each stakeholder leverages much more money than could otherwise be secured locally. Each investment of 20 percent automatically leverages *five times that amount* and as the number of multi-site programs grows, cost savings increase through an economy of scale. A solid local partnership also significantly improves the likelihood of securing state and federal funding and support from regional, statewide and national foundations, yielding a return on investment of at least *10 times* the amount committed – or 1,000 percent!

Help Potential Investors Identify Sources of Local Funding

Having made the commitment to fund programs, stakeholders must then determine the *sources* of financial support available. Based on the actual investments of local funding partnerships, the following are representative.

Potential Funding Sources

CITIES	COUNTIES	SCHOOL DISTRICTS	CORPORATIONS/ FOUNDATIONS
General funds	General funds	General funds	Community Foundation grants
Community Services Department funds	Community Bloc Grants	Title I, Title 3, Title 4 and other categorical funds	Corporate Foundation investments
Recreation Department and Children, Youth and Family Community funds	Prevention funds (juvenile justice, teen pregnancy, child abuse prevention)	Safe and Drug Free School funds	Ongoing annual fundraising events
Local taxes	Local taxes	Average Daily Attendance dollars	Matching and challenge grants

Consider it part of your responsibility to work closely with people to identify sources specific to your own area and offer other ideas that you become familiar with as you engage in research and talk with people in other communities.

Generate State, Federal and Foundation Funding

With a 50 percent local funding base, the balance of financial support must be secured either at the state or federal level. The key factor in determining the most appropriate *use* of these funds is their longevity.

State Grants. In California, the target should be to fund as many sites as is feasible through the *After School Education and Safety Programs Act* when additional funding becomes available. (Additional information is provided in the Appendix.) The new formula provides $50,000 a year for elementary schools and $75,000 for middle schools, with reimbursement based on meeting attendance and other requirements. Since this funding continues in perpetuity so long as programs meet specified outcomes, it should be used to cover core-operating costs over time.

Other states are increasingly using Child Development and School-Age Child Care resources. Don't over look any possibilities, but remember that many of these are of limited duration and will have to be replaced when they come to an end. Aim to keep this funding source at approximately one-fifth of your projected funding base unless it is renewable.

In combination, local, state and federal funding provides a solid foundation for long-term financial sustainability.

Federally Funded Grants. Federally funded/state administered 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants are vital to program success but they are limited to three to five years – at which time

funding must be replaced. To-date, programs that have relied on this as a single source of financial support have faced insurmountable challenges. These and other federally funded grants should be targeted at no more than 20 percent of operating costs – with the amount declining each year. The remaining 80 percent should be reserved for strengthening program quality. The same is true for other federal grants.

Foundation Grants. Private funding should be targeted at approximately 20 percent of the dollars secured from non-local investments. Awards are typically made for one to two years and therefore should be used to strengthen program quality (investments in leadership development, staff training, materials for specific program components such as science clusters, and so on) rather than be used for operation expenses.

In combination, local, state and federal funding provides the foundation for a balanced, diversified and sustainable portfolio. The examples provided below offer three different kinds of funding scenarios that are taken from actual afterschool programs. They help demonstrate how important it is for you to work conscientiously to create this kind of portfolio and explain the dangers of not doing so.

SAMPLE FUNDING SCENARIOS

Based on actual examples of an average cost per elementary
school site (100 students) with an annual budget of $112,500

	SCENARIO 1	SCENARIO 2	SCENARIO 3
INVESTORS	REVENUE	REVENUE	REVENUE
Local Support			
City	0	10,000	11,250
County	0	10,000	11,250
School District	10,000	In-Kind Only	11,250
Local Foundations	5,000	In-Kind Only	11,250
Local Corporations	0	10,500	11,250
Total Dollar Investment	**0**	**35,000**	**56,250**
State and Federal Funding			
State After School Education and Safety Programs	0	50,000	50,000
Federal/state administered 21st Century Community Learning Centers	75,000	0	75,000
Foundations/grants	0	27,500	10,000
Total State/Federal Funding	**75,000**	**77,500**	**135,000**
GRAND TOTAL FUNDING	90,000	112,500	191,250
OPERATIONAL COSTS	112,500	112,500	112,500
BALANCE	**-22,500**	**0**	**78,750**

Scenario 1: Local funding in cash is nonexistent and in-kind contributions will not pay the bills. Outside funding is limited to federal support – which fails to meet projected costs. At best, this program will struggle to meet even a minimal level of quality. If it

makes it through the five-year cycle, which is doubtful, when the *21st Century Community Learning Centers* funding cycle is completed this program will no longer exist.

Scenario 2: Although combined local, state, and federal funding is adequate to meet operational funding requirements, long-term sustainability is threatened with the end of federal and local foundation grants. There is no contingency fund available for meeting hidden or unanticipated costs, strengthening program quality or increasing student enrollment. If this community is considering applying for *21st Century Community Learning Centers* funding, it would be well advised to secure long-term local funding commitments prior to doing so.

Scenario 3: Funding is secure, with a balance that allows for considerable flexibility in strengthening and expanding the program by adding children on waiting lists. The operating budget will be balanced over time, with financial resources available for the program to grow and expand to meet community needs and interests. Enhancement money is available for value-added program components. Although *21st Century Community Learning Centers* funding will run out, the program will continue – and is well positioned to thrive. Moreover, the strategic uses to which federal dollars are put can have a profound impact on the community's ability to attract other sources of financial support when this cycle is completed.

Commit to Moving Forward Now

Commit to moving forward now, while popular support remains high and it can and will make all the difference in your long term success! In a June 2002 poll commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, a national research and advocacy organization that seeks to ensure quality, affordable afterschool programs for all children:

- Eighty percent of voters wanted the federal government to set aside specific funds for afterschool programs,
- Seventy-nine percent wanted state governments to do so,
- Eighty-two percent wanted school districts to do the same thing, and
- Sixty-two percent said they would be willing to pay $100 or more in taxes annually to support afterschool programs.

Local partnerships throughout the country have demonstrated that the return on their investments in afterschool programs has paid huge dividends. High quality programs meet the needs of children and their families, bring millions of dollars into communities that would not otherwise be available and result in millions of dollars in cost savings. Pooling resources to create balanced, diversified and sustainable funding is socially responsible *and* fiscally prudent. Develop this practice in your program and you'll be well on your way to success!

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE INDICATORS

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE #14
SECURE BALANCED, DIVERSIFIED AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

The following indicators will help you determine your program's progress in this practice area. They're designed as an individual self-assessment for you as a program director or member of your leadership team, and to be used by your staff and partners to provide you with a way of identifying areas in which you are especially strong and those where you can improve.

KEY:

1. We're just beginning to work in this area.
2. We've done some work, but have a long way to go.
3. We've made significant progress and are doing reasonably well.
4. We've achieved a high level of success in this area.
5. We're clearly outstanding in this area and everyone would agree.

Please circle the appropriate Key Number						
1	We've secured adequate financial investments to ensure that our program can operate at a high level of quality.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Funding for our program operations is diversified and reflects a broad range of federal, state and local government and private foundation support.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We have secured a solid base of local funding for our program that amounts to at least 50 percent of our total revenue from state and federal sources.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Financial investors in our program include the federal government, the state, the school district(s), the City, the County and private foundations.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Primary investments in our program that are used for operating expenditures are made in the form of cash.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Our program has adequate cash reserves and commitments to allow us to maintain our current level of quality should one of our funding partners no longer provide support or one of our grants end.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Our program has been successful in attracting in-kind contributions.	1	2	3	4	5

	Please circle the appropriate Key Number					
9	We restrict the use of in-kind contributions to provide program enhancements.	1	2	3	4	5
10	We continually develop and nurture positive relationships with potential investors.	1	2	3	4	5
11	We consistently meet or exceed funders' expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
12	We are committed to managing growth in a way that ensures that expansion will not outpace quality.	1	2	3	4	5
Sub Total	*Add the circled Key Numbers and record your subtotals in the squares to the right.*					
To assess your overall current progress in this Practice Area, sum the subtotal numbers and divide by the number of indicators.						

NEXT STEPS

As you begin to understand the *connections* between these 14 practices, you'll see how powerful they really are. If you're like the hundreds of people we've worked with, you'll begin to think differently about your work, your role as a leader and the impact you're capable of having. You can and will make a bigger difference in the lives of children and young people and in your community than you may have thought possible!

Assess Your Program's Current Level of Development

The tools we've included at the end of each chapter will make it easier for you to identify areas of strength and those that need improvement. They will assist you in establishing clear objectives and provide you with what you'll need to track your progress. We recommend that you set aside time to thoughtfully explore the indicators in each practice area. Be as candid and accurate in your responses as you can. Do this with your staff and your partners, both independently and together.

Once this process has been completed for all 14 practices, you'll have a much better understanding of where you, your team, your program and your sites are at a point in time. You might be surprised to find a difference between the perceptions you had before you began this process and the realities that are revealed after it's been completed. Your program may be stronger in some areas than you thought, and weaker in others. In either case, this will be extremely useful information – and it will lay the groundwork for moving ahead.

Create an Action Plan

We know there's a huge difference between learning something and being able to apply it in everyday situations. It's very important for you to work on more than one practice at a time – and not to take on too much at any one time. Determining the order in which you begin to develop specific practices matters. While it's tempting to base this decision on your instincts or personal preferences, we strongly recommend that you don't.

> To achieve the long-term results you want, you'll have to get your partners and staff excited and committed to this process.

To achieve the long-term results you want, focus first on developing the skills that will enable you to lead more strategically, act more intentionally and work more collaboratively. This will impact your ability to get your partners and staff excited about and committed to this process and create positive *energy*. As you do this, it's also important to identify and work on those practices that you're reasonably confident can produce the most visible, meaningful results in the shortest period of time. Early successes will increase your confidence and generate enthusiasm.

We've learned from experience that while all of these practices are critically important to the development of high quality programs, some are more complex and take longer to implement than others. Some focus on changes in the way you approach your work and others on the way things are structured within your organization. For example, you may feel pressured to begin by using the approach offered in this Guide to bring more money into your program, but don't forget that it's extremely difficult unless *you* are passionate about your vision and clearly able to articulate it *and* are able to demonstrate that you've already established a system for measuring results that can show a high return on investments.

Take time to determine the order that makes the most sense for you and your own program. Listen to what your partners and staff members say and review the practices and indicators to establish priorities, create concrete goals and develop an *action* plan. The sooner you begin to develop these practices, the sooner you and everyone else will see the difference they're making in the quality of your program!

Focus on What You Can Achieve in the Next Six Months

> As you begin to see the results of your work, you'll be excited about your progress and motivated to continue.

Once you've identified what you want to work on first, ask yourself and your staff what *two or three actions* you can take that are the most likely to produce meaningful, visible results *within the next six months.* Choose these well, and commit to doing *something every day* to make this happen. Remember that six months is 180 days, and that with consistent effort, almost anything can change in that amount of time! The real key is your willingness to make this happen.

As you begin to see the results of your work, we're confident you'll be excited about your progress and motivated to continue. As you move toward integrating more of these practices into your program, keep in mind that as you introduce the changes you'll need to implement them, some people will come on board right away and others won't. The *way* you frame what you're doing will strongly influence their receptiveness to the new ideas and approaches you're introducing. Be sure you tell them not only what you intend to do, but how and why. The more you, your leadership team, your staff and your partners work together, the faster you'll be able to achieve your goals!

We're Here to Help!

If you're experiencing challenges in particular areas, or would like help with your self-assessments or with your work in developing these practices in your program, please don't hesitate to contact us! Our team is intimately familiar with these practices and has worked closely with hundreds of programs to build their capacity to develop them in their own environments! We provide training, coaching and consultations and will tailor these to meet your interests and needs. Call us at 916-567-9911 (CCS) or 415-495-0622 (CNYD), or visit us at www.ccscenter.org or www.cnyd.org for additional information.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ANDRIA J. FLETCHER, PhD…Andi is a nationally recognized expert in afterschool program and policy development. She has served as the Director of Program Development for the California AfterSchool Partnership and is currently the Chief Consultant– Afterschool Division for the Center for Collaborative Solutions. For the past five years she has led a team of nationally acclaimed experts who have worked closely with hundreds of afterschool programs and thousands of sites.

As the founding Director of Sacramento START, Andi initiated the program in 1995 with 20 sites, 120 staff members, 2,000 students and $850,000 in funding. Under her leadership, within three years the number of sites increased to 24, the students to 4,000 and the funding to more than $3.4 million. In 1997, she and Carla Sanger of LA's BEST worked with Senator Deborah Ortiz to create California's first afterschool legislation, resulting in an initial state investment of $3.6 million. The early success of this effort has culminated in widespread public support for afterschool programs in California, with a total of $550 million now earmarked for state-funded programs. This will make it possible for the vision of afterschool-for-all to become a reality in California.

Andi has been a keynote speaker and presenter at over 150 national, state and regional conferences including the Council of Chief State School Officers 21st Century Community Learning Centers sessions, Harvard University's Symposium of Evaluation, the National League of Cities, the Disney Institute, the National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals and the U.S. Department of Education's National Summit on Afterschool. Her publications appear on several national websites, and many are regarded as seminal articles in the field. She is a member of the national advisory team for the evaluation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers led by SRI International and the Policy Studies Institute. She earned her doctorate in Political Science at UCLA.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS…Founded in 1991, the Center for Collaborative Solutions is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that helps individuals and groups work together to discover innovative and effective ways to achieve shared goals. Through a wide array of services, CCS works strategically to help create high quality, collaborative partnerships, teams, programs and workplaces. CCS' work is built around two complementary divisions within the organization: Afterschool Services and Workplace Services.

Our Afterschool Services Division focuses on building high quality, sustainable afterschool programs and partnerships. Our approach is based on a bold vision, a strategic orientation and a solid foundation of knowledge, research and practical experience. We provide training, mentorship and on-site coaching in all aspects of program, partnership and staff development, as well as design and implementation support for local, regional and statewide afterschool initiatives. CCS is passionately committed to helping afterschool

programs achieve their goals by creating powerful visions, developing capable leaders and high performing teams, constructing authentic partnerships and implementing approaches that build the capacity of children and young people to succeed in all areas of their lives.

CCS' Workplace Services Division centers on providing training, facilitation and consultation services to both public and private sector clients in unionized and non-unionized workplace settings. Focused on an approach and process that can drive fundamental change, our philosophy and curricula derive from a principled, interest-based process that enables collaboration, and helps organizations and groups to discover and harness the power of their interdependence.

For more information on CCS, please call (916) 567-9911, email ccs@ccscenter.org or visit us at www.ccscenter.org.

SAM PIHA, LCSW…Sam is the Director for Community and School Partnerships at the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD), a youth development intermediary in San Francisco, California. Sam has been working to bring youth development principles and innovative practices to afterschool programs since 1989. Between 1996 and 2001, he served as the first Managing Director of the San Francisco Beacon Initiative, a public/private partnership that transformed public school facilities into large-scale youth development centers. The Beacon Centers continue to serve over 8,000 participants a year and are a model for other cities across the country.

Since 2001, Sam has led CNYD's efforts to build the capacity of afterschool programs across California and foster state policies that promote youth development practices. Working in partnership with the California Department of Education and the California AfterSchool Partnership, Sam led the development and statewide distribution of the *Youth Development Guide: Engaging Young People in After School Programming*, and co-led a three-year initiative to develop a state network of Regional Afterschool Learning Centers – demonstration sites for exemplary afterschool practices. Over the past two years, Sam has been advocating to extend afterschool resources to include high school age youth and leading a learning community of practice with 60 high schools programs across California.

Between 1989 and 1996, he developed and managed youth programs based in schools, housing projects and community centers across the Bay area and the country. Inspired by his experiences as an afterschool worker, Sam's previous work with children includes ten years as a classroom teacher and five years as a child and adolescent psychotherapist. Sam holds a Masters Degree in Social Welfare, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and the father of Max, age eighteen.

REBA ROSE, MA…Reba is the Director for Training and Capacity Building at the Community Network for Youth Development, a youth development intermediary in San Francisco, California. Reba oversees the design and implementation of CNYD's diverse offerings of training opportunities and provides support for CNYD's youth development specialists who work in the field. These trainings focus on building the capacity of youth

workers and their supervisors and covers all aspects of their work. Strategies include face-to-face training sessions, blended learning trainings drawing on internet technology, and the facilitation of learning communities of practice. She also serves as a senior coach and consultant to support the effectiveness of senior managers and program leaders in applying youth development principles throughout their programs. Reba also co-designed and facilitated a three-year initiative to develop a state network of Regional Afterschool Learning Centers – demonstration sites for exemplary afterschool practices. Reba is current working in partnership with California Tomorrow to design and implement a five-day institute for afterschool workers on Youth Development, Equity and Diversity which focuses on how to address inequities and bring youth development principles to life in diverse youth programs.

Previously, Reba was the Executive Director of Destiny Arts Center, an arts education and youth leadership organization offering dance and martial arts to youth ages 3 through 18. She was also the Visitacion Valley Beacon Director, part of San Francisco's city-wide public/private partnership to create youth development centers dedicated to serving the larger community. Reba was the Co-Director of Gateway afterschool programs where she led a staff team and worked directly with youth in school-based recreational counseling programs. She has worked directly with elementary, middle and high school youth for 15 years in a range of out of school programs. Reba also delivers training on leadership presence using theater techniques to members of the business community internationally.

Reba holds a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology, a Teaching Certificate in Theater, a Credential in Special Education and a Black Belt in Kajukenbo Kung Fu and Chi Gung.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY NETWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT…The

Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) has served the Bay Area, and more recently, the State of California for the past twelve years as a youth development intermediary organization. In this role, CNYD offers support, training and capacity building resources to youth-serving organizations and afterschool programs. We strive to strengthen programs and services for youth by providing workers and organizations with a practical link to research being done in the field. We also provide a forum for communication between funders and policy-makers and the people and agencies doing the daily work with young people. Finally, we provide an arena for discussion and sharing among the entire youth development community so that policy decisions can be made with a wider perspective and resources can be used efficiently and wisely.

Since CNYD's founding, we have created a rich array of training and capacity-building resources to support youth workers and strengthen small and large youth-serving organizations, and large-scale afterschool initiatives. These resources range from intensive, long-term learning experiences to one-day workshops and speakers' forums.

In an effort to increase our impact, CNYD also works as a youth development catalyst in large, Bay Area youth-serving organizations, and in large, youth-focused initiatives outside the Bay Area. By sharing our knowledge and expertise with organizations like the YMCA of

the Bay Area and the Boys and Girls Clubs of San Francisco, we provide a way for organizations to integrate the youth development approach as an ongoing part of their staff development efforts. By working with intermediary organizations outside the Bay Area, such as the Youth Services Providers Network in Sacramento, we provide resources that allow them to build the capacity of their own communities and strengthen local youth-serving organizations. At the statewide level, we work with the California Department of Education, the Foundation Consortium and others to develop resources and provide support and training to the program leaders representing hundreds of afterschool sites.

All our work both locally and outside the Bay Area reflects the values at the core of CNYD's purpose: to support high-quality, youth-centered organizations and programs firmly based in the developmental needs of young people. The three major areas of CNYD's programs are program capacity building, partnerships that transfer CNYD's know-how to others, and educating and influencing policy and funding decisions that promote quality youth development practices in our youth programs.

For more information on CNYD, please call (415) 495-0622, email info@cnyd.org or visit us at www.cnyd.org.

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