

San Diego Regional After-School Consortium

San Diego County Office of Education

By Francesca Wright

CCS Partnership selected the San Diego Regional After-School Consortium to receive one of its three 2005 Partnership Awards. This Consortium brings together 25 school districts, local governments and many community-based organizations to provide before and after school services to over 41,000 students annually at 293 school sites. Their collaborative approach has secured new funding and developed a service scope unimaginable only a decade ago.

Background

San Diego County has developed a system of before and after school care unprecedented in scope and scale. But it was not always so easy to enroll an elementary or middle school child in a supervised program in San Diego.

In 1995 San Diego County had nearly 150,000 students in kindergarten through eighth grade who were unsupervised after school. The San Diego County Suicide and Homicide Audit Committee (SHAC) found that young people engage in high risk activities at higher rates during the "critical hours" of 2:00 pm - 6:00 pm when no adults are present in their lives. These data galvanized the start of a movement to provide safe after school activities for San Diego's young people.

City and County Lead the Way

In 1996, the County of San Diego approved the development and funding of the "Critical Hours" program, providing after school programming to middle school youth to address youth violence and social issues. This was the first time that County public health dollars were earmarked to provide after school programs.

In 1998-99 the City of San Diego established the "6 to 6" Extended Day Program for elementary school students as part of Mayor Susan Golding's Safe School Initiative. The City invested general fund as a strategy to prevent youth crime, gangs and drug abuse.

Bigger Vision, Farther Reach

But Sandra McBrayer, the CEO of The Children's Initiative recognized that the need for quality after school activities was larger than local government could address. She and other after school leaders worked with Sacramento lawmakers to create the legislation which is now the After School Education and Safety Program (ASES). The goals of the legislation are an increase in school attendance, stronger academic performance, improved behavior, and enhanced neighborhood safety.

In 1998 Ms. McBrayer went to County Superintendent of Education Rudy Castruita, the County School Board Association, Ninth District PTA and ACSA Region 18 Superintendents Council and together they convened the founders of the San Diego Regional After-School Consortium. Fifteen superintendents, numerous local community leaders, government officials, and law enforcement providers forged a collective vision for after school programming. They realized that if San Diego was going to provide comprehensive after school programming for all students and to competitively vie for state dollars, they would have a stronger proposal by banding together.

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In 1999, the San Diego After-School Regional Consortium was awarded the largest grant in the state - \$5.6 million annually - and opened more than 100 programs. In 2000, State expansion funds totaling \$9.4 million allowed the Consortium to open 100 additional program sites. Currently, the Consortium works with 25 school districts, operating nearly 300 programs with an annual budget of \$40 million.

Nowhere else in the country has an educational partnership brought together so many key stakeholders in the community to be a part of delivering a comprehensive after school program. By acting as one entity, rather than 25 competing school districts the Consortium has achieved an economy of scale, created a consistent delivery system, and galvanized political will.

Partners and Roles

SDCOE is the grantee of record for the Consortium. They provide fiscal and evaluation support ensuring accountability to the funding sources.

The Children's Initiative provides program training, support and coordination. They monitor quality of on-site services and provide staff development opportunities of after school workers in partnership with SDCOE's Regional Technical Assistance Center. The Initiative also leads the efforts in developing supportive after school policies, procedures and legislation.

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The individual school districts help identify community partners to provide services, provide facility space, and design and monitor the academic component. They collect the qualitative outcome measures.

Community based organizations, like the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs are sub-contracted to staff the programs and offer enrichment activities that expand upon the school-day curriculum. They recruit, hire, orient and supervise staff, track program attendance, maintain fiscal records, collaborate with school administration for program design and maintain a safe and healthy environment. Program activities include homework assistance, tutoring, project-based learning, visual and performing arts, technology and science, sports, group games, prevention education and community service opportunities.

Eligibility

All students attending any of the 293 schools that offer before and after school services are eligible to participate. However, since there are often more students who need services than can be accommodated, eligibility systems have been developed to ensure that the students with the greatest need according to income level, academic achievement, and latchkey status receive priority ranking. Special attention has been placed on guaranteeing equal access for students with special needs.

Accomplishments

- ✓ **Over 41,000 students** participate daily.
- ✓ **Improved academic achievement.** The percentage of participating students scoring below proficiency in California Standards Tests (2001-2004) has been reduced. Among those participating in the program at least 30 days, that percentage has dropped from 74% to 64% in mathematics and from 77% to 72% on the English/language arts test.
- ✓ **Increased students' positive affiliation with school.** At least 83% of the students regularly participating have either increased or maintained their attendance rate of at least 95%. Eighty three percent of participating school principals reported an increase in positive school climate as a result of providing an after school program
- ✓ **Provided a safety net for unsupervised students.** Seventy-one percent of parents reported that their children's exposure to risky/unsafe behaviors had decreased.
- ✓ **Sustained funding.** The city (\$500,000 in FY '05-'06) and county (\$1.9 million in FY '05-'06) continue to invest. The Consortium has garnered \$26 of the \$120 million granted from the state Department of Education (FY '05-'06)

Lessons

Use data to build partnerships. The SHAC data helped advocates argue that after-school hours are a shared responsibility, involving health as well as educational and law-enforcement issues.

Consider your messenger. "It puts a different face on the issue when you can say to the community, 'This is part of our crime control strategy,'" says former San Diego Police Chief Jerry Sanders, now Mayor of San Diego. Because health and law enforcement leaders were involved in gathering the data, their buy-in was assured.

Expect Growing Pains. Changing from a single source to a collaborative approach can be a difficult transition for program administrators. Suddenly they are accountable to a committee with people who don't even work in their agency. It takes top level vision and commitment to overcome resistance along the way.

Cultivate champions. The leadership of Mayor Golding and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors was instrumental for allocating initial funding and attracting additional resources. County Superintendent of Schools Rudy Castruita was able to bring districts into

the Consortium. Sandra McBrayer continues to advocate for multi-source investments in out-of-school hours.

Use your village. See and cultivate partners with schools, non-profits and local businesses

Dare to dream big...with partners.

Contacts

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