



Linking and Learning:

Lessons for Afterschool from Early Childhood
System-Building Efforts



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Child Care Bureau





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The Afterschool Investments Project

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) provides federal resources for child care that support both direct services and quality enhancements. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Child Care Bureau awards CCDF grants to states, territories, and tribes. With nearly half of the children receiving services being of school or kindergarten age, CCDF provides significant funding for afterschool care in a variety of settings. The majority of CCDF dollars are used to provide subsidies to eligible low-income children under age 13. A portion of CCDF funding is also used for quality improvement initiatives, such as professional development and technical assistance, with the goal of building the capacity of states to deliver quality services including programs before and after-school, during summers, and on school holidays.

To support state efforts to provide quality afterschool opportunities, the Child Care Bureau awarded a technical assistance contract on out-of-school time to The Finance Project and its partner, The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. The Afterschool Investments project provides technical assistance to Child Care and Development Fund grantees and other state and local leaders who support afterschool efforts. The goals of the project include:

- Identifying ways that states and communities are using Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidy and quality dollars to support out-of-school time programs, and sharing these practices and approaches with other states;
- Identifying administrative and implementation issues related to CCDF investments in out-of-school time programs, and providing information and context (about barriers, problems, opportunities) as well as practical tools that will help CCDF administrators make decisions; and
- Identifying other major programs and sectors that are potential partners for CCDF in supporting out-of-school time programs, and providing models, strategies, and tools for coordination with other programs and sectors.

To meet these goals, the Afterschool Investments Project:

- Develops state profiles of afterschool resources, policies, and issues;
- Creates tools and materials to support the development and sustainability of afterschool efforts; and
- Provides technical assistance at meetings and conferences around building state collaborations for afterschool.

For more information about the project or to submit a request for technical assistance or information, contact The Finance Project at (202) 587-1000 or by email at afterschool@financeproject.org, or visit <http://www.nccic.org/afterschool>.



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Introduction

During the 20th century, child care progressed from an act of charity, to a work support, to an educational opportunity for children.¹ Accompanying this evolution was an emerging consensus about the value of quality care for young children. The evolution of care for school-age children is more recent. It emerged as a national policy issue toward the end of the 20th century, driven by steady increases in maternal labor force participation, an ambitious education reform agenda, and a rise in juvenile crime during the hours after school. The need for structured activities after school captured the attention of parents and policymakers alike, creating a consensus about the value of afterschool² programs. A 2003 poll of registered voters showed:

- 94 percent agree that there should be some type of organized activity or place for children and teens to go after school every day that provides opportunities for them to learn; and
- three in five say they are willing to pay more in taxes if the money is guaranteed to fund afterschool programs.³

The rapid growth of afterschool care is a testament to the individuals working in these programs and those who have professionalized the field of caring for children of all ages. In state- and city-wide afterschool network meetings, participants often acknowledge the wisdom and success of early childhood practitioners in developing systems of support and recognize that those experiences can help guide afterschool system-building efforts. Members of the afterschool field are looking for ways to extend and connect with the progress made in supporting quality early care and education initiatives, understanding that afterschool programs can be a strategy for sustaining the investments made in children before they enter school.

¹ Joan Lombardi. *Time to Care* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 2003), p. 29.

² In this paper, the care of children from birth to school entry is referred to as early care and education. The care of school-age children when they are not in school is referred to as afterschool care. This term includes programs that occur before school and during the summer and holidays.

³ Press Release. *Americans Want Children Safe, Supervised, With Opportunities to Learn after School Day Ends* (Washington, D.C.: Afterschool Alliance, October 29, 2003).



In support of these efforts, this paper attempts to capture what afterschool practitioners can learn from those working in the field of early care and education with regard to building quality systems of care. Inspired by interviews with leaders in early childhood system-building,⁴ the paper begins by defining how the two fields face similar challenges, and where issues converge and diverge. It goes on to identify eleven lessons that transcend these differences, including lessons on:

- Building infrastructure;
- Building an evidence base; and
- Building support among parents and policymakers.

These lessons, grounded in experiences developing systems for early care and education, can help inform and support similar processes for the afterschool field. While this paper draws from the wisdom of leaders in the field of early care and education, there are many successful afterschool initiatives already putting these lessons into action, and their examples appear throughout the paper as well.

Degrees of Difference

At the most basic level, the needs of infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children are similar to school-age children. Regardless of age, children need care from nurturing adults who have appropriate training; they need programs that meet health and safety standards as well as age-appropriate standards of quality; and they need stimulating environments that engage them. Parents also have similar needs, regardless of their children's ages. Parents need choices about whom to entrust with the care of their children, and they need to be active partners in providing that care. High-quality child care for younger and older children supports the dual goals of allowing parents to go to work, and promoting healthy child and youth development.

Early childhood and afterschool programs not only fulfill similar needs for children and parents, they also face similar challenges. Both types of programs struggle with funding, service delivery, staffing, and customer satisfaction, but the degree of difficulty is often greater for afterschool programs. The following list highlights some of the challenges faced by programs serving both age groups, identifying fundamental differences between caring for children from birth to age six—and those that are school-age.

- 1. Diverse Funding Streams.** Managing multiple funding streams is a challenge for both early care and afterschool programs. Some funding streams serve both age groups, such as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Title I. In 2005, approximately one-third of the \$5 billion CCDF went to school-age children. However, those who care for young children have other large sources of money to draw from. Head Start focuses

⁴ This paper reflects the wisdom of Helen Blank, Lindy Buch, Gail Daughtry, Barbara Gebhard, Grace Hardy, Woody Sue Herlein, Joan Lombardi, Anne Mitchell, Nina Sazer O'Donnell, Elyse Rosenblum, Susan Russell, and Tonya Russell.



exclusively on children ages 3–5, and totaled \$6.8 billion in 2005. State funding for public pre-kindergarten rose to nearly \$3 billion in the same year.⁵ In contrast, the largest source of funding dedicated to afterschool programs is the \$1 billion from the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21CCLC) Grants. And unlike CCDF and Head Start, 21CCLC funds were intended as seed grants to start new programs, not sustain them. Programs must reapply for funds every three years, and many states do not provide renewal funding under 21CCLC.

- 2. Diverse Delivery System.** A diverse delivery system gives parents choices when deciding who will take care of their children. Some prefer more informal, home-based settings, while others choose a community- or school-based setting. Both early care and afterschool programs rely on diverse delivery systems, but afterschool program settings are even more varied than early care setting. Parents searching for care for their young children can generally find a list of providers through the local child care licensing agency, a child care resource and referral service, or their own informal network of family, friends, and neighbors. Afterschool programs offer a wider variety of options for parents and are less likely to be identified through a resource and referral service or a local licensing agency. The decentralized nature of afterschool programs presents an even greater challenge for parents considering their options, as well as for developing standards of quality, establishing licensing criteria, and developing a professional development system to train staff.
- 3. Staffing.** Both early childhood and afterschool programs struggle to recruit and retain staff. Qualified staff is scarce because wages are low and professional development systems are sporadic, inadequate, and/or lack sufficient incentives for staff to seek higher credentials. However, the part-time nature of afterschool positions makes it even more difficult to cultivate a stable, professional workforce. Most afterschool programs complement the school day and provide only part-time work opportunities for afterschool staff. Some of these programs operate on school holiday and/or during the summer, others do not. Where early care and education programs generally allow full-time work opportunities for staff by providing a full-day program or combining two half-day programs, the erratic schedules of afterschool programs greatly complicate efforts to develop a qualified and stable work force.
- 4. Developmental Age Span.** Early childhood programs span five to six years of child development, while afterschool programs can span ten years or more. Afterschool programs face greater challenges in providing activities that are developmentally appropriate for a wider age span, and in coordinating programming—both with schools and with other afterschool programs—to supplement and strengthen child development. They also vary in the comprehensiveness of their program content. The early childhood field promotes a comprehensive approach to child development, including social and emotional health, physical development, communication, creative expression, and cognitive development. Some afterschool



⁵ W. Steven Barnett, Jason Hustedt, Kenneth Robin, and Karen Schulman, *The State of Preschool* (Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006)

programs may address only one or two dimensions of child and youth development, while others may offer a comprehensive range of programming.

- 5. Customer Satisfaction.** As children grow older, their interests become more specialized and they become more particular about where and how they spend their time. Whereas early education programs must provide services that meet the expectations of the parents, after-school programs must satisfy both the parents and the children. This is especially true as children gain independence and have the ability to “vote with their feet” when the afterschool program does not hold their interest.

Lessons from Early Care and Education Systems Building

Despite the degrees of difference between caring for young children and caring for school-age children, there are lessons that the afterschool field can learn from the pioneers of early childhood system-building. The following lessons summarize the wisdom of early childhood leaders, many of whom also work on afterschool policy. The first four lessons focus on building an infrastructure to support the afterschool system. The infrastructure coordinates funding, professional development, administration, and evaluation to provide the highest quality afterschool programs. Lessons five through seven highlight the importance of research and data in raising the quality of programs and making the case for future investment. The remaining lessons teach the importance of communicating with parents, the public, and policymakers to raise awareness about afterschool and build support for a system of high-quality afterschool programs.

These lessons are valuable for anyone working to improve the care and education of children, regardless of age. Some afterschool programs, as well as state and city afterschool networks, have already embraced these lessons; others are just beginning to figure out how to connect the two fields. Whenever possible, the lessons below include examples of afterschool initiatives that are turning lessons into action.





Building Infrastructure

Lesson 1: Invest in Infrastructure

Just as the structure of a building helps it stand, the infrastructure of a system allows it to function effectively. Building effective infrastructure requires tireless coordination among the providers of care and the people or personnel that administer the programs. The structural results will vary from state to state depending on the specific resources and needs of the community, but there are several tips for improving the chances of success. The Build Initiative of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative works with nine states, each of which takes a different path for building systems. Their experiences yield the following wisdom:

- **Build on local strengths**—Do not start from scratch; build on the strengths of the state or community. For example, if the state or community has a viable early childhood system-building effort, it may make sense to join this effort and expand it to include older children. Alternatively, if the school district provides the most stability, efforts could focus on expanding the school's mission to include afterschool care.
- **Seize opportunities**—Look for windows of opportunity, such as one-time funding sources, a local champion, or a hot local issue, and use them to bring attention to the need for afterschool programs. More attention and resources help build momentum, which is essential for sustaining interest in building the infrastructure.
- **Focus on sustainability from the beginning**—Pursue strategies to ensure that efforts continue beyond the immediate opportunity. Such strategies include codifying the infrastructure in legislation or regulations, cultivating sustainable funding sources, and building grassroots support that will continue over the long run.

Fortunately, there are public and private funders who understand the importance of infrastructure development. For instance, The Maternal and Child Health Bureau in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funds every state to develop early childhood comprehensive systems of care. There are also several public and private sources of funding focused on afterschool infrastructure. (see Funding Sources for Building Infrastructure in

Afterschool below.) These investments will help afterschool programs build the infrastructure they need for long-term sustainability.

State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grants

The federal State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grants provide a small amount of flexible funds for states to develop and implement partnerships that support early childhood development. These multi-year grants began with states convening stakeholders to develop a plan for coordination among early childhood programs and services. Now, 21 states are in the process of implementing their plans to create the infrastructure necessary to provide coordinated, comprehensive early childhood care. For more information, see <http://www.state-eccs.org/index.htm>.

Funding Sources for Building Infrastructure in Afterschool

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Child Care Bureau provides technical assistance to afterschool programs through the Afterschool Investments Project (<http://nccic.org/afterschool>).
- The U.S. Department of Education was a founding partner of the Afterschool Alliance (<http://www.afterschoolalliance.org>) and is helping to build the infrastructure with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers national activities resources (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html>).
- The C.S. Mott Foundation is funding 31 states to build statewide infrastructures for afterschool programs (<http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net>).
- The W.T. Grant Foundation is funding the development of evaluation and quality assessment tools that will strengthen the research base for afterschool programs (<http://www.wtgrantfoundation.org>).

Lesson 2: Invest in Staff Development

In both early childhood and afterschool programs, a central ingredient to quality is staff. In 2003, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and the Academy for Educational Development (AED) Center for Youth Development and Policy Research published the recommendations of a broad-based advisory committee on the afterschool workforce. The number one recommendation was to “determine a national set of standards for out-of-school time workers, create training and career development opportunities and a set of compensation benchmarks.”⁶ Efforts to promote a professional development system for afterschool can learn from and build upon early care and education professional development systems.

⁶ NIOST, AED. *Strategic Plan: Building a Skilled and Stable Out-of-School Time Workforce*, September 2003, http://www.niost.org/about/strategic_plan_building_skilled.pdf.



Building on early childhood professional development systems can leverage experience in building infrastructure. This includes developing relationships with institutions of higher education in order to integrate standards into curriculum and credentials. For example, Arkansas is in the process of defining a school age credential by creating a specialized professional development track similar to the Child Development Associate degree path. The National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) has a simplified framework for a professional development system for early care and education⁷ that can serve as a template for afterschool.

Efforts to build early childhood professional development systems suggest that it is not enough to create training systems. Professional development must advance staff along a career path, and that path must be rewarded with higher compensation. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project provides one example of how to do this.

T.E.A.C.H.

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project is a coordinated system of college scholarships tied to increased education, compensation, and retention. Twenty-four states now participate in this program, which rewards staff who improve their education with a stipend or increased wage. Almost 20,000 child care professionals were awarded a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship in FY 04–05. The result is more educated staff and lower turnover rates. When professional development is tied to a career ladder and compensation, it stabilizes the field and enhances the quality of the care providers. For more information, see www.childcareservices.org.



According to the National Institute on Out-of-school Time, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey are working on professional development opportunities tied to a career ladder for afterschool staff. All four of these efforts build on the professional development system established for early care and education professionals.⁸ For example, California's career lattice allows students to "swap" courses on early childhood development for courses focused on school-age children. Upon completion, they receive the same credential (a Child Development Permit) but have a school-age emphasis.

⁷ To view the framework, go to: <http://nccic.org/poptopics/pdsystem.html>

⁸ For more information, search for career lattice examples at the NIOST clearinghouse, <http://www.niost.org/clearinghouse/index.html>.



Lesson 3: Promote Program Standards

Quality afterschool programs have both qualified teachers and program standards that guide effective practice. Program standards include structural elements, such as the ratio of teachers to students, facilities that meet health and safety licensing requirements, and materials that support program activities. Formal early care and education programs must meet state child care licensing standards which establish a baseline to ensure the health and safety of children. Child care regulations also create a baseline for afterschool program standards, but they must be flexible enough to address the needs of older children in a more diverse array of program settings. Many states are convening stakeholders to find new ways to adapt licensing regulations and to find the common ground between child care licensing regulations and afterschool quality standards. Their goal is to create explicit linkages between the two sets of standards, which can streamline administrative functions such as monitoring, and/or to provide incentives for quality improvements. For more information, see *Promoting Quality in Afterschool Through State Child Care Regulations* at <http://www.nccic.org/afterschool/childcareregs.pdf>.

Kansas. The Kansas Enrichment Network is working to develop statewide standards, models, and/or curricula for afterschool programs that meet the needs of three state departments and the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

Louisiana. The Louisiana Departments of Education and Social Services have drafted an interagency memorandum of understanding (MOU) to develop new regulations for programs funded by education, child care, social services, and other state resources. The MOU will help facilitate discussions on program licensing regulations and quality standards for all state-supported afterschool programs.

Michigan. The Michigan State Board of Education finalized model standards for Out-of-School Time (OST) programs in 2003. They are designed to assist schools and other organizations in developing and evaluating high-quality, comprehensive, out-of-school-time programs for elementary and middle schools. These standards are a guide; they are not intended to provide a quality rating for parents or policymakers. To read the standards, go to: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/OST_Standards_43292_7.pdf



Lesson 4: Cultivate Sustainable Funding Streams

Money matters, and both the early childhood and the afterschool fields need sustainable sources of money to stabilize direct services and to build infrastructure. Providers of early care and afterschool engage in on-going and time-consuming searches for sustainable sources of funding. Parent fees are the largest source of sustainable funds, but many working parents cannot afford the true cost of quality programs. Federal funding streams frequently supplement parent fees, but depending on the funding source, they may not be sustainable. There are many good examples from both the early childhood and afterschool fields of innovative ways to generate revenues to cultivate sustainable funding and/or maximize funds by aligning funding streams and reducing the administrative burden of managing multiple grants.

Arkansas. In 1999, the Arkansas legislature decided to increase funding for child care subsidies and not direct money to improving the quality of programs. Arguing that both aspects of child care needed funding, a coalition of early education stakeholders vowed to find a way to fund both. During the next legislative session, the coalition succeeded in securing 11 percent of the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for child care, as well as a three percent excise tax on beer. The combination of the two victories increased funds for quality and ensured a stable source of funding for the future.

Wyoming. The state-level Wyoming Youth Development Collaborative created the 21st Century State Incentive Grant (21st Century SIG) by aligning the overlapping goals of four funding streams. Spearheaded by the state Departments of Education and Health, 21st Century SIG combines 21st Century Community Learning Center funds, the governor's allocation for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration State Incentive Grant, and state tobacco settlement dollars. In 2005, 26 Wyoming communities have created community collaboratives and community advisory boards to oversee and coordinate these and other relevant funding sources at the local level. As a result, communities can collaborate across systems to build a continuum of care during nonschool hours. For more information, go to <http://sad.state.wy.us/21SIG> or <http://www.nccic.org/afterschool/PDFDocs/WY.pdf>.

California. Voters passed two ballot initiatives to generate additional revenues for early childhood and afterschool programs. In 1998, Proposition 10 raised the tax on cigarettes and dedicated the revenue for comprehensive birth to five services. In 2002, Proposition 49 required the state legislature to earmark state general revenues of up to \$550 million per year for new or expanded afterschool programs.





Building an Evidence Base

Lesson 5: Encourage Rigorous, High-Profile Evaluations

The early childhood field benefits from multiple, longitudinal evaluations that demonstrate how high-quality early childhood intervention programs improve child outcomes. These results include between 20 and 40 years of data on small-scale programs such as the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian programs, and large-scale programs such as the Parent Child Centers in the Chicago Public Schools. This research base plays a critical role in informing policymakers about the importance of quality early care and education.

The afterschool field lacks a similar longitudinal research base. Afterschool programs are more diverse than early childhood programs, and children typically spend much shorter amounts of time in afterschool programs. The wider range of programs and smaller dose of participation make evaluation more complicated, but not impossible. The W.T. Grant foundation recognizes the need to advance evaluation practices by funding evaluations of afterschool programs and building the capacity of scholars to design and execute precise and credible evaluation designs in youth-related fields. One grantee is the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, which is engaged in a multi-year project to link program and youth worker practices with youth outcomes. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) also received funding from W.T. Grant to do a quantitative study of the individual and contextual predictors of participation in afterschool activities. Over the next several years, new investments in afterschool research may yield the same types of evaluation data that are available for the early childhood field.

Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database

The The Harvard Family Research Project's *Out-of-School Time Program Evaluation Database* catalogues available evaluations of afterschool programs. The database provides a systematic way to look at the different approaches to evaluation, allowing evaluators to learn from one another. The database also includes syntheses of evaluation elements, such as an inventory of the instruments and assessments that programs are using in their evaluations. To access the database, go to <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html>.



Lesson 6: Recognize the Power of Data

Evaluation data can be a powerful tool, but evaluations can be expensive to administer and slow to produce results. Other types of data are also powerful in making the case for after-school programs, as well as useful in setting priorities, guiding strategies, and demonstrating accountability. These include data on the number of children served, their demographic characteristics, and the types of services they received. Tracking indicators of child well-being is another effective use of data. For example, what are the juvenile crime rates for children during the afterschool hours? Statistics like this provide quantitative credibility to the value of after-school programs and help explain why it is important to invest in afterschool programming.



The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative uses data to tell the story about the importance of early childhood development. During a three-year period, 17 state teams worked to develop their own state-level indicators to track results for children from birth through age eight. The goal of the initiative was to inform public policy decisions and track progress in improving outcomes for young children. The 17 states came to agreement on a set of core indicators that they hope will build national awareness and mobilize support for early education.

The afterschool field will benefit from more agreement about which data to collect, more accuracy in data collection, and more evidence to support the value of afterschool programs. While there are some examples of effective uses of data at the state level, the field could benefit from building a national consensus around how to tell the story about the afterschool hours using data. The Mott Foundation's *Moving Toward Success: Framework for After-School Programs* can serve as a foundation for building this consensus. The framework links goals to program elements to intended outcomes, with many examples of data sources and performance indicators. The framework is organized around four primary goals: academic and other learning, social and emotional learning, health and safety, and community engagement.⁹

Rhode Island. While it is difficult to prove that better data leads to better policy, Rhode Island's experience is compelling. Focused attention on data related to access to prenatal care, infant mortality, and child lead poisoning led to increased funding in these areas. By tracking data over time, Rhode Island Kids Count, through its National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, showed that the incidence of these problems decreased with increased funding. For more information on Rhode Island and the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, go to www.GettingReady.org.



⁹ A copy of the framework is available at http://www.publicengagement.com/framework/images/framework_61505.pdf.

Montana. The Montana afterschool mapping project tracks the supply of and demand for after-school services. The daily capacity of all known afterschool programs (licensed centers, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Boys & Girls Clubs, etc.) is compared to the state's percentage of children with working parents and K–6 enrollment data by county. This comparison offers a useful graphic demonstration of pockets of need, including the disproportional need that is found in extremely rural areas. This information is helpful to policymakers and assists local programs in writing compelling need statements for their grant proposals. For more information, see *Estimating Supply and Demand for Afterschool Programs: A Tool for State and Local Policymakers*, at <http://www.nccic.org/afterschool/SupplyDemand.pdf>.

Lesson 7: Raise the Profile of Adolescent Brain Development Research

In the 1990s, colorful images of infant brain scans captured widespread attention and convinced policymakers, parents, and the general public that the first three years are a period of significant growth and development. Many organizations and program providers used this new research to argue for more funding and better quality for early care and education programs.

But brain development does not stop when children turn three, nor does it stop when school ends at 3:00 P.M. The biological and cognitive changes that occur between the ages of 10 and 20 are as dramatic and important as those of early childhood.¹⁰ Research on the developing brain has the potential to be equally effective in educating the public about the importance of providing quality programs during the school-age years. Using the same brain scan technology, research shows that during the transition from childhood to adulthood (approximately the second decade of life), the brain remains structurally different from an adult brain.¹¹ As a result of this difference, a child's brain relies more on emotion than on the rational evaluation of consequences when making decisions. The fact that children can be impulsive and emotional is not new, but increasing public awareness of the biological basis for this behavior may increase public support for after-school programs that keep children connected to adults into their adolescent years.



¹⁰ White, Aaron, M. (accessed November, 2005) *Substance use and the adolescent brain: An overview with a focus on alcohol*. Topics in Alcohol Research, available at: <http://www.duke.edu/~amwhite/Adolescence/index.html>.

¹¹ Giedd J, Blumenthal J, Jeffries N, Castellanos F, Liu H, Zijdenbos A, Paus T, Evans A, Rapoport, J (1999) *Brain development during childhood and adolescence: a longitudinal MRI study*. Nature Neurosci 2:861863.



The experience from the 1990s illustrates that pictures of brain development can be a powerful tool for attracting allies and making the case for new investments. It also teaches the importance of articulating the implications for programs, parents, and public policy so that the increased attention leads to meaningful changes. The infant brain development information spawned an industry of baby brain development toys, and legislation that required child care centers to play classical music. While well-intentioned, these efforts failed to make meaningful changes in programs and policies that promote early childhood development. Without a clear link between the science of the brain development and the policies and programs that support healthy brain development, consumers and policymakers will draw their own conclusions about how to respond.

There's been a great deal of emphasis in the 1990s on the critical importance of the first three years. I certainly applaud those efforts. But what happens sometimes when an area is emphasized so much is other areas are forgotten. And even though the first three years are important, so are the next 16. And [during] the ages between three and 16, there's still enormous dynamic activity happening in brain biology. I think that that might have been somewhat overlooked with the emphasis on the early years.

—Dr. Jay Giedd, National Institutes of Health, in an interview for PBS Frontline.¹²



¹² In an interview for PBS Frontline. For a transcript, go to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/interviews/giedd.html>.



Building Support Among Policymakers and Parents

Lesson 8: Make Quality Transparent to Parents and Policymakers

Everyone wants quality, but not all parents and policymakers know what quality care looks like. The early childhood field teaches the importance of having clear symbols of quality that parents and policymakers can see and understand. Licensing, professional development, and program standards are the building blocks of quality. They establish a framework that allows child care agencies and policymakers to monitor improvements in quality, to encourage self-assessment, and to reward better quality with higher subsidy reimbursement rates or other forms of recognition. In an attempt to make quality more transparent to policymakers and parents, 13 states have established statewide quality ratings systems that define a continuum of quality and rate programs along this continuum.¹³ Everyone can understand that a four-star quality rating is better than a two-star rating without having to understand how the program environment, staff education, and content of the curriculum produced that rating.

Before the afterschool field can develop easily understandable symbols of quality, there must be agreement on the building blocks of quality—licensing, professional development, and standards. Some states use the definitions adopted by the child care field, and include school-age child care programs in their quality ratings scale. Of the 13 states with established ratings systems, six include school-age child care. Afterschool programs could build on this foundation, or create a complementary ratings system that reflects the dimensions of quality that are specific to caring for older children.

North Carolina. The STARS quality ratings system creates public awareness and demand for quality child care by communicating quality in a five-star system. Every licensed child care setting must display its star rating (one is low, five is high). In 1999, most children in center-based child care attended one- and two-star child care centers, and very few four- and five-star programs existed. In 2005, only 10 percent were in one- and two-star programs, and 45 percent were in four- and five-star programs. By establishing an easily recognizable symbol of quality, the state created parental demand for quality and changed the supply of quality child care programs.

¹³ For more information on quality rating systems, see the National Child Care Information Center's "Statewide Quality Rating Systems (QRS) Standards/Criteria: Web Sites" at <http://nccic.org/poptopics/qrs-criteria-websites.pdf>.



Lesson 9: Create a Shared Identity

Both early care and education and afterschool care have many names, and can mean many things. Is it child care, day care, educare, preschool, pre-kindergarten, or Head Start? Is it afterschool, out-of-school time, school-age care, extended learning, or youth development? Does it occur for a half-day, school day, or work day? Does it occur before school, after school, over holidays, or during the summer? The answer to all of these questions is yes. Finding the right words to describe the field is essential to communicating with parents, the public, and policymakers. The challenge is to create an umbrella that covers the rich variety of afterschool programs, and then to articulate the function of the umbrella.

State and local early childhood initiatives are developing their own brand names to define their work. Branding helps communicate core services and approaches shared by a wide array of programs. Branding also makes the effort distinctive and easily recognizable. North Carolina's Smart Start program has national name recognition as a community-based effort to promote early care and education. Smart Start means different things in different counties, but everyone understands it is an effort to give every child a smart start in life. Other examples include California's First Five, Kentucky's KIDS Now, and South Carolina's First Steps to School Readiness. Afterschool initiatives can also benefit from branding their work. It helps both parents and policymakers understand what is being offered, when, and at what level of quality.

North Carolina. Smart Start is a comprehensive public-private initiative helping all children under six enter school healthy and prepared for success. It looks different in every community. Some communities focus on access to child care, others on professional development, and others on support services such as dental health and parent education. Despite such diversity, Smart Start has national name recognition as an effort to promote high-quality early care and education for all children in the state. For more information, see <http://www.smartstart-nc.org>.

New Hampshire. One example of a successful afterschool brand is PlusTime New Hampshire. PlusTime casts a wide, inclusive net for a diverse array of afterschool programs, and then works to both build the quality of the field and educate policymakers on the value of these programs. For more information, see www.plustime.org.



Lesson 10: Join Forces to Create a United Voice for Children

Low pay and limited resources lead to competition for funding among programs in both the early education and the afterschool fields. Too often, the struggle for money creates adversaries, with programs competing for scarce resources. In the 1990's, several early care and education organizations recognized that a more effective strategy is to join forces, gain recognition for the valuable services provided, and work together to secure additional funding. For instance, early childhood organizations in Colorado learned the power of collaboration in 1998, and now hold a monthly summit to coordinate their policy messages. Afterschool organizations face similar competition for recognition and scarce resources. Uniting the diverse voices of afterschool programs can draw attention to the need and value of quality afterschool programming, and may be more effective in securing additional funding. And just as coordination within the fields of early care and afterschool can be effective, coordination between the two has even greater potential.

Colorado. In the 1998 legislative session, a proposal to expand the state child care subsidy program led representatives of statewide membership organizations working to improve child care to come together for an early childhood summit. The stakeholders resolved their differences in private, and produced a set of principles that they would use when talking to policymakers about their proposal. Their summit was so effective that they now meet monthly, with more frequent meetings when they need to reconsider their priorities and clarify their message. If they cannot reach a consensus, individual organizations are required to talk about their positions and strategies so that each is aware of the other's position. Representatives from state agencies are included in the summits for their technical expertise, but are not voting members. For more information: <http://www.coloradoaeyc.org/summitmission.htm>

Washington. In addition to competing with each other, afterschool organizations often compete with early childhood and other children's organizations for recognition. In Washington, organizations and individuals promoting afterschool joined forces with their counterparts in early care and education to create a statewide coalition. School's Out Washington, a statewide afterschool advocate and intermediary, is a member of The Collaborative, a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals from child care, Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, afterschool, resource and referral, and union organizations. Members of The Collaborative work together on setting an agenda, testifying before the legislature, meeting quarterly with state agency leaders to learn about current issues, and distributing newsletters to inform and engage constituents. School's Out Washington benefits by leveraging a strong voice for its issues and by raising awareness among members about the need for and value of afterschool programs. For more information: <http://www.schoolsoutwashington.org>



Lesson 11: Connect to Efforts that Focus on School Success

Prior to the 1980s, the term “child care” often meant providing young children with a safe and nurturing environment. Since then, parents and policymakers are increasingly aware of the nature and scope of early brain development and anxious to maximize the young mind’s eagerness to learn. As a result, many in the early childhood field now see themselves as educators as well as caretakers of young children, and choose to use the term “early care and education” to describe their work.

Growing recognition of the importance of the early years for school readiness has stimulated major new policy initiatives across the United States. Between 1988 and 2005, combined state spending for pre-kindergarten grew from \$190 million to \$2.8 billion, and the number of states funding prekindergarten programs grew from 28 to 42.¹⁴ President Bush’s Good Start, Grow Smart initiative asks all states to adopt voluntary guidelines on literacy, language, pre-reading skills, and numeracy activities for children ages three to five, and align these guidelines with the state’s K-12 standards.

Afterschool programs can also benefit by measuring their effectiveness in terms of educational outcomes. Many programs already provide homework help, tutoring services, and/or remedial education activities, while others seek to improve attitudes toward education and learning by allowing youth to explore new areas that complement the school day. The 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law opened the door for extending learning into the afterschool hours by strengthening the academic components of the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program (21CCLC). Other NCLB programs, including Title I, Supplemental Educational Services, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools, can also be used during the afterschool hours to enhance and support school-day success.¹⁵ By aligning or linking with educational goals, school-age programs can sustain and strengthen the educational foundation that early care and education programs build.

Nebraska. The Lincoln, Nebraska Community Learning Center Network has worked to show how its afterschool programs improve learning during the school day. Regular program evaluations include school achievement, attendance, and behavioral changes. Documenting success has led to further engagement of school staff and additional resources for afterschool programs. For more information, see <http://www.lincolnclc.org>.

¹⁴ A. Mitchell, *Prekindergarten Programs in the States: Trends and Issues* (Climax, N.Y.: Early Childhood Policy Research, 2001). Available at: <http://www.nccic.org/pubs/prekinderprogtrends.pdf>; W. Steven Barnett, et al., *The State of Preschool* (Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2005).

¹⁵ For more information, see *Finding Funding: A Guide to Federal Sources for Out-of-School Time and Community School Initiatives*, by Heather Clapp Padgett (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, January 2003)



Conclusion

The number of afterschool programs is growing, and so are the supports and services needed to improve their quality and promote their sustainability. Individuals working to build a stable foundation for afterschool programs can learn from the system-building experiences of early care and education experts. While early care and afterschool providers differ in who they serve and what those children need, there are many similarities in the infrastructure and supports they need to succeed. The 11 lessons in this paper capture the wisdom of early care and education experts—from strategic coalition-building, to a clear vision and mission, to a relentless focus on quality and the data to prove it. As the examples in the paper illustrate, afterschool programs are already embracing these lessons and benefiting from the path that was paved before them.

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