

Working across cities to create high-quality out-of-school-time programs

Leveraging the role of after-school intermediaries by LUCY FRIEDMAN



AUTHOR: Lucy Friedman is President of The After-School Corporation in New York City.
CONTACT: LFriedman@tascorp.org

With the No Child Left Behind act, federal policymakers recognized that out-of-school-time learning opportunities could improve the odds of student success. And a growing body of research shows that a child's participation in a high-quality out-of-school-time program correlates with higher attendance, better grades and a decreased risk of dropping out of school. Yet in many cities, the field is still in a formative stage, with most programs operating on a small scale with unpredictable funding and without much coordination or common standards.

Not-for-profit intermediary organizations are one key strategy for building quality programs in more cities; where they exist already, these organizations are demonstrably increasing young peoples' chances for success by building coordinated, large-scale systems of after-school programs that are well-managed and accountable. They do so by expanding students' learning time beyond the school day and serving under-resourced neighborhoods.

To strengthen after-school intermediaries, a new effort—the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems—is helping this promising approach to expanding after-school, and reinforcing school reform efforts, take root and thrive across the country.

Historically, intermediaries have played an important role in increasing the availability of essential services within municipalities. For example, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation—organized by the Ford Foundation in 1979—has helped community groups across the country make economic and infrastructure improvements by providing funds and technical assistance. And in 1,350 towns and cities, The United Way works successfully with organizations and individuals to solve problems government alone cannot address.

Like their counterparts in other fields, after-school intermediaries convene stakeholders around a common goal: in this case, high-quality after-school programming for all kids who want and need it. They are well-suited to building citywide systems because, with their singular and sustained focus over time, they become trusted experts and advisors. As neutral parties they can broker relationships among schools, after-school providers, public and private funders, and policymakers, forming partnerships that promote effective practice. And they have the flexibility to implement these promising practices at the system level. This distinguishes them from government agencies, which may not have those options or incentives.

In 2006, leaders from six after-school intermediaries—After School Matters (Chicago), After School Strategy (Baltimore), Boston After School & Beyond, The D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, The Providence After School Alliance, and The After-School Corporation—met to take stock

of their work; their discussion led to the creation of the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems.

Individually, these intermediaries have increased the availability of quality after-school in their cities. For example, Baltimore's After School Strategy was formed at the request of city residents, whose children lacked sufficient after-school services; it now reaches 22,000 young people. In Washington, D.C., the Trust provides out-of-school-time learning for 20,000 young people in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Each intermediary, however, faces challenges in growing these systems to scale, including:

- *The pressure for programs to measure their effectiveness solely by students' grades and test scores. We believe the field needs to develop common metrics to evaluate the social and developmental, as well as academic, benefits of programming.*
- *Aligning school and out-of-school learning.*
- *Building a stable and sufficient after-school workforce.*
- *Determining how best to contribute to proposals to extend the school day.*

To help intermediaries share their experiences and perspectives to meet these challenges in their own and other cities, The Atlantic Philanthropies has provided a founding three-year grant to the Collaborative, which now is a year into its work to build sustainable after-school systems through public policy change. Its members are developing policy recommendations and leveraging additional funds to support their implementation. For example, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is helping by convening national experts and local stakeholders to discuss the role of after-school in high school reform.

Equally important, the Collaborative is expanding its reach to support system-building in cities with newer or no after-school intermediaries. Beginning in 2008, partners will share their experiences with other jurisdictions and offer targeted technical assistance around policy challenges. We also expect to add two or three more partners with new regional perspectives.

We believe that the ultimate outcome of this systems-building and policy work by intermediaries will be greater numbers of students prepared to succeed in a global economy. To get there, more cities need after-school systems. ■