

The Illinois After-school Initiative 2002 Task Force Report



Illinois State Board of Education

The State of Illinois is committed to improving the future of our young people. We have demonstrated this commitment by creating opportunities, as a state and in partnership with local service providers, for school-aged children and youth to make the most out of the time when they are not in school.

The TeenREACH (Responsibility, Education, Achievement, Caring and Hope) Program, created in 1998 by the Illinois Department of Human Services, offers positive services and activities for youth between the ages of 6 and 17 during non-school hours. The Illinois State Board of Education's Summer Bridges program established in 1999 has helped elementary school students improve their reading, math and language arts skills. TeenREACH and Summer Bridges are just two of the examples of state-funded programs offered during the out-of-school-time hours. The recent federal funding through No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) to the Illinois State Board of Education for 21st Century Community Learning Centers also extends opportunities for students to learn during non-school hours.


Despite the investment in out-of-school time programs, there was much that we didn't know about the state of these programs in Illinois. The number of youth in need of out-of-school time programs was not understood. There was no formal system in place to coordinate programs, nor a system to ensure that all programs were providing enriching activities.

The Illinois General Assembly demonstrated its commitment to strengthening Illinois' out-of-school-time programs when it passed House Resolution 63 and Senate Resolution 70 in 2001 creating the Illinois After-school Initiative. The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force, co-chaired by the Department of Human Services and the State Board of Education, has responded to the call of the General Assembly.

The Task Force has recommended strategies for enhancing out-of-school-time services and expanding services so all interested children and youth have an opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

We are pleased to present the Final Report of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force. The report provides a clearer understanding of the numbers of youth who would benefit from out-of-school-time activities, the types of programs currently provided and the elements of successful programs (including appropriate outcome measures). The report cites recommendations that would move Illinois forward in building a comprehensive network of quality out-of-school-time programs. We strongly encourage the next Administration to engage Illinois stakeholders in implementing these important recommendations and to continuing its critical work of developing long-term strategies for a system of quality out-of-school-time programs across Illinois.

Structured activities can turn time that youth may have spent in unproductive ways or unsupervised settings into an opportunity to explore undiscovered interests, receive assistance with their homework, learn new academic skills and discover the fun in learning, apprentice skills that will carry over into the job market or help children become role models themselves for younger children. The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force is dedicated to making these opportunities available to as many of our youth as possible.


Linda Renee Baker
Secretary
Illinois Department of Human Services

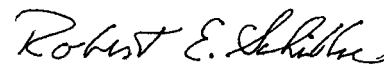

Robert E. Schiller
State Superintendent of Education

Table of Contents

4	Executive Summary
7	Introduction
8	Benefits of Out-of-School-Time
8	Background
9	Need for Out-of-School-Time Programs
11	Status of Out-of-School-Time Programs
13	Funding
16	Needs of Older Youth
17	Guiding Principles
18	Core Elements
19	Core Elements : Organizational
24	Strategic Next Steps
26	Core Elements : Programmatic
30	Conclusion
31	Endnotes
35	Appendix A
38	Appendix B



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The Illinois Center for Violence Prevention coordinated the Illinois After-school Initiative on behalf of the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education.

Executive Summary

Many people are affected when parents cannot find a safe, fun and enriching activity for their children to participate in when they are not in school. Employers face decreasing productivity when employees begin calling home every hour after 3 p.m. to make sure that their children are safe and well occupied. Teachers have a greater challenge when a child who could have spent time getting help with homework or engaging in other enriching activities instead watched television. Local police can expect more calls during 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., the prime time for juvenile crime. Policy makers struggle to find ways to reduce the high rates of teen pregnancy, and teen alcohol and drug use.

Over 2 million school-age children live in Illinois. What are our children doing when they are not in school? Is a caring adult available to supervise them during the non-school hours? Are they participating in enriching activities—activities that can develop their potential, build their confidence, and help them in their schoolwork? Can more be done to keep them safe and well occupied?

These are the questions the Illinois General Assembly considered when it created the Illinois After-school Initiative in 2001. The Task Force established from the Initiative met between January and September 2002 to uncover information about the status of out-of-school-time programs in the state and develop recommendations to enhance these programs and expand their reach.

Through the efforts of the Task Force, state leaders now will have a better understanding of the number of children who would benefit from out-of-school-time activities, the elements of successful programs and the types of programs currently available. The recommendations of the Task Force articulate the steps needed to build a statewide system of quality out-of-school-time programs that meet the range of needs and interests of Illinois youth. The business and civic communities, community-based organizations—including religious institutions and non-profit agencies—and parents and youth each, with the government, play a role in enhancing the supply of high quality enriching activities so as to meet the current strong demand for services.

Business and civic leaders are needed to forge a partnership between government and the corporate sector to infuse additional resources into out-of-school-time programming. Community-based organizations must connect with one another and other local institutions to maximize their effectiveness and learn from each other's experience. Parents and youth must articulate their needs and work with programs to design activities that meet the interests of their families. The Illinois After-school Initiative is poised to serve as the vehicle to engage each of these groups in maximizing all available resources so that as many youth as possible can participate in activities that develop their potential.

But what will it cost? The Task Force has deliberately not established a definitive cost for providing all of the services needed to reach Illinois' school-age youth. The information-gathering needed to project a cost of high-quality services and create strategies to finance them has just begun. More information from programs on the revenues and expenses of their out-of-school-time services is needed. Descriptions from communities of the types of services wanted for their local youth are needed. An assessment by foundations, corporations and local business on their level of commitment to financing out-of-school-time programs is also needed. With this information, policy makers will be able to make informed decisions and invest wisely in programs that will make a positive difference in the lives of our children and youth.

Out-of-school-time programs refer to programs that provide opportunities for youth to participate in rewarding activities, to improve their academic performance, to develop positive relationships with peers and adults and to gain self-confidence in a positive and safe environment during the hours youth are not in school, including before and after school, summers, weekends and holidays. The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force, in describing these services, has chosen to use the term out-of-school-time rather than after-school as it is more descriptive of the hours during which youth need services.

The Task Force has developed a series of recommendations to meet this objective. The recommendations are concentrated in five areas—state-level interagency coordination, capacity building, community collaboration, evaluation and funding. These topics repeatedly surfaced during Task Force discussions as areas needing action in order to improve and expand out-of-school-time services. The Task Force believes that the implementation of these recommendations will connect more Illinois youth to quality out-of-school-time activities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To make quality out-of-school-time programming available to more children and communities in Illinois, the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force recommends that the state take the following actions:

- > **Extend the duration of the After-school Initiative and expand its membership and responsibilities to oversee the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.**

- > **Adopt the Final Report of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force as the plan for creating a comprehensive system of out-of-school-time services across the state.**

State-level Interagency Collaboration

Several divisions within multiple state agencies fund activities during the non-school hours for children and youth. The mission of the agency funding the program drives the focus of each of the programs. Improving low reading scores may be the goal of a program funded by the Illinois State Board of Education while a program run by the Illinois Department of Human Services' Bureau of Substance Abuse and Prevention aims to keep youth from experimenting with drugs. The programs may offer similar activities and target youth of the same ages, but it is likely that the agencies require different reporting standards and measure outcomes and evaluate effectiveness differently. They may even have funding restrictions that prevent program directors from collaborating to offer services to a larger group of youth. The Task Force agreed that state agencies and institutions must collaborate with one another to reduce duplication, maximize funding opportunities and lessen the burden on programs to meet sometimes contradictory program requirements.

- > **Develop common procedures among the state agencies with a focus on youth for training, credentialing, meeting fiscal and programmatic reporting requirements and evaluating programs.**

- > **Continue the Illinois Clearinghouse, which monitors and coordinates responses to federal funding opportunities, in the next administration.**

Capacity Building

Program directors and staff need information, training, technical assistance, strong relationships in the community and flexible funding to deliver the best quality services by highly skilled staff. The Task Force agreed that the following steps would improve the capacity of programs to work effectively with children and youth.

- > **Build a system to disseminate information on best practices and outcome measures, link programs and increase community capacity to provide needs assessment, training, service delivery and evaluation to support organizations providing out-of-school-time services.**

- > **Encourage state agencies responsible for out-of school-time programs to collect common information and common outcomes through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process; explore creation of a common RFP to be used across these agencies.**

- > **Develop a Best Practices Institute that disseminates lessons learned from out-of-school-time programs across the state and country and equips state administrators and community-based institutions with knowledge, support and tools to adopt an evidence-based system, including outcome-based planning.**

- > **Create and maintain a state and local web data link for program planning and grant writing; provide access to data from state agencies and information on program development and implementation from organizations across the state.**

- > **Require publicly funded programs to meet outcomes that support the stated goals for programs of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force. (See Appendix B, p. 38)**

- > **Leverage all funds for coordinated service delivery, evaluation, training, professional development, needs assessment, conferences and media to support the capacity of programs to provide services.**

- > **Coordinate, promote and fund intensive ongoing training for out-of-school-time programs regardless of the program's funding source.**

- > **Determine why some counties have no out-of-school-time programs and what it would take to provide programs.**

Community Collaboration

Out-of-school-time programs will better fit the needs of local residents when the community institutions play a role in designing and implementing the program. This involvement also paves the way for organizations to share resources or develop relationships that lead to in-kind or financial support from local business. The Task Force supports steps to encourage community collaboration.

- > Use public funds to support coordinators at the local level to help communities plan for and provide out-of-school-time services.
- > Encourage state agencies and local communities to collaborate; encourage the federal government to support the collaborative efforts.

Evaluation

Measuring outcomes and evaluating program effectiveness is essential to designing programs that work. The Task Force encourages the State to develop effective evaluation tools and to coach staff in administering these tools and modifying the program based on the evaluation results.

- > Create a statewide mechanism to provide information and technical assistance to local communities on the outcomes of program evaluations and the effectiveness of planning and program implementation.
- > Require all programs, regardless of the source of their funding, to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions.
- > Reach consensus on the outcome measures out-of-school-time programs should utilize, using as a guide outcomes currently required by programs such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, TeenREACH and the Bureau of Substance Abuse and Prevention. (see Appendix B, p. 38)
- > Collect data in the same format (by zip codes, regions, etc.) to facilitate more effective use of common data across state agencies and local programs.
- > Support, along with private funders, collaborations between researchers and the practice community.

Funding

Programs need funding from a variety of sources—private foundations and business, federal, state and local government and parent fees—to survive for a period of years. A diversified budget reduces a program's reliance on any one funding source and can increase the likelihood that the program will survive when a funding source is eliminated. Program directors also need the ability to use funds for start-up costs and expenses related to quality improvement—such as assistance with developing an evaluation tool or hiring a coordinator to work with local schools and other institutions. The Task Force recommends the state take the following steps.

- > Expand government funding; coordinate state and federal categorical funding; and develop strategies to increase private, local and foundation support.
- > Explore tax incentives and innovative tax policies to generate additional public and private funding.
- > Encourage providers and communities to contribute monetary or in-kind support to out-of-school-time programs as part of government grants.

- > Provide funding to support programs' ability to expand their capacity—including conducting needs assessments, developing and implementing evaluation tools, making programs accessible for youth with special needs and working with schools and community organizations.
- > Explore modifying current law to allow programs to carry funding into the next fiscal year, making it easier for them to respond to unexpected needs or program changes.
- > Undertake a thorough analysis of the private funding, including foundation and corporate dollars, supporting out-of-school-time programs.

Introduction

Mission Statement

All children and youth should have the opportunity to access high quality, affordable, out-of-school-time programs.

Goal

The ultimate goal of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force is to develop a plan to provide high-quality out-of-school-time programs to all interested children and youth in Illinois. Illinois children and youth will have access to a network of out-of-school-time programs that in a positive and safe environment provide the opportunity:

- > to participate in rewarding activities
- > to improve their academic performance
- > to develop positive relationships with peers and adults
- > to gain self-confidence.

Only 20 percent of school-age children and youth's waking hours are spent in school.¹ For adolescents, 40 percent of this time is discretionary and much of it may be spent alone.² This is time before and after school, during weekends, summers and holidays that youth may be without an adult to guide them in their decision making, introduce them to activities that can expand their interests and help them complete their homework and improve academic skills. Programs that provide a safe, structured environment where youth have fun, learn new skills and develop positive relationships with peers and adults can keep them safe during out-of-school-time hours and have a lasting impact on their lives.

Nearly 28 million school-aged youth across the U.S. have working parents.³ In Illinois, 1.4 million school-age children and youth live in families where the sole parent or both parents work. That translates to 64 percent of all Illinois children between the ages of 6 and 17.⁴

The resulting unsupervised time increases the opportunity for youth to become involved in dangerous or unhealthy activities. Recent research has shown that the likelihood of problem behaviors increases when school-age youth remain at home alone for approximately 10 hours or more a week.⁵ According to data collected from the Illinois Youth Survey 2000, an estimated 41 percent of Illinois eighth-grade students were home alone more than 10 hours per week.⁶

Being unsupervised during out-of-school hours puts children and youth at greater risk of truancy, performing poorly in school, depression and substance abuse. The out-of-school hours are also the most common time for teens to engage in sexual behavior, and the dangers facing youth when they are unsupervised can range from trying drugs or alcohol to becoming a victim of a violent crime.⁷ During the hours between 3 and 6 p.m., youth are most likely to become a victim of violent crime, be killed by household or other accidents, get hooked on cigarettes, experiment with other drugs and, if they are 16 or 17, be in or cause a car crash.⁸

The growing need, increasing dangers facing youth and an awareness of the value of programs that reach youth when they are not in school have led to public demand for out-of-school-time programs and have sparked an expectation that government will play a role in ensuring that these programs are available. Illinois voters are clear in their desire for out-of-school-time programs for children and youth. In a poll of 800 Illinois registered voters conducted in September 2002, 90 percent of those polled said out-of-school-time programs were important. Over 81 percent of the voters said they would be willing to support using federal and state taxpayer money for out-of-school-time programs.⁹

The combination of public interest and unmet need has created an atmosphere that is ripe for the public and private sectors to develop a joint strategy for making affordable, quality out-of-school-time programs available for all interested youth and their families.

Illinois took the first important step toward this goal in May 2001 when the General Assembly passed resolutions creating the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force. In December 2001, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) convened the Task Force. Driven by its mission that "all children and youth have the opportunity to access high-quality, affordable, out-of-school-time programs," the Task Force developed recommendations that lay the foundation for implementing a strategic plan to improve the delivery of out-of-school-time services, increase the public and private resources supporting these services and enhance the quality of programs.

Background

BENEFITS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME

Several studies have demonstrated that out-of-school-time programs designed to increase students' cognitive or social skills and provide opportunities for community service are effective at preventing delinquency.¹⁰

The Search Institute, a non-profit organization that created a framework of positive youth development, has shown that youth participation in out-of-school-time programs is associated with reductions in alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, as well as other risk-taking behaviors. The positive benefits of these programs have a disproportionately larger impact upon the highest-risk youth in the community.¹¹ A review of out-of-school-time programs found that even very high-risk youth benefit from participating in programs that provide constructive use of this time but are not solely targeted to at-risk youth. These youth reported positive changes in virtually all risk-taking behaviors, including drug use, academic failure, crime involvement and anti-social activity, even though the programs were not specifically designed for at-risk youth.¹²

Communities across the state have been working—some for years—on finding solutions to the problem of children and youth languishing without constructive activities during the hours they are not in school. Programs have operated in some towns for decades, providing a safe and nourishing place for youth to spend their free time. Concerned parents, local officials and social service providers in other areas have joined together to share resources and involve area businesses in supporting out-of-school-time programs. Other communities have directed significant public resources toward services for school-age children and youth.

Last year in Chicago alone, approximately 400,000 youth¹³ participated in out-of-school-time activities administered by several city departments, ranging from the Chicago Park District to the Chicago Department of Human Services. The city is also spearheading an effort to improve the quality of activities for youth and track the programs available in the city's neighborhoods. (See Chicago sidebar, page 14.)

Despite the commitment in communities across Illinois to develop enriching activities to engage youth during out-of-school hours, the demand for affordable out-of-school-time programs exceeds the supply. There is also no consistent accounting of the number of children in need of out-of-school-time services, no system to coordinate out-of-school-time services at the state level and no assurances that out-of-school-time programs are utilizing practices proven by research to yield the best results for youth.

The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force was intended to bring leaders in youth development and education together to strategize methods to enhance quality and expand access to out-of-school-time programs. The resolutions that created the Task Force were the result of the work of the Illinois After-school Alliance, a coalition of community-based organizations, children and youth advocates, parents and others interested in promoting out-of-school-time programming. The resolutions required the Task Force to assess the state of out-of-school-time services in Illinois—including estimating the number of children and youth who are participating in programs, those who need but are not attending programs and the various public funding streams for out-of-school-time programs—and to develop a plan for coordinating these services so that out-of-school-time programs can eventually be made available to all interested school-age children.

Then-Superintendent Glenn “Max” McGee of the Illinois State Board of Education,¹⁴ and Secretary Linda Renée Baker, of the Illinois Department of Human Services, co-chaired the Task Force and named more than 60 representatives from different disciplines with an investment in out-of-school-time programming to the body. Task Force members or their designees participated in one of three Work Groups—Research and Data Collection, Policy, and Best Practices. The Illinois Center for Violence Prevention (ICVP), a statewide non-profit organization, provided staff support to the Task Force, coordinating the overall efforts of the project and working with the leadership of the Task Force to provide strategic direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- > The Task Force recommends that the new Administration and members of the 2003 Illinois General Assembly formally extend the duration of the After-school Initiative and expand its membership and responsibilities to oversee the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.
- > The Task Force recommends that the new Administration adopt the Final Report of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force as the plan for creating a comprehensive system of out-of-school-time services across the state.

The need for out-of-school-time programming in Illinois

The first step in determining the need for out-of-school-time programming is defining who most needs access to these services. The most apparent needs are based on the continuing changes in the economy, family structures, labor force, and youth problem behaviors (school failure, delinquency, and youth risk behaviors). People connected with youth—such as parents, educators, child advocates and police—have developed their own rationale for why out-of-school-time programs are needed and what problems they are likely to address. Some proponents stress that programs are safe havens away from the crime and drugs of a neighborhood; others say they are an extension of the school day for continuous learning. Other advocates view the out-of-school-time program as a place addressing the needs of high-risk youth, and still others believe programs are healthy, developmentally appropriate environments for all youth. To that end, most out-of-school programs are meeting a number of needs for various constituent groups. Each group views out-of-school programs for its own unique purposes even while these purposes are interrelated on several levels. (See Figure 1). For example, police may view safety of youth as a high priority, while parents and school personnel may see extended learning opportunities as a more compelling out-of-school-time purpose. As a result, out-of-school programs mean different things to different people and groups. However, the underlying purpose and context determines the priorities that will most benefit children, families and communities.¹⁵

FIGURE 1.
MULTIPLE NEEDS FOR
AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS



The definition of who most needs out-of-school-time services then drives the type of approach selected to make out-of-school-time programs available. One model of preventative strategies divides the approaches into three types: universal, selected and indicated. Universal interventions, designed to target all youth, are based on the belief that everyone needs opportunities to develop and enrich personal skills and experiences, in order to prevent the early onset of problem behaviors such as school failure, drug abuse, teen pregnancy and delinquency.

Selected interventions focus on youth who are at risk or live in high-risk environments. Problems such as alcohol and drug use, poor academic achievement and delinquency are not likely to just show up; often there are

signs before problems emerge that indicate the need for high risk and early intervention services. Prevention programs using the selected approach seek to target at-risk individuals as well as those families, schools or communities that may contribute to risk.¹⁶

The indicated approach targets families and children already experiencing or manifesting mental health, behavioral and other related problems. These problems require more intensive individual or group services. From the educational policy perspective, Illinois schools with large numbers of children who are not meeting state academic standards are already in a serious position that will require intensive or alternative services to move them from this situation. The indicated approach usually involves a smaller number of children, but is often the most expensive service to provide.¹⁷

Out-of-school-time programs can be the critical force that changes the direction of youth who are engaging in high-risk behaviors. As a result, it is easy to describe these programs in terms of what they can keep youth away from—criminal and delinquent acts, alcohol and drug use and school failure. Seen in these terms, out-of-school-time programs become a strategy for intervening with youth most at risk of poor outcomes. However, quality out-of-school-time programs don't just prevent risky behavior, they promote attitudes and skills that are essential for a productive and successful adult life. According to a 2001 report from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine,

“Participation in voluntary structured activities during nonschool time is associated with the development of positive identity, increased initiative, and positive relationships with diverse peers and adults.”¹⁸

All children benefit from this participation. In fact, a recent study found that affluent early adolescents are equally at risk for depression, substance abuse, isolation from adults, and lack of adult supervision after school.¹⁹ As a result, the Task Force agreed that all interested school-age youth should have the opportunity to participate in out-of-school-time programs. The goal of universal access to such programs by all interested children and youth is supported by many parents and policy makers throughout the state. As one state legislator interviewed as part of the key informant study conducted for the Initiative stated, “I think the opportunity for out-of-school-time programs should be universal. Some kids may not take it, some parents may not want to involve their kids, but I think the program should be there, offering opportunities.”²⁰

In Illinois, there are 2.2 million children between the ages of 6 and 17.²¹ An estimated 600,000 children are attending some type of publicly funded out-of-school-time program.²² That leaves approximately 1.6 million children who do not participate in out-of-school-time activities. However, not all school-age youth, including teens who may have jobs or other responsibilities, would be interested in out-of-school-time programming.

A majority of the programs currently supported by state-level public funding target children and youth who face obstacles such as poor academic performance, poverty and a risk for delinquency. By targeting programs to those most at risk, the state is limiting access to vital programming to other youth, who, while not currently at risk for juvenile delinquency or other poor outcomes, could benefit from the programs.

Nevertheless, one of the first steps may be to target an initial expansion of public funding for out-of-school-time services to youth who are most at risk of negative behaviors. As suggested by one state legislator participating in the Initiative's key informant study, "We can look at dropout scores, we can look at crime rates, and other factors to determine where ... we can target these services initially, where we can make the greatest impact."²³

Table 1 highlights the number of youth, based on a targeted approach to implementing services, most immediately in need of out-of-school-time programs.

Research has found that when both parents are working, whether or not the family is poor, children and youth may need out-of-school-time services due to the large amounts of unsupervised time.²⁴ This risk factor is compounded by single parent families and families living in poverty. Single-parent families and high levels of family poverty are without question the most compelling reasons for

needing out-of-school-time programs. Fewer options are available for one-parent families to provide supervision, and the lack of income makes it difficult to purchase after-school and child care services.²⁵ The dangers that can accompany living in poverty—unsafe neighborhoods and few community resources—make facing the out-of-school hours unsupervised even more hazardous for many Illinois children.

A substantial body of research has reported school failure as part of a cluster of youth problem behaviors that includes socio-emotional and behavioral problems.²⁶ As a result, many researchers and educators believe that educational success is fundamental to becoming a healthy and productive adult citizen, although there are some differences as to what approach should be used, particularly for those children living in poverty.²⁷

The Data Collection and Analysis Work Group used ISBE's School Report Card data to analyze youth levels of performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). The state average for not meeting standards for reading and math is approximately 38% and 38% respectively, but ranges from 10% to 91% not meeting standards across Illinois counties and Chicago communities, which shows extraordinary variation across Illinois schools and communities statewide.

Using data from the 2000 Illinois Youth Survey, given to more than 19,000 eighth-

and tenth-graders, researchers identified seven indicators of need for out-of-school-time programming reported by the respondents. The youth:

Were at home unsupervised more than 10 hours per week

Lacked adults who could provide support

Had limited access to youth-focused activities

Perceived low levels of neighborhood safety

Lacked adults who encouraged them

Reported low levels of parental monitoring

Earned poor grades (Ds and Fs)

Research suggests that the number of hours youth spend home alone is the most critical factor relative to high-risk problem behaviors and missed opportunities. There is evidence that youth problem behaviors are more of a result of youth remaining at home alone for an extended period of time than of coming home to an empty house.²⁸ Children and youth who are home alone for approximately 10 or more hours a week, research suggests, are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors than their peers.²⁹

Based on information for 10,765 Illinois eighth-grade students, the average youth is home alone approximately 6 hours per week. The analysis found that 41% of Illinois eighth-grade students were home alone more than 10 hours per week.³⁰

TABLE 1

School-age youth (6-17) immediately in need of out-of-school-time programming*

	NUMBER	PERCENT
School-age youth living with a single parent who works	437,167	20%
School-age youth living with both parents who work	958,900	44%
School-age youth who live in poverty	295,174	13.5%
School age youth living in low-income single parent home	190,778	9%
Elementary (3rd, 5th, 8th grades) students performing below state standards		
Reading	168,341	38%
Math	168,669	38%

Sources: Population estimate and information on family configuration, 2000 Census, 2001 School Report Card data, Illinois State Board of Education.

The status of out-of-school-time programs in Illinois

To better understand the current state of out-of-school-time services in Illinois, the Data Collection and Analysis Work Group conducted a survey of providers to determine what types of programs are available to Illinois children and youth.

The survey aimed to reach as many programs as possible, regardless of whether funding is public or private. However, no survey results were received for 23 of the 102 counties in the state. In an additional five counties, representatives from the Regional Offices of Education or local school districts reported having no out-of-school-time programs in their area.

In all, the survey obtained information from 220 programs, being implemented at a total of 1,307 program sites. (A program that provides activities in two schools, for example, would be considered a single program operating at two program sites.) Nearly half of all programs surveyed take place at a single program site. Site-level survey data was reported for 420 program sites.

Program focus

Sixty-eight percent of the programs surveyed reported academic enrichment and enhancement as a major focus. More than half, 57 percent, reported youth development and life skills as a major focus.

Most programs were described by administrators as comprehensive, defined as programs with a moderate or major focus in academics, youth development and recreation. Multi-focus programs are those programs that have a moderate or major focus in two or more areas but do not fall into the category of comprehensive. Survey findings suggests that comprehensive programs are the strongest in terms of the number of programming hours per week, number of sources of funding and number of sources of data supporting program effectiveness.³⁶

Number of youth enrolled and staff to participant ratio

At any given point in time, programs have an average of just over 100 youth enrolled. On any given day, about half of the participants who are enrolled attend. The average staff to participant ratio is 1 to 15, which meets the standards set by accreditation bodies, such as the National School-Age Care Alliance, for children aged six and older.³⁷

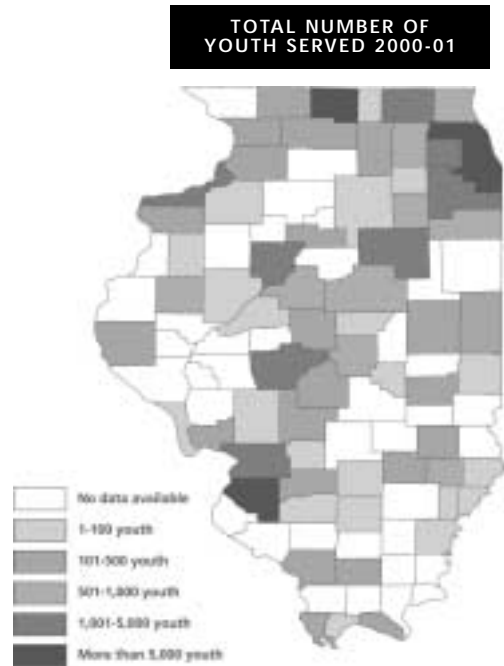
The information gathered illustrated the variety in out-of-school-time programs in Illinois.

Administration and location of programs

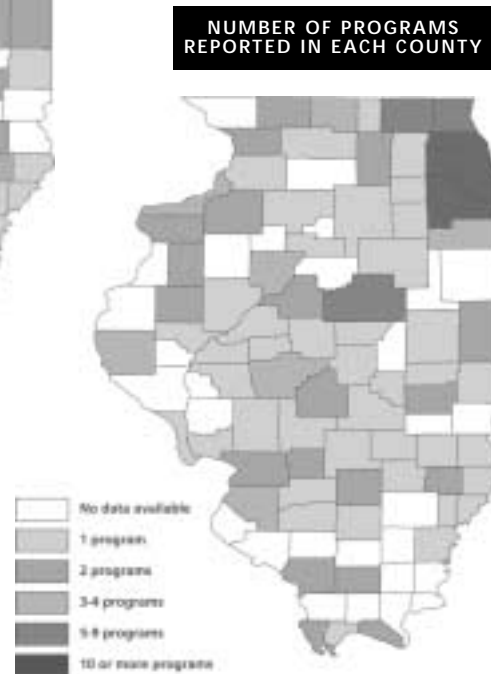
The administration of out-of-school-time programs is roughly split among school districts, Regional Offices of Education (ROE), non-profit organizations and other organizations. Twenty-two percent of the programs were administered by either school districts or Regional Offices of Education and 20 percent of the programs were administered by non-profit organizations. Organizations classified as other, which include child care centers, housing authorities, universities, hospitals, county extension offices and the county sheriff's department, administered 18 percent of the programs surveyed. Regardless of the type of organization that administers a program, most of the out-of-school-time programs surveyed, 54 percent, were located in a school building (See The Role of Schools, page 12.)

RECOMMENDATION

- > The Task Force recommends that the state determine why some counties have no out-of-school-time programs and what it would take to provide programs.



To see maps with all counties, go to: www.cprd.uiuc.edu/afterschool/



Duration of programs

To have a positive impact on youth participants, particularly those at risk for negative outcomes, requires the program be delivered at a certain level of intensity or frequency. Programs with a sole focus on academics tended to be offered less than five days a week and less than the entire school year. This may be because the single focus academic programs target youth in need of academic assistance, and provide intensive academic programming. As soon as the youth's academic performance improves, the intensive programming is no longer needed.

Programs providing a comprehensive array of services are more likely to be offered five days a week and year round. Comprehensive programs provide a range of programming activities and because of this require more time to fully implement.

Program structure

The literature on out-of-school-time programming points to program organization and structure as a key component that distinguishes successful programs from less successful ones. To capture elements of program structure, the survey asked questions on program enrollment procedures and requirements, the types of program records maintained and a general question on the overall program model. Results showed that low levels of program structure are associated with the weakest programs. Programs with low levels of program structure offer the fewest number

of program hours per week, report having the fewest sources of data to support program effectiveness and have the fewest sources of funding. Programs with high levels of program structure, on the other hand, have the largest number of funding sources and the largest number of data sources to support their effectiveness.³⁸

It is important to note that the survey did not capture the reason for the low level of program structure. It is possible that low levels of program structure are a result of a program's limited and unstable source of funding. While the survey did ask respondents about the number of funders supporting their program, information about the level of funding and program budgets was not included in this survey. The Task Force's recommendation to explore the need for funding supporting program planning and capacity is discussed on page 15.

Programs with an advisory board reported significantly higher levels of program structure, a larger number of data sources supporting program effectiveness, and a larger number of funding sources compared to programs without an advisory board. Programs without an advisory board tended to be older than programs with an advisory board. The presence of a board appears to be a strength. Community advisory boards can serve as a vehicle to build collaborative partnerships with other community organizations, which in turn, can increase the program's success.

The Role of Schools

The amount of education funding directed toward programs to improve student academic performance outside of school hours and the number of community programs that use school facilities raise an important question as to the role of schools in out-of-school-time programming. Schools are providers of services, administrators of programs and a location for programs funded by other sources. The impact of these various roles, particularly as it affects the development of additional programs, must be explored as the state moves forward in its efforts to expand available out-of-school-time programming for interested children and youth.

The schools often reflect the problems in the community, such as a lack of financial resources, which in turn can make it difficult for schools to meet the out-of-school-time needs of the students. Information collected from the out-of-school-time program site visits conducted for the Initiative revealed that some programs reported difficulty communicating with the schools when the students they were serving attended schools that were extremely overburdened. The schools themselves frequently lacked resources and were struggling with the demands of a high-risk youth population. The program administrators, while acknowledging the importance of a relationship with the school, felt limited in their ability to increase interactions with the schools.³¹

Collaboration among key community stakeholders is essential to the success of any program—particularly programs

serving high-risk youth and families. For out-of-school-time programs, cooperation, coordination and collaboration between the program and the school are critically important. The building of a solid, positive working relationship with school personnel is crucial to the success of the out-of-school-time program.

Some Illinois out-of-school-time programs, especially those who have a strong focus on academics, take special efforts to contact teachers, participate in faculty meetings and maintain open lines of communication with school staff. As one program administrator states, "Communication with the school is the key."³²

Many programs indicated they recruit school teachers as out-of-school-time staff as a way of linking the program to the school. These teachers already know many of the participants, have an expertise in academics and behavioral issues, are already located at the school, and can assist the program in creating a "seamless" day for the participants in terms of behavioral expectations and relationship building.³³

Other strategies for strengthening the relationship between the program and the school include involving school personnel early in program planning, sharing a common vision and establishing regular and planned communication.³⁴ A healthy program and school relationship facilitates coordination of learning opportunities with the regular school day, linkage between program and classroom content, exchange of information and insights about program participants between teachers and program staff, and sharing of space and resources for program activities.³⁵

The Public Funding Landscape

There are several sources of funds to support out-of-school-time programming. Programs can be supported by government—state, federal or local—funds, private foundation grants and participant fees. The provider survey conducted for the Initiative collected some information on the sources of funding supporting programs, but did not ask programs about the level of funding or the program budgets. The Initiative concentrated its analysis on the public funding supporting out-of-school-time programs in Illinois.

STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Public dollars are a critical source of funding for out-of-school-time programming. The positive social outcomes of out-of-school-time programs, from reduced juvenile crime and lower teen pregnancy to improved student academic performance, validate government's investment in these programs. In Illinois, out-of-school-time programs are administered by several divisions within the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education. The funding supporting these programs is a mix of federal and state dollars.

State Funding

Since its inception in 1998, the TeenREACH program has served 50,000 children and youth ages 6 to 17. The program currently operates in 240 sites across the state. The average age of participants is 11 to 13 years old. The \$19 million program targets low-income youth, with an emphasis on youth from families receiving public assistance, and youth at risk of dropping out of school or juvenile delinquency. TeenREACH is supported by state General Revenue Funds. Since its inception, TeenREACH has been able to fund less than a quarter of the programs that have applied for funding.³⁹

Combined State and Federal funding

The Illinois State Board of Education's Summer Bridges program is a summer program for pre-kindergarten to sixth grade students who did not meet reading and math standards, were recommended for retention or were below grade level in reading or writing or math. In 2001, the \$32 million program served 32,000 students. The bulk of the program's funding, \$26 million, is from state funds and the remainder is federal dollars.

The Illinois Department of Human Services' subsidized child care program for lower-income families provides care to 78,364 school-age children between the ages of six and 12. Approximately \$200 million of the \$540 million spent last year in child care subsidies supported care for school-age children. Thirty-one percent of the funding was from the federal Child Care Development Block Grant.

Payment is provided for children in child care centers, home day care settings and in the care of relatives. Thirty-eight percent of the school-age children in the subsidized child care program, or 29,565, are cared for by relatives.⁴⁰ While these children are supervised during the hours they are not in school and their parents are at work, they may still be interested in participating in out-of-school-time activities.

The other programs administered by IDHS, such as the Bureau of Substance Abuse Prevention (BSAP) and the Bureau of Juvenile Justice and Youth Services, (BJJYS) may offer out-of-school-time activities as a strategy for working with youth, but out-of-school-time services are not the main focus of these programs. BSAP programs receive both state and federal funding, while the juvenile justice programs receive federal funding targeted at delinquency prevention and services for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Youth Services programs are supported with federal and state dollars.

Federal funding

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, created in 1994 and expanded in 1997, provides federal funding for programs in high-need urban and rural schools with low-achieving students and high rates of crime, school violence and drug use, but low resources. In Illinois, the 43 grants funded directly by the U.S. Department of Education provide \$23.16 million to serve 7,749 students at 190 program sites. In January, 2003, an additional \$12 million will be awarded and will support new programs. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers is transitioning from a federally administered program to one administered by ISBE, but the funding will continue to be provided by the federal government.

The demand for the 21st Century program exceeds the supply. During the 2001-2002 academic year, ten 21st Century programs serving over 7,700 children were funded; 123 organizations across the state had applied for the 21st Century funding.⁴¹

Chicago out-of-school-time programming

All of the recommendations of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force are driven by the twin goals of enhancing the quality of existing out-of-school-time programs and expanding access to these programs by interested children and youth. The Task Force has suggested specific next steps in five key areas for government, direct service programs, private funders, business and the civic community to take to enact these recommendations and make affordable quality out-of-school-time programs available to Illinois youth (see page 24). Chicago, with the city's Department of Human Services' Youth Services Division at the helm, has made important strides in one of these areas—capacity building—and its efforts offer a glimpse of what it takes for communities to develop the ability of out-of-school-time programs to better serve youth.

The city's Department of Human Services has collaborated with the Making the Most of Out-of-School-Time (MOST) Initiative to pilot a common set of program standards for programs serving youth ages 12 to 18. The nine programs selected for the pilot are receiving technical assistance, training, peer support and

a stipend to assist them in reaching the standards. The programs are also developing assessments to measure their progress. In addition to developing and promoting standards for youth services, the Chicago Department of Human Services has created a Youth Worker Certification. Thirty-two professionals recently completed the 400-hour curriculum. Several years ago, the Department also implemented a 32-hour Advancing Youth Development training for front-line youth workers.

The Department, in an effort to improve the coordination among program providers and between providers and city institutions such as schools, libraries and parks, tracks the resources available for youth and monitors service duplication and gaps through the YouthNet Program. YouthNet employs young people to map services in city neighborhoods and act as peer outreach workers to link youth to activities. YouthNet is also governed by a Youth Advisory Council that meets monthly to develop a community consortium and to plan organized activities for young people.

Changes in the funding landscape

Starting with the 2003 fiscal year, which began July 1, 2002, the 21st Century Community Learning Center grants are being administered through the Illinois State Board of Education. In the past, only schools or school districts were allowed to apply for funding. In the upcoming grant cycle, community-based organizations and other non-school agencies can apply directly for funding.

ISBE will require schools at some point to provide Supplemental Education Services through Title I to students in schools that are failing to meet state academic standards. These services will include tutoring and other programs provided outside of school hours. A small number of schools will provide those services during the second semester of the 2002-2003 school year.

The 1996 federal overhaul of the welfare program has affected out-of-school-time programs. The legislation limited families to a lifetime total of five years of welfare benefits. As a result, the number of families receiving welfare payments fell sharply over the last several years. Many former welfare recipients entered the workforce. As a result, school-age children who may have had parents available to them during the out-of-school-time hours may now be without adult supervision. With a steep decrease in the number of families receiving monthly welfare payments and a federal requirement that the state maintain a certain threshold of funding for low-income families, IDHS had the resources to provide additional services to these families. TeenREACH was originally funded through dollars earmarked for welfare payments. The program is now supported by General Revenue Funds and helps the state meet its TANF funding requirement. Within the next year, Congress will reauthorize and determine its financial commitment to the welfare programs. It also will determine how states will be able to use dollars that have supported programs such as TeenREACH.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- > The Task Force recommends that Illinois develop common procedures among the state agencies with a focus on youth for training, credentialing, meeting fiscal and programmatic reporting requirements and evaluating programs.
- > The Task Force recommends that the incoming Administration continue the Illinois Clearinghouse, which monitors and coordinates responses to federal funding opportunities.
- > The Task Force recommends that the State expand government funding; coordinate state and federal categorical funding; and develop strategies to increase private, local and foundation support.
- > The Task Force recommends that the State explore tax incentives and innovative tax policies to generate additional public and private funding.

Reaching the goal of out-of-school-time programs for all interested youth

National efforts to estimate costs of quality out-of-school time programs have found it difficult to compare different programs because of the wide variety in the types of services provided.⁴² One study found that out-of-school-time program costs range from \$700 a year to more than \$5,000 a year per child.⁴³ Another study suggested that services, based on four program models, average about \$3,060 per child per year.⁴⁴

Factors that account for the disparity in costs include the duration of the program, type and structure of activities offered, child and staff ratios, staff credentials and salary requirements, and facility costs. An analysis of the funding provided by the major state and federal sources of out-of-school-time programming in Illinois found that grants or subsidies to programs ranged from approximately \$3,000 a year per child in the 21st Century and IDHS subsidized child care program to approximately \$500 per child in the TeenREACH program.⁴⁵ Other programs that offer less structured services or provide activities for a limited period of time, such as the summer, cost \$100 or less per child. An evaluation of the Making the Most of Out-of-School-Time Initiative (MOST) in Chicago, Boston and Seattle found that the full cost of providing a five-day-a-week-program for a 50-week year ranges from \$2,500 to

\$3,000. The MOST evaluation found that revenues generally ranged between \$1,500 to \$2,000 a year, falling short of the costs.⁴⁶

The Task Force realizes that calculating a cost of meeting the out-of-school-time needs of Illinois' school-aged children and youth will require additional analysis. Illinois must develop a plan to expand out-of-school-time services to interested children and youth who do not currently have the opportunity to participate in activities. Illinois must also develop a plan to enhance existing programming so youth have all the advantages that quality programs can offer.

The Task Force realizes that calculating the cost of meeting the out-of-school-time needs of Illinois' school-aged children and youth will require additional analysis. Illinois must develop a plan to expand out-of-school-time services to interested children and youth who do not currently have the opportunity to participate in activities. Illinois must also develop a plan to enhance existing programming so youth have all the advantages that quality programs can offer. In its next stage of work, the Task Force will develop strategies for financing the necessary increase of out-of-school-time opportunities. The Task Force may consider models that look at incremental increases across the next ten years that reach an additional percentage of youth per year and also will examine the cost of enhancing the quality of existing programs.

Government has a vital role in financing out-of-school-time programs, given the positive outcomes quality programs yield for youth, their families and the general public. However, government should not be the sole source of funding for these programs. Building public-private partnerships to support out-of-school-time programming at the local and state levels should be a priority for the follow-up work of the Initiative. Parent fees, scaled so they are affordable for families with modest incomes, also are a vital source of program funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- > The Task Force recommends Illinois undertake a thorough analysis of the private funding, including foundation and corporate dollars, supporting out-of-school-time programs.
- > The Task Force encourages providers and communities to contribute monetary or in-kind support to out-of-school-time programs as part of government grants.
- > The Task Force recommends that public funding support programs' ability to expand their capacity—including conducting needs assessments, developing and implementing evaluation tools, making programs accessible for youth with special needs and working with schools and community organizations.
- > The Task Force recommends exploring modifying current law to allow programs to carry funding into the next fiscal year, making it easier for them to respond to unexpected needs or program changes.

A Special Challenge: Meeting the Needs of Older Youth

Negotiating adolescence can be difficult, as young people struggle to establish a sense of who they are and face choices that can shape the path their lives will take as adults. Out-of-school-time programs can offer experiences that help youth safely navigate their teen years and develop skills, such as setting goals, solving problems and negotiating conflicts peacefully, that are necessary to be successful.⁴⁷

As youth age, however, it can become more difficult to keep them engaged in out-of-school-time programs. Program participation drops off as youth become older.⁴⁸ Regardless of the age of the student, the best learning occurs when participants have choices about what and how they learn.⁴⁹ These choices can be even more critical for older participants who, unlike elementary school students, can leave if they are not interested. Research has shown that it is important to engage youth in the design of out-of-school-time programs so the activities are relevant and of interest to junior high and high school students.

In Illinois, some out-of-school-time programs develop youth leadership by employing young people as youth leaders or utilizing them as program volunteers. Other programs offer career development activities, giving teens a chance to explore career choices, and internship opportunities where participants can develop marketable skills while earning a wage.⁵⁰

Parents participating in discussion groups led by the After-school Initiative underscored the importance of providing engaging activities for the students. “It is important for the program to provide age-appropriate space and activities for the older kids, separate from the younger kids. My middle-school-age daughters were bored stiff at their summer program because the staff catered to the toddlers and younger children,” stated a parent in Central Illinois.⁵¹ A youth participant in another program in Northern Illinois echoed that same sentiment. “The little kids should have a separate class than the older kids. They need a different staff person to work with the younger kids.”⁵²

Developing programs specifically geared to teens is an important next step in meeting the out-of-school-time needs of Illinois youth. It is not uncommon for the number of organized opportunities for youth during non-school hours to decrease as they grow older.⁵³ One study of three communities outside of Illinois found that while two-thirds of 13-to-15-year-olds reported that they had constructive things to do during the out-of-school-time hours, only half of 16-to-17-year-olds and one third of 18-to-19-year-olds reported being positively engaged during this time.⁵⁴ Older youth in Illinois may have similar difficulties in finding engaging activities. Of the 420 program sites surveyed for the After-school Initiative, only seven percent worked solely with youth ages 12 and over. On average, the programs surveyed worked with children and youth spanning a 10 year age range.

Efforts such as the Illinois School-aged Child Care Network, are examining the special considerations that must be addressed when working with teens. The lessons learned from these efforts and the input of youth should be incorporated into future strategic planning efforts.

Guiding Principles of the Illinois After-school Initiative

As part of the development of a strategic plan to enhance the quality of existing out-of-school-time programs and expand the number of quality programs available, the Task Force agreed upon a set of guiding principles to serve as benchmarks for programs. The principles were originally developed by the Best Practices Work Group based on research findings and direct program experience. They were then presented to the full Task Force for its approval. The principles are meant to guide the direction of out-of-school-time programs so that they provide the best programming possible.

Meeting the different needs of children Illinois out-of-school programs: are tailored to the developmental stage, special needs and physical and cognitive abilities of participants; offer a range of activities to capitalize on the varied interests of children and youth and take creative, multi-disciplinary approaches to develop participants' potential and skills; offer activities that are based on sound practices to reach the program's stated goals; have an established management system in place addressing personnel management—including the use of volunteers—planning, professional development, accounting and evaluation to deliver effective programming from year to year; are staffed with high quality, well-trained personnel that receive continuous professional development and evaluation.

Diversity Illinois out-of-school programs are developed with respect and appreciation for the diverse backgrounds, family structures, cultures, communities and languages of the children and families served by the program.

Outcomes and evaluation Illinois out-of-school programs use policies, programs and principles that have been shown by research to be effective. Illinois out-of-school programs are held accountable to parents, youth, funders, and related stakeholders through periodic process and outcome evaluations. Illinois out-of-school programs are data-driven with specific goals, objectives and milestones that regularly assess progress and provide feedback for program improvement.

Parent involvement Illinois out-of-school programs consider parents and caregivers as partners. Programs work with parents and caregivers across all levels of program development, design, implementation and evaluation.

Role of the community The State of Illinois actively encourages public institutions, schools, private agencies, business, faith-based and other community-based organizations and civic leaders to work collaboratively to plan sustainable out-of-school programs that meet the needs of local children.

Role of the state State government assures that needs assessments are conducted, priorities are set, training and technical assistance is promoted, best practices are supported and outcomes are evaluated for publicly funded out-of-school-time programs.

Core Elements of Strong Programs

National research and studies from other states have found that out-of-school-time programs with positive outcomes share common components. The Best Practices Work Group explored research and regional and national resources, such as the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Forum for Youth Investment, the National School-Age Care Alliance and the National Institute for Out-of-School-Time, and drew upon participants' own program knowledge to select the core elements of quality programs. These core elements take the guiding principles one step further and provide concrete examples of the characteristics of quality programs. The Best Practices Work Group presented the core elements to the full Task Force, which approved them. The organizational core elements describe the key components that organizations running out-of-school-time programs must make sure are in place to support quality programming. The programmatic elements describe the opportunities programs must provide to fully develop the potential of their participants.

During site visits to 20 Illinois out-of-school-time programs, conducted as part of the Task Force's research, the Center for Prevention Research and Development found that program administrators and staff supported the idea of program standards and expectations. However, there was serious concern regarding a program's ability to meet predetermined standards, given the huge disparities in program size and resources. Some program staff also questioned how it would be possible to use one "measure" for all programs regardless of focus, level of comprehensiveness and size. For smaller, more isolated programs, finding the time, energy and resources to strategically plan around program goals and address program deficits was a much greater challenge.⁵⁵

Recognizing that programs are in various stages of development and do not always have the full funding and programmatic support they need, the Task Force, rather than recommending that the programs be required to implement each of the core elements, sets these elements as examples for programs to strive to meet. The Task Force encourages the state, through the RFP process, to promote the use of these core elements.

The Task Force agreed—
Ongoing Staff Training and Development
Safe and Appropriate Program Environment
Consistent and Defined Program Management
Sustainability
Transportation
Community Collaboration
Program Monitoring/Evaluation
Family Involvement

Organizational Elements

1 ONGOING STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Out-of-school program staff must receive training that supports their ability to effectively carry out program activities and elements and to meet established standards. This training includes knowledge of child development, positive youth development and cultural issues and how to include children and youth with special needs. Training for specific program activities, such as recreation, academic enrichment and arts, also should be provided.

The staff of out-of-school-time programs is perhaps the single most important ingredient to an effective program.⁵⁶ If the staff members are not trained to work with youth, then the programs cannot expect to achieve the intended results. For this reason, ensuring that staff is fully prepared for their roles in out-of-school-time programs is of central importance. Preparation for their roles means hiring and keeping qualified staff as well as providing ongoing professional development opportunities.

If staff members do not receive adequate training, well-intended adults who want to spend quality time with children may become frustrated, which, in turn, may lead to a high attrition rate and less effective programming. Thus, training of program staff not only helps to maintain staff quality, but it can also help to prevent high rates of staff turnover.⁵⁷

Staff must be given training in how to implement the specific components of the out-of-school-time program. In addition, training should include how to work well

with children and how to adapt to the needs of children of different ages, races, or cultures and children with disabilities. Training can also provide program staff with ideas for enrichment and hands-on activities, greater expertise in academic subject matter, knowledge in assessing student progress and strategies for the different program components of academics, enrichment and recreation.⁵⁸

Professional development opportunities can be provided in a variety of ways.⁵⁹ Out-of-school-time program staff should have frequent staff meetings and should have less formal avenues for the exchange of information as well. Such opportunities provide program staff with a mechanism for presenting and solving issues that often arise in out-of-school-time programs, such as discipline, academic and other social problems. These exchanges also give program staff a way to share ideas and generate new ones. In addition to these group meetings, individual meetings between program staff and administrators are also important strategies for solving problems and evaluating program performance and effectiveness. Effective supervision is critical. All in all, the program director must assume the responsibility of ensuring that the out-of-school-time program provides high-quality services that meet the needs of youth participants and their families.

What are the specific qualifications that staff of out-of-school-time programs needs the most? Currently, there is not an agreed-upon credential or skill set that can be required of out-of-school-time and youth workers. Efforts are under way to develop professional

standards for program quality but these efforts are complicated by the differing goals of out-of-school-time programs that require staff with different skills and training.⁶⁰

Based on recent findings from a statewide evaluation of the Department of Human Services' Teen REACH Programs, one of the areas which staff sees as needing improvement is the expansion of professional development opportunities for out-of-school-time program staff. The areas of training most often noted by program staff include working with youth with special needs, increasing parent involvement and using recreation to manage and teach behavior. Project Directors, in particular, note the need for additional training in curriculum design and research-based best practices.

In a rural community in western Illinois, out-of-school-time program staff expressed feelings of isolation. This sense of program isolation is addressed through monthly staff meetings and professional development trainings. Topics have included CPR/First Aid, food safety, life skills and character building; team building; and effective discipline techniques. The Project Coordinator reports that it is "inspiring to staff when others come in" from outside their program to provide training or share ideas. Still, the Program Director would like additional opportunities for information sharing on a statewide level, and even offered to help facilitate this process.⁶¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois leverage all funds for coordinated service delivery, evaluation, training, professional development, needs assessment, conferences and media.**

- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois coordinate, promote and fund intensive ongoing training for out-of-school-time programs regardless of the program's funding source.**

- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois build a system to disseminate information on best practices, link programs and increase community capacity to provide needs assessment, training, service delivery and evaluation to support organizations providing out-of-school-time services.**

2 SAFE AND APPROPRIATE PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

The program environment must be safe, meet all relevant municipal codes and be conducive to a variety of educational, recreational and cultural activities. Program staffing and procedures must protect and enhance the health and positive well being of the participants.

Safety is one of the common features of out-of-school-time settings that support youth development. The primary responsibility of all programs is to ensure that safety procedures and protocols are in place, the facility is appropriate for program activities, and staff are trained to respond to emergencies. Arrival and departure times must be closely monitored and staff should have a clear understanding of who is authorized to pick up each child. Youth must be carefully supervised and efforts to promote a positive, safe and nurturing environment should be emphasized.⁶²

Programs should also have space for a variety of activities that support age appropriate learning opportunities. In a study of the Extended Service School Adaptation Initiative (ESS), researchers found two of the major challenges out-of-school-time programs faced were gaining access to programming space and arranging for the maintenance of that space. The availability of appropriate space can be challenging, especially when out-of-school-time programs exist in school buildings. The demand for certain rooms (such as large multi-purpose rooms) may be especially great when out-of-school-time programs are competing with extra-curricular

activities. In addition to scheduling, logistical issues such as custodial and maintenance duties can come into conflict with space usage.⁶³

The Department of Education suggests that quality school-based out-of-school-time programs have access to the school library, computers, art room, music room and playground. Unfortunately, studies have shown that less than 25% of out-of-school-time programs surveyed had regular access to playgrounds, parks, libraries or special rooms for art, music or games. Facility resources are likely even less satisfactory in low-income neighborhoods.⁶⁴

Since quality out-of-school-time programs provide a variety of age appropriate activities that promote the development of the participating youth, the availability of various types of space is an important factor in administering the program. The types of space available for activities such as pottery, computer skills and dance greatly impact opportunities for youth. For programs located in schools, the ESS study showed that strong positive relationships between school principals/school staff and out-of-school-time program staff were at the heart of gaining access to space and coordination of space utilization.⁶⁵

3 CONSISTENT AND DEFINED PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

All programs, regardless of their size, must have in place a strong program plan and organizational structure, effective management and communication systems and a plan for sustaining the program. Roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated. Defined procedures are in place for both program management and implementation.

A solid organizational and management structure is another essential element of a sound program. To some extent, the management structure employed depends on the type of organization administering the program and whether or not the program is the result of a partnership between organizations. However, regardless of the organization overseeing the program, successful organizational structure includes on site-based management with regular oversight and accountability.

Good management practices impact the services youth receive by reducing staff turnover and thereby creating a more stable program environment. Positive management efforts also help to create a favorable emotional climate for both staff and youth. In fact, RAND researchers have noted a number of model program practices that include staff and program management as well as collaboration with other individuals and organizations.⁶⁶

In programs with a goal of improving academic improvement, school and program staff must communicate regularly.⁶⁷

In addition, a program director may be instrumental in building working relationships with school staff, parents and community members. Providing engaging activities and coordinating with regular school programs requires regular communication, staff meeting opportunities and adequate planning time.

The majority of programs visited in Illinois had some type of regularly scheduled staff meetings to facilitate communication regarding the program and its participants. For smaller programs (both in size and funding), having staff meetings was limited due to lack of time and dollars to pay staff when they were not directly working with youth. The program administrators saw this as a significant challenge to communication.

Clearly delineated roles for staff and defined procedures also ensure a smooth-running program and create a stable and predictable environment for youth.⁶⁸ Programs need to strike a balance between established procedures and flexibility. For example, written job descriptions and employee evaluations should be common to all out-of-school-time programs, but specific emergency procedures and policy guidelines will vary depending on the individual characteristics of the program.⁶⁹

Effective management structures have systems in place that not only assist the program to run smoothly, but also include future sustainability. Employing systems for budgeting and accountability and developing a long-term resource plan is key to ensuring program sustainability.

4 SUSTAINABILITY

Out-of-school-time programs must develop a sustainability plan that includes evaluation from the beginning of the program, diversified funding and solid leadership that builds partnerships with key stakeholders.

Program sustainability is one of the elements of a high quality out-of-school-time program. Programs must continuously search for and be creative in their use of dollars.⁷⁰ A program with strong resource management has varied funding sources. A frequent strategy employed by successful programs is to develop a solid core of support for program management and vital programs, draw upon major funding from sources such as state and federal grants, and utilize dollars received through grant writing efforts or user fees to fill in any funding gaps.⁷¹

Established Illinois programs visited for the After-school Initiative highlighted the importance of planning for sustainability throughout the program cycle or funding period. These program administrators believed that ongoing, long-term resource development was a significant part of their role. In addition to having an identified person responsible for resource development, one administrator also emphasized the need for program partners/collaborators to see program sustainability as a part of their role in supporting the out-of-school-time program.

In addition to dollars, another critical element of sustainability is leadership.⁷² A cornerstone of quality leadership is identifying and building a coalition of key stakeholders that work in partnership with the after-school program to define, support and articulate a common vision and direction of the program.⁷³

Correspondingly, these stakeholders can play a role in creating a sustainability plan that includes identifying strengths and challenges to sustainability as well as developing strategies and contributing resources to overcome the obstacles.⁷⁴

RECOMMENDATION

> **The Task Force recommends Illinois create and maintain a state and local web data link for program planning and grant writing; provide access to data from state agencies and information on program development and implementation from organizations across the state.**

A comprehensive evaluation is an integral part of any sustainability plan.⁷⁵ The evaluation should be developed in concert with the program plan. Programs should have in place a conceptual framework for how it operates. It details the relationship among the program philosophy, services and activities, and short and long-term outcomes. This framework provides the foundation for the evaluation and program development. Findings from the evaluation can then be used to demonstrate to families, community members and key constituencies, including policymakers, the value added of the out-of-school-time program.

RECOMMENDATION

> **The Task Force recommends Illinois create a statewide mechanism to provide information and technical assistance to local communities on the outcomes of program evaluations and the effectiveness of planning and program implementation.**

The development of a sustainability plan shows long-term investment in the community and increases the buy-in of program participants, other community members and program staff. In short, programs must couple building partnerships and seeking funds in order to sustain their out-of-school-time program.⁷⁶

5 TRANSPORTATION

Plans for providing transportation to and from program activities must reflect the needs of the children, families and community served by the program.

Transportation is a complex challenge for out-of-school-time programs and requires the collaborative efforts of the program, the schools and the community. Transportation has far-reaching impact on every aspect of the program from who attends to the hours the program is able to operate.

Lack of transportation can be a major barrier to youth participation in out-of-school-time programs especially for urban and rural students who rely on bus transportation to and from school. Some researchers speculate that students who require busing, such as youth whose parents work evening shifts, might benefit most from the additional support offered by out-of-school-time programs.⁷⁷

Of the programs responding to the Illinois After-school Initiative provider survey, 41 percent indicated that they provided some form of transportation. Programs that participated in the site visits indicated that lack of transportation negatively impacted parent involvement, especially in rural areas where the program drew youth from a large geographical area.

Transportation costs are great and can seriously affect the cost of program services. In addition, there is a limited supply of buses and qualified drivers. Even when buses and drivers are available, the number of seats available on those buses may limit the number of youth participants.⁷⁸

Even in areas in which program participants live within walking distance of home, transportation can be an issue. Many parents and staff are uncomfortable with children walking the distance between the program and home after dark. This problem is exacerbated when programs are located in unsafe neighborhoods.⁷⁹

In studies of out-of-school-time programs, the urgency of transportation issues has pressed a number of programs to develop an array of creative solutions. In some cases, the school districts offered monetary or in-kind support. Some programs developed partnerships with other organizations to split the costs of busing, share busing or gain the occasional use of vans for off-site trips.⁸⁰ Yet another program funded transportation costs through the receipt of a grant funded by tax dollars earmarked for drug prevention.⁸¹

6 COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Schools, community and faith-based organizations, government agencies, civic organizations, business, foundations and participants and their families must work collaboratively to connect out-of-school-time programs with community resources.

Though out-of-school-time programs must differ in order to fit the needs of the local community, a key contributing factor to success across all programs is collaborative planning and monitoring.⁸² Having broad-based involvement helps communities to design and implement programs that can meet the broad range of developmental needs experienced by youth today. Key stakeholders may include youth, parents, school administrators, and local business and community agency representatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois use public funds to support coordinators at the local level to help communities plan for and provide out-of-school-time services.**
- > **The Task Force recommends state agencies collaborate and that Illinois encourage the federal government to support the collaborative efforts.**

Major functions of the collaborative group include the following:⁸³

- Identifying local needs based on local expertise.
- Prioritizing goals and building consensus around these goals.
- Drawing on the existing resources and youth-serving expertise of multiple organizations.
- Avoiding service duplication and service gaps among youth-serving organizations.
- Creating a stronger foundation for sustainability through local support, relationships with funders, and long-range planning efforts.

Keys to successful community collaboration include:

- Broad-based involvement in the decision-making process.
- A structure ensuring clear communication between collaborative partners.
- Involvement of key stakeholders in the collaborative process from the beginning.
- Appreciation for the unique specialties of the members, including the differing perceptions of children's learning and development.
- Clear roles and responsibilities for all members.
- Maintaining a focus on clear goals, with a method of measuring success.
- A sense of flexibility—changing programs in an ongoing fashion as community needs change.
- Perhaps most important, a person to facilitate and manage the collaborative process.

During a site visit to an out-of-school-time program being implemented in a mid-size community in the northwestern part of the state, program administrators were asked about collaboration because this community has a long history of effective community collaboration. According to the program director, the program maintains a very strong relationship with the local school district. The program and the district share resources, ideas and information. The director talks about "customer service to the district" and says, "We're not competing with them."⁸⁴ To foster collaboration, the staff at the administrative agency has effectively conveyed the message that the out-of-school-time program benefits everyone in the community—not just the administrative agency, but also the school district and other community stakeholders.

7 PROGRAM MONITORING/ EVALUATION

Program evaluation, quality assurance and continuous improvement strategies must be in place to ensure that program goals and targeted outcomes are met. Programs must have data collection strategies and information systems in place to facilitate the evaluation.

The Task Force agreed that all out-of-school programs should be evaluated. It was also recognized that not all programs currently have the expertise or resources to conduct an evaluation, and that state, federal, and local agencies must provide technical assistance and resources to help programs conduct evaluations. As a result, conducting and using evaluation results should be viewed as an integral component for understanding and improving the quality and effectiveness of out-of-school programs.

Evaluation of out-of-school programs has multiple goals and purposes. First, evaluating out-of-school-time programs assists project staff to reaffirm and build consensus for the goals and objectives of the program. Out-of-school-time programs have complex and multiple purposes ranging from promoting social development, to improving promoting academic success, to reducing violence and substance abuse. Evaluators help programs crystallize their focus, and establish realistic goals and levels of attainment. Evaluation also helps programs understand the strengths and weaknesses of their programs, and can provide data for self-study and continuous quality improvement.

Out-of-school programs use several sources of data to review with participants, parents, program staff and funders. This type of evaluation uses both process and outcome indicators to assess progress and goal attainment. Process indicators provide the staff with information regarding who is being reached, what is implemented, by whom, to whom, and in what setting. In other words, process evaluation is the "who, what, when, where, and why" questions that determine what seems to be working and builds off that information for program improvement. When process and outcome evaluation results are used together they can tell how a program is working and why. This information is also used for monitoring, refining, and improving program quality. (See Appendix B, Outcome Measures, p. 38.)

Finally, evaluation can be used to ensure accountability to funders and policy makers. That is, do the programs reach the intended audience and are they impacting them in a cost-effective way? Performance measures, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, TeenREACH and Bureau of Substance Abuse Prevention guidelines, can help out-of-school programs to ensure they are on the right track for attaining outcomes. (See Appendix B, p. 38.)

Out-of-school programs should be regularly evaluated. Ideally, evaluation should be conducted annually so that programs receive information and data for program improvement. However, given the resource limitations, annual assessments may not be realistic. But, it is plausible that all out-of-school programs collect, maintain and analyze process data for program improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- > **The Task Force recommends all programs, regardless of the source of their funding, be required to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions.**
- > **The Task Force recommends state agencies responsible for out-of school-time programs collect common information through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process and explore creating a common community RFP.**
- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois develop a Best Practices Institute that disseminates lessons learned from out-of-school-time programs across the state and equips state administrators and community-based institutions with knowledge, support and tools to adopt an evidence-based system, including outcome-based planning.**
- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois require publicly funded programs to meet outcomes that support the stated goals for programs of the Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force.**
- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois reach consensus on the outcome measures out-of-school-time programs should meet, using as a guide outcomes currently required by programs such as 21st Century Community Learning Center, TeenREACH and the Bureau of Substance Abuse and Prevention.**
- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois collect data in the same format (by zip codes, regions, etc.) to facilitate more effective use of common data across state agencies and local programs.**
- > **The Task Force recommends Illinois support, along with private funders, collaborations between researchers and the practice community.**

8 FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Families and youth should play an essential role in program planning including design and implementation. Out-of-school-time programs must build collaborative relationships with and seek the active participation of families.

Decades of research have demonstrated that parental involvement makes a difference in a child's learning and academic success.⁸⁵ Youth and their families are more likely to support and maintain program involvement if they have a part in program planning or evaluation activities. Programs that utilize the ideas generated by families and youth tend to have activities that would be considered more enjoyable, culturally relevant and a better match with the interests of participants than programs that do not solicit family and youth input.⁸⁶

A fundamental aspect of the establishment of a partnership with families is communication. Good programs keep families informed of program schedules and happenings, share and exchange important information about youth and work as a team with families to promote healthy youth development. Staff also share youth accomplishments with families and increase a family's awareness of community resources.⁸⁷ Various methods are used to maintain communication with families such as sending notices home, newsletters, fliers, or personal contact through family-focused activities or home visits.

Research has shown that parental involvement makes a difference in a child's learning and academic success.⁸⁸ Out-of-school-time programs can involve parents in a myriad of ways including program planning, orientation sessions, advisory boards, attending parent meetings, serving as volunteers, surveying to see if the program is meeting their needs, and fundraising. Parent involvement can be an important asset to a program in multiple ways including helping staff address issues with the youth. In the words of one staff person interviewed during a site visit, "Once we meet the parents, we get more insight on what is going on with the kids and how to address it."⁸⁹

Another critical aspect of family involvement is addressing the needs of working parents. A quality out-of-school-time program considers the schedule of working parents, program costs or fees, and transportation.⁹⁰ In addition to after-school hours, programs also offer activities before school, modify their hours for teacher conference and planning days, and operate when school is not in session such as during school holidays and summer breaks.

There also is a need for out-of-school-time programs to create services not only for youth, but their parents and other adults in the community.⁹¹ Out-of-school-time programs can provide adult learning opportunities such as parenting education, technology training, GED, and English as a second language.

Strategic Next Steps

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS STRATEGIC NEXT STEPS

Changes, often significant, are necessary in the areas of funding, state-level interagency collaboration, capacity building, evaluation and community collaboration for the state to build a quality system of out-of-school-time programming. The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force has generated next steps in each of these five critical areas to guide policy makers in building an out-of-school-time system of quality programs reaching all interested school-age children and youth in Illinois.

NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE STATE-LEVEL INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Assess the barriers and opportunities to collaboration

Determine state-level policies needed to make out-of-school-time services less fragmented and more responsive to local needs

Implement policies to aid state agencies to collaborate and avoid duplicating services

NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE CAPACITY BUILDING

Program funding next steps

Develop an ideal funding timeline that encourages program sustainability

Explore how funding takes into account upfront program expenses

Reconsider how grants can support the costs of program planning, evaluation, facilitating community and school involvement and assessing needs

Consider the implications of public and private funders providing greater support for administrative program costs

Workforce next steps

Attract and maintain a skilled workforce

Enhance the knowledge and skills of the current workforce

Retain qualified staff

Evaluate the need for more trained out-of-school-time program staff

Determine how programs can use volunteers effectively

Facility next steps

Maximize the use of existing public facilities to make them available to meet the need for out-of-school-time programs

Study the need for more facilities to house out-of-school-time programs

Management next steps

Promote the elements programs need to build a successful management plan

Increase the capacity of programs for self-evaluation

Expand the capacity of state agencies to administer programs well and promote standards based on best practices

NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Define community collaboration and the expectations for local communities and local providers

Assess the opportunities and challenges to community-level collaboration

Assess how communities currently collaborate to deliver out-of-school-time services

Encourage collaboration at the community level

Evaluate how programs engage parents and caregivers and provide them with learning opportunities

Determine how programs can work with other sectors in the community

Determine the incentives to involve local business, other private organizations and community members in planning for out-of-school-time programs

Promote the use of private funding or foundation grants for out-of-school-time programming

NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE EVALUATION

Evaluating the effectiveness of out-of-school-time programs is essential to designing programs that help children and youth to participate in rewarding activities, improve their academic performance, develop positive relationships with peers and adults and gain self-confidence in a positive and safe environment.

Determine the data needed to evaluate program effectiveness

Clarify to state-funded programs the state's expectation of program evaluation

Create flexible state evaluation criteria to allow for unique community needs

Ensure programs get the technical assistance needed to develop and implement program evaluations

Support funding for high-quality program evaluations

Utilize evaluation data to plan for and improve programs

NEXT STEPS TO IMPROVE FUNDING

Determine the level of funding needed to support positive outcomes for all school-age children

Prioritize the population of children and youth served by an expansion of public funds for out-of-school-time programs

Create a systematic approach for securing long-term federal/state/local funding and private and foundation funding and reaching a healthy balance among these funding sources

Assist communities in determining the level of funding needed for out-of-school-time programs

Develop strategies—including public-private partnerships—to bring additional dollars into out-of-school-time programming

Study and recommend the best method (vouchers, subsidies, grants) to provide funding for programs

Programmatic Elements

The Task Force identified five programmatic elements that exemplify best practices. Each of these program areas focuses on a different activity, but they share a goal of helping youth develop skills they will need as adults. Out-of-school-time programs, as stated by a state legislator interviewed for the Task Force's key informant study, should "offer additional opportunities for young people to better themselves."⁹²

Practitioners and researchers have found that the best programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural and recreational activities to engage youth and develop their learning.⁹³ Program administrators interviewed during the site visits said they believed their programs, even those with a very specific goal, such as art enhancement, had greater positive effects on the participants than just the development of a single skill. These staff members reported they saw positive changes in attitudes and behavior in the youth they served and attributed these changes to such things as caring adult role models and youth exposure to opportunities and environments they previously had not experienced.⁹⁴

Many of the programs visited, while providing a variety of activities for youth, had academic enrichment and tutoring as a core component. Several program administrators indicated they believed that their sports/recreation component served a secondary purpose of "hooking" youth into the program. Once involved, these youth were expected to participate in the academic portion of the program.⁹⁵

The challenge is to provide enriching programming that does not repeat the failures of the school day. Research has shown that children often disengage if an out-of-school-time program too closely resembles the school day. Programs such as 21st Century may provide an opportunity for schools to improve the performance of their students, but not if administrators simply extend the elements of an unsuccessful school day into the out-of-school-time hours.

Experience from the Regional Learning Centers Initiative in California has found: "Improvement in academic performance is not in and of itself predictive of a longer-term outcome of strengthening the ability of young people to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in adolescence and early adulthood. Young people must learn to be productive, not only by doing well in school. They must be able to engage positively and form attachments, experience supportive relationships with adults and peers, and identify with the larger community. They must be able to navigate through different settings, situations and challenges and make positive choices. And, they must experience and internalize a sense of personal growth and progress. The real value of out-of-school-time programs lies in their potential for providing supports and opportunities for children and young people to acquire and strengthen all of these skills and competencies."⁹⁶

THE CORE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS ARE DEFINED BELOW.

1 ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Out-of-school programs must support the academic performance of children and youth through developmentally appropriate activities that strengthen the learning occurring during the regular school day.

By augmenting the school day and adding to the number of hours in which children engage in learning activities, out-of-school programs can be an important resource for improving academic achievement. They offer children—even those who struggle academically during the school day—a safe, less formal environment where they can practice and reinforce academic skills without competition or grades. They also offer children the individualized attention that is often unavailable in traditional classroom settings. Sustained individualized attention through extended learning time, when combined with parental involvement and quality school instruction can raise reading levels and mathematical performance.⁹⁷

Academic assistance services can take on many forms, including tutoring, subject-based programming, family literacy programming, enrichment programs, homework assistance centers, and open library. But across these various programming formats, from the highly structured to the more informal, there are certain characteristics associated with the highest quality programs.

The intensity, duration, and amount of programming provided to youth matters. For example, to be most effective, tutoring programs must ensure that participants attend at least three tutoring sessions a week, with each session lasting 30-60 minutes.⁹⁸ Preliminary findings from another study suggest that the positive effects on cognitive and emotional development are greatest for youth participating in out-of-school programs with high rates of average attendance.⁹⁹

As noted in one of the other core elements presented in this report, the quality of program staff is also an essential component of high quality out-of-school-time programs. Though staffing arrangements vary depending on program size, structure and goals, it is clear that all programs need staff who are qualified and committed, have appropriate experience and realistic expectations, and can interact productively with regular school staff.¹⁰⁰

Successful academic assistance and enrichment programming makes the curriculum challenging yet not overwhelming. A challenging curriculum offers more than remedial work, meets the needs of individual students, and coordinates with the classroom instruction of the schools served by the program.¹⁰¹

Out-of-school programs often have the freedom and flexibility to employ a variety of engaging techniques and activities that schools may be reluctant to use. Working closely with local schools, academic assistance programs can use a variety of approaches to retain student interest and reinforce current classroom learning concepts. Indeed, the most successful academic programs utilize a combination of instructional methods and programming elements.¹⁰²

2 SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND LIFE-SKILLS-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES AND ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

Program elements must build social-emotional skills that support healthy development and cultivate leadership, and provide academic, cultural and artistic enrichment. Youth must develop skills including problem solving, empathy for others and the ability to identify one's own emotions.

Faced with many challenges, schools and, more recently, communities have taken an increasingly active role to promote positive mental, emotional and physical well being in youth and adolescents, particularly through the use of life and social skills training programs. Substantial research indicates that youth with high levels of life and social skills often experience academic success, get along with peers and family, and meaningfully contribute to their communities. Youth with skills in these areas are more resistant to many high-risk behaviors and better able to succeed academically.¹⁰³ Youth trained in life/social skills are efficient in problem solving as well as more assertive, resistant to peer pressure, goal-oriented and effective in communicating than youth who engage in problem behaviors.

Life skills education provides youth with multiple experiences and increased exposure to different environmental settings, factors that influence opportunities to practice and reinforce life skills. Children and youth who go home to an empty house everyday after school typically spend more of their time watching television or "hanging out." In contrast, youth who attend high quality out-of-school-time programs are more likely to have opportunities to interact with adults, peers and friends. Such contact serves to reinforce the life and social skills learned at home or school.

An out-of-school-time program should provide developmentally and personally meaningful activities that require its young participants to use and practice life and social skills. Program participants can work together on a common goal, offer community service or carry out significant responsibilities requiring adult-like skills and behaviors.

Social and emotional competence in areas such as self-awareness, impulse control, cooperation and caring, allows youth and adults to manage important tasks such as learning, forming relationships and handling everyday problems.¹⁰⁴ Effective life-skills programs encourage a supportive, family-like atmosphere, which is especially important for high-risk adolescents who have limited opportunities to experience family support.

The best life skills educational programs are interactive and emphasize the exchange of ideas and actions between peers. Techniques include cooperative learning, discussions, brainstorming sessions, role playing or practicing new behaviors, as well as structured small-group activities.

3 CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC ENRICHMENT

Out-of-school-time programs must provide youth with opportunities to explore, develop and discover interests and express themselves through the exposure to artistic and cultural activities.

The arts are a critical component of any out-of-school-time program. Exposure to the arts allows youth the opportunity for self-expression or development of their abilities.¹⁰⁵ Research has shown¹⁰⁶ that participation in the arts is the reason, in some instances the only reason, that many youth give for being involved in school. Similarly, the arts can serve as a catalyst for learning for youth that would be considered 'problem' or 'at-risk' students. In other words, the arts can often be a way to reach youth who would otherwise be disengaged from school.

According to Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning, involvement in the arts nurtures the development of cognitive, social and personal competencies.¹⁰⁷ Whether it is creative writing, visual arts, dance, music, theatre or other artistic expressions, these skills and abilities are strengthened through arts participation. Research has demonstrated that involvement in the arts has a positive effect on the academic success of youth, and youth who took part in instrumental music showed significant increases in mathematics proficiency.¹⁰⁸

These academic and math gains grew over the middle and high school years, regardless of the youth's socioeconomic status. Youth involvement in the theater arts is linked to a number of positive youth outcomes: increase in reading ability, increase in self-concept and motivation, and increase in empathy and tolerance for others.¹⁰⁹ Other research has corroborated these findings.¹¹⁰

A compendium of research on arts education compiled by the Arts Education Partnership has found that arts strengthen primary reading skills, literacy and writing.¹¹¹ Youth who received instruction in certain arts such as dance can increase their reading skills. Additionally, such teaching complements instruction in reading skills. Participation in drama improves reading comprehension, story understanding and ability to read and understand new materials. Writing proficiency and prolixity are enhanced through learning music, drama and dance. The spatial reasoning and spatial temporal reasoning skills learned in music instruction such as training in piano/keyboard skills are essential in the learning of mathematics. Participation in the arts significantly improves critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills as well as the ability to think creatively.

The arts provide youth with opportunities for personal expression and learning, which enable them to reach higher levels of achievement and enhance their development.¹¹² Such chances may not be available during the regular school day.

4 HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PROMOTION

Out-of-school-time programs must support and build awareness of a healthy lifestyle. Programs include opportunities for recreation and instruction on nutrition, fitness and other healthy behaviors and teach youth how to avoid problem or risky behaviors that may impact their future health and development.

Out-of-school-time programs should be designed to promote the health and development of children and adolescents.¹¹³ This is critical in that lifestyle choices made in adolescence can have an impact on health and prevention into adulthood.¹¹⁴ American youth continue to be troubled by poor physical fitness; violence; inadequate nutrition; dropping out of school; engaging in criminal behavior; sexually transmitted diseases; and alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. This is particularly the case among youth of color and youth living in resource scarce, disenfranchised, low-income inner city and rural communities.

Out-of-school-time programs offer youth safe, supervised, positive, healthy alternatives to and protection from risk-taking and delinquent behavior.¹¹⁵ Programs can educate youth on the consequences of engaging in negative behaviors and promote positive behaviors. Moreover, staff and other youth can serve as mentors and role models to help youth develop the needed assets to thrive.

Programs can provide recreational and physical activities to develop the physical skills and improve fitness of youth. Additionally, participation in sport activities helps youth learn good sportsmanship and cooperation as well as develop problem-solving skills and how to think strategically. Youth involvement in sports also develops self-worth and self-confidence.¹¹⁶

Coupled with the promotion of physical activity is the development of good eating habits and nutrition. A quality out-of-school-time program promotes good nutrition for youth. After-school programs can teach youth how to eat healthy and prepare wholesome snacks, and provide a nutritious snack or other meals to youth. In other words, programs can help youth establish and maintain healthy eating habits. In addition to sound nutrition, snacks provide youth with an opportunity to relax and socialize.¹¹⁷

5 OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Out-of-school programs must provide youth the opportunity to build consistent positive relationships with adults and peers. These positive relationships help to create the foundation on which youth can build additional strengths, assets and competencies. Youth input into program design and governance is another strategy by which strengths and assets can be built. These strategies, embedded in a positive youth development philosophy, are characteristic of the most effective out-of-school-time programs.

Many youth lack the skills and competencies needed for future success and the connections to family, school, community and society. Too many youth also engage in behaviors that threaten their health and their futures.¹¹⁸ Out-of-school-time programs can address these needs.

The positive youth development approach views youth empowerment and exploration, competence and mastery, emotional health, compassion and generosity, community connections and belonging, and civic participation as indicators of positive youth development.¹¹⁹ And this approach can be particularly powerful in working with adolescents.¹²⁰ Adolescence is a time when young people can begin to think critically and act deliberately. They can contribute to the life and revitalization of their communities and neighborhoods; can actively prepare for and even begin careers, relationships and lifestyles; and can develop nurturing relationships that sustain themselves and others. These abilities reflect the outcomes of positive youth development and form the foundation for successful adulthood.

The research clearly documents the powerful impact that positive relationships can have on youth development. Based upon numerous studies of mentoring relationships between youth and adults, research concludes that mentors can influence youth development in three important ways: 1) by enhancing social skills and emotional well-being; 2) by improving cognitive skills through dialogue and listening; and 3) by serving as a role model and advocate.¹²¹

Studies of ten youth mentoring programs, have concluded that mentoring programs can be an effective tool for enhancing the positive development of youth.¹²² Mentored youth are likely to have fewer absences from school, better attitudes about school, fewer incidents of hitting others, less drug and alcohol use, more positive attitudes toward elders and toward helping in general, and improved relationships with their parents.¹²³

Another strategy employed by out-of-school-time programs to foster the development of strengths and assets is to engage youth in all phases of program development and implementation. According to the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, meaningful youth engagement occurs when adults involve youth in challenging tasks that meet genuine needs of the community; when youth are given the opportunity for planning or decision-making that affects others; and when youth and adults mutually teach and learn from each other.¹²⁴

Opportunities for youth input and involvement may be particularly important during adolescence, a time when many young people are driven to explore issues of social justice.¹²⁵ This can lead youth to become involved in ways that can have a powerful and positive effect on organizations and the adults involved in the organizations.

Out-of-school-time programs for Illinois youth must strive to create environments in which young people can develop the confidence, caring and competencies necessary to lead independent and productive lives. Because no single entity can ensure positive outcomes for young people, we must create a system of supports that includes families, schools and community organizations—public and private—that offer young people opportunities to take “safe” risks, make real choices and contributions, and form lasting relationships.

In a rural community in the northern part of Illinois, there is an out-of-school program known as the Teen Center. The program serves youth in grades six through twelve, with teen leaders working with the younger participants. The origin of the program is a true example of youth empowerment. It began with a small group of youth (who ultimately became the teen leaders) meeting with the program coordinator to develop a grant proposal to fund their program. The program was created by the teens and is a true reflection of their vision. The youth feel a great deal of pride and ownership of the program. As one youth put it, “all of us have done something really special” for the program. In addition, youth say that the program “shows the community that teens are good.” A staff member described the Teen Center as “a place where they [the youth participants] can mature and come out as more productive citizens.”¹²⁶

Conclusion

Out-of-school-time programs in Illinois are enriching, and in some cases, redirecting the lives of the children and youth who participate. Programs in some communities are building teenagers' self-confidence by teaching a new skill that they then can master in a paid internship. Other programs are helping elementary students improve their reading skills. In still other out-of-school-time programs, children are exploring their talents and making new friends playing volleyball or creating a mural. In each of these cases, parents and families can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that, during the hours of the program, their children are safe and making full use of that time.

The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force is committed to making these positive experiences available to all school-age children and youth who are interested. The guiding principles, core elements of strong programs, policy recommendations and strategic next steps advanced in this report bring the state a step closer to reaching this goal. The challenge now is to implement the Task Force's plan.

Enhancing the quality of existing out-of-school-time programs and increasing the number of programs available requires the commitment of the State Administration and the Illinois General Assembly, the continued participation of members of the Initiative Task Force and the involvement of many others – from parents to local business owners—throughout the state. Each of these groups has an important contribution to make in designing an out-of-school-time system that supports administrators in their efforts to improve their programs, coordinates the efforts of the various state agencies involved in out-of-school-time programming, maximizes the available public funding and secures additional private and public resources.

Illinois has received national recognition for its work to date in the area of out-of-school-time programming. The state has the opportunity to build on that track record and become a leader in the nation in developing high-quality out-of-school-time programming for school-age children and youth. The Illinois After-school Initiative Task Force Report calls on the state to continue the work of the Task Force so that all children and youth have the opportunity to attend high-quality affordable out-of-school-time programs.

Endnotes

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- ⁴ Center for Prevention Research and Development, *Assessing the Needs for After-school Programs and Services for Illinois Children and Families* A study completed for the Illinois After-school Initiative and funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services. 2002.
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- ¹⁰ Marcia R. Chaiken, *Violent Neighborhoods, Violent Kids, Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.: The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, March, 2000) p. 8.
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- ¹² JH McMillan and DF Reed, "A Qualitative Study of Resilient At-risk Students," *At Risk Students and Resiliency: Factors Contributing to Academic Success* (Clearing House: 1994) 67(3): pp. 137-140.
- ¹³ Derrick Brownlee, Assistant Director, Chicago Department of Human Services, Youth Services Division, Chicago, Illinois, verified information October, 2002.
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Appendix A : DATA PROCEDURES

ILLINOIS AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE AN OVERVIEW OF STUDIES CONDUCTED BY THE CENTER FOR PREVENTION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Illinois After-school Initiative, the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois conducted three studies of after-school programming in Illinois. The studies included estimating the number of youth who need after-school program opportunities, an assessment of existing programs throughout the state, and an intensive study of a sample of after-school programs to identify and better understand core programming elements. Collectively, these studies were designed to assist the Illinois After-school Task Force Initiative in understanding the depth and breath of after-school programs in Illinois and to ensure that the recommendations of the Task Force reflect Illinois' unique diversity and need for these types of programs.

STUDY 1. Review of Social Indicator and Youth Survey Data

Three sources of data were used to provide estimates of the number of youth and families in need, levels of need across the state, and the geographic distribution of need across the state. Key variables from the three sources of data are summarized in the table below:

Data Source	Key Variables
Census data (1990 and 2000) (population estimates and family configuration)	Number of youth ages 5-17
Married couples both working in labor force with child <18	
Single parent working in labor force with child < 18	
Married couples with children (ages 5-17) below poverty level	
Single parents in poverty with children (ages 5-17)	Illinois State Board of Education
Student achievement and school characteristics (2000-2001)	Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)—Reading and mathematics achievement scores at grades 3, 5, 8
Free and reduced lunch status	
Study mobility	
School dropout rate	
Limited English proficiency	
Illinois Youth Survey (2001) (risk and protective factors)	Latchkey status > 10 hours per week
Lack of adult support	
Limited availability of youth activities	
Low perceptions of neighborhood safety	
Lack of encouragement from neighbors	
Lack of parental monitoring	
Low grades (self-report)	

STUDY 2. Development of an After-School Resource Inventory

The second study was the development of a resource inventory database of existing after-schools programs throughout Illinois. In Study 2, surveys were completed by after-school program providers, primarily through a web site developed and maintained by CPRD. Paper copies of the survey were completed by those without internet access or who experienced difficulty accessing the survey on-line. The surveying process occurred from March 2002 through July 2002, though the survey remains on-line and surveys continue to be completed. By July 12, when analysis of the survey data began, the database contained the following:

Information on 220 programs across the state
These 220 programs are being implemented at 1,307 program sites.
Site-level data are available for 420 program sites.

STUDY 3. Site Visits

Twenty after-school programs were selected for site visits. The site selection criteria are listed below:

- > **Geographic location**
- > **Community size: rural / urban / suburban**
- > **Primary sources of program funding**
- > **Type of administrative organization**
- > **Program setting**
- > **Age of the program**
- > **Program size**
- > **Major program focus**
- > **Program dosage / intensity**
- > **Level of program structure**
- > **Collaborative / advisory boards**
- > **Parent involvement**
- > **Cultural / racial diversity among youth participants**
- > **Programs serving different ages of youth**

The site visit selection process was intended to result in a sample of after-school programs that are not necessarily representative of all programs across the state. Rather, the intent was to visit after-school programs that represented all points along the continuum of various “best practices.”

Each site visit lasted 3-4 hours and included 1) interviews with program administrators and / or program staff, 2) a focus group of youth participants (if available), 3) a focus group of parents of youth participants (if available), and 4) program observations (if summer programming was being conducted).

Key areas addressed during visits included the following:

- > **Program Development**
- > **Quality of Programming**
- > **Family Involvement**
- > **Collaboration**
- > **Communication**
- > **Organizational Management/Structure**
- > **Sustainability**
- > **Summary (major findings/trends and recommendations)**

Site visitors were responsible for preparing written reports summarizing their findings across each of the key areas listed above. From these 20 site visit reports, major themes that emerged across the programs were extracted and summarized in the Study 3 report.

STUDY 3.
Site Visit Detail

Program Name	Community	DHS region
God Squad, Teen REACH	1	urban (Chicago) (Cook County)
Vietnamese Association of Illinois, Teen REACH	1	urban (Chicago) (Cook County)
After School Matters – George W. Collins High School	1	urban (Chicago) (Cook County)
Boys Club of Cicero	1	urban (Cicero) (Cook County)
Heritage YMCA Group, Child Development Center, Safe n’ Sound Program	2	suburban (Naperville) (mostly DuPage, part Will County)
Sinnissippi Centers, Inc. TAZ, Teen REACH	2	rural (Sterling) (Whiteside County)
GreenEye Designs Jewelry Club	2	suburban (Aurora) (mostly Kane, part DuPage, Will, & Kendall Counties)
Martin L. King Jr. Community Services, Inc. ACE after school program	2	rural (Freeport) (Stephenson County)
Waukegan Park District, Genesee Street Recreation Club	2	urban (Waukegan) (Lake County)
Champaign & Urbana Park Districts C-U Special Recreation	3	mid size / rural (Champaign) (Champaign County)
Peoria County ROE ARTS Opportunities	3	urban (Peoria) (Peoria County)
Tazewell County Health Department, Teen REACH First Choice	3	East Peoria or Pekin (Tazewell County)
University of Illinois – Mercer County – Lincoln Learning Trails Program	3	rural (Aledo, Viola, Sherrard) (Mercer County)
4 Counties for Kids, 21st Century Community Learning Centers - Jacksonville ROE #46	4	rural (Jacksonville) (Morgan County)
LAN After School Klub – Christian – Montgomery ROE	4	rural (Taylorville) (Christian County)
Boys & Girls Club of Springfield, 21st Century Community Learning Centers	4	midsized (Springfield)(Sangamon County)
Jackie Joyner-Kersey Boys & Girls Club, Teen REACH	5	urban (East St. Louis) (St. Clair County)
Scott Air Force Base Youth Center	5	rural (Scott AFB) (St. Clair County)
Delta Center, Inc. Teen REACH	5	rural (Cairo) (Alexander County)
ACE After School Program, Teen REACH	5	rural (Olney) (Richland County)

Appendix B : 21 ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS: OBJECTIVES, INDICATORS, AND MEASURES

Measuring outcomes and evaluating program effectiveness is essential to designing programs that work. The outcome measures from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the Illinois Department of Human Services' TeenREACH program can guide programs in their efforts to measure effectiveness.

Objective 1: Participants will demonstrate an increased involvement in school activities and in participating in other subject areas such as technology, arts, music, theater, and sports and other recreation activities.

Performance Indicator 1a
Students participating in the program will have a higher attendance rate and a change in their attitudes toward school.

Source for Measurement 1a
Attendance rates.

Performance Indicator 1b
Students participating in the program will graduate from school.

Sources for Measurement 1b
Dropout rates/graduation rate, parent survey, and student survey.

Objective 2: Participants in the programs will demonstrate increased academic achievement.

Performance Indicator 2a

- The state assessment test scores of the participants will show an increase in performance.
- Participants will show progress in reading and mathematics scores on the state assessment.

Source for Measurement 2a
The individual student's scores on state assessment and other tests.

Performance Indicator 2b
Participants will show improvement in academic achievement.

Source for Measurement 2b
The retention rate and/or the promotion of the participants.

Objective 3: Participants in the program will demonstrate social benefits and exhibit positive behavioral changes.

Performance Indicator 3
Students participating in the program will show improvements in measures such as increase in attendance, decrease in disciplinary actions, less violence, and a decrease in other adverse behaviors.

Sources for Measurement 3
The number of instances of student violence and suspensions; the number of students using drugs and alcohol; and teacher/parent and student surveys.

Objective 4: The 21 st Century Community Learning Centers will work toward services that benefit the entire community by including families of participants and collaborating with other agencies and non-profit organizations.

Performance Indicator 4a
The centers (grantees) will offer enrichment and other support services for families of participants.

Source for Measurement 4a
The activities offered.

Performance Indicator 4b
The families will get more involved in their children's education and become more responsible citizens benefiting the whole community.

Sources for Measurement 4b
The type and extent of collaborations and parent/adult satisfaction survey.

Objective 5: These programs will serve children and community members with the greatest needs for expanded learning opportunities.

Performance Indicator 5
Majority of grants will be awarded in high-poverty communities.

Sources for Measurement 5
Free and reduced-price lunch eligibility of participants and participants' test scores, grades, and promotion rates.

Objective 6: 21 st Century Community Learning Center Program personnel will participate in professional development and training that will enable them to implement an effective program. Professional development activities must be aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act definitions and National Staff Development Council's professional development standards.

Performance Indicator 6
All centers' staff will participate in a variety of training/workshops provided to improve and maintain the quality of the program(s).

Sources for Measurement 6
The number of workshops and topics addressed by each, attendance at workshops, and evaluation of workshops' effectiveness.

Objective 7: 21 st Century Community Learning Center Program projects will use the funding most efficiently by coordinating and collaborating with other Federal and state funding sources, agencies and other community projects to supplement the program and not supplant the funds, and to eventually become self-sustaining.

Performance Indicator 7
All grantees will provide the detailed plan of coordination and collaboration efforts.

Source for Measurement 7
List of coordinating/collaborating agencies and the type of services, with letters of agreement from collaborating agencies.

TEENREACH OUTCOME MEASURES

Measuring outcomes and evaluating program effectiveness is essential to designing programs that work. The outcome measures from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the Illinois Department of Human Services' TeenREACH program can guide programs in their efforts to measure effectiveness.

GOAL: Improve academic performance.

Intermediate Outcomes

Participant will maintain or improve school attendance.

Participant will maintain or improve grades or progress rating in school.

Participant will achieve academic promotions.

Participants will decrease premature or unscheduled exit from high school or continuing education programs prior to graduation.

Improve participants' career aspirations and choices

GOAL: Adopt positive decision-making skills that discourage harmful risk-taking behavior.

Intermediate Outcomes

Participants will increase knowledge on harmful effects of substance use and abuse.

Participants will increase knowledge of physical growth and development.

Participants will increase knowledge of harmful effects of early sexual activity and pregnancy.

Participants will increase anger management and conflict resolution skills.

Participants will increase decision making and problem solving skills.

Provide formal, structured opportunities for older teens to develop peer leadership skills

GOAL: Provide opportunities for parents and guardians to strengthen communication and community involvement.

Intermediate Outcomes

Increase positive monitoring of academic performance

Increase understanding of child and adolescent developmental stages and appropriate expectations

Increase positive and effective communication with children and teens regarding ATOD, sexual activity, abstinence, life skills

Increase positive opportunities for parent to: a) meet other parents; b) identify common interests and concerns

Increase positive opportunities for families as a unit to participate in program and community activities and celebrations

GOAL: Provide opportunities for improving social interaction and building skills through mentoring relationships and peer influence.

Intermediate Outcomes

Develop and sustain a sufficient pool of adult mentors

Provide opportunities for mentoring relationships to develop

Maintain a high quality of adult mentoring skills

GOAL: Provide opportunities for learning, building, and demonstrating positive social skills through sports and recreation.

Intermediate Outcomes

Provide opportunities for participants to engage in cultural enrichment/diversity activities

Provide opportunities to develop leisure time hobbies and interests

Provide opportunities for participants to demonstrate sportsmanship and athletic skills

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