

## A Report to the Field

### The After School Project

*A Program  
of the Robert  
Wood Johnson  
Foundation*



# Between *School & Home*

**I**n 1998, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation created the After School Project with one primary goal in mind: to determine whether the growth, quality, and funding of out-of-school-time programs could be significantly improved by creating a central coordinating body, or intermediary, in each locality, responsible for promoting a system of high-quality, sustainable services for all the children who need them. In our first report, nearly three years ago, we surveyed several local efforts to form such intermediaries and to organize more coherent systems of after-school activity in a variety of cities and metropolitan areas.

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By now, at least three of the efforts reviewed in that earlier publication have progressed far enough to show significant results, as later sections of this report will describe in detail. Elsewhere in the country, perhaps as many as two dozen cities have begun to form similar intermediaries with some amount of responsibility for coordinating, expanding, and advocating for the field. In all but a few of these cases, the coordinating structure is still taking shape and exploring opportunities, and it seems fair to say that none of them has yet reached its full potential. Very few of them, for example, encompass their cities' entire out-of-school-time field. Some address only certain types of communities and needs, others incorporate some programs and funders but not all. Yet virtually all of them — including all three of the examples presented here — are moving quickly, gaining influence, and stimulating remarkable growth and innovation. Given sufficient time and support, it seems reasonably likely that each of these could become a galvanizing force in the creation of durable local systems of out-of-school-time programs, policy, and funding.

## Two paths to growth

Surrounding the formation of these coordinating organizations is a rapidly expanding field of activity, with not only a steadily growing roster of organizations and programs, but also more and more sources of funding, advocacy, research, and operating expertise. In beginning to exert influence over this expanding universe, central intermediaries have tended to adopt one of two strategies: either encourage broad variety and experimentation, with wide latitude for organizations and communities to design programs that suit their needs, or concentrate on a more specific segment of the field, in hopes of promoting replications of a clearly defined service or model for a particular population group. Though they lead to quite different results, both approaches are beginning to show success, both in the number of young people served and in the durability of the programs providing the service. And each seems to have lessons that may prove useful to the other.

The first, more eclectic pattern usually results from an intermediary administering a large city-wide funding program in which all or most schools, community-based organizations, or both are encouraged to apply for

support. If the applicants meet some basic criteria — a record of experience and administrative credibility, a formal school-community partnership, a given amount of matching funding, adequate facilities and staff, or other qualifications — they are then free, within limits, to



design whatever programs fit their local resources and needs. Some may concentrate on the arts, others on community service or sports, some mainly on academics, or more often, the programs mix and match these elements depending on their preferences and available talent. The intermediary may set rules about the number of hours of service to be provided, a minimum number of students to be enrolled, or a target ratio of teachers to students, but they

typically don't specify all the activities that must take place and how long each must last. These models usually become popular across many constituencies, because there is room for all of them to pursue their particular needs.



Boston's After-School for All Partnership, for example, comprises a loose federation of programs and funders from all over the city. Among many other activities, it is pursuing three concentrated initiatives aimed at cultivating more after-school service among schools, community organizations, and faith-based institutions. The result has been a sharp increase in the available funding and the number of operating programs — but no deliberate imposition of a particular model

or kind of activity for any defined group of children. The goal has been to expand the field, not regiment it, and by that standard, the Partnership is making clear headway. Given all this diversity, however, evaluation has had to proceed eclectically, with considerable accumulation of data but not yet a comprehensive idea about how to assess outcomes citywide.

One strength of this decentralized, pluralistic approach is that it can spread quickly, taking advantage of all the different interests and energies of an assortment of communities and organizations. Just as important, it can draw support from a wide array of funders with different interests. One weakness, though, is that it can be hard to coordinate all this variety and to set consistent expectations about quality across so many different program models. Nonetheless, several intermediaries — notably in New York, Boston, and San Diego — are managing just such systems, with some confidence that they can recognize and certify quality despite the range of activity going on under their umbrella.

The second approach to growth usually starts with some identified need or gap in available services to a specific group of young people, and then seeks to fill that gap. L.A.'s BEST, a program that many regard as the grandparent of modern urban after-school intermediaries, set out to serve neighborhoods that the city regards as "high risk," and for more than

15 years has kept to that mission. (The target group is nonetheless very large by most other cities' standards, made up of almost 19,000 kids a year.) San Francisco's Team-Up for Youth defines its boundaries not by location but by focusing on one important activity missing from many children's lives: athletics. The program took shape in response to deep reductions in physical education in Bay Area public schools and a general crisis in physical fitness among the young. After School Matters in Chicago set its boundaries by picking a single age group. It took on the rare mission of serving high school students — a group that most after-school programs find difficult to enroll and retain (in fact, few even try).

One obvious advantage of these more narrowly defined approaches to coordination and growth is that they present clearer targets for evaluation, in part because they have standard aims for a clearly identified clientele. That doesn't mean the evaluations have yet been completed (some are under way), or even that they will be easy to conduct when they do take place. But most of them feature a fairly well-defined approach to cause and effect, what some observers call a "theory of change." The best of the more wide-ranging programs have theories of change, too, but they often apply differently to different parts of the system,



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varying with the providers and methods of service. For example, when your stated purpose is to get more young people to be active and physically fit, and your approach is to offer them a smorgasbord of fun, healthy physical activities, it becomes much easier to ask the basic evaluative question: Did your chosen approach lead to your desired result? When some programs involve sports but others don't, when some concentrate on homework and academics but others don't, even framing the right question becomes harder, and interpreting the answers is harder still.

The disadvantage of the target-specific programs is just as obvious: They don't have an answer for every need. Chicago's program is carefully tailored to the needs of high school-age young people. It does not, at least at this point, have solutions for idle fifth-graders or for working parents of young children with no after-school care. (Chicago has other programs that serve younger kids, though like nearly all cities, it doesn't have enough of them.) Team-Up for Youth doesn't pretend to have answers for kids who are already physically active but whose real need is for help in reading or math, or who wish they could play in a jazz ensemble. The clarity and focus of these programs comes at the cost of universality. The more

pluralistic programs, for the most part, make the opposite trade-off.

To note these strengths and weaknesses is not to argue for or against either model. In fact, many cities have programs of both types, growing alongside each other, supported by different combinations of funding streams and governed by separate intermediaries, but often relying on many of the same schools and community groups for their service delivery. The fact that these different approaches are flourishing side-by-side, or overlapping, is one sign of how complex and diffuse the expectations are for out-of-school-time programs, both in official policy and in the preferences of individual families. We all want very specific things for our children. We want those things to lead to good results. But we don't all want the same things or even, in all cases, the same results. The growing legions of people marching under the banner of "after-school" or "out-of-school-time" programs are united, in reality, only by the hours in which they would like to see something constructive done. What that something is continues to differ from city to city, neighborhood to neighborhood, and family to family.

## From vision to system

For frontline personnel in the after-school movement, the pressure of all these competing expectations, differing standards, and inconsistent sources of funding and regulation can be exhausting at best, infuriating at worst. Yet to veterans of older movements who have seen such scattered activity gradually coalesce into functioning networks, fields, and systems, the after-school story may carry a hint of déjà vu. It may even, in its very complexity, seem encouraging.

In truth, the variety, geographic breadth, and bipartisan popularity of the after-school field would be a source of envy to those who spent decades cobbling together intermediaries and systems in other branches of domestic policy. Consider community development, employment, or homeless services — all of which started as more or less scatter-shot, local, idiosyncratic activities and came together over many years into national systems with their own sources of funding, standards of quality and performance, and political constituencies. Judged by the evolution of those fields, the burgeoning strengths of the after-school movement, though comparatively recent, have reached a stage of considerable

maturity. The evidence of that maturity is not just the geometric expansion in the number of programs, but the growth of research projects and institutions dedicated to the field, the formation of regional and national advocacy coalitions, a cluster of prominent funders, and even a few household-name politicians and celebrities who have adopted the cause as their own.

After-school advocates, to their credit, are impatient for the establishment of adequate, consistent funding streams; for conclusive research about effectiveness; for a universal presence in every neighborhood or public school; and for government policy at every level defining their work as a necessary part of a healthy community. Those are all great aspirations, but many of the best-established fields in American civic life have yet to achieve all or even most of them. For such a young field (organized after-school activity is at least a century old, but the effort at building citywide and nationwide systems is barely into its second decade) the progress so far has been swift and, in some respects, stunning.

Even so, continuing that progress and achieving any of the more ambitious goals will depend on one thing above all: the growth and strengthening of citywide systems of planning, funding, and quality assurance. That is the chief role, and the principal rationale, for the central coordinating structures the

After School Project was established to create. Even though the emerging structures aren't all alike, and may never be, most of them have a few necessary things in common: emerging coalitions of funders and providers, increasingly clear standards of quality and means of promoting them, and some degree of government recognition and support for at least a good portion of their work.



Can those milestones eventually lead to the goal of serving all the children who need after-school services — even if the universe of such children is narrowed by location, age, or particular kinds of need? On one hand, it seems unlikely that such an ambitious goal could ever be reached without some broad, formal embrace by government. That is how San

Diego's "6 to 6" program, for example, managed to reach every school in the city, and how L.A.'s BEST grew to become the trend-setter for every out-of-school-time intermediary in the country. But the arms of government can bind as well as shelter. Enterprising, versatile nonprofits have been the leading forces in much of the recent growth in both the scope and quality of services; can those strengths endure if their coordinating responsibilities are absorbed by local or state governments? In more than one city, that question is now on the table. Whether success in those cities will eventually lead to a burst of new growth, as government resources pour into a field newly anointed as a public responsibility, or whether it will lead to a stifling descent into bureaucracy and political manipulation (or conceivably, a little of both) the next several years will tell.

We will return to these questions about the future at the end of this report. First, though, it may be helpful to review the After School Project's experience in the three cities where we have invested most of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funds. From that range of experiences — of faster and slower growth, of broader and narrower goals, and of newer and older programs — it may be possible to gather a few ideas about where the field is headed in the next several years, and about what it might take, in the long run, to reach the most urgent goals.

# *Boston's*

## **After-School for All Partnership** *(now Boston After School & Beyond)*



*New England SCORES, Courtesy of Boston Beyond - BYSI*

“**B**oston is blessed,” declared a blue ribbon Task Force on After-School Time convened in 1999 by Mayor Thomas Menino, “with an exceptionally strong network of after-school programs. Arising from more than 100 independently inspired sources that have over time developed an extraordinary variety of approaches, Boston’s after-school programs are eager to grow and are hungry for the support that would enable them to increase their impact.”<sup>1</sup> At the time the task force’s report was released, in May 2000, the profusion and variety of out-of-



school-time programs were every bit as impressive as the report claimed, and they have expanded dramatically since then. At that point, however, characterizing these programs as a “network” might best have been described as optimistic.

Boston’s supply of funders, providers, technical advisers, and prominent advocates for out-of-school-time activity was, and remains, far above the national average. But the “100 independently inspired sources” of such activity were, in truth, independent in more than just inspiration. Boston’s long history of forming and supporting community-based organizations meant that many local nonprofits had been active in the after-school field for many years, each with its own program philosophy, administrative machinery, operating partners, geographic turf, and assortment of funders. The various providers included nationally known youth development organizations like Citizen Schools and BELL, more than 70 public schools, plus scores of civic and community organizations from volunteer church groups to community development corporations to citywide and national institutions like Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA.

Meanwhile, prominent local funders like the Boston, Barr, Hyams, and Nellie Mae Education Foundations had major programs or initiatives of their own in out-of-school-time services, and at least one national funder, the Wallace Foundation,

had made a significant commitment to a group of providers through the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, headquartered at nearby Wellesley College. Boston’s Youth Services Department and public school system had a longstanding program of support for quasi-public Community Centers, which usually linked schools and nonprofit groups in the provision of after-school services. Corporate philanthropy and major private institutions had made public commitments to the field and were supporting various programs and organizations, depending on their particular interests. There was a wealth of funding, organizing, and advice in Boston, but the web of relationships among all these efforts was at best complex, incomplete, and often improvised.

## Beginnings of a system

Mayor Menino’s major step in trying to build a more coherent system, called “Boston’s 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative,” was unveiled in 1998 in his second inaugural address and headquartered in his office. It sought to draw the universe of city-sponsored activities into closer alignment while also expanding the number of available programs and enrollment slots across the city. The Task Force on After-School Time, whose report was quoted earlier, was one early step in this direction, as was a \$5 million effort to expand after-school programs to

reach a majority of the city’s public schools. More than any other single effort of the 1990s, the 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative took a giant step toward creating consistency, common expectations, and a broader exchange of information in the Boston after-school field. Still, the recommendations in the task force report made clear that there were still many more steps to be taken.

Well over half of those recommendations dealt with creating the basic elements of a functioning “system” or “network” for out-of-school-time activity: coordinating funding and delivery, improving staff training and compensation, collecting more sophisticated data on performance and outcomes, exchanging information more efficiently among providers, and enlisting more participants in planning and governing programs, among other things. One of the recommendations adopted the most quickly was the creation of a “private funding collaborative ... to develop and implement a coordinated strategy to support after-school programming in Boston.” The collaborative, known as Boston’s After-School for All Partnership, was formed within a year of the report’s release, with a mission of “expanding, improving, and sustaining a system of quality after-school programming in Boston.” That same year, the Robert Wood Johnson After School Project provided \$100,000 in support for the Partnership’s planning and start-up activities.

<sup>1</sup> “Schools Alone Are Not Enough: Why Out-of-School-Time Is Crucial to the Success of Our Children,” the Mayor’s Task Force on After-School Time, May 2000, p. 4.

# *Members of Boston's Partnership were not just diverse and independent; they were experienced and knowledgeable.*

In our report three years ago, we didn't have much to say about this support, because the planning work in Boston was still under way, and it would have been premature to speculate about the possible outcome. Among other cautionary lessons at that point, we were discovering that bringing coherence and structure to an already rich field — one with plentiful resources and talent, but hardly any unifying center of gravity — was in some ways harder than planning and organizing a largely new system from scratch.

Members of Boston's Partnership were not just diverse and independent; they were experienced and knowledgeable. Each funding organization had its own carefully formed principles about how to serve young people, the kinds of organizations it wanted to support, the comparative strengths and advantages that the funder and its grantees brought to the field, and the sources of collaboration and expertise on which they could rely. Like most pioneer providers of out-of-school-time programs, the organizations supported by these funders were in the field for reasons closely related to their missions, and thus the approaches they took to their work were usually a matter of strong commitment. It was clear that the new Partnership would not be able to corral all these forces into a

single, integrated structure, if that meant imposing a set of approved program models, budgets, administrative policies, or evaluation systems on all of them. Nor was it clear that that degree of regimentation was even desirable. So at the time of our last report, an interesting

The answer to that question, in our view, is a clear Yes. In fact, one remarkable procedural achievement of Boston's After-School for All Partnership is that its panel of influential participants remained active, for the most part, through more than a year of organizing and



*Tenacity, Courtesy of Boston Beyond-BYSI*

and important question about Boston's effort was still, in our view, wide open for discussion: Would it be possible to hold all these committed but varied players to a single table without either dampening their enthusiasm or dissolving into factions?

deliberation, and then three more years of designing and launching pilot projects. Unlike many such planning exercises, Partnership meetings routinely featured senior officials of all or most of the participating organizations. From the outset,



they agreed on a set of three major goals (expanding the field, enriching program content, and building sustainable sources of public funding), and went on to launch a half-dozen projects and initiatives and a plan to create a more formal, lasting system within five years. Members of the Partnership have collectively added more than \$26 million in new funding to Boston's after-school resources. Those are additional commitments, beyond what these organizations had been providing in the past. Based on these accomplishments, we increased our support with a \$750,000 grant for continued operation in 2003 and 2004.

What the After-School for All Partnership did not do, as one of the members put it, is "create one tight model or a single funding pool for the whole city. It's a loose network of funders, acting in small subgroups that focus on what the members want to work on, where the members decide what they want to do. It was a big enough table so that enough interested people could get involved, spread the word, and let the activity evolve over time." Organizers recognized early on that one of the group's purposes, building a more sustainable, better-funded field, would best be served by encouraging funders to bring their own interests to the table and to find allies among the other participants — not demanding that they support only a particular kind of activity in a particular way.

The Partnership's three goals are derived primarily from the task force report: to increase the number of children served by out-of-school-time programs, to raise the amount of learning that children derive from those programs, and to create larger, more durable streams of public funding for them. Each of the three goals is the focus of a separate working group co-chaired by senior members of the Partnership — an example of the self-selected "subgroups" to which the participating funder was referring. Together, the working groups have created five "pooled funding initiatives" to develop and test model projects.

## Approaches to growth and quality

The working group dedicated to the first of these goals, expansion, launched three initiatives aimed at raising the number of available after-school slots offered by current providers. The group put more emphasis on expanding current programs than on adding new providers, largely based on a recommendation by analysts from McKinsey & Co., working pro-bono for the Partnership. The McKinsey consultants determined that expanding current programs would be more efficient than trying to recruit inexperienced providers and construct new programs de novo. The first of the three initiatives therefore set out to increase enrollment in after-school services at school sites; the second sought

to enlarge programs run by community-based organizations that are smaller and more diverse than the ones currently working in schools; and the third focused on expanding the role of faith-based institutions in providing out-of-school-time services. Each initiative was overseen by a separate working group of funders.

The first of these, called the **School Sites Initiative**, selected school-based programs, operated jointly by the school and a nonprofit organization, that had been running for at least two years, but whose enrollment seemed to be well below capacity. The committee noted that typical school-based programs in large cities enroll around 100 students each, while the average Boston program had closer to 40. It therefore set a target for each school of adding at least 25 more students or increasing total enrollment to at least 75, whichever was greater. Members of the Partnership formed a grant pool that subsidized the cost of adding the required slots: \$1,500 per slot per year for the first two years and \$1,000 in the third year, plus \$100 annually per slot to the school to help defray the schools' costs of participating in the initiative. The pool also provided technical assistance and data analysis by Boston-based Technical Development Corp. (TDC). The 17 participating programs added 757 kids to their enrollment under this arrangement, amounting to more than 45 percent growth. That

*The Partnership's various initiatives and projects...are all meant to contribute to the broad vision of a larger, richer, and more sustainable system of out-of-school-time services in Boston.*

accomplishment exceeded the committee's five-year goal with more than a year to spare. Meanwhile, TDC reports, the cost per student in nearly every participating program dropped by 20-40 percent, with steady or improved quality and stronger partnerships between the school and the participating nonprofit organization.

The second effort, known as the **Community After-School Initiative**, targeted small community-based organizations that operated after-school programs in their own facilities, rather than at schools. The 13 organizations in the Initiative had been serving roughly 20 students each, and were expected to expand by at least 50 percent, though most set higher goals than that. In the end, results were somewhat short of the goal — a 27 percent average expansion for programs serving younger children and 42 percent for those serving teenagers (the two types of programs use different methods of measuring participation, so their results are recorded separately). The shortfall is partly the result of deep cuts in state funding that occurred at the same time. As a result, the Partnership grants didn't represent nearly as much of a net increase in funding as had been hoped. Beyond the increase in the number of students served, grants under this initiative also contributed to strengthening the organizations

providing the service — helping them improve their financial systems, fundraising capacity, information technology, and overall management, as well as upgrading their facilities.

The third expansion project was the **Faith-Based After-School Initiative**, which aimed at the least robust of the three categories of providers. Whereas schools and, to a lesser extent, community-based organizations had well-established funding relationships, professional management, and organizational expertise, religious groups tended more often to operate their after-school programs with volunteers or minimal staff and limited outside funding. Yet in many neighborhoods, including some of Boston's poorest, these were the only groups offering any after-school service at all. The Initiative struck up a partnership with Boston's nationally known Black Ministerial Alliance, whose members represent most of the city's minority and low-income communities and take a prominent role in civic affairs.

Like the initiative for community-based organizations, this effort focused both on expanding the number of children served and on strengthening the core functions of the provider organizations. But in this case, the organizational strengthening was

focused as much on the Black Ministerial Alliance itself, to help it become an umbrella or intermediary organization for the individual churches offering after-school programs. Strengthening the Alliance and its after-school network became the overriding initial focus of the initiative, addressing challenges of management, governance, finances, and staffing. As a result of that shift in emphasis, enrollment growth was slower than originally expected. But thanks to the investment in the Black Ministerial Alliance, the longer-term potential for expansion among faith-based organizations may have been substantially increased. And even in the short term, the slower-than-expected growth was still significant: a 70 percent increase in total enrollment among participating programs, to a total of 460 children served at what ended up being nine sites.

A second major goal of the After-School for All Partnership was to enrich the effect of after-school services on students' learning and on their achievement in school. The working group dedicated to this goal commissioned a series of research projects to determine the best ways to promote children's learning in areas like literacy, technology, and the arts. Among several efforts to enrich children's out-of-school-time learning experience,



*G-ROW BOSTON, Courtesy of Boston Beyond - BYSL*

the Partnership created an **After-School Literacy Coaching Initiative** to train adult staff of after-school programs in ways of teaching and promoting reading more effectively. In this program, staff attend training sessions, get on-site coaching from literacy experts, and receive book collections and curriculum materials over the course of the year. The initiative operates on approximately \$1 million in grants from five members of the Partnership. Meanwhile, a separate organization called Achieve Boston — which is supported by several members of the After-School for All Partnership, including the city —

has begun assembling a training and credentialing system for staff of out-of-school-time programs that aims at the full range of skills and experience that define excellence in staffing.

The Partnership's third goal was to promote sustainable, significantly increased public revenue streams for out-of-school-time programs. Because success in this area would necessarily depend on state-level support, members of the Partnership provided a two-to-one match to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to support the creation of the Massachusetts After-School Partnership. Besides advocating

for state funding, this statewide group hopes to promote and nurture regional and local partnerships dedicated to out-of-school-time services and to help in raising the quality of the available programs.

## Shaping and strengthening the field: Next steps

**T**he Partnership's various initiatives and projects — of which we have given only a sampling here — are all meant to contribute to the broad vision of a larger,



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richer, and more sustainable system of out-of-school-time services in Boston. The Partnership itself was not meant to be that system, or to guide it in perpetuity. In fact, it planned to complete its work within five years and turn over the catalyst role to a new, permanent organization, which is just now taking shape. That organization, named Boston After School & Beyond (known for short as Boston Beyond) will take on responsibilities from both the After-School for All Partnership and the mayor's 2:00-to-6:00 Initiative. Its board includes both the key funders in the Partnership and a number of top mayoral appointees, including the schools superintendent, the police chief, and the director of human services. Starting in 2004, we have provided additional support of \$2.25 million to the Partnership to support organization and start-up of Boston Beyond through 2007.

The new, permanent organization will set out to strengthen the field in four primary ways:

- **Knowledge Strategy**  
to collect and analyze data that reinforces or challenges the information prevailing in the field.
- **Communications**  
to disseminate knowledge throughout the network.
- **Strategic Initiatives**  
continuing the various pilot

efforts begun by the After-School for All Partnership, along with new initiatives for sports, cultural activities, and teens, and expanding these efforts to address systemic issues that face multiple programs and providers.

- **Resource Development**  
promoting increased public and private funding, with emphasis on creating an adequate, sustainable flow of funds to an expanding field.

The purpose of our support for Boston Beyond, as of our work in other cities, is to determine whether it is possible for cities to establish a lasting, centralized capacity to increase the number of young people involved in high-quality after-school activities and to build those activities into a durable citywide system. As we wrote in our previous report, we were not certain, at the outset, what kinds of institutional structure are best for creating that capacity, or what sources of money, authority, and expertise need to be incorporated into that structure. We were fairly sure, of course, that the answer would be different in different places, but we hoped to discover some patterns and sets of common expectations.

Boston's experience, while obviously still evolving, has provided a promising model of that structure for at least one

kind of city: where support from City Hall and the school system are strong, where funders are relatively plentiful and committed (even if not well organized among themselves), and where many current programs are operating below their optimal size. Even without having achieved its goal of sustainable public funding (a goal that continues to elude nearly all cities), Boston's After-School for All Partnership has gone a considerable distance in forming a central coordinating organization to draw the field into more coherence, enlist support from more funders, and prove the value of the services being delivered. Now that such a capacity has been established, how much farther it can lead is now a question that the next several years may answer.

# Team-Up for Youth – *San Francisco Bay Area*



**N**o matter what particular effects an after-school program sets out to produce, both evidence and logic suggest it is more likely to succeed if students attend regularly than if they drop in and out — or, more obviously, if they stop coming altogether. Especially for older children, who are usually freer to organize their own out-of-school-time hours, activities that aren't fun, or that don't exert some kind of regular pull on their interest, are less likely to have any lasting effect, whether academic, emotional, or social. In short, fun is serious business in after-school programs, because it represents the magnetic force that keeps kids attending steadily. As a way of generating both interest and allegiance — the desire to keep returning and

*[Team-Up] strikes a difficult but important balance between scale and specificity – that is, operating large enough programs and networks to make efficient use of resources...while also designing particular activities for each neighborhood population...*

to bond with the program, the participating adults, and the other students — few activities can compare with the magnetism of sports. That is no doubt why athletic programs have been by far the most popular after-school activity for the greatest number of young people.

The importance of sports has lately become even more obvious, and more serious, as evidence has mounted of a crisis in youth fitness — dangerously high rates of childhood obesity, related chronic illness, and sedentary habits that can harm both physical development and long-term health. Many young people may be naturally drawn to sports but lack any safe, decently equipped places to play, or enough willing players to make much of a game. That is especially common among girls, for whom organized activities are typically fewer and less well funded than for boys. (Title IX, a 1972 amendment to the Federal Education Act, has gone some distance in equalizing programs supported with federal money, but disparities between boys' and girls' sports are still common even in federally funded programs. In activities with only state, local, or private money, the imbalance is typically much greater.) The shortage of physical activity for both boys and girls continues to worsen as public schools devote less and less of their regular time to supposed

“non-essentials” like physical education.

For many kids, though, the problem is more complex than simply coming up with more athletic opportunities. Overweight or out-of-shape young people may shun team or competitive sports even when such things are readily available, because the youngsters are physically self-conscious, consider themselves poor competitors, or simply aren't accustomed to physical activity. To reach them, it may not be enough to organize some pickup basketball games or form a little-league team. “That stuff,” as one overweight boy told a counselor in New York, “is for the jocks. My sports are on the computer.”

Thus physical activity falls into a kind of double bind. In simplest form, sports can be highly useful for attracting young people to after-school programs — and in the process, many believe, can promote both physical health and emotional well-being, by teaching essential skills like teamwork, leadership, quick thinking, fairness, and perseverance. From that perspective, sports are sometimes treated as the “do-everything” activity in after-school programs, and thus may face enormous expectations about how much measurable change they can make in young people's lives. Yet at the same time, sports programs can also have the



*Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and*

hardest time attracting the very youngsters for whom they really could make the most difference: children who are shy, alienated, unathletic, or overweight, or who (like many girls) have simply never been encouraged to try.

## Scale and specificity

Three years ago, we wrote about our support for a start-up organization that was





Leadership, Courtesy of Team-Up for Youth

designed to meet both these challenges: organizing high-quality, well-planned physical activity and drawing young people, especially girls, who would ordinarily not participate in sports.

At the time of that earlier report, Team-Up for Youth had barely reached its second birthday. It was still solidifying what would become an ambitious program spanning San Francisco and Alameda County and adding, as of late 2004, some 6,000 new slots

for out-of-school-time physical activity. Team-Up was then launching its Community Sports Organizing Project, aimed at building coalitions of local organizations in three neighborhoods based on shared standards of quality, attention to leadership development, and determination to make a big difference in the number of young people participating in athletics. Later renamed the Neighborhood Sports Initiative, the program is now in its fourth year and has expanded

to five low-income neighborhoods with total grants of more than \$1 million. These neighborhoods now have functioning partnerships of parents, local organizations, and residents offering activities that reflect local kids' interests and needs.

The program strikes a difficult but important balance between scale and specificity — that is, operating large enough programs and networks to make efficient use of resources like staff, transportation, and equipment, while also designing particular activities for each neighborhood population that are most likely to draw in that group's uninvolved youngsters and meet its particular needs. The Initiative manages this balance by selecting a lead community organization in each of the five participating areas and contracting with that organization to build networks of other local agencies and programs within its broad catchment area. These local groups in turn offer individual programs for specific target populations, including the area's hundreds of immigrant and ethnic groups, for whom the list of popular sports ranges far beyond the standard roster of traditional American ball games.

An example of a lead organization in this system is the Bay Area Women and Children's Center in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. The neighborhood — a center of both concentrated poverty and pockets of recent gentrification — is home to some 3,000 low-income

*...cultural diversity...is a critical objective of Team-Up's work [as is] open[ing] up forms of physical activity that young people unaccustomed to sports may find appealing...*

children in 56 blocks. With that kind of concentration, open space is scarce, and safety concerns, both from traffic and from crime, make unsupervised play on the streets impractical. In our last report, we wrote that Team-Up and neighborhood groups were beginning to improve facilities, organize new programs, and tailor specific activities to the traditions and interests of recent immigrant groups. By now, the Women and Children's Center has organized a functioning Neighborhood Collaborative for the Tenderloin, incorporating the various local efforts that were previously under way and adding new ones. With support from Team-Up, member agencies have launched a boys' basketball league and bowling, ice-skating, volleyball, yoga, and girls' basketball programs. Programs in theatrical martial arts, popular among Southeast Asian immigrants, and in rhythm gymnastics, a favorite of many Russian families, have grown and are thriving. With help from the San Francisco Ballet Center for Dance Education, the collaborative offers free after-school classes in ballet and multicultural dance for girls and boys three days a week from September through May.

Besides the Tenderloin, lead agencies operate in the San Francisco Excelsior district, and in San Antonio, Fruitvale, and Ashland, all in Alameda

County. Each of these typically serves low-income youth populations of more than 9,000 each. Team-Up has supported these new collaboratives in launching programs with instruction and practice in dance, weight training, martial arts, and swimming for youth and their families. It has supported the creation of leagues for basketball and soccer, with plenty of youth input in the development of a curriculum to train volunteer coaches and referees. And it has helped build the first San Antonio Youth Dragon Boat Team to participate in the California International Dragon Boat Festival, an annual highlight of water recreation on the Bay that's based on a Chinese tradition dating back some two millennia.

## Multiplying the options

The point of these international and innovative athletic programs is not just to reflect the area's cultural diversity, though that is a critical objective of Team-Up's work. A nearly equal advantage is that they open up forms of physical activity that young people unaccustomed to sports may find appealing, or at least non-threatening. Expanding the sports menu in this way is a key objective of two other Team-Up initiatives: Community Grants

and Girls Sports. In contrast with the Neighborhood Sports Initiative's emphasis on concentrated local networks, the roughly \$700,000 in annual Community Grants goes to individual agencies all over the Bay Area — 33 of them in 2004 — with an emphasis on promoting participation by more young people in more kinds of activity. Of those, 60 percent of the slots are aimed specifically at girls. Many others are designed to appeal to children of either gender who might not consider participating in a basketball or soccer league, but who may find their imaginations piqued by less-familiar forms of activity, like yoga, martial arts, or bicycling.

Take Capoeira, for example — an Afro-Brazilian hybrid of dance and martial arts in which, as a teenager put it on his Web page devoted to the sport, "the other player is not your enemy, he is your friend, and both of you try to keep the game going." In San Francisco's Mission district, the 14-year-old ABADA-Capoeira SF organization became a 2004 recipient of a Team-Up community grant to enlarge its enrollment and promote the sport to more young people. Though largely unfamiliar to most Americans (apart from martial-arts movie buffs, who would have seen it featured in a handful of films starting in the mid-'90s), Capoeira's appeal tends to extend well beyond

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Latin Americans and martial arts aficionados. Its emphasis on grace of movement and physical and mental discipline, rather than on aggressive contact or pure strength, makes it inviting to all kinds of young people for whom conventional team sports might be off-putting. According to Artistic Director Marcia Treidler, a world-renowned master of Capoeira, ABADA's program offers "a safe place where there is mutual respect among students and teachers." She does not let her classes "get swept away by the speed" of a few standouts. "Everyone here is respected, welcomed, and treated equally for who they are."

Team-Up's Community Grants do, of course, also support more-familiar activities (though not necessarily ones that are common or widely available in the Bay Area's poorer neighborhoods). Another Team-Up grantee in the Mission district, Real Options for City Kids, or ROCK, is one of four organizations that together organized the district's first and only all-girls winter soccer league. In the Bay Area's large Latino community, soccer could hardly be considered an exotic or unfamiliar game, and yet actual opportunities to play the sport, rather than just watch it on TV, are rare. Team-Up has funded ROCK to expand its whole roster of athletic programs for boys and girls by 55 additional slots in 2003-04 and another 75 in 2004-05 — a more than 40 percent overall increase in its enrollment.

Across the Bay in Oakland, another Team-Up community grantee, the Jack London Aquatic Center, offers a group of teenage Latinas and African-American girls an introduction to crew, a sport with a patrician reputation in which neither girls nor minority groups are well represented nationally. Most of the program's first recruits were participating in a sport — any sport — for the first time. In fact, when the

first 18-member team was formed, organizers immediately discovered they'd have to revamp the program, because nearly one-third of the girls didn't yet know how to swim. Today, sculls full of girls arrive and depart from the center's new boat-house, situated on a waterfront that had tended to be a playground mainly for upper-income families, despite being surrounded by poor or working-class neighborhoods.



*Bay Area SCORES, Courtesy of Team-Up for Youth*



*...possibly [a] more lasting contribution, is [Team-Up's] training, technical assistance, and policy work.*

Thus the Aquatic Center's crew program manages to score three breakthroughs at once: bringing young people into physical activity for the first time, drawing minority girls into a sport that none of them might ever have considered, and making the waterfront a more welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and income levels.

## Building the field

Selecting and funding all these various activities, organizations, and networks is only part of what makes Team-Up an important resource for youth sports in San Francisco. The more difficult, but possibly more lasting contribution, is its training, technical assistance, and policy work. To help create the networks in the Neighborhood Sports Initiative or to help a small community-based program add a new sport or a significant number of new children to its roster, Team-Up offers training, coaching, and workshops for staff members of local organizations and for coaches and counselors in individual sports. A two-day "training camp" gives organizations a concentrated practicum in organizing and staffing high-quality sports programs, with curricula for specific topics like youth leadership. The two days are followed by on-site consulting and training for coaches.

All of Team-Up's training and consulting is based around five "building blocks" — the organization's list of the key ingredients of quality in the design and management of an after-school sports program:

- **Physical activity** that is frequent, varied, and moderate to vigorous, so that participants not only get a regular, healthy workout but also develop basic motor skills and a better attitude toward vigorous activity throughout their lives.
- **Safety**, both physical and emotional — that is, an environment where not only are the premises, equipment, lighting, and transportation adequate and secure, but also where children of different backgrounds and levels of skill feel welcome and supported, where rules are enforced, and where kids feel free to test their ability without fear of failure.
- **Positive relationships**, where children form bonds of trust and friendship with both adults and peers, and where they encounter, and learn from, children who are different from themselves.
- **Youth participation** in decision-making, with opportunities for leadership and for shaping and evaluating the program's content.
- **Skill-building** through engaging, challenging, and fun activities rich with learning

opportunity, not only in skills specific to a given sport, but also in broader life skills like fair play, determination, and handling success and failure.

Training programs help participating organizations translate these basic values into practical activity, training regimens for staff and volunteers, and methods of evaluation and course-correction over time. One example: Justin Johnson, ROCK's program director, said the workshops provided him a "fantastic model" for how to meld youth-development and athletics programming. Among other things, he cites three guidelines he derived from Team-Up's Youth Development Workshop: introduce short activities with quick lessons; play on strengths; and, at least for elementary schoolchildren, give plenty of personal acknowledgement.

In public policy, Team-Up has concentrated mainly on two issues: gender equity in sports, parks, and recreation; and obesity prevention. In the first area, Team-Up and its allies in philanthropy and government achieved a national milestone in 2004 with the passage of a new state law that will strengthen the requirements of Title IX in California and apply the stricter principles to state and locally funded programs as well as those with federal funding.

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Beyond its initial advocacy for the bill, Team-Up is now helping the governments of San Francisco and Oakland — both with training and with \$50,000 in grants — to implement the new requirements in their parks and youth development programs. A similar advocacy effort in preventing obesity got a prominent start in early 2005 with a policy hearing before the state Assembly Health Committee. Team-Up helped organize the hearing.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's After School Project

has supported the formation and early expansion of Team-Up for Youth with a \$5 million grant lasting through 2006. For us, the opportunity to observe and learn from Team-Up's growth pays a double benefit: Not only is this an unusual effort to build a high-quality, region-wide system concentrated solely on a single (though crucial) branch of out-of-school-time activity, but it is a marriage of two of the Foundation's areas of critical interest in healthy youth development: constructive use of out-of-school hours and physical fitness.

The two issues are a logical, even obvious, match. Virtually every good after-school system in the country incorporates a prominent place for sports of one kind or another. Several respected non-profit organizations, such as New York's Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation, have helped spotlight the dwindling opportunities for physical fitness during the school day. But Team-Up may be a unique, or at least highly unusual, experiment in building an entire, well-organized network devoted to creative, high-quality athletic programs across not only a single major city, but an entire metropolitan area. It surely adds to the promise of this idea that, at this moment, the nation's most prominent celebrity-advocate for out-of-school-time programs is himself a champion athlete. He also, as it happens, works just 80 miles from Team-Up for Youth, in the California Governor's Mansion.



*ABADA-Capoeira San Francisco, Courtesy of Team-Up for Youth*

# After School Matters – *Chicago*



Our involvement with Chicago's After School Matters is no doubt the best-documented aspect of this project, largely because of two reports we have published over the past three years that touch on its accomplishments and the reasons for our support. One, called "No Idle Hours," deals exclusively with After School Matters and the process by which it came into existence; the other, titled "After-School Grows Up," describes emerging out-of-school-time systems in several cities, with one chapter devoted to the growth of After School Matters. Separately, researcher Robert Halpern of the Erikson Institute has recently released a highly readable and thorough interim report on the program ("A Qualitative Study



of After School Matters,” Erikson Institute, January 2005). The result of all these publications is an extensive body of available material on this program that we will not try to recapitulate here. Instead, we will describe some recent changes in the program, including a significant expansion of partnerships between After School Matters and community-based organizations around Chicago, and summarize Dr. Halpern’s findings.

In very broad strokes, After School Matters is a citywide nonprofit organization closely affiliated with, but for now formally independent of, the City of Chicago. It operates in close partnership with the Mayor’s Office and the three city departments with the greatest role in after-school programs: the Public Schools, the Park District, and the Public Libraries. Its core program offers high-school-age young people a three-day-a-week paid practicum, known as an apprenticeship, in a creative or professional discipline. The apprenticeships take many forms, but they are grouped, for simplicity’s sake, into five broad categories: the arts, communications, technology, sports leadership, and lifeguarding. The program has space for about 4,100 students in 20-week apprenticeships.

The apprenticeships are led mostly by adults with professional jobs in the same field. Though a few are teachers, most are prac-

ticing artists, actors, journalists, tech professionals, coaches, lifeguards, and so on. The apprenticeships they lead reflect their particular backgrounds and interests: some groups design Web pages, others produce videos or newspapers, sports groups work on skills that will be useful in assisting coaches or game officials in organized leagues or summer day camps. Each apprenticeship is structured so as to lead, at least potentially, to a summer or longer-term job. (Lifeguards are in particular demand; successful apprentices who pass the qualifying exam are practically guaranteed summer employment for as many years as they wish.)

The stipends (up to \$450 for regular attendance through a ten-week cycle), and the hands-on skill development are meant to appeal particularly to teenagers, who are among the hardest to attract and retain in after-school programs. To receive the full stipend and complete the program, attendance is mandatory. A less structured, unpaid “club” program also operates one to five days a week, offering sports and other recreational activity in which students are free to drop in when they wish. All told, clubs can accommodate more than 7,200 teens at any given time. After School Matters piloted this program with all five categories of apprenticeship, plus a club, running in just a handful of schools, starting in 2001. By now some version of the program is operat-

ing in 37 of the city’s 100 high schools, serving most of the city’s neediest neighborhoods.

## The burdens of growth

From the beginning, the expansion has been exhaustingly fast. The program tripled in size, from six schools to 18, in its first two years of operation. Two school years later, the number has once again more than doubled. Much of the early growth was a matter of enlarging the program’s direct operation of apprenticeships and clubs. That meant, in effect, that After School Matters’ small staff of about 20 people in 2002 (now more than double that number), recruited and paid adult professionals, designed curricula, negotiated for space in schools and parks, monitored operations and security, disbursed stipends to students, gathered data on attendance and performance, and ensured instructional quality. In all these areas, the organization has had some help from city staff in the three participating departments and in the Mayor’s Office. Still, the administrative and fundraising strains on the young organization have been constant and sometimes grueling.

Increasingly, After School Matters has expanded its contracts with community-based service providers in addition to its direct operation of more and more programs. The contracting process takes place in

*Increasingly, After School Matters has expanded its contracts with community-based service providers in addition to its direct operation of more and more programs.*

cooperation with the city's Department of Children and Youth Services, with After School Matters developing and issuing requests for proposals that are partly funded by the department. After School Matters and the department then work together to select organizations based on how faithfully they meet the basic requirements of the apprenticeship or club model, how creative and appealing the activities are that they can offer, and how effectively they can appeal to students who are not now being reached by current programs. By now, more than 40 nonprofit groups are offering affiliated programs, ranging from specialized arts and tech organizations to ethnic, cultural, and athletic clubs to multi-purpose agencies like youth centers and YMCAs, to large institutions like colleges and universities. Although these arrangements have always been a part of the program, their significant expansion in the past year — ten more contracts are being added to the list in 2005 — has meant a rapid build-up of administrative responsibilities, working alliances, and logistical arrangements for the central staff to navigate and manage.

Yet whatever the challenges they pose, these contracts bring three big, possibly indispensable, benefits: First, they greatly expand the range of facilities, personnel, types of apprenticeship, and other programming



resources available to the program. Although schools have been more than usually cooperative in furnishing After School Matters with space and equipment (thanks to the Mayor's de facto control of the school system and the active participation of the head of the Chicago Public Schools), classrooms and school facilities can go only so far. Nonprofit organizations often have space that is at least as well suited as classrooms and school gyms to particular

kinds of apprenticeships, and sometimes better. Their available equipment, in some cases, may be far better than anything the school system could supply (one obvious example: video equipment for broadcasting apprenticeships).

A second advantage is diplomatic and political: To be an effective citywide organization, After School Matters needs good working relationships with Chicago's rich web of nonprofit



organizations. It's not just that these organizations are influential (they are, but so is After School Matters, given that Maggie Daley, the mayor's wife, is its chair, its board features a blue-ribbon assortment of civic and business leaders, and its key partners are among the city's top officials). Just as important, community and civic organizations can extend the program's recruitment reach — both for students and for skilled instructors — much farther than would ever be possible for the program's

own staff. They also have all kinds of specialized expertise in activities that might attract particular sub-groups of young people. Finally, working with community groups specifically helps After School Matters reach teenagers who would not otherwise be available to a school-based program — because they're no longer in school. Leaders of the program hope that attracting dropouts into some kind of learning experience, with real-world work and a small stipend, might be a step toward enticing them back into earning a diploma.

## Clues about effectiveness

In the course of a long-running study of After School Matters, Robert Halpern of Chicago's Erikson Institute published an interim report at the beginning of this year, concluding that, for most students, apprenticeships have real value in the areas that were most important to the program's organizers: in building self-confidence, encouraging diligence and self-expression, and establishing trust between young people and accomplished, caring adults. The sessions, Dr. Halpern writes, have "come to be valued as settings where working hard and doing one's best are themselves valued — where one is not pulled down for demonstrating these qualities — and yet also as a setting where one can be oneself, a little different, unsure, confident

or not." Regular attendance, always a problem in programs for teens, has averaged an encouraging 70 percent, and is rising.

Dr. Halpern's research, at least at this stage, yields only a tentative, fragmented picture of the longer-term effects that apprenticeship might have on young people's abilities and behavior, whether in school or in the wider world. His inquiry is largely qualitative, built up over months of observing students and instructors firsthand and interviewing them at length. "We do not know," he acknowledges, "whether observed or reported changes would have occurred absent participation in this (or a very similar) program. ... We have no way of knowing whether effects persist — or conversely begin appearing — beyond the apprenticeship period." Further, some of the intended effects of the apprenticeship experience are collective; they have to do with interaction with others and performing in teams — skills that are hard to measure one student at a time.

Yet even with all these caveats weighed, the evaluation is finding beneficial outcomes in all four of the skill areas that the original designers of the program targeted: discipline-specific skills (learning to use the HTML computer language, take photographs, or do the breast stroke); executive skills (how to organize a task and see it through to completion); social or interpersonal skills (giving and receiving constructive criticism, appreciating



*[working with]...community and civic organizations can extend [After School Matter's] recruitment reach – both for students and for skilled instructors – much farther than would ever be possible for the program's own staff.*

others' talents); and what Dr. Halpern describes as “self effects” — the inner strengths of confidence and risk-taking referred to earlier.

Nonetheless, these effects evidently vary widely from student to student and from one kind of apprenticeship to another. Not surprisingly, much depends on the strengths and weaknesses of any given instructor. Instructors regarded the original

apprenticeship period of 10 weeks (now expanded to 20) as “just a start,” and felt that they don't really begin bonding with students, or tapping their real potential, until around the fifth week. The more lasting effects, it seems, depend on faithful attendance and perhaps the experience of more than one semester, what the report describes as “persistent immersion in the apprenticeship environment.” That was one

rationale for the new, longer schedule. Thus far, Dr. Halpern writes, “it appears that apprentices do not easily transfer what they learn or acquire in apprenticeships, or the ways in which they grow through the apprenticeship experience, to their school lives.”

### **‘Tight’ model for an elusive target**

Unlike the Boston and San Francisco programs profiled in the previous two sections, Chicago's approach to serving teens has been based on what management experts sometimes refer to as a “tight-tight” model — meaning that it sets relatively “tight” requirements governing both means and ends. All three programs have (or at least strive to create) relatively “tight” expectations about resources and outcomes: expenditures that lie in a closely bounded range; results that include a discernible contribution to learning, health, and/or socialization; staff-to-student ratios that encourage close relationships between youngsters and adults. All three programs offer training and technical assistance to help ensure that every provider is effective, accountable, and continually improving. But the models embraced by Boston's After-School for All Partnership and San Francisco's Team-Up for Youth tend to be relatively “loose” on the means



that contractors may employ to achieve the desired ends. In fact, both expressly encourage variety in the offerings and styles of organizations they support, in the hope of addressing the varying needs of different kinds of young people and communities.

After School Matters, by contrast, was created specifically to serve a single group that, in Maggie Daley's words, "has been the most neglected." That neglect, which many service providers readily acknowledge, is based on serious, proven difficulties in recruiting and retaining teenagers in organized after-school activities. High-school students simply have too many other things to do — including a need to earn money — to enroll faithfully in three-hour activities every day of the week. Many teenagers also tend to regard any additional structure beyond the school day as a restraint on their emerging independence. Plenty of out-of-school-time programs have tried to interest high-school students, with varying levels of success, but few have experienced anywhere near the levels of enrollment and regular attendance that are typical of younger children.

For After School Matters, therefore, part of the challenge was not only attracting neglected teenagers, but demonstrating a particular model of what makes an activity attractive for teens. To conduct that demonstration, and to build

the model to sufficient scale to determine whether it's replicable and transportable, meant that the basic structure of the apprenticeships (though not so much that of the clubs) needed to be similar from place to place. At this early stage, the model seems to be appealing to teen-agers in just the way its architects envisioned: In spring 2005, more than 16,500 students applied for 11,000 available slots. Of those, just under 9,200 specifically asked for apprenticeships — well over twice the number for whom slots were available.

One reason for the widespread interest is that the model still allows for sweeping variety in the skills and interests that the apprenticeships pursue. Students in any participating school can choose among at least five categories of activity, and usually more. The particular activity offered in each of those categories depends largely on the expertise of the organizations and professionals who lead them. But the practical, task-oriented nature of the curriculum, the requirement that activities lead to some product or performance by the semester's end, the hours of activity, the qualifications of the instructors, and the payment of stipends are all tightly supervised from site to site. As Robert Halpern sums it up in his interim evaluation, "All instructors work within a common framework of guiding principles and required program elements specified by ASM." Even in the midst of explo-

sive growth, staff have retained at least this basic framework among all the schools and community organizations hosting apprenticeships.

Our \$5 million grant to After School Matters, lasting until spring of 2006, is based on a keen interest in the outcome of this demonstration — as measured not only by the benefits it generates for the particular students who participate, but also by the lessons it yields on how to engage adolescents in productive activity after school and equip them with experiences and skills that will benefit them beyond graduation. The "tightness" of the After School Matters model is therefore part of its value to the field, and a source of some optimism that, over time, we may be able to ease some of the frustrations attached to the idea of out-of-school-time services for older students.

# Looking *Ahead*



*San Antonio Neighborhood Sports Initiative, Courtesy of Team-Up for Youth*

**I**t wasn't so long ago that the very idea of issuing a report to "the field" of out-of-school-time programs seemed fanciful, something like a shout in the dark. It's not that the work wasn't plentiful, or that it wasn't led by legions of dedicated people. Those elements had been around, in one form or another, for at least a hundred years. The problem was that there wasn't much of a "field" surrounding all this effort, at least when measured by the organizational scaffolding we sometimes call "infrastructure": established networks for exchanging information and ideas; widely accepted standards of quality and efficiency; reliable centers of training and technical assistance; broad-based coalitions of advocacy and public mobilization, including high-profile public champions; and



most of all, dependable sources of public funding that are more or less consistent from place to place and year to year.

In our frustration over the last of these issues, which remains the weakest and most fragile on the list, practitioners and funders may be tempted to overlook how much progress has been made on all the other fronts in the last decade or two. At a pace that few other emerging fields could match, the far-flung universe of out-of-school-time services has emerged from relative chaos into a remarkable, if still incomplete, kind of order. There unquestionably is a field to report to, and a great deal of reporting (and debate, and inquiry, and sometimes shared confusion) going on.

This publication contributes to that widening conversation, we hope, with a perspective that's aimed not so much at individual after-school programs and their content, but at the field as a whole — its shape and ambitions, its near-term needs, and the organizational forces drawing and holding it together. Among those forces, one of the most prominent, and maybe the most potent, has been the emergence of local intermediary organizations that have begun to embody the collective leadership and vision of the field's various elements: practitioners, funders, policymakers, beneficiaries, and advocates.

## Centers of gravity

In none of the three cities profiled in this report (and in none of the other cities we've studied, which we'll describe momentarily) has there yet emerged a single, omnibus coordinating body for the whole local out-of-school-time system. It is still not clear whether such a group will ever take shape in quite so sweeping a form, or whether it's necessary to go that far. Boston's After-School for All Partnership comes the closest to that standard, in that it addresses all of the city's forms and branches of after-school activity. But the Partnership is both temporary and focused more on improving and advocating for the field than on coordinating it. It is also a funding collaborative, not a general forum for practitioners and advisers as well as funders. Boston After School & Beyond, the new nonprofit organization the Partnership has created as a permanent follow-on to its work, may come to fill some of that role, though its full scope and potential remain to be tested. Many in Boston believe that the group's open, pluralistic approach is part of its strength — that the central collaborative needs to spend its first few years proving its usefulness to funders and providers, and by that means eventually develop the respect and credibility to become a cohering and coordinating force. That's a persuasive hypothesis, and we're supporting it with keen interest.

In both of the other cities where we're working, the central coordinating group is in some ways more directive than Boston's, more of a standard-setter in its area of work, but in each case, that area is something considerably narrower than the whole out-of-school-time field. Both Team-Up for Youth and After School Matters have set out, with growing success, to establish and build a network of programs in one defined area: sports in the former case, and apprenticeships and clubs for teens in the latter. Both have become recognized leaders — even nationally — in those branches of activity. That is the kind of centralized leadership and influence the Foundation sought to promote, though the span of that leadership, in these two cities, deliberately omits other parts of the after-school world. Both of these programs rest, in essence, on the principle that their particular area of work is itself an emerging specialty, desperately needed but underdeveloped, and that building these tightly defined areas of practice calls for a nucleus and a creative effort all its own. That, too, makes sense to us, as our support for it reflects.

To learn what other models of coordination may be emerging in large cities and metropolitan areas, we commissioned a survey in 2004 of four large local organizations or programs that fund, promote, and to some extent govern, citywide out-of-school-time programs.<sup>2</sup> For comparison purposes, we included one of our own grantees, After

*...while the potential for these intermediaries is still being tested, the field's greatest political and organizational asset, and the glue that binds it together, continues to be its sense of moral imperative.*

*Jack London Aquatic Center, Courtesy of Team-Up for Youth*



School Matters, in the sample. But for the other cities — New York, Los Angeles, and San Diego — we deliberately looked outside our circle. In the first two, we found large, influential public/private partnerships that fund and coordinate large segments (though not all) of the activity in their cities. In San Diego, we found a truly comprehensive citywide system, lodged firmly in local government, performing many of the funding, quality assurance, advocacy, and cost-control functions that the Foundation believes are essential for growing the field. The difference is that, in San Diego's model, this central function flows not so much from a collaborative

group representing the whole field as from a line agency of city government (though one that contracts out its field work to a whole array of community-based providers).

In several of the other cities where we've worked or done research, the role of government in solidifying and setting standards for the field is a much-debated, still-open question. In New York and Chicago, where the coordinating groups are for now independent organizations, there is a simmering discussion about bringing them formally into the government, or at least of absorbing their current activity into an expanded role for some municipal

agency. It's still hard to say whether that constitutes a promising sign of official public endorsement, or whether it threatens to choke off some of the field's creative spontaneity. We'll return to that question toward the end of this report, though we will not pretend to have a confident answer for it.

For now, while the potential for these intermediaries is still being tested, the field's greatest political and organizational asset, and the glue that binds it together, continues to be its sense of moral imperative. That was true for many of the most successful upstart movements of the 20th century — whether they have ended up as public-

sector responsibilities like Head Start, or remained largely in the private and voluntary sectors, like hospice care or community development. Among out-of-school-time programs, that emotional and philosophical fuel shows no sign of depleting. If anything, it's growing stronger and energizing more kinds of activity than at any time before. The question for leaders and organizers is therefore not just how to encourage more activity, but how to ensure the lasting credibility and public support that come from consistent quality and accountability, and then reach sufficient scale to touch a broad cross-section of a deeply interested public.

## Defining and measuring quality

The explosive growth of the out-of-school-time field in the past decade and a half may well be the most important and challenging fact confronting everyone who operates, funds, or regulates out-of-school-time services in the United States. On the plus side, the field has proven its ability to span many of the fault lines that bitterly divide Americans on other issues, including ideology, class, geography, and race. Parents really like after-school programs — whether they live in blue states or red, whether they are poor or prosperous, whether their children are

gifted or struggling, whether their schools are performing well or ill. Of course, all those “whethers” make a big difference in why they like after-school programs, and in what they expect those programs to deliver. Those differences, in turn, are reflected in the many political constituencies and funding pipelines on which emerging systems rely.

Are those systems and programs supposed to protect children from dangerous streets, help them get their homework done, boost their attendance and performance in school, pursue special talents or interests, enrich their education on subjects neglected during the school day, improve their physical and emotional health, help them build social and employment skills, fill otherwise idle time on weekends and in the summer, or just provide a few hours of wholesome fun while parents wrap up their work day? Judging from the tangle of funding streams on which most out-of-school-time systems depend, the answer would seem to be an improbable “all of the above.” But to any practitioner delivering actual services, that answer is a transparent fiction. (Youth development scholar Robert Halpern, in this year's seminal paper on the evaluation of after-school programs, calls the presumed link between those programs and academic achievement “the Big Lie.”<sup>3</sup>) The real answer is both obvious and

immensely challenging: Expectations are different from place to place, program to program, and even student to student.

One part of the challenge is that a number of popular claims about these programs have so far been unable to withstand close scrutiny. It is politically appealing, and therefore common, to suggest that after-school programs consistently improve students' school-time performance (as measured, say, on standardized reading and math tests), or that these programs promote safer streets by keeping kids busy during high-crime hours, or that they promote employment among parents who would otherwise need child care during the out-of-school hours. On cold reflection, it hardly seems reasonable to expect after-school programs, on their own, to alter a big city's vast education, crime, or employment patterns — and indeed, no reliable evidence suggests that they do.<sup>4</sup> For any given student, and maybe even for any given neighborhood, a particular kind of program, delivered in a particular way to just the right target group, might actually make an important difference in one or more of these areas. But nationwide? Even citywide? With so many different kinds of services being delivered to so many different kinds of families and communities, and with so many other factors influencing the same populations?

<sup>3</sup> Robert Halpern, “Confronting the Big Lie: The Need to Reframe Expectations of After-School Programs,” Partnership for After-School Education, September 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Besides Robert Halpern's paper, other persuasive treatments of these issues have been supported by the W.T. Grant Foundation, notably an essay by Foundation President Robert C. Granger and UCLA Professor Thomas Kane, “Improving the Quality of After-School Programs,” *Education Week*, vol. XXIII, no. 23, Feb. 18, 2004, and a longer paper by Professor Kane, “The Impact of After-School Programs: Interpreting the Results of Four Recent Evaluations,” January 16, 2004. Both are available from the W.T. Grant Foundation Web site at <http://www.wtgrantfoundation.org>.



*...one crucial role for the coordinating, intermediary organizations this project is supporting is to find a realistic system of accountability in each place and make that system work for their respective cities, parents and communities.*

The questions seem naïve on their face. Yet many evaluation and research projects — including several prominent ones commissioned at great cost by major government programs — have asked just such questions.

It's right to object to that simplistic approach, but it would be even more naïve to then reject all serious efforts at clarifying expectations, defining ways of meeting them, and measuring whether they've been met. No system with any hope of broad financial and political support can get away with that for long, nor would most out-of-school-time professionals want that degree of unaccountability. Yet we're still a long way from a clear, consistent approach to the issue, much less a good set of data and analytic techniques to frame and answer the questions.

While most observers believe that the overall quality of programs is improving, it still varies widely. Programs appear to be meeting at least some genuine needs, and demand for these programs in many places still far outstrips supply. Yet anecdotal evidence also suggests that content, in some cases, may be less than advertised, that attendance is often spotty, or that some activities bear only tangential relation to the expected outcomes. Either way,

as the late Senator Pat Moynihan used to say, the plural of “anecdote” is not “data.” We may have hunches about the strengths and weaknesses of many programs, but we would be hard pressed to evaluate more than a handful of them with any amount of rigor, or even with a clear set of relevant standards by which to judge.

Thus one crucial role for the coordinating, intermediary organizations this project is supporting is to find a realistic system of accountability in each place and to make that system work for their respective cities, parents, and communities. That process is under way in all three of the programs we have described, though it is far too soon to describe any of them as conclusive or certain to succeed. Again, as with so many other aspects of the field's growth, this process seems frustratingly slow to the practitioners and funders who believe intensely that results are real and ought to be measurable. Yet compared with the progress of performance measurement in other fields, including ones that have been searching for accountability mechanisms for decades, out-of-school-time programs are neither far behind nor lacking in direction. Though not all programs and localities are taking the same direction — a fact that duly reflects the diversity of the

landscape — they are pursuing systems of research and measurement that seem to have meaning and potential. The role of the coordinating groups in each city is to ensure that these systems eventually produce information that both informs parents and funders and helps providers and intermediaries continually improve the services they deliver.

## Mind and body

Though the field's diversity and complexity may frustrate analysts and funders, those same qualities seem to have the opposite effect on the public at large. The movement is widely popular precisely because, taken as a whole, it includes responses to the whole gamut of needs that children, parents, schools, and communities bring to it. By contrast, the intense concentration on the purely academic effects of after-school programs may be an understandable response to political trends in Washington, where funding decisions seem for now inextricably bound up with test scores. But that route has met with only mixed success, and in the process has risked presenting a distorted picture of the field. Some programs do concentrate significant time and energy on promoting reading or math or both, and those

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of how and where this is most likely to happen, see The After-School Corporation's five-year evaluation, “Building Quality, Scale and Effectiveness in After-School Programs,” by Elizabeth Reisner et al., Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, Inc., November 2004, p.42. The complete evaluation report is available from TASC's web site at <http://tascorp.org>.

programs sometimes make a provable difference in test-score performance.<sup>5</sup> Yet those programs are neither typical of the whole field nor fully responsive to the many other interests that fuel the after-school movement.

Just one example of the urgent non-academic interests being addressed in the out-of-school hours — though one that's getting a lot of recent attention — is childhood obesity. We have already discussed the value of after-school physical activity at some length in our profile of Team-Up for Youth. But well beyond the fertile environment that Team-Up has created in one metropolitan area, there is clearly a national clamor for more fitness and sports activity for young people — a clamor unlikely to be satisfied during the school day or in informal or league sports alone. In a detailed treatment of the issue in 2003, youth development scholar Robert Halpern surveyed this landscape for the After School Project and found the crisis every bit as alarming as media reports have suggested, especially among children from low-income and minority communities.<sup>6</sup> He concluded, as have many community groups and parents, that the non-school hours are an ideal time to engage young people in healthy physical activity. We were gratified to see similar views expressed in the November 15, 2004, edition of *Sports Illustrated*, in which an

article described the extent of the problem and cited after-school sports programs — with a reference to some of our work — as part of the solution.<sup>7</sup>

That is merely one example of popular, urgently necessary after-school programming that will have little effect on school-time test scores. Yes, such activity surely contributes indirectly to children's academic performance, at least by combating habits of lethargy and self-doubt. But its value extends far beyond the classroom, and its popularity is based not on the momentary preoccupations of national policy, but on the more fundamental concern for children's survival and quality of life. When we describe the sustaining force of this field as a moral imperative, that is the sort of fundamental value we mean.

## The questions ahead

As we did in our last report three years ago, we conclude this publication with a few open questions that we hope this project and its grantees will help to answer. Most of the questions on this list echo the ones in our earlier report, though the ensuing years' experience has helped us refine (or at least re-examine) several of them with increased information and insight. As we look ahead, the

following five questions seem likely to grow in importance as the field continues to expand and organize in the remainder of this decade.

***How much farther is it possible to go in creating and strengthening intermediary organizations to promote a coherent, dependably funded, yet still diverse field?***

In our search for forces of cohesion and coordination at the local level, we have found several different kinds of central organizations, each effective in a different way. Each has its own particular relationship with providers, funders, and public policymakers, and each has visibly contributed to a stronger field. But none of them is, in itself, the sole cohesive force in out-of-school-time services, nor would it be reasonable to expect that of them at this stage. What, then, will it take for these organizations and their collaborators to marshal all the forces that can draw the field more tightly together, establish more widely shared norms of performance and accomplishment, support providers more effectively, raise public awareness, and improve public policy? The experience of the last several years has spotlighted helpful influences from research, funding collaboratives, state and national advocacy coalitions, and constructive alliances with other fields concerned with youth development, such as recreation, criminal justice, and employment.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Halpern, "Physical (In)Activity Among Low-Income Children and Youth," The After School Project, 2003, available at [www.theafterschoolproject.org](http://www.theafterschoolproject.org).

<sup>7</sup> Tim Layden, "A Weighty Issue for Minorities," *Sports Illustrated*, Nov. 15, 2004, p. 88.

# *What...will it take for these [intermediary] organizations and their collaborators to marshal all the forces that can draw the field more tightly together...?*

Some combination of these, along with stronger collaborative groups at the local level, no doubt holds some key for answering this question. Finding the right combination and making the most of it will surely be a continuing effort calling for wide experimentation over several more years.

***What kinds of support, for what purposes, will be the most useful in creating effective, stable, and versatile intermediaries?***

The three organizations supported by this project, and nearly all the other intermediary structures we've researched, grew to their current level of influence and expertise with some early leadership and financial support from both philanthropy and government. The intermediaries have then put the various public and private resources to many uses: funding more and more service providers, strengthening their central organizations, building their repertoire of services to provider agencies, expanding their range of after-school and youth-development expertise, developing research and evaluation systems, and assembling the operational, financial, and political alliances on which effective leadership depends. There are, by now, enough local variations on both the forms of support and the methods of intermediary growth to help us start to understand what combi-

nations of support — financial, technical, intellectual, organizational, political, or other — lead to what kinds of intermediaries and systems. Although we are not aware of any definitive research on that question, it is one that will be increasingly ripe for investigation as the number, size, and effectiveness of intermediary organizations continues to grow.

***When, and where, is it reasonable to look for ample, sustainable, and dedicated public funding for after-school intermediaries and services?***

It takes a special kind of optimism, in the fiscal climate of the early 21st century, to seek additional public money for any activity, no matter how popular. Federal deficits, state budget crises, agonizing local trade-offs between police and schools, all form the immediate backdrop to any discussion about additional funding for out-of-school-time programs. Yet among the competitors for increasingly scarce public funds, this field has proven formidable. Budget-strapped cities and states, from New York City to Chicago to California, have nonetheless made strong, often difficult, commitments to after-school systems and programs, even as they struggle to find money to fund the commitments. Assuming that the political and moral potency of this field gives

it some hope in the ever-more-desperate search for public dollars, which is the most likely level at which to seek those dollars? Can a sufficient portion be earmarked specifically to build and sustain intermediaries, and if so, which public source would be the most likely funder? And is it realistic to hope for a more streamlined flow of dedicated money at each level, or would a more promising approach be to seek multiple increases and set-asides in the various fiscal brooks and tributaries from which the field now draws (schools, youth services, health, parks and recreation, criminal justice, and so on)?

***How can intermediaries organize the search for measurable results in this field in a way that poses reasonable questions, investigates subsections of the field appropriately, and comes up with useful conclusions?***

The writings of Robert Halpern, Elizabeth Reisner, Robert Granger, and Thomas Kane, cited earlier, all suggest that big, omnibus research projects — in which the whole field is held to account for a few kinds of easily measurable outcomes — are neither intellectually defensible nor practically helpful. So what can be studied, and with what resources? It seems clear that smaller, more specialized research is in order, not just to



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evaluate individual programs but to develop common conclusions about how to match strategies with desired results. That is obviously harder and more expensive than conducting a simple all-in-one survey of dozens of disparate programs and matching their work with standardized test scores. But the problems for conducting and using research aren't just methodological. As Dr. Halpern noted in a recent paper, "When pressed, most frontline providers in after-school programs can offer only the most general statements of what they are trying to accomplish, and why they do what they do." The problem of deciding what we want from research — of what, exactly, we're trying to prove — is at least as urgent as the problem of deciding how to organize and pay for the studies. This would seem to be a fitting topic for a broad, field-wide collaboration at the national level, where practitioners, thinkers, and funders could hammer out some basic questions and practical next steps toward a meaningful, efficient body of research on the field.

***Does the prospect of greater government control of intermediaries and coordinating structures represent a step forward — an affirmation that after-school programs ought to be a normal public service to all families — or a threat to the field's growth and versatility?***

In our survey of four citywide after-school systems, as well as



*Culinary Arts Club, Courtesy of After School Matters*

in our own grantmaking, we found a broad range of relationships between the central coordinating bodies and their local governments. At one end of the range is San Diego, where the city's Department of Community and Economic Development funds and regulates the vast majority of after-school activity in San Diego's public schools. At the other end are Boston's After-School for All Partnership and New York City's After School Corporation, both free-standing nonprofit organizations heavily supported by private philanthropy, which work closely with government, but from a position of relative independence. In between are Chicago and Los

Angeles. In Chicago, the primary backing and leadership of After School Matters trace directly to Mayor Richard M. Daley and his wife, Maggie, and its key operating partners are large city agencies. Still, the organization's board and legal status are those of an independent nonprofit. In Los Angeles, the connections with city government are more formal — the chief executive is part of the Mayor's Office and the chief operating officer is employed by the School District — yet its hybrid organizational structure and very strong chief executive give L.A.'s BEST more of the operating versatility of an independent agency. All of this suggests, if anything, that there is

*...each unresolved issue is actually an expression of some emerging, often remarkable strength of the field.*



*Hip Hop Dance Club, Courtesy of After School Matters*

no single answer to the (admittedly simplistic) question “Government: Good or bad?” But all of these experiences, in all their variety, nonetheless speak unanimously to the virtue of striking some balance between government funding and legitimacy on the one hand and nonprofit entrepreneurship and flexibility on the other. As discussions in more and more cities — including New York and Chicago — explore the possibility of a more direct government role in running after-school programs, finding ways of preserving that fragile balance will need to remain high on the agenda,

no matter what formal role government ends up playing in each place.

All of these questions, difficult as they are to answer in the short term, are matters that other fields have confronted, and eventually answered, as they progressed from scattered activity to integrated systems. More to the point, each unresolved issue is actually an expression of some emerging, often remarkable strength of the field. If we’re now able to ask how to build coordinating and unifying structures, formulate and integrate goals, measure results, seek better funding

streams, and negotiate the best possible relationship with government, that is primarily because we are no longer viewing after-school activity as a cluster of ad-hoc, upstart activities, but as a potent force in American society. That’s an accomplishment that’s fraught with challenges, no doubt. But it is an accomplishment all the same — and one that shows every sign of expanding and improving year by year.

# *Contact* **Information**

## *After School Matters*

David Sinski, Executive Vice President

[dsinski@cityofchicago.org](mailto:dsinski@cityofchicago.org)

[www.afterschoolmatters.org](http://www.afterschoolmatters.org)

## *Boston After School & Beyond*

Steven Pratt, President

[smpratt@bostonbeyond.org](mailto:smpratt@bostonbeyond.org)

[www.bostonbeyond.org](http://www.bostonbeyond.org)

## *Team-Up for Youth*

Tim Johnson, Executive Director

[timj@teamupforyouth.org](mailto:timj@teamupforyouth.org)

[www.teamupforyouth.org](http://www.teamupforyouth.org)





Horticulture Apprenticeship, Courtesy of After School Matters

## A Report to the Field

### The After School Project

*A Program  
of the Robert  
Wood Johnson  
Foundation*

# About the *After School Project*

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation created the After School Project in 1998 as a five-year, three-city demonstration aimed at connecting significant numbers of young people in low-income neighborhoods with responsible adults during out-of-school time. To that end, the Project focuses on developing: (1) an array of developmental opportunities for youth, including physical activity and sports, educational, social and recreational programs; and, (2) strong local organizations with the necessary resources, credibility, and political clout to bring focus and visibility to the youth development field.

For more information, please contact:

#### ***The After School Project***

180 West 80th Street  
Second Floor  
New York, NY 10024  
Tel: 646-277-2408  
Fax: 646-505-1184

[www.theafterschoolproject.org](http://www.theafterschoolproject.org)  
Email: [info@theafterschoolproject.org](mailto:info@theafterschoolproject.org)

Carol Glazer  
Senior Program Consultant  
646-277-2402

JoAnne Vellardita  
Program Associate  
646-277-2408