

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF



Issue Brief No. 13

August 2002

Afterschool and School Improvement

Afterschool programs are a proven method of helping to improve a school's performance. Studies show that afterschool programs improve academic achievement, reduce grade retention and increase student attendance and interest in school. Across the country, afterschool is a key element in strategies to turn around under-performing schools. The superintendent of Philadelphia and the governor of Virginia have used afterschool to turn their schools around. Congress recognized the benefits of afterschool by mandating provision of extra learning opportunities in afterschool hours through the creation of the Title I Supplemental Educational Services program.

According to state departments of education, more than 7,000 schools in the United States are considered in need of improvement.¹ Some characteristics of successful schools include high academic achievement, clear standards and evaluation processes, community involvement and students who are engaged in learning. Afterschool programs offer a chance to reinforce and supplement the curriculum by offering new and different opportunities for learning that further engage students in school. Community involvement frequently is built in, as many afterschool programs are partners with community- and faith-based organizations.

Of Principal Importance

Principals and superintendents acknowledge that afterschool plays an important role in turning around failing or under-performing schools.

- According to a survey of K-8 principals by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, afterschool is becoming an integral part of their schools. Principals say afterschool programs have improved academic performance, provided safe environments and helped the school connect with parents and the community.

Principals have embraced...after-school programs because there is clearly a need. Most see the payoff in terms of benefits to the children. If they are helping children make progress academically and helping to keep them safe, those are very good incentives to keep going.

Vincent L. Ferrandino, executive director, NAESP²

- Paul Vallas, current head of the Philadelphia Public School District and former chief of Chicago public schools, has seen first-hand the difference afterschool programs can make in turning around failing schools. When he took charge in Chicago, the district had a dropout rate of more than 50 percent and an average daily attendance rate of about 86 percent. On standardized reading exams, only about 25 percent of the kids were scoring above the national average. Now, thanks in part to afterschool programs such as Lighthouse, which is

mandatory for students with attendance problems or who are in danger of being retained, 35 percent of students are scoring above the national average in reading. Also, the attendance rate is above 90 percent.

Of the schools that established Lighthouse programs two years ago, 90 percent have shown an improvement in academic performance. Some of them have improved so fast, in fact, that I've had to go in and audit the test scores to make sure they're kosher.

Paul Vallas, former CEO, Chicago Public Schools³

Blue Ribbon Success

Since 1982, the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools program has honored schools that meet high academic standards or have shown significant improvement during the past five years. Studies show that afterschool programs help schools develop qualities necessary to win a Blue Ribbon designation, namely high student retention and graduation rates; challenging standards and curriculum; excellent teaching and an environment that strengthens teachers' skills and improvement; school, family and community partnerships; and good student performance on measures of achievement. In 2001, 264 schools were selected as Blue Ribbon Schools. What do many of them credit for their success? Afterschool programs.

- Good Elementary School in Irving, Texas, keeps its doors open from 7 a.m. until after 8 p.m. to serve its nearly 800 students. Of those, about 81 percent are considered economically disadvantaged; 63 percent speak limited English; and 79 percent are considered at-risk. The staff is committed to focusing on every aspect of youth development and working with both students and parents.

*This is an affirmation of everything we have been doing...Our mixed-aged, looping, technology and **after-school programs** played a big role in receiving this award.*

Cheryl Jennings, principal⁴

- Los Penasquitos Elementary School of Rancho Penasquitos, California, was recognized for its afterschool program, which has a waiting list of more than 50 students. The program, using local high school volunteers, has helped the school improve dramatically in recent years.⁵ Forty percent of students, in a population that includes as many as 21 languages, scored at or above the 75th percentile on the SAT-9 in reading, compared to twenty-eighth percent in 1998.⁶

For us it was much less about receiving an award than it was about receiving an independent, external confirmation that what has happened here in the last five years has been nothing short of miraculous.

Jeff King, principal⁷

¹No Child Left Behind, Supplemental Services, "How many schools are in need of improvement?" 2002, available from <http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov/parents/supplementalservices/index.html>

²National Association of Elementary School Principals, *Principals and After School Programs: A Survey of PreK-8 Principals*, August 2001, available from <http://www.naesp.org/afterschool/report.pdf>.

³Paul G. Vallas, "Saving Public Schools," Civic Bulletin No. 16 (Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, March 1999), available from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cb_16.htm.

⁴Stephen Terry, "With 'everything in place,' school wins Blue Ribbon," *Dallas Morning News*, 3 June, 2001.

⁵Shay K. McKinley, "2 schools in community earn national award," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 28 December, 2001.

⁶Los Penasquitos Elementary School Web site, Student Achievement Section, *SAT-9 Test Results: National Percentile Ranking*, 2001, available from <http://www.pusd.info/pusdlpes/Sachievement.htm>.

⁷McKinley, *San Diego Union-Tribune*.