

A Guide for Those Who Care About Creating and Supporting **Quality in Schools**

# Leading After-School Learning Communities

What  
Principals  
Should Know  
and Be Able  
To Do



National Association of Elementary School Principals



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The mission of NAESP is to lead in the advocacy and support for elementary and middle-level principals and other education leaders in their commitment to all children.

The 30,000 members of the National Association of Elementary School Principals provide administrative and instructional leadership for public and private elementary and middle schools throughout the United States, Canada and overseas. Founded in 1921, NAESP is an independent professional association with its own headquarters building in Alexandria, VA. Through national and regional meetings, award-winning publications and joint efforts with its 50 state affiliates, NAESP is a strong advocate for both its members and for the 35 million American children enrolled in preschool, kindergarten and grades 1 through 8.

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Collaborative Communications Group is a strategic consulting firm that builds the capacity of individuals, organizations and networks to work collaboratively to create solutions that are better than any single entity could produce on its own. Through strategic consulting, dialogue and convening, creation of publications and tools, and community conversations, Collaborative helps organizations and networks to identify, share and apply what they know in ways that increase productivity and effectiveness. The ultimate objective of Collaborative's work is the improvement of the quality of public education and community life.



# Foreword

By Dr. Vincent Ferrandino

After-school can no longer be an afterthought. Creating a seamless day—in which the school day influences the after-school program, and what is learned from after-school practices enhances the school day—is an exciting possibility to support children’s learning.

By collaborating with after-school programs and accepting them as vital partners in education, principals can advance their own missions and move closer to their ultimate goal of helping every child to learn and succeed. Leading after-school learning communities represents nothing less than the opportunity to re-imagine the learning day.

Focusing on the time children spend after school isn’t new. Indeed, NAESP has a long history of involvement with after-school programs, beginning nearly 20 years ago with a survey of members who expressed concern for children’s safety in the after-school hours. In 1993, NAESP also created standards for quality school-age childcare and revised them in 1999. After-school programs have come a long way since then. Well beyond simply providing a safe place for children after the school bell rings, after-school programs offer vast opportunities to provide time for academic enrichment and support and recreational activities that children enjoy and learn from. After-school programs offer new strategies and opportunities to help children grow and succeed—in school and in life.

The public and the education community agree strongly on the need for some type of organized activity or place for children to go after school every day. Nearly three in four parents say that after-school programs are an “absolute necessity” in their communities. More than three-fourths of elementary school principals whose schools offer after-school programs said it was “extremely important” to maintain these programs. Perhaps more than at any time in the past, Americans recognize that after-school programs help children learn, keep them safe and help working families.

Ensuring that all students achieve high standards will require the support of a comprehensive learning community that includes after-school programs. We hope this guide will help principals form effective partnerships that will benefit all of their students.

*Dr. Vincent Ferrandino is the executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals.*



# The Challenge:

## Leveraging Learning and Community Resources

Children's minds don't stop when school ends, and neither should their learning. Yet, in too many schools the bell at the end of the school day marks the time when learning does effectively stop, and children's minds, not to mention school facilities and resources, sit idle. Instead of enjoying a variety of engaging, fun and enriching learning opportunities, students face boredom or, worse, inappropriate behaviors that can harm them or others.

After-school hours are a means of helping students, teachers and schools meet more rigorous academic demands. In after-school programs, children often engage in innovative, hands-on and experiential learning activities that are vital to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

To advocates and practitioners, the benefits of after-school programs are already evident. Recent studies demonstrate the value of after-school—for students' achievement, social interaction and safety. But despite this evidence, the supply of after-school programs falls far short of the need. One recent NAESP survey found that twice as many elementary and middle school parents wanted after-school programs as were currently available. As many as 15 million children have nowhere to go after school, more than twice as many children as are in supervised programs.

One reason for the shortage of programs is the attitude of too many traditional educators. Principals, struggling to manage the myriad demands of their own schools, are reluctant to add another responsibility to their plate.

But by collaborating with after-school programs and accepting them as vital partners in education, principals can strengthen their schools and move closer to the overriding, common goal of maximizing learning for every child.



# Principles

## of Quality After-School Programs

Advocating for programs is easier if they meet certain standards of quality. The following is a summary of the principles of quality programs NAESP believes are necessary and aligned to the standards in this guide. The list is not meant to replace or replicate criteria developed by other organizations, nor is it intended to be exhaustive. It is meant as a jumping-off point for principals in their schools and communities to begin to define quality in after-school programs and as a tool to engage in conversation about the quality that exists in after-school programs where they live.

### **Strong Vision, Management and Collaboration**

Schools and after-school programs have a shared vision of after-school as an asset to the school. Programs follow effective management procedures. The administration focuses on the needs and desires of students, families and staff members and develops strong relationships with schools and community partners in order to sustain the program over the long term.

### **Sufficient and Quality Staff**

Programs are staffed sufficiently to address and promote children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Staff members are skilled, qualified and committed and have appropriate experience working with school-age children. Programs provide attractive compensation and work scheduling packages to retain quality staff.

### **Attention to Safety, Health and Nutrition Issues**

Programs are safe and accessible to all who want to participate. They have adequate space for a variety of indoor and outdoor activities and age-appropriate materials to enhance learning. They provide a nutritious snack and other meals when appropriate, and substantial amounts of health-enhancing physical activity.

### **Effective Family and Community Partnerships**

Programs are designed with sensitivity to the schedules and requirements of working parents. They are affordable and provide transportation when necessary. Programs communicate regularly with parents and provide parents with opportunities to be involved in activities with their children. They also use community resources effectively.

### **Enriching Learning Opportunities That Complement the School Day**

Programs integrate their academic activities with those of the regular school through a continuum of learning for students. Programs offer academic enrichment opportunities and provide support for academic learning by providing tutoring and assisting students with basic skills and homework. Programs also offer enrichment activities that allow students to explore new ideas in new ways, such as through art, music and drama.

### **Links Between School-Day and After-School Staff**

Programs enable school and after-school staff to work together to establish and maintain relationships of mutual respect and understanding in an effort to maximize children's opportunities. Programs coordinate the use of facilities and resources to maximize learning opportunities and to prevent potential problems and misunderstandings.

### **Evaluation of Program Progress and Effectiveness**

Programs are evaluated regularly in ways that incorporate multiple measures of success. Staff members continuously monitor program goals. Partners gather feedback regularly and systematically and use the data in decision-making around design and in making the case for funding to additional community stakeholders.



# A Call to Action

Here are ten ways that federal, state and local leaders can support the extension of learning beyond the school day:

- 1. Integrate after-school into the overall policy on education, youth and family.** In any policy decision on education, youth or family, the entirety of children's time, learning and lives should be addressed.
- 2. Steer state principal associations toward becoming part of state-wide efforts to further after-school.** The voice of principals, sharing authentic stories and needs, can help to raise awareness among governors, mayors and other decision makers about the impact—and potential—of after-school.
- 3. Advocate at all levels for adequate funding for after-school.** These funds should supplement, not supplant, funds originally awarded for other education programs. Schools need ongoing, reliable funding to increase the number of after-school programs and to ensure that all children have access to high-quality programs. Funds for after-school programs should be awarded in time for program operators to plan for the most efficient use of these resources.
- 4. Continue to increase funding of 21st Century Community Learning Centers.** Unfortunately, the amounts appropriated for 21st Century Community Learning Centers each year remain far short of the annual levels authorized by No Child Left Behind. NAESP urges Congress to substantially increase 21st CCLC appropriations.
- 5. Ensure the quality of after-school staff.** All personnel associated with after-school should exhibit a solid understanding of the development of children and adolescents. Background checks should be conducted to ensure that all personnel are without criminal records.
- 6. Provide principals with high-quality, ongoing professional development on after-school issues.** Federal, state and local education agencies should promote efforts to build the capacity of principals to ensure an understanding of the important linkages between school and after-school programs.
- 7. Use supplemental services as an opportunity to provide a continuum of supports for students.** Tutorial services and academic enrichment activities within No Child Left Behind are designed to help students meet local and state academic standards in subjects such as reading and math. For many students, after-school programs are the places where they receive homework help or enrichment opportunities.
- 8. Conduct more research on after-school.** After-school is an emerging field, and research on what constitutes quality in after-school programs is still somewhat limited. After-school programs should be evaluated, and the results of the evaluations should be used to improve programs where needed as well as to make the case for increased funding and other types of support for after-school.
- 9. Link after-school programs to other social service programs in the community.** After-school settings give providers access to parents whose work schedules may not permit them to visit school during the regular day. Integrating social services after school may give parents a better opportunity to access them when they pick up their children or participate in activities designed for families.
- 10. Recognize wellness and nutrition as important components in children's overall ability to learn.** After-school programs must provide healthy snacks and, in some cases, dinner, particularly for low-income children. After-school can also play an important role in addressing issues such as obesity prevention by providing sports and recreational activities that supplement school-day physical education programs.

# Vision

**Expand the vision of learning to include high-quality experiences during out-of-school time.**

Learning does not begin when the school doors open or end when the last bell rings. It is a complex process that evolves in different ways and in countless settings. Students spend only about 12 percent of their time in school. What happens during the hours when young people are not in a classroom has a profound effect on their academic, social and emotional development.

After-school experiences can be particularly effective in helping those students who may benefit from learning opportunities that may be in short supply in schools. The social skills and self-confidence children gain from interacting with peers and adult role models are essential aspects of youth development. In addition, after-school initiatives present opportunities for enrichment activities and cultural programs.

Surveys show the vast majority of parents and youth want structured activities outside of school. African-American and Latino parents, whose children spend more time unsupervised than other youth, report an even higher demand for quality after-school programs. There is ample room for growth in this emerging field, which presents a window of opportunity for principals. Only 11 percent of youth in K-12 schools take part in after-school programs. Some 15 million children have nowhere to go after school.

## **Principals who expand the vision of learning to include high-quality experiences in after-school:**

- Demonstrate the belief that the school's mission, vision and plan encompass learning that occurs during and beyond the traditional school day
- Articulate to all stakeholders the value of learning opportunities that occur after school, whether they are school-based, school-linked or community-based
- Consider after-school opportunities as added learning time and a complement to, not an extension of, the school day
- Extend the school's culture of adult learning to after-school staff members

## **FOCUSED VISION:**

### **Finding After-School Programs That Share Your School's Mission**

Tom Archuleta, Principal

Valdez Elementary School, Denver, Colorado

When Tom Archuleta arrived as principal at Valdez Elementary School, he encountered a wide variety of after-school programs, run by community agencies, for-profit groups and parent volunteers.

He discovered quickly that many of the programs were poorly run and that there was little quality control. Providers, for example, would fail to show up and students would be left in the school building without supervision.

Archuleta worked to change the way after-school worked at Valdez. He streamlined the school's after-school offerings, finding programs that complemented the school curriculum.

Today, Valdez's after-school programs serve approximately 200 students. Archuleta now requires a firm commitment from each after-school partner. Providers are expected to assign a coordinator for their program, find substitutes when staff members are absent and be responsible for children in their care.

"Now our after-school programs really enhance what we do during the school day," notes Archuleta. "They share our vision."

# Community Catalyst

Act as a catalyst in the community to develop high-quality after-school programs.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum. Their vitality and success are linked to the communities of which they are a part. Principals recognize this symbiotic relationship and reach out to establish networks with other community leaders who have an interest in the positive development of young people.

Students, too, understand the need to connect with the community outside of school. They yearn to make connections with supportive adults, deepen community bonds and feel they are part of a thriving civic culture.

After-school can become a center of community life, a renewed public square where children and adults gather to learn, play and grow together. At their best, after-school programs become sources of civic pride that have the potential to strengthen community engagement and create safer and stronger neighborhoods. They become a point of connection for schools, families and communities.

Principals have the credibility to initiate conversations about the value of after-school programs with community-based organizations, colleges and universities, business groups and social service providers. Together, principals and their partners can explore opportunities, discuss challenges and develop strategies for more effectively supporting students when they are not in school.

## Principals who act as a catalyst in the community to develop high-quality after-school programs:

- Collaborate with stakeholders to create learning opportunities for students beyond the traditional school day
- Facilitate the development of an after-school plan that identifies and addresses the needs of students and the community
- Connect students with a diverse group of role models who will help ensure their success
- Encourage families to support and participate in after-school learning

## FOCUSED VISION:

### Community Efforts in After-School

Juli Kwikkel, Principal

East and West Elementary Schools, Storm Lake, Iowa

The faces in Storm Lake schools have changed over the past 10 years. A wave of immigrants, most of whom have come to the area to work at local meat processing plants, has led to an increase of students who are English language learners in schools.

Juli Kwikkel, principal of two of the town's elementary schools, knows student, parent and community needs are different from what they used to be. And she believes after-school programs are essential to meeting those evolving needs.

According to Kwikkel, city-wide partnerships and a community-wide focus on education have created high-quality after-school programs that help students learn, encourage parents to become more involved in schools and allow the community to embrace new residents and connect them to resources they need to thrive.

Local businesses and organizations partner with the after-school program to offer students real-world learning opportunities that teach lessons of civic responsibility and social consciousness. Education students at local colleges and universities staff after-school programs, giving them valuable experience in the field and an opportunity to be involved in the community.

"These programs benefit the entire community," says Kwikkel. "Kids are getting their homework done, students and parents are learning the language while they learn about the school and community and the community is fully engaged in education."



# Infrastructure

**Collaborate with program directors to manage resources that support the full learning day.**

Seamless coordination between school and after-school programs enables resources to be managed efficiently and programs to operate smoothly.

Principals are not expected to be the primary managers of after-school programs. Instead, effective principals delegate responsibilities and work in tandem with after-school directors. Principals help build support for after-school funding, coordinate schedules and use of facilities, ensure a safe environment for students, and help shape the content of after-school activities.

Creating this collaborative approach is challenging. School and after-school environments often have their own norms and institutional cultures. Principals must be clear about roles, expectations and accountability when partnering with community-based organizations, foundations and other social service agencies that often manage after-school programs at school or at off-site locations.

## Principals who collaborate with program directors to manage resources that support the full learning day:

- Hold programs accountable to expectations jointly developed with the program director
- Ensure that after-school programs are well managed and employ sound fiscal practices
- Create formal and informal communication strategies between the principal and the program director and the school and after-school staff members
- Develop a positive culture between school and after-school staff members and mediate concerns when they arise
- Provide appropriate resources when the program is implemented (including facilities, security, custodial services, storage, cafeterias, secretarial support, technology, supplies and telephones)

## FOCUSED VISION:

### Enlisting Help to Achieve Success

Janette Hewitt, Principal

George Washington Elementary School, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Janette Hewitt knew she couldn't implement an after-school program that met the needs of children, families and the community at George Washington Elementary School on her own.

An important key to the program's success has been the collaboration between Hewitt and the program coordinator, Annette Rosa-Pabon. Hewitt and Rosa-Pabon operate on a shared calendar and meet at least once a week to discuss program successes and challenges. The pair draws from their respective experiences in education and social services to overcome barriers and implement a program that extends the school's vision and expectations.

Hewitt and Rosa-Pabon have started to see results from their work. In 2003-04, the school for the first time made adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act in math, reading and attendance. Their inclusive leadership style has encouraged others to get involved with the program. Nearly all of the tutors in the extended day program are teachers from the school, and parents have started coming in during and after school, looking for ways to help.

While Hewitt stresses that starting an after-school program is hard work and requires attention, she notes that it can be done when there is someone on board who is ready and able to help. "It's worth it," she says. "It's changed the way I lead in this community and this school."

# Quality Content

**Support linkages, connections and relationships between the school day and after-school learning that ensure program content meets community, school and student needs.**

By creating a seamless learning day, principals and after-school leaders create a more coherent experience for young people. They help students make deeper connections with adults both inside and out of school and offer young people added resources that can support them academically and socially.

The pressure of academic standards and assessments is a reality in schools today. While after-school programs are not directly accountable for student achievement, they do have the potential to support and enrich standards-based learning. The unique culture of after-school programs allows for creative teaching strategies, multi-age learning groups and extended blocks of learning time. Arts projects and practical science activities enhance classroom-based learning.

Students, teachers, parents and other community members all have a role in shaping the content of quality after-school programs. Active engagement encourages an attitude of personal ownership and investment and helps ensure the activities have relevance in the eyes of the community.

## **Principals who support linkages, connections and relationships between the school day and after-school learning that ensure program content meets community, school and students needs:**

- Ensure that the school's learning and core academic standards are connected to activities in after-school programs
- Offer learning opportunities in after-school that are different from, but connected to, those in the school day
- Provide a continuum of services and supports for students (including homework assistance, enrichment, tutoring, extra-curricular clubs, service and civic development opportunities, mentoring, arts, technology, foreign language and healthy snacks)
- Connect professional development opportunities for after-school and school day staff members to ensure consistency in standards of teaching and learning and to encourage relationship-building among staff members

### FOCUSED VISION :

#### **Building Confidence for School and Life**

Carol Miller, Principal

John B. McFerran Elementary School, Louisville, Kentucky

Principal Carol Miller knows most of the parents of her students worry about their children having safe and enriching environments. She has worked hard to build a range of quality programs that provide students and families with academic and social support during the school year and into the summer months.

Today, more than 300 students a year participate in one of the school's after-school activities. These include a science club, a computer club, soccer and basketball teams, cheerleading, girls' and boys' clubs and academic tutoring. The school's family resource coordinator also serves as the after-school coordinator.

"The coordinator is here during the day so he understands what the kids are studying," says Miller. "We try to make as many connections between school and after-school as we can."

For example, the after-school coordinator brought students and parents on a tour of an art museum to expose them to cultural and artistic work that complements and enhances their understanding of what the students are learning in class. There are also popular "night hikes" in the forest where students have the opportunity to understand scientific and environmental issues in a more practical way.

"For us, after-school is about social skills, learning how to get along and live in this world and solve problems," says Miller.

# Evaluation

Work with program directors to evaluate after-school programs to ensure they achieve defined outcomes.

In an era of accountability, schools and students are expected more than ever before to demonstrate academic progress against rigorous standards. After-school programs are not exempt from the accountability pressures. They must prove they can make a positive impact in this results-based environment if they hope to win the confidence of education and political leaders grappling with competing demands and shrinking resources.

After-school programs that can clearly prove effectiveness across a range of different measures stand out by showcasing the effect they have on students, families, schools and neighborhoods.

Data collected to evaluate programs can serve other purposes as well. Evaluations of quality programs provide information on best practices that can guide new programs and provide new ideas to reenergize existing programs. Evaluations also keep after-school programs focused and strategic in how they respond to the needs of students, parents and community members.

## Principals who evaluate after-school programs to ensure they achieve defined outcomes:

- Define short- and long-term outcomes for after-school programs collaboratively with the program director
- Use data to ensure that children most in need have access to after-school
- Work with the program director to identify, generate and collect data to assess after-school programs
- Encourage the use of data and best practices to improve programs by fostering communication about results to teachers, program directors, after-school staff members and other stakeholders
- Use data and evaluation results to document program impact and make the case for quality after-school programs with school, community and political leaders

## FOCUSED VISION:

### Putting Evaluation Results to Work

Patrick Bryan, Principal

Jackson Preparatory Magnet School, St. Paul, Minnesota

When Patrick Bryan arrived at Jackson in 2000, he learned that his after-school program, funded by 21st Century Community Learning Centers, was in trouble. The after-school coordinator at the time had overspent her budget and alienated many of the school's community partners.

Bryan worked with Lee Litman, St. Paul's 21st CCLC coordinator, to hire a new after-school coordinator and immediately set about repairing relationships with community groups.

"I wanted to involve as many community groups as possible, to draw on the resources of the Frogtown neighborhood," notes Bryan. "My goal was to build a program that would complement the acceleration and enrichment focus of the school. I also knew that it was important to demonstrate that the after-school program was really helping the kids and families who needed it most."

Data provided the way. A multi-site evaluation found that Jackson's after-school participants received higher scores than their non-participating counterparts on standardized tests. Bryan and the current after-school coordinator, Emily Weiss, have used the data to make changes to the multi-faceted program.

Bryan has also used evaluation results to build support for the program and the school with parents and the broader community. When faced with impending budget cuts recently, Bryan sent out a survey to parents. After-school was by far the most frequently mentioned service parents wanted to see remain in the building.

# Champion After-School

Promote access to high-quality after-school programs for all children.

If young people are going to participate in enriching after-school programs, they need enthusiastic ambassadors and savvy advocates for extended learning opportunities.

Currently, the voices of principals are often not heard when policymakers, researchers and youth advocates gather at the local, state and federal levels to discuss after-school initiatives. By filling largely untapped roles as champions of after-school, principals can help ensure that these programs are linked to the school's vision, are adequately funded and serve the needs of all students.

Principals who are at the table speaking out about the value of after-school opportunities convey a powerful message to school boards, city councils, foundations, community groups and the media that after-school is not a luxury, but an integral component of educating and supporting children and families.

## Principals who promote access to high-quality after-school programs for all children:

- Use the credibility of the principal to advocate for after-school programs for students
- Understand after-school funding streams and policy issues
- Keep the public and policymakers focused on the need for a continuum of services that supports students' learning beyond the school day
- Promote and facilitate partnerships among schools, providers and communities that secure adequate, sustainable funding for after-school programs

## FOCUSED VISION:

### Filling the Gaps With After-School Support

Pat Echanis, Principal

Parkdale Elementary School, Parkdale, Oregon

The natural beauty of the Columbia River setting belies the stark challenges that many Latino immigrants flocking to Parkdale for employment face as migrant workers. Parkdale students often live in small cabins with other migrant families and leave school for extended periods of time during harvest seasons in Mexico and California.

Pat Echanis, the principal at this K-5 grade school, has recognized the potential of after-school programs to support the needs of his students. Over his eight years as principal, he has become a visible champion for extended-day experiences.

"The after-school program has made one of the biggest differences for our kids," says Echanis. "When students miss class time, we have to play catch-up with academics. That is why after-school time is so critical."

The principal admits to having a hands-on approach to after-school programs and frequently stops by to observe and talk with students and staff. He also offers a free trip to the movies every nine weeks for students who have perfect attendance. "It's a way of telling the kids, I honor the time and effort you put in to make yourself better," he says.



# Ordering Information

The 120-page *Leading After-School Learning Communities* is a guidebook for those who care about re-imagining the learning day to provide additional opportunities for students and helping them succeed.

- **Principals' Voices.** No one speaks with more authority about school leadership than principals themselves. Principals are honest, compelling spokespeople about the challenges and opportunities in their profession. Principal and expert comments throughout the guide come from a learning community organized for the creation of the book.
- **Focus on Practice.** The guide shows that theories and concepts really work. Each chapter includes stories of real people in real schools that exemplify the ideas outlined in the guide. There are vignettes reflecting a wide geographic and demographic spectrum.
- **Questions for Further Reflection.** Each standards section contains a list of practical guiding questions principals can ask themselves or a small group, at faculty meetings or with grade- or subject-level teams. Planning tools are included at the end of each section to help principals think about program strengths and areas that need additional attention.
- **Tools and Resources.** There are a variety of tools to help principals improve and deepen their practice. Tools include Web pages and useful tips. Each standards section concludes with a brief bibliography of key research and resources from NAESP. The book ends with a comprehensive bibliography.

To order a full copy of *Leading After-School Learning Communities*, call 800-386-2377 or visit [www.naesp.org](http://www.naesp.org). This executive summary is available for download at [www.naesp.org](http://www.naesp.org).

# After-School

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*Leading After-School Learning Communities* identifies six standards that NAESP believes principals should know and be able to do as leaders of after-school learning communities. They are:

- Expand the Vision of Learning
- Act as a Catalyst
- Collaborate to Manage Resources
- Ensure Quality Content
- Evaluate After-School Programs
- Champion After-School



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