

Call to Action

NAESP believes that creating a seamless learning day is essential to support children's learning. The benefits of after-school are evident in student achievement, social interaction and safety. By most assessments, after-school programs make a positive difference in the lives of students and improve the climate for school success.

Policymakers, as well as principals, must focus on a continuum of teaching and learning for children. After-school programs provide a wonderful opportunity to expand a variety of enrichment opportunities-not just academics-beyond the school day.

Here are some ways that federal, state and local leaders can support the extension of learning beyond the school day:

- 1. Integrate after-school into the overall policy on education, youth and family.** In any policy decision, the entirety of children's time, learning and lives should be addressed. Thus, discussions about policy on education, youth or family must include discussions about after-school.
- 2. Steer state principal associations toward becoming part of statewide efforts to further after-school.** The voice of principals needs to be heard not just at the district level but also at the state level. One method is to become involved in the National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks. This is a coalition of 31 states, each with their own statewide network, that helps bring together policymakers, educators, youth development workers and others in an effort to improve outcomes for children and youth through school-based and school-linked after-school programs. Whatever the mechanism, the voice of principals, sharing authentic stories and needs, can help to raise awareness among governors, mayors and other decision makers about the impact-and potential-of after-school.
- 3. Advocate at all levels for adequate funding for after-school.** These funds should supplement, not supplant, funds originally awarded for other education programs. Research shows that students who regularly participate in after-school programs for several years benefit the most. Yet stable funding is a problem both locally and at the state and national levels. There is no systemic state funding, and only poor or schools in need of improvement qualify for federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding. To sustain programs, funds are often cobbled together from a variety of sources. Schools need ongoing, reliable funding to increase the number of after-school programs and to ensure that all children who want it have access to high-quality programs. Funds for after-school programs should be awarded in time for program operators to plan for the most efficient use of these resources.

- 4. Continue to increase funding of 21st Century Community Learning Centers.** The 21st CCLC program, part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, is a key source of after-school funds. The program is an opportunity for students and their families to continue to learn new skills and discover new abilities after the school day has ended. The focus of this program is the provision of expanded academic enrichment opportunities for children attending low-performing schools. In addition, 21st CCLC programs provide youth development activities, drug and violence prevention programs, technology education programs, art, music and recreation programs, counseling and character education to enhance the academic component of the program.
- 5. Ensure the quality of after-school staff.** All personnel associated with after school should exhibit a solid understanding of children and adolescent development. Background checks should be conducted to assure that all personnel are without criminal records.
- 6. Provide principals with high-quality, ongoing professional development on after-school issues.** Federal, state and local education agencies should promote efforts to build the capacity of principals to ensure an understanding of the important linkages between school and after-school programs and provide resources and flexibility to consider a number of ways to help them connect learning opportunities in each.
- 7. Use supplemental services as an opportunity to provide a continuum of supports for students.** Tutorial services and academic enrichment activities within No Child Left Behind are designed to help students meet local and state academic standards in subjects such as reading and math. Although they encounter challenges, there are several well-known after-school programs that have become supplemental education service providers. For many students, after-school programs are the places where they receive homework help or enrichment opportunities. Tutoring, whether one-or-one or with peers, may be a component of after-school programs, as may programs that focus on enrichment, service learning or other activities.
- 8. Conduct more research on after-school.** After-school is an emerging field, and research on what constitutes quality in after-school programs is still somewhat limited. Issues of staffing, funding, transportation and curriculum are often not addressed in the research findings, providing a vague picture of the necessary infrastructure for quality after-school programs. We encourage universities, philanthropists and associations to expand research on these various areas of after-school. An important component of research is evaluation. After-school programs should be evaluated, and the results of the evaluations should be used to improve programs where needed as well as to make the case for increased funding and other types of support for after-school.
- 9. Link after-school programs to other social service programs in the community.** After-school programs provide a flexible and appropriate environment to connect families with social service providers. After-school settings give providers access to parents whose work schedules may not permit them to visit school during the regular day. Integrating social services after school may give parents a better opportunity to access them when they pick up their children or participate in activities designed for families.
- 10. Recognize wellness and nutrition as important components in children's overall ability to learn.** After-school programs must provide healthy snacks and, in some cases, dinner, particularly for low-income children. NAESP encourages the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide resources for meals and snacks for participants in after-school programs. After-school can also play an important role in addressing issues such as obesity prevention by providing sports and recreational activities that supplement school-day physical education programs.