

Vision, leadership, and determination: Cities and their partners are creating after-school system

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The Need for After-School

In the spring of 2004, a household survey on after-school care in America confirmed what civic leaders already suspected: nearly 11 percent of elementary school children and 34 percent of middle schoolers report that they are in unsupervised “self-care” after school.

African American and Hispanic youth spend more time unsupervised than other children, yet 53 percent of African American and 40 percent of Hispanic families say they would enroll their children in after-school programs if they were available. Twenty-three percent of Caucasian parents agree.

Sponsored by the After-school Alliance, the America After 3 PM¹ survey found that parents whose children are not in after-school programs think their kids would benefit from programs in several ways: through fun/personal enjoyment; being safe and avoiding trouble; gaining academic enrichment; and improving social skills, health, and fitness.

The after-school movement has gained momentum over the past 10 years in several states and in major cities across the country. Local governments, school districts, and influential community organizations are ideally positioned to lead the development of an organized system of services that is comprehensive, high quality, coordinated, and accessible for families and children.

For purposes of this paper, “after-school system” is defined broadly to include programs that serve children:

- during out-of-school time, including before and after school, school breaks, and summer vacation
- K-12, in elementary, middle, and high school
- in programs that may be licensed or unlicensed
- in school and community-based facilities

How are cities responding?

Although the demand is widespread, and out-of-school time programs are multiplying, very few cities have any coherent, firmly established system for funding, promoting, or regulating these activities. The programs constitute, in most places, a patchwork of independent efforts, cobbled together by individual neighborhoods and schools, funded

¹ The Afterschool Alliance. (2004). America after 3 PM. Washington, D.C.: Author

*by a hodgepodge of often-unrelated grants and contracts, and certified or evaluated by no single authority.*² –Tony Proscio and Basil J. Whiting

In Boston, Los Angeles, San Diego, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Seattle, Washington, DC, Chicago, Fort Worth, Columbus, and Detroit, city governments are taking the lead in out-of-school time (OST) system-building efforts. In other cities, such as Denver, Dallas, Houston, and St. Louis, school districts are leading the way. In New York City, Charlotte, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Kansas City, local foundations, the United Way, or community organizations spearhead system-building efforts. In all of these cities—no matter which entity takes the lead—community partnerships, strategic planning, and stable funding have all been vital to success.

The Cross-Cities Network for Leaders of Citywide After-school Initiatives (CCN) brings together leaders of after-school initiatives from 21 major cities across the United States and is staffed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST). CCN members have spent five years in a learning community focused on fostering the development of high-quality, accessible systems of after-school programs.

Lessons learned from CCN members can help other cities that are struggling to make the leap from a patchwork of unrelated after-school programs to a coordinated, effective system of OST services for children and youth from kindergarten through high school.

What is meant by “system building,” and what are the components of an effective after-school system?

*There is nothing easy about building mature systems for after-school. Expanding opportunities for learning and engagement requires action at multiple levels—ensuring quality, quantity and continuity at the practice level; building an infrastructure to support programming; and creating a climate that guarantees consistent and sustained support.*³
– The Forum for Youth Investment

Clearly a system of OST services must be built upon shared values and agreement about desired outcomes. It must have stable and coordinated funding streams, consistent quality expectations and centralized support, accountability, and evaluation. NIOST adds that there must be an infrastructure in place that holds a system together, including communication systems, leadership and governance models, public relations, and data collection.

Citywide systems of after-school services must be broad-based and widely accessible to families, be deliberately constructed to link program design to outcomes, and have some congruity across all program sites. The policy framework that guides investments and program expansion ought to be agreed upon by policymakers, funders, consumers, schools, providers, and community members. There needs to be an easy way for families, children, and community members to know which services are available and how to access them.

² Proscio, T. & Whiting, B. (2004). *After-school grows up: Moving toward universal extended school days in four large American cities*. New York, NY: The After School Project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

³ Forum for Youth Investment. (2003). *Reflections on system building: Lessons from the after-school movement*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

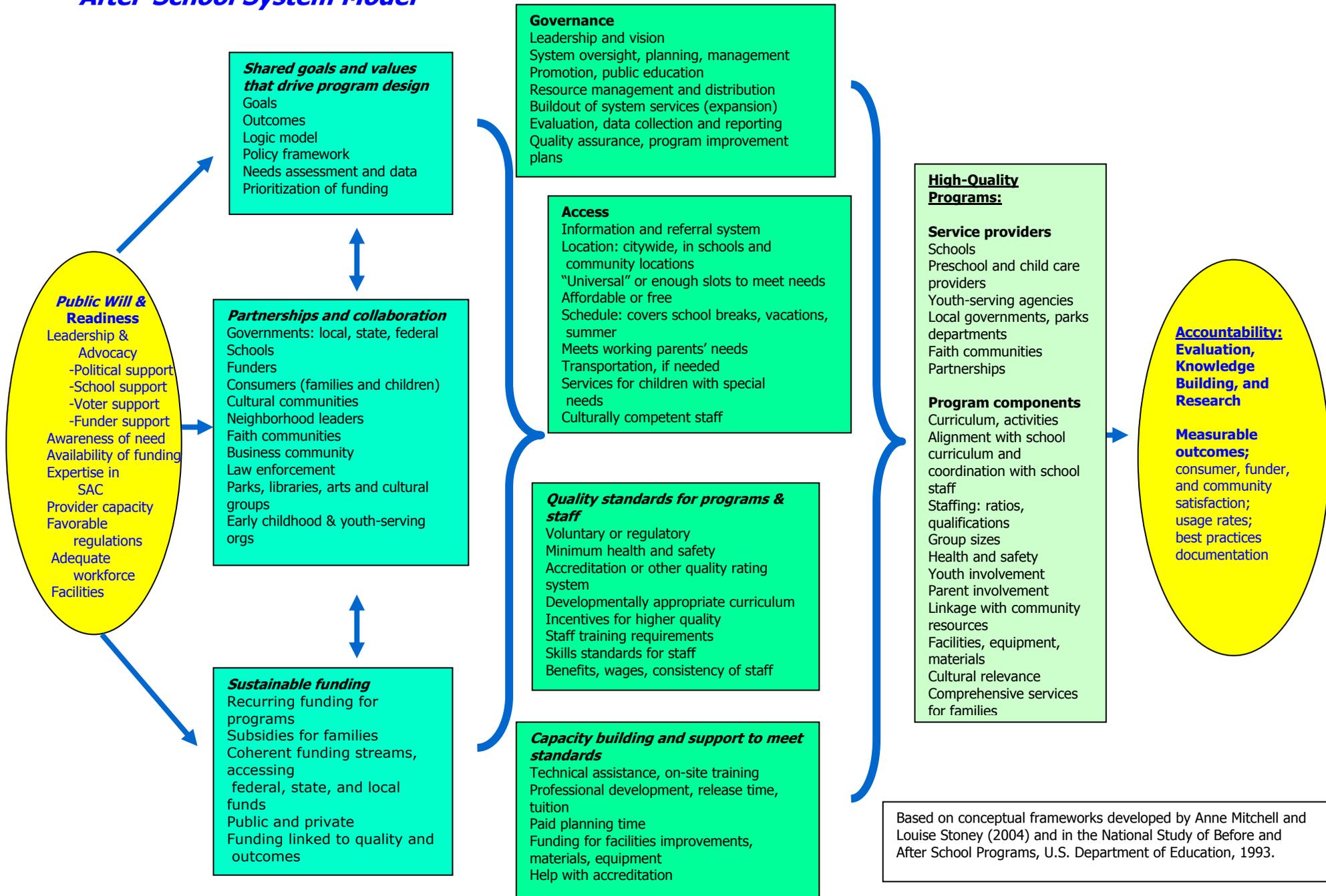
Proscio and Whiting⁴ identify six key elements in successful city system-building efforts:

- an intentional plan to extend services to a broad number children, neighborhoods, and schools
- recurring and stable funding
- quality expectations
- centralized support and regulation
- shared goals and a program designed to fit them
- political support

Below is a graphic representation of the components of an after-school system, adapted to reflect insights from CCN members. Because funding is limited, most CCN members have initially focused their efforts on one or two elements of the overall system: access, quality standards, professional development, capacity building, forging partnerships, and developing strategic plans. With a clear vision of the systems they are building toward, communities can incorporate additional components as time and funding allow.

⁴ Proscio, T. & Whiting, B. (2004). *After-school grows up: Moving toward universal extended school days in four large American cities*. New York, NY: The After School Project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

After-School System Model



Some cities have worked in all areas of system building, but with selected areas of emphasis or on a smaller scale, owing to limited funding and community capacity. For example, Seattle and Boston have made progress in all areas of the system model, but with a scaled-down approach focusing strongly on the quality of services. Baltimore, San Diego, and Los Angeles have developed large-scale systems, with a focus on access and universality of services.

What roles have CCN members played in system building, and what can be learned from their successes?

The chart below corresponds with the After School System Model and gives brief examples from members of the CCN that illustrate promising practices for seven key system elements.

System Building

<p>Public will and readiness</p> <p>Leadership and advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ political support ▪ school support ▪ voter support ▪ funder support <p>Awareness of need</p> <p>Availability of funding</p> <p>Expertise in after-school services</p> <p>Provider capacity</p> <p>Favorable regulations</p> <p>Adequate workforce</p> <p>Facilities</p>	<p>There is both readiness and public will to tackle after-school system-building tasks.</p> <p>The major focus of every CCN member site is to increase public understanding about both the benefits of high-quality after-school programs and the needs of families, children, and youth. These advocacy campaigns have been designed to foster the political, funder, and voter “will” to finance after-school services, and to mobilize key partners to join in system-building efforts.</p> <p>LA’s BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow), an initiative of former Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, is adept at public education, advocacy, and image building. LA’s BEST places a high priority on public relations and public awareness, and has used positive evaluations and media coverage of programs in schools to elicit corporate, civic, and private sector funding. Using celebrities as spokespersons, LA’s BEST has garnered media attention; its Director of Public Information has developed a strategic plan for promoting LA’s BEST to key constituencies, which has paid off with increased funding, public will, and access to community resources.</p> <p>New York City’s TASC (The After-School Corporation) was charged by its founding funder, the Open Society Institute, to build public will for funding after-school programs and to engage the City of New York in the process. Through its use of available funding and its efforts to match seed funding, TASC has garnered media coverage and established credibility for its system-building efforts. TASC was able to leverage program space in schools and to build upon existing after-school training and professional development organizations to do capacity building and quality improvement work.</p>
<p>Shared goals and values that drive program design</p> <p>Goals</p> <p>Outcomes</p> <p>Logic model</p> <p>Policy framework</p> <p>Needs assessment and data</p>	<p>System expansion and policy priorities are informed by the community’s vision for children and youth</p> <p>Nearly every city in the CCN has developed a strategic plan for after-school services, fueled by needs-assessment data and shared goals, outcomes, and a policy framework. For example, the plan for before- and after-school programs in metropolitan Atlanta is led by the United Way’s Afterschool Alliance. The planning process included a Dream Team (Atlanta’s top civic, corporate, philanthropic, public, and</p>

<p>Prioritization of funding</p>	<p>nonprofit sector leaders) and a Coordinating Council (a core leadership group that sets goals and priorities). The Alliance also had a Funders’ Roundtable (key public and private funders), a Providers’ Network (front-line service providers), and Change Agents (key organizations with a vested interest in expansion of after-school programs). This highly inclusive structure resulted in a policy framework and statement of outcomes with six prioritized strategies that enjoy buy-in from across the community.</p>
<p>Partnerships and Collaboration</p> <p>Governments Schools Funders Consumers Cultural communities Neighborhood leaders Faith-based communities Business community Law enforcement Parks, libraries Arts and cultural groups Child care providers Youth-serving organizations</p>	<p>It takes partnerships to build a system.</p> <p>Seattle’s Project Lift-Off, founded in 1997, forged a partnership between city, state, and county government and the chamber of commerce, the United Way, the Seattle Public Schools, nonprofit organizations, culturally relevant child care task forces, the Church Council, School’s Out Washington, Child Care Resources, and parents to develop a strategic plan. The goal was to ensure that every child, from birth to age 18, had access to quality early learning and OST opportunities. Project Lift-Off brought together early learning and after-school advocates to design a continuum of services for children and youth, both in schools and in the community. School’s Out’s MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) initiative in the early and mid-1990s laid the groundwork for expanding the after-school system in Seattle.</p> <p>Partners in Out-of-School Time (POST) is a collaborative communitywide commitment to provide each child in grades K–12 in Charlotte-Mecklenburg a safe, supportive, stimulating environment when school is out. POST was convened and funded in 1999 by a community foundation that brought together after-school experts, city and county government, the police department, schools, parks and recreation, the United Way, banking, the Junior League, social services, the YMCA and YWCA, arts and advocacy groups and other foundations, community leaders, and stakeholders to develop a strategic plan. One of the goals of POST, according to Clare Tate, Director, has been to “create a collaborative structure that will lead POST by assessing needs, formulating strategies, developing resources, and ensuring accountability.”</p> <p>The Kansas City system-building effort has as its community mission, “high-quality school-age care available to all KC families, providing a safe and fun place that supports the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of the children of our community.” The 1998–99 Community Task Force recommended transition from school district–operated programs to a community-owned system. LINC (Local Investment Commission, a private, municipal funding intermediary) became the system coordinator in 1999, and it</p>

oversees a community partnership effort that also includes KCMUSD (Kansas City, Missouri School District), YouthNet, the Francis Child Development Institute, 12 contracted community-based agencies, and 45 schools. All sites are electronically connected to a common management information system. Kansas City's partnership model invests LINC and KCMUSD with overall coordination responsibilities, while YouthNet is responsible for program improvement and the Francis Child Development Institute offers professional development. Community-based organizations are charged with service delivery in schools. Roles and responsibilities are interdependent and based on preexisting capacities to deliver "the goods."

The St. Louis Public Schools' Community Education Initiative has created Community Education Centers in 16 elementary and middle schools through a partnership among schools, Americorps, Neighborhood Stabilization and Police Department Officers, parents, and youth. Fundamental to the success of these programs has been the involvement of parents, youth, neighborhood residents, service providers, elected officials, local business leaders, and clergy in leadership roles on Community Councils, which identify needs, set priorities, and solve problems for the Community Education Centers. These centers offer after-school activities such as tutoring and homework assistance, cultural enrichment, recreation, organized team sports, violence and drug prevention, and other activities that enhance academic achievement and personal development.

In Fort Worth, a partnership between the city and the school district in 1999 created the Task Force for After School Programs, convened by the assistant city manager and the school deputy superintendent. The scope of representation on the task force was comprehensive, including high-level administrators from the school district, the city, the Crime Prevention Resource Center, county juvenile services, and community organizations. The presence of power brokers enabled the group to tap into potential sources of funding including crime control and prevention dollars. Because the representatives on the task force were decision makers in their respective organizations, they were able to make decisions and get them implemented. As a group, they were able to merge their individual agendas, learn together about best practices, assess needs, and develop a joint venture that would ultimately serve over 2,600 children daily at 52 sites.

<p>Sustainable funding</p> <p>Recurring funding for programs Subsidies for families Coherent funding streams Public and private funds Funding linked to quality and outcomes</p> <p><u>Sources:</u> Federal, state, county and local government United Way Schools Corporations Foundations Parent fees In-kind (e.g., free rent)</p> <p><u>Funding types:</u> Education Crime prevention Youth development Workforce development Community Development Americorps Social Services Recreation, arts Health, sports Tobacco settlement</p>	<p>CCN members have pieced together sustainable funding from a crazy quilt of sources.</p> <p>Funding streams for after-school systems include federal, state, county and local government; school districts; foundations; business; and fees for service. In most CCN cities, including Los Angeles, San Diego, Houston, Columbus, Seattle, Dallas, Denver, New York, Kansas City, San Francisco, and St. Louis, free rent in schools has been crucial to program sustainability. Atlanta has relied on strong volunteer involvement. Seattle combines funding from a local property tax, the Families and Education Levy, with city general fund, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), 21st Century Community Learning Center, and foundation dollars to fund free after-school programs in every middle school and to provide after-school services for children in grades K–5. Support includes funding for professional development, on-site training, resource and referral, and subsidies for low-income families using fee-based programs. In a partnership with private philanthropy, the city matches private sector grants for school-age care, leveraging \$3 for every city dollar.</p> <p>The advent of 21st Century Community Learning Center (CLC) funding became the launching pad for after-school care systems in several cities, such as Dallas. The Dallas Independent School District began the 2001/02 school year with 45 21st Century CLCs providing after-school and community programs for more than 10,000 students, parents, and community members. Dallas schools offered free space to community organizations in a partnership to develop programs. Using a variety of funding sources, Dallas Schools have established after-school programs in 153 elementary and 25 middle schools, serving 25,000 students daily.</p> <p>The Denver Public School (DPS) System has an innovative partnership with a local foundation to raise money for after-school services. It has a variety of program models for after-school programs, based on funders' guidelines. For example the DPS operates Beacon centers, 21st Century CLCs, Neighborhood Centers, licensed school-age child care, day camps, sports programs, and a Learn and Earn program. Each of these program models is responsive to particular funders and school-community needs, and DPS uses district-wide guidelines to ensure consistency in policies and procedures across program models and sites.</p> <p>In San Francisco, the Beacon Initiative has a public/private partnership-funding model. Its steering committee is overseen by the major funders: the city, the Juvenile Probation Department, the San Francisco Unified School</p>
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	<p>District, and local private foundations. The Evelyn and Walter J. Haas, Jr. Fund provided seed funding and continues to invest in the Beacon centers. They convene 10 foundations that provide capacity-building grants to Beacon centers, along with core operating funding. The city contributes funding from the Children’s Fund, a voter-approved initiative that sets aside a portion of tax revenues for children’s services.</p> <p>A Kansas City task force found that its after-school initiative could be funded by using existing state and federal funding streams that weren’t being fully utilized, including TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), Title I, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. They combined this anchor of public funding with sliding scale–based parent fees and private funds.</p> <p>Boston’s After-School for All Partnership, a public/private funding collaborative, has 14 funders, including the city, the United Way, Harvard University, Fleet Bank now Bank of America; ,and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. As of 2003, the collaborative represented over \$24 million in funding and had developed a five-year plan to expand funding for a sustainable system of high-quality after-school programming in Boston. Under this model, “funders within the partnership share ideas and common goals, pool resources and collaborate on projects, but retain their own identity and investment options.”⁵ The Partnership’s Sustainable Funding work group’s prime strategy is to link the city-level initiative with a statewide plan for a stable OST system in Massachusetts, in a joint venture with the Massachusetts After-School Partnership.</p> <p>In Washington, DC, an extensive community partnership worked with the mayor, who formed the Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, to fund OST programs. The Trust is supported by a line item in the city budget, which in 2005 will be over \$5 million. About 90 percent of funding is for grants to direct service providers; 10 percent is for administration, monitoring, evaluation, and development of standards. Recently, the city council allocated an additional \$1.8 million to focus on older youth (ages 14–24) to prevent juvenile crime.</p>
<p>Governance</p> <p>Leadership and vision System oversight Planning,</p>	<p>The high-profile role of the mayor can galvanize civic leadership for after-school programs.</p> <p>Detroit’s mayor made after-school programs a centerpiece of his election campaign. His passion was fueled by his</p>

⁵ National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2003). *Promising practices in citywide afterschool initiatives: Creating infrastructure to support targeted planning, financing and sustainability* . Wellesley, MA: Author.

<p>management, promotion, public education Resource management and distribution Buildout of system (expansion) Evaluation, data collection and reporting Quality assurance, program improvement plans</p>	<p>personal experience as a youth, and he traded on his clout as mayor to establish his after-school program -Mayor's Time., and to help launch the Michigan After-School Partnership.</p> <p>Houston has two major after-school programs: CASE (The Cooperative for After-School Enrichment) and ASAP (The After-School Achievement Program). The County Department of Education operates CASE and uses federal grant funds for comprehensive after-school programs in 89 schools in over 20 school districts and charters across the county. The City of Houston's ASAP uses city general revenues to support 72 after-school programs in community nonprofit agencies and schools. The Harris County After-School Initiative was formed in 2004 by CASE, ASAP, the YMCA of Houston, the United Way, the Boys and Girls Clubs, the City of Houston, Harris County, area school districts, and community nonprofit organizations. The goal was to provide a new level of leadership to the local after-school system. The Initiative is conducting a countywide needs assessment, building a Web-based clearinghouse of after-school programs and activities, and creating a set of local standards for programs.</p> <p>San Diego's dynamic mayor's driving concern about the needs of working families and of children left unsupervised after school created the impetus for coalescing political support and funding for the city's "6 to 6" program. City government joined forces with schools to gain access to free facilities for programs and contracted with 15 community-based nonprofits that had the experience and capacity to quickly gear up services across the city in every public elementary school. The city sets performance standards for subcontractors, monitors sites to ensure that standards are met, and contracts for an overall program evaluation to measure outcomes.</p> <p>Chicago's mayor first established 26 YouthNets to provide 10,000 youth, ages 6 to 13, and their families with after-school services. The YouthNets, administered by Chicago Department of Human Services (CDHS), act as community catalysts to bring local, public, and private agencies together to form collaborations, perform needs assessments, develop action plans and services, and recruit youth for involvement in every aspect of program delivery. CDHS provides technical assistance, evaluates sites, facilitates system linkages, and funds the YouthNets. Next, the mayor's wife initiated a program, After School Matters, that offers teens hands-on job training in the arts, sports, technology, and communication. Teens earn a stipend and have fun.</p>
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<p>Quality Standards for programs and staff</p> <p>Voluntary or regulatory</p> <p>Minimum health and safety</p> <p>Accreditation or other quality rating system</p> <p>Incentives for higher quality</p> <p>Staff training requirements</p> <p>Skills standards for staff</p> <p>Benefits, wages, consistency of staff</p>	<p>Values, goals, and outcomes drive decisions about quality standards, which are a unifying element that solidifies a systemic approach across a range of providers and sites.</p> <p>Establishing standards to unify diverse program sites systematizes the services offered, solidifies definitions of quality, clarifies roles, allows for evaluation of outcomes, and provides a basis for funding allocations. Columbus, Kansas City, Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Philadelphia, Seattle, Chicago, and several other cities have pioneered the development of quality standards for programs and skills standards (core competencies) for after-school staff.</p> <p>Program standards comprise expectations about facilities, equipment, activities, and curriculum; staffing ratios; staff qualifications and ongoing training; group sizes; health and safety standards; parent and youth involvement; program management; cultural relevance; linkage to community services; adaptations for children with special needs; and alignment with schools.</p> <p>Columbus, Ohio uses the Columbus Standards to focus its investments. The Columbus Standards were established, in part, through research on best practices and the mayor’s after-school summit, which involved over 180 area educators, child advocates, neighborhood leaders, and clergy members in a one-day meeting. Columbus then established a partnership with Ohio State University for evaluation. Contracted providers perform an interim self-assessment and an evaluator performs site visits. These two evaluations are used to create program improvement plans and are linked to a professional development initiative.</p> <p>Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign researched and agreed upon a set of standards to guide the development of their after-school programs. It adapted standards established and tested by the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA). Safe and Sound created B.BRAVO for Youth to offer training, technical support, and networking opportunities to help providers meet these standards.</p> <p>The Core Standards of Philadelphia are based on a number of national youth advocacy organization standards, including those of NSACA. There are three levels of standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimum (level 1), which must be in place at the start of the program ▪ First Year (level 2), which should be fully implemented
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	<p>by the end of the first year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuous Improvement (level 3), which are tailored to individual programs and serve as long-term quality goals⁶ <p>Besides the performance standards for school-age care established by the City of Seattle, the after-school programs that are located in schools must meet ten additional criteria to receive free rent in Seattle Public Schools buildings. Representatives from the school district, the city government, School's Out Washington, and school-based providers created the criteria. The criteria mandate alignment of the after-school program's curricula with school district learning standards and require school principals to involve the after-school program in meaningful ways, such as inclusion in professional development opportunities, membership on school management teams, and involvement in school improvement plans. School's Out provides on-site coaching to help with implementation of alignment agreements.</p> <p>Massachusetts, Washington, and Columbus, Ohio have developed Skills Standards, or core competencies, for teaching staff. These Skill Standards, created by both states and cities, link to their professional development and program improvement funds. Research based, these core competencies for school-age practitioners are the soul of the new quality improvement and professional development system in Massachusetts. They outline the skills and knowledge practitioners use every day to provide quality services for children ages 5–14. These standards can also be used by school-age care providers as a basis for job descriptions and performance reviews, by colleges to inform course content, and by individuals to create professional development plans.</p> <p>Cities can use standards for both programs and staff to inform funding, technical assistance, capacity building assistance, system planning, and evaluation.</p>
<p>Capacity building and support to meet standards Technical assistance, on-site training Professional development, release time, tuition Paid planning time</p>	<p>Capacity building and professional development help programs meet quality standards.</p> <p>The After-School Corporation (TASC) is a capacity-building intermediary organization that seeks to leverage funding, engage stakeholders, and provide the support and technical assistance necessary to build a network of high-quality, school-based after-school programs in New York.⁷ TASC contracts with 148 community-based organizations in New</p>

⁶ National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2003). *Citywide after-school initiatives share their experiences developing and implementing standards*. Wellesley, MA: Author.

⁷ National Institute on Out-of-School Time (2003). *Creating infrastructure to provide and support knowledge building activities*. Wellesley, MA: Author.

<p>Funding for facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ improvements ▪ materials ▪ equipment <p>Help with accreditation</p>	<p>York City to establish partnerships with individual public schools and to manage after-school programs in those schools. All programs must adhere to the basic TASC program model. In addition to funding, TASC, in partnership with a variety of partners, offers staff training and technical assistance to subcontractors. It offers preservice training institutes, intensive training during the summer, technical support groups for new site coordinators, train-the-trainer sessions, and other professional development workshops geared to site coordinators, program supervisors, program staff, volunteers, and school principals.</p> <p>Through Achieve Boston, several local organizations collaborated to develop a model for a professional development system, or “infrastructure,” based on five components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ core competencies, defining what staff need to know and do to work effectively with young people ▪ a system of training that is coordinated, sequenced, and widely accessible ▪ a training approval system, setting standards for conduct, content, and quality of training ▪ a professional registry, documenting relevant training and education competed by practitioners ▪ a career lattice/pathway, linking roles, competencies, and salary ranges <p>Boston Achieve has made substantial progress toward realizing its vision by integrating its core competencies with its training catalog of professional development opportunities, and creating a blueprint that outlines recommendations for fully realizing its ideal professional development system.</p> <p>For the past 12 years, the Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) has served youth workers and youth-serving organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area as an intermediary organization. The CNYD’s goal is to improve the quality of programs for youth by supporting and strengthening the people and agencies that work with them. CNYD’s capacity-building work is grounded in a comprehensive framework that identifies four domains for youth development: intellectual, physical, social, and psychological/emotional. CNYD has created:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ toolkits for implementing the youth development framework ▪ a Learning Network training series, which involves teams from agencies in a series of workshops ▪ followup on-site coaching <p>CNYD’s program improvement process involves both organizational assessments and the use of youth surveys to</p>
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	guide program improvement plans. CNYD has found that youth workers are more highly motivated to change practices in response to youth feedback, and staff changes alone won't result in high-quality programs. CNYD's operating principle is that in order to deliver effective youth development services, agencies need to both improve staff skills and realign organizational structures, policies, and resources to support service delivery.
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How have CCN members grappled with the policy issues and trade-offs in setting priorities for funding?

Although funding for after-school initiatives in the CCN is wildly variable—ranging from programs with multimillion-dollar budgets to those with more modest means—no one has enough funding to provide year-round, universal access to free, high-quality programs for children from kindergarten through high school. Another possible barrier to building the ideal after-school system is the community's capacity to "scale up" and deliver high-quality programs to large numbers of kids. For example, some communities lack facilities for programs and others have a shortage of skilled providers to staff programs. In addition to funding and capacity limitations, three factors influence system design:

- the initiative's values and goals
- desired outcomes
- needs of children and families

Members of the CCN have had to grapple with hard choices and trade-offs in order to establish policy and funding priorities. These decisions have a direct impact on program delivery, and ultimately on the shape of the overall system and its outcomes. Most initiatives embrace multiple goals, but when funding gets tight, priorities are based on the core goal that sparks leadership involvement and funding. Core goals can also include:

- helping parents to seek and keep jobs
- reducing high-risk and criminal behaviors
- keeping kids safe
- increasing academic success
- building strengths and resiliency in children and youth
- filling in the gaps in public education (e.g., sports, arts, music)

For example, systems whose priorities include providing services that help working parents are more likely to offer year-round programs, before and after school and during school holidays. Programs focused on keeping kids safe are more likely to prioritize "universal" access during after-school hours, when most juvenile crimes are committed. If the core goal is increasing academic success, curriculum content and linkage to school standards is the prime focus. The chart below summarizes the core policy dilemmas that CCN members have addressed in designing their after-school systems.

Policy Dilemmas

Core value/goal	Potential program impacts
After-school services for all vs. targeting specific schools or income groups	Serving large numbers of children may mean compromises in quality to balance budgets (e.g., higher staff/child ratios, larger group sizes, lower staff wages), whereas targeting specific groups or schools may leave vast numbers of children and families without services.
Free vs. fee-based programs	Free programs are more accessible to all. Fee-based programs may serve fewer kids because low income children may not have access to subsidies. However, without income from fees, free programs may not be sustainable and may be forced to compromise on quality.
School-based vs. community-based	School-based programs can be staffed and run by schools or contracted to community agencies. Some CCN members have found that expanding after-school services that are run by schools can create competition with community-based agencies. However, school-based programs offer a greater likelihood of consistency in services and alignment with school curricula.
Focus on one age group: elementary, middle, or high school	While most CCN initiatives cover at least elementary school, many also include middle school and there is a new push to incorporate services to high school students. Some initiatives start with the age group deemed most at risk and plan to build out services to the others as funds allow.
Licensed vs. initiative-designed standards	Licensure may be critical to accessing state subsidy, but many CCN members have chosen to develop their own standards, believing that meeting state licensing standards is too expensive and restrictive. Developing standards and holding programs accountable to them can be costly and labor intensive.
Consistency in services vs. focus on a few shared parameters/goals with wide latitude for individual sites	Initiatives with a strong emphasis on quality and educational outcomes may seek more consistency in service delivery across sites and subcontractors and are better able to measure their effectiveness. Consistency can also make it difficult to honor cultural diversity, however, and sites need to be flexible and responsive to the individuals and communities they are serving.
Focus on academic outcomes vs. social and physical development for youth	Decisions about staffing, curricula, and activities depend greatly on whether the initiative prioritizes educational or youth development outcomes, or both. Evaluation criteria and data sources are linked to this policy decision as well.

Conclusion

For most communities in the United States, building a system of after-school services is an incremental experience. Community partnerships construct elements of the system, using programs that are already in place and adding, piece by piece, additional services and infrastructure. In communities where the system architects have shared goals, a blueprint for building out system components, stable funding, quality standards, and public will, there is greater likelihood that the end result will be a holistic system that truly

meets the need of children and families. Most CCN members would argue that they have a long way to go to achieve their true vision, but the progress they have made offers hope that it is possible to realize the dream of high-quality, accessible after-school services for all children who need them.

Links:

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The National League of Cities www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site

National Governor's Association www.nga.org

National Institute on Out-of-School Time www.niost.org

Afterschool Alliance www.afterschoolalliance.org

Forum for Youth Development www.forumforyouthinvestment.org