

Anaheim, California

Anaheim Achieves:

An After School Collaboration that Works

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Participants:

- City of Anaheim
- Anaheim City School District
- Magnolia School District
- Anaheim Union High School District
- Anaheim Family YMCA
- Anaheim Chamber of Commerce
- Children’s Hospital of Orange County (CHOC)
- Over 30 organizations reflecting many major community stakeholders, including public and private agencies, businesses, the city’s police and fire departments, universities and colleges, private health care providers, service clubs, and other community based organizations.

The Challenge

Once upon a time, a Magic Kingdom was built in Anaheim, California, and ever since, children and families have come to frolic in this land of fantasies and dreams come true. Despite its well-known reference as the “Happiest Place on Earth”, a rapid shift in demographics and rise in low-income service workers over the past several years has created many urban challenges. A lack of affordable housing requires families (many who work the seasonal, minimum-wage jobs of the tourism industry) to share cramped living spaces. The city’s surging immigrant and refugee populations forced schools to adopt a staggered day and/or year-round schedule that leaves 25% of its children on the streets at any one time. Over 78% participate in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program at school, and over half are identified as English Language Learners. 1999 student surveys and testing revealed that over 60% of the children did not have anyone to help them with homework, and that Anaheim students were performing far below the 50th percentile in math, reading, and language on SAT/9 tests. In addition, an overwhelming majority of children did not have access to medical or dental services. Dangerous neighborhoods, overcrowded housing, few opportunities for enrichment and learning support, stressed parents, and a lack of educational

aspirations, merged to form powerful risk factors for Anaheim's children and the community as a whole. Studies show that 85% of gang activity and crimes occur between the hours of 3:00-6:00 p.m.

But this isn't another story about the conditions of poverty and how they impact youth and their families. This is a story about how profound community needs drove a vision... about children having a supportive, safe place to go after school. This is a story about a citywide collaboration willing to obscure organizational boundaries in favor of achieving a shared vision, and in the process, raising the norms of an entire community . . .

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Anaheim Achieves Collaboration Becomes a Reality

The vision driven by these needs was the catalyst to bring together key leaders in Anaheim to address the need for after school programs that would go beyond existing program offerings. Anaheim Achieves was initially started as a pilot project with the Anaheim City School District and the City of Anaheim. About this time (1999) the State of California developed the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnership Program to spur the development of after school programs. This became the spark needed to bring a collaborative together. The key agencies forming this collaborative were the City of Anaheim, Anaheim City School District, Magnolia School District, the Anaheim Family YMCA, the Anaheim Chamber of Commerce, and Children's Hospital of Orange County (CHOC). "We realized early on that Return On Involvement (ROI) was the key to making the collaboration work. Every group at the table had to be clear about what their desired outcomes were. These outcomes then became the key elements to measure," said Todd Ament (YMCA Chief Operating Officer). Through the group's collective efforts, funding from the State of California was secured, making Anaheim Achieves a reality. Prior to this the YMCA had operated after school programs, and had a track record of successful collaborations with the City, which made the YMCA the logical partner to manage the day- to-day operations of the program. Starting in 1999 with 16 school based sites, the collaboration has grown to involve over 30 organizations reflecting many major community stakeholders, including public and private agencies, businesses, the city's police and fire departments, universities and colleges, private health care providers, service clubs, and other community based organizations. Currently the program operates in 35 school sites (31 elementary schools and 4 junior highs), serving 4,500 students each school day.

A Shared Vision

“A citywide collaborative initiative aimed at assuring that Anaheim’s children maximize their learning potential, develop healthy lifestyles, practice responsible citizenship, and envision meaningful and productive futures.”

Since its inception in 1999, the collaborators in Anaheim Achieves have each brought distinctive benefits to the table, while operating under a common mission: “a citywide collaborative initiative aimed at assuring that Anaheim’s children maximize their learning potential, develop healthy lifestyles, practice responsible citizenship, and envision meaningful and productive futures.”

With a program of such breadth and depth, the YMCA could not do this alone; therein lies the profound impact an effective collaboration can have. By listening carefully to teachers and principals from the school districts, Anaheim Achieves has been better able to address students’ specific academic needs. The districts have also shared their already crowded facilities.

The City of Anaheim, as a founding partner of Anaheim Achieves, had helped magnify its services to the community by providing a valuable after school resource. As a result, Anaheim Achieves has helped lower child care costs, strengthen workforce development and ultimately provide a positive path for students to grow into responsible citizens. Through this citywide collaboration, Anaheim has also become a more attractive place for families to settle and businesses to grow.

There is a tremendous opportunity for the YMCA to offer its unique experiences as a collaborator in Anaheim Achieves. As the nation’s leading child care provider, Anaheim Achieves fits perfectly with the Y’s national agenda to provide families with quality, low-cost child care. Families who have toddlers in the Anaheim Family YMCA’s Children’s Station now have additional resources once their kids reach the first grade. There are many opportunities for program integration, which will allow Anaheim Achieves families to learn more about all YMCA programs, while exposing current Y participants to the after school program. The YMCA is also beginning to integrate YMCA Youth Sports and YMCA Parent/Child Clubs in many of the Anaheim Achieves school sites.

The Eight Program Goals

The development of Anaheim Achieves’ eight program goals was also a collaborative process. These goals have become the building blocks of the programs and a constant reminder of “why we do what we do.”

1. Providing safe off-track and after-school environments
2. Helping students meet State and local academic standards
3. Developing positive character traits
4. Providing constructive recreation, enrichment, and community service
5. Promoting parent and family involvement
6. Fostering healthy lifestyle choices and greater access to health care
7. Encouraging volunteerism
8. Comprehensive staff development and training

A Safe Learning Environment

Every school day, Anaheim Achieves kids have a safe, supervised environment to study, to learn and to grow. Careful coordination works behind the scenes to maintain the positive environment for students: sign-in and sign-out procedures; a strict screening process for staff, volunteers, mentors and tutors; staff who are well trained and positive role models. Providing emotional safety is another facet of the program. Mentoring provides students with positive role models; and close communalization among staff, students, teachers and parents is ongoing.

Achieving Academic Excellence

Initially, providing a strong academic focus in the program was challenging. By working closely with school staff from the beginning, the collaboration has been able to address students' specific academic needs and improve their performance in the daytime program as a result. An Education Consultant, a recently-retired school administrator, was brought on board early on to facilitate communication between staff members and educators, and develop standards-based curriculum. Some teachers also serve as Literacy Coaches, who help provide learning services that are aligned with the students' academic needs. Over the first five years, students' test scores in reading and math increased by up to 20%.

Developing Positive Character Traits

Character education is a feature of most YMCA's, so it was natural to include it as one of the eight Anaheim Achieves goals. "Honesty, caring, respect and responsibility," the four pillars of YMCA, mesh well with the Character Counts model used in the local school districts. Developing responsible homework completion habits, for example, is emphasized in both the daytime program and in Anaheim Achieves.

Enrichment Themes Highlighted Monthly

Enrichment is an important program element and is promoted through monthly enrichment themes. Curriculum workshops and instructional materials are geared to the themes, a practice that fosters integration of curriculum and enrichment. Aside from traditional monthly highlights (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day etc.), themes reflect children's interests and have included such topics as College and Careers, Ocean Adventures, the Great American West, and Space Travel. Enrichment activities also include learning opportunities provided by various community partners, such as an Anaheim Achieves garden plot, developed with the help of volunteers from the Cal State Fullerton Arboretum. In addition, an annual Anaheim Achieves Community Showcase conducted at a local park brings together over 2,000 program participants and community partners to showcase many of the enrichment activities. These include art and dance demonstrations, Kid's Challenge (a pentathlon-type event demonstrating academic success), and other related services and activities.

Promoting Parent and Family Involvement

Parents are encouraged to contribute to the program in a variety of ways including regular events for families, volunteer opportunities, and field trips. Parents and families of the program's English learner population have opportunities to attend ESL/Literacy classes at each of the sites. This "in-kind" district contribution provides skills for parents to reinforce the school curriculum in the home. Through a new grant this year, the current youth obesity crisis is being addressed through nutrition education and fitness programs.

Healthy Lifestyles

Early on in the program's development, the Children's Hospital of Orange County (CHOC), was brought into the collaboration to provide program sites with regularly scheduled mobile health van visits. Through CHOC van services, parents access information on low or no cost health insurance for which they qualify, and receive referrals to community physicians. The medical staff addresses minor health problems and provides health instruction. Reduced student absenteeism has been a resulting benefit.

In 2004, Anaheim Achieves introduced the Y Be Healthy program through a grant from the Carol M. White Foundation. Program goals are to expose youth to healthy lifestyles through physical fitness, nutrition education and parent involvement. In line with the Anaheim Achieves mantra, "*The needs direct the vision,*" Y Be Healthy is one of many examples where prevalent community needs drive program growth. With Y Be Healthy, Anaheim Achieves has risen to the challenge to address the staggering rise in youth obesity and diabetes.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism is stressed through extensive outreach efforts, resulting in numerous volunteers—from high school students to senior citizens—participating in Anaheim Achieves. More than 500 volunteers work in the program and provide individual mentoring to more than 600 students. As an AmeriCorps site, the YMCA is also able to offer staff and program volunteers training and community service opportunities through this Federally funded program. Many AmeriCorps members serve Anaheim Achieves as academic mentors and program volunteers. This includes over twenty-five teachers from the two school districts who serve as AmeriCorps volunteers and help tutor Anaheim Achieves students who need additional academic assistance.

Comprehensive Staff Development and Training

Comprehensive staff development is a requirement for program success. Throughout the year, a variety of training opportunities are implemented, from events at the individual site level, to monthly training events conducted for all staff. These include academic topics as well as trainings on items such as recreational leadership, classroom management, CPR, character development, first aid, and a variety of enrichment activities.

Collaborators Involved in Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation

Regular collaborator input is a factor in continuous program improvement. A Planning Team consisting of representatives from the lead agencies meets monthly. In addition literacy coaches, program staff, principals and other program related task groups meet regularly to plan and communicate as needed. This may sound like a lot of meetings, but the program's experience is that with multiple agencies involved, regular communication is essential to smooth program operations. Meetings are short, to the point, and occasionally not conducted if there is no significant agenda. The City of Anaheim provides community rooms, as well as venues for special activities - part of its "in-kind" contribution to the program.

Program evaluation is both formal and informal. The City of Anaheim has helped organize observation team visits to provide one way to measure the success of the program's eight goals. Principals, teachers, city officials, chamber of commerce personnel, State officials, and university professors are among the observers. These observation walk-throughs supplement formal program evaluations.

The formal evaluation process involves parents, students, teachers, staff, and the community. The data collected and the analyses generated are extensive, and foster continuous program improvement. With both state and federal grants requiring extensive evaluation data and measurable results, Anaheim Achieves has had to be much more deliberate about evaluation, and bring in outside evaluators to help with the process. Sheila Marcus, a former school administrator and leader of the evaluation team says, "Too many times evaluation is seen as a "gotcha" activity . . . rather it should focus on how we can do it better." She adds, "It is also a great tool for validating the work of our staff and gives us the evidence that our work is of value." Evaluation results from the 2004 program year include:

- *High Satisfaction:* 85% of students surveyed reported feeling safe and satisfied with the program. 98% of parents indicated satisfaction with the program.
- *Improved Test Scores:* Students in the program scored higher on standardized tests Reading scores were 17% higher than non-participants. English learner student participants showed reading scores 20% higher than non-participants.

- Attendance: Students averaged 23% higher attendance in the daytime program than non-participants, this generated over \$125,000 in increased ADA funding for the school districts.

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Validation of the program was captured by this parent: “As a parent, words cannot begin to say Thank You enough for influencing our kids in such a wholesome, positive way. Our kids are with young adults that are winners – they are out there doing something with their lives. Kids see that and want to be just like them. Telling them to be good and say no to drugs is one thing, but giving them programs that help them grow and learn to be better people is so invaluable.”

Former Anaheim Police Chief Roger Baker has publicly acknowledged the program’s value with these comments: “After school programs play a significant role in lowering the juvenile crime rate in Anaheim. Thanks to the work of the YMCA and the Anaheim Achieves Collaboration, our community is a safer place.”

Funding Challenges

As with most programs in inner city environments, funding can be a challenge. Anaheim Achieves has been fortunate to develop a “blended” funding approach. It is not dependent on just one source.

Funding comes from state and federal grants, (includes 21st Century Funding, AmeriCorps, and other grants), United Way, YMCA fundraising and annual Campaign, program fees, foundation grants, and funding from school and city partners. The total budget for Anaheim Achieves will exceed \$6.2 million for the 2005 year.

Despite rising operational costs and drops in federal grant funding, collaborators have heightened their efforts to provide monetary and in-kind support. This has allowed the program to keep a low participant fee of \$1.50 per day per child and keep program quality at its highest. While the goal is to eventually lessen dependence on government grants, state and federal assistance remains key to the program. 21st Century funding has allowed Anaheim Achieves to expand from 16 to 35 school sites.

What Has Been Learned

The Anaheim Achieves collaboration experience has provided some valuable lessons. It is clear that communication is the key to successful collaborations. Additional “keys” identified at a recent after school conference included:

- Invest in relationships.
- Obscure organizational boundaries.
- Remain focused on the mission/vision.
- Utilize multi-faceted communication.
- Empower all group members to be decision-makers.
- Model continuous improvement management.
- Share success . . . and challenges

Results

By infusing the city with a genuine spirit of collaboration, Anaheim Achieves has united a community behind a vision . . . and in turn is experiencing positive, quantified changes in test scores, homework completion, school absenteeism and in building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities.

Once upon a time . . . and not so long ago . . . Anaheim was a city unaware that dreams could also come true outside the gates of the Magic Kingdom. But a dynamic collaboration was formed that engaged an entire community in creating the kinds of opportunities that will allow its youth and families to pursue active and fulfilling lives in the tradition of the American dream.

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Sources

To learn more about the program, visit the Anaheim Family YMCA web site: www.anaheimymca.org