

Connecting School and Afterschool

15 Ways to Improve Partnerships



WELCOME to **Connecting School and Afterschool: 15 Ways to Improve Partnerships**, sponsored by United Way of Massachusetts Bay and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. These cards are the result of an initiative where eight greater Boston-based afterschool programs examined how children positively benefited from strong partnerships between their schools and afterschools. Each card outlines an activity with subsequent step-by-step action plans including helpful tips along the way for afterschool program directors. We hope you find the resources on these cards helpful!

Connecting schools with afterschool programs better serves children and families by:

- Improving school staff to afterschool staff partnerships
- Increasing curricular alignment
- Formalizing positive, results-based relationships between each institution's management teams

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Effective Partnership Tips

- **Choose your school wisely** – Start with a school where a large percentage of your young people attend.
- **Take one step at a time** – Set realistic goals, celebrate accomplishments along the way, and adjust your goals as needed.
- **Estimate your available resources** – Begin partnerships with a clear expectation of the necessary financial and staff commitments.
- **Plan your message** – Be clear and powerful. Explain how collaboration fits the school’s vision or improvement plan.
- **Promote your program** – Identify opportunities to communicate your program’s value to the school and its staff. Take the opportunity to strut your stuff.
- **Face time pays off** – Meet individually with as many school day teachers as you can. Be proactive. Walk the halls and greet the staff, hang out in the teachers’ room.
- **Be organized and facilitate meetings effectively** – Set realistic meeting outcomes. Use facilitation management skills. Make sure school day staff walk away feeling valued.
- **You never know who can help** – Build intentional relationships with staff throughout the school including those within custodial, cafeteria, administrative, health and guidance departments.
- **Write it down** – Make sure you document and record progress to pass on to future staff leaders.
- **Ask parents to sign a release form** – You can only share student information with permission.

How to Use This Tool

- These activities should **not** be considered sequential.
- Identify 1-2 schools where your efforts will have the biggest impact on youth.
- Start small. Aim to accomplish one activity at a time.
- Think about which activities your program is most prepared to engage in first.
- Discuss with program staff which goals seem most attainable.
- Map out an implementation plan for the chosen activity.
- Be patient. It takes time to build trust, the cornerstone of successful partnerships.

Make Principal Connections

Step 1

Introduce yourself to the school principal associated with your afterschool program. Find a good time to sit down and converse with the school principal about building a strong partnership between the school and afterschool program.

Step 2

Create a brief report that informs the principal of the benefits of your afterschool program as well as those issues which you are working to improve. Work together to collectively set action steps that improve the relationship between the afterschool and school.

Follow Up

- After each meeting with the principal, type a memorandum outlining the agenda items discussed and future plans for improving the partnerships between the school and afterschool.
- Arrange a specific bi-weekly or monthly meeting time with the principal to keep communication active.

GOAL

To build a strong foundation for afterschool-to-school partnership and establish regular communication with the principal.

HELPFUL HINT

Think of creative ways to use multiple strategies to engage your principal. For suggestions, please visit www.beyondthebell.org/PrincipalGuide.pdf

Formalize Agreements

Step 1

Think strategically about how this partnership can be a win-win for both your program and the school. What are realistic expectations and outcomes given available staff and financial resources? Engage the principal in the development of a team from the school and the afterschool program that will work closely together to address the roles and responsibilities included in the memo of understanding (M.O.U.)

Step 2

Make sure the language in the M.O.U. is clearly understood and signed by all parties, including the principal and afterschool program director. A comprehensive M.O.U. will include: a description of outcomes to be achieved; a timeline with meeting dates; the specific roles and responsibilities of key people; time and financial resources needed; and all information related to sharing resources, space, and material.

Follow Up

- Revisit the M.O.U. regularly with the principal (schedule meeting dates in the M.O.U.) in order to re-evaluate and make necessary mid-year changes.
- Clearly document any challenges that arise in addition to successes at future meetings.

GOAL

To create a mutually agreed upon document that clearly explains the working relationship between the school and the afterschool program.

HELPFUL HINT

Be open and honest about your needs, expectations, and concerns from the start.

Getting Connected

Step 1

Investigate the variety of boards, committees, leadership teams, and meetings that are organized through the school. Suggest becoming a member of such committees when talking to the principal. Highlight how serving on the committee could support afterschool program effectiveness and outcomes.

Step 2

Come to meetings prepared to report your progress on afterschool program agenda items. Share your ideas on how the afterschool program and the school can work to enhance coordination and collaboration.

Follow Up

- Compile and distribute a directory of the committee members along with the skills and talents that they bring to the table to staff from your program.
- Create an on-line community chat room or e-mail group for afterschool and school day staff.

GOAL

To increase program visibility, help the afterschool program become an integral part of the school community, and to demonstrate commitment.

HELPFUL HINT

Before joining a committee or leadership team be sure that you are able to fulfill expectations for attendance and contribution.

Support School Events

Step 1

Talk to the school principal about the upcoming school events in which afterschool program staff could participate, attend, or support. School open-houses, art shows, book fairs, and assembly events are good places to meet and greet with teachers, school administrators, and families.

Step 2

Make an effort to introduce yourself and converse with the teachers of your students. Emphasize to them that afterschool program staff are available and interested in issues relevant to both settings.

Follow Up

- A thank-you e-mail or note of appreciation in a teacher's mailbox is a beneficial gesture.
- Take advantage of opportunities to reinforce your contributions to the school community.
- Share attendance of these events among all afterschool staff.

GOAL

To develop stronger relationships with school personnel and the school community. To emphasize the role of the afterschool program in the broader school community.

HELPFUL HINT

The more events you can attend the more familiar your afterschool program and staff will become to school personnel.

Communicating Program Information

Step 1

Create informational materials designed for different stakeholders such as school personnel and families. In each program guide, include the afterschool program's mission statement and program philosophy. Promote policies and practices that support your program's vision for connecting with each set of stakeholders.

Step 2

In the program guide for families emphasize:

- Policies on fees, inclement weather, observed holidays, medication and transportation.
- Activities that connect the afterschool program with families.
- Staff contact information including fax numbers and e-mail addresses if relevant.

In the program guide for school personnel emphasize:

- Ways to ensure effective communication between school personnel and afterschool staff.
- Communication with families.
- Descriptions of curriculum in place or being developed.

Follow Up

- Update informational materials when needed.
- Provide families and school personnel with a new guide at the beginning of each year.

GOAL

To provide families and school personnel with important program and policy information related to the afterschool program.

HELPFUL HINT

Make sure each publication is concise and easy to read with clearly labeled subject headings for quick reference.

Establish a Presence in the School

Step 1

Dedicate a few hours each week to visiting the school building(s). Meet with school day teachers when feasible and appropriate at the teachers' lounge, lunch time, library or recess duty. Build relationships with school day teachers by talking about mutually shared students.

Step 2

Explain to the principal the importance of acquiring office space or a workstation in the school building. Discuss the benefits of being visible in the school on a regular basis to communicate with school day teachers. Offer to share space with other school personnel if space is limited.

Follow Up

- Keep track of conversations held with school day teachers by maintaining a log.
- Be sure to follow up with school day teachers regarding student progress.
- Place a memo in the teachers mailboxes or send an e-mail to summarize key discussion points or updates.

GOAL

To provide school and afterschool staff an opportunity to exchange information about student academic progress, behavior, homework, and other student needs.

HELPFUL HINT

Plan to consistently visit the school on the same day each week. This will allow school day teachers and administrators to become familiar with your schedule and allow you an allotted time to follow up with school day personnel.

Invite School Day Staff to Get to Know You

Step 1

Plan an open house or snack party hosted by your afterschool program for school day staff. Help students plan the menu and design invitations. Have students hand-deliver invitations the next day. Have students personally invite the school principal.

Step 2

Hold the event immediately following the release of school. Try to make the day of the event be as close to a “typical” afterschool program day as possible. This will show school day staff and the principal(s) how the program normally operates.

Follow Up

- Give all staff an open invitation to visit the afterschool program.
- Suggest to school day teachers that visiting their classrooms will help you get a better understanding of learning strategies and possible curriculum supports.

GOAL

To provide school day staff with a better understanding of your afterschool program and how it operates.

HELPFUL HINT

Be sure to give school day staff plenty of notice about upcoming events and send a reminder memo a day or two before the event.

Formalize Communication

Step 1

Introduce yourself to school day teachers as you see them in the hallways or meetings. Ask administrators and school day teachers which method of communication works best for them.

Step 2

Generate reports to school day teachers that communicate student successes, challenges, and observations about learning and behavior, etc. When doing projects related to grade level topics, provide a written summary to school day teachers explaining the activities and how school day learning is reinforced. Request school day teacher feedback.

Follow Up

- Collaborate with school day teachers on a system for sharing grades, progress reports, and methods of evaluation.
- Attach teacher feedback forms on students' homework to facilitate regular communication with school day teachers.
- Celebrate and recognize school day teachers (both in-school and afterschool) that do a good job in connecting with you.

GOAL

To establish regular and formal communication patterns with school day teachers in order to improve relationships and support student learning.

HELPFUL HINT

Some school day teachers may prefer e-mail, while others like in-person contact. Being flexible with communication methods will help you access the resources you need.

Share Your News

Step 1

Create a monthly afterschool program newsletter. Talk to both students and afterschool program staff about what type of content to include. Design a standard newsletter template to help you easily and regularly create a colorful and informative newsletter.

Step 2

Put the most important details on the front cover. Include information about early closings, snacks, special events, and program policies. Profile a different afterschool staff member and high-achieving student each month. Have youth help name it and contribute as writers, photographers, and editors.

Follow Up

- Send newsletters home with students and have extra copies available for families.
- Put a copy in school day teachers' boxes so they stay informed of current afterschool events.
- Distribute newsletters on-line.

GOAL

To update families and school day staff on activities and important upcoming events in the afterschool program.

HELPFUL HINT

Consider including a column in the school newspaper about your program. If you do your own, offer to include a message from the principal.

Visit Student Classrooms

Step 1

Ask school day teachers if you may visit their classrooms. The purpose of the visiting is to observe teaching strategies, management strategies, and experience a student's daily schedule. Approach teachers at the end of the day or e-mail them to schedule a visit time.

Step 2

Observe how the school day teacher organizes the classroom, how behavior is managed, the type of instruction strategies that are used, and how the curriculum is delivered. Take notes so you can implement innovative ideas into your afterschool program curriculum.

Follow Up

- Follow up with the school day teacher after class with any questions.
- Request copies of lesson materials such as charts, discussion leads, handouts, and any other written materials.
- Be sure to write a thank-you note or e-mail to the teacher.

GOAL

To learn effective teaching strategies and integrate them into afterschool learning activities while creating consistency in learning strategies and behavior management techniques.

HELPFUL HINT

Let afterschool program youth and families know why you are visiting school classrooms and explain the connections between the afterschool program and school.

Develop Learning Support Activities

Step 1

Talk to the school day principal about how the school and the afterschool program can work together to provide learning support activities during the afterschool hours. This could include homework help, tutoring, or special learning activities.

Step 2

Plan activities for your students that coincide and complement curriculum being taught. Be sure to make the learning support activities meaningful and applicable yet engaging and enjoyable. As you develop learning support activities that work for your afterschool program, invite feedback from staff, students, and school day teachers.

Follow Up

- Host regular forums with school day personnel and parents to jointly discuss afterschool activities and school curriculum.
- Invite school day teachers to brief the afterschool program staff on the basics of what students are learning.

GOAL

To build on students' strengths and skills through implementing activities that complement learning during the school day.

HELPFUL HINT

Consider using academic games (i.e. board games/create a jeopardy board) to engage students. Encourage older student participation by allowing them to lead some of the activities.

Produce Student Portfolios

Step 1

Brainstorm with afterschool staff about the contents of student portfolios. Include each student's picture, grades, progress reports, interests, notes on behavioral issues or concerns, summaries or examples of accomplishments, and contact information. Create a school day teacher input form that includes questions you would like answered about students' academic performance and needs.

Step 2

Arrange a meeting with the school principal. Show the principal the afterschool program student portfolios and discuss the best way to solicit information from school day teachers. Propose to the principal that you attend the next all-staff meeting to introduce the input forms to school day teachers.

Follow Up

- Talk to families at pick-up time or in phone conversations about the student portfolio you are creating for their child.
- Ask families to provide input on their child's learning strengths and needs as well as information on emotional, physical, and social development.



GOAL

To centralize important information about each student and to gain a better understanding of each student's personal and academic needs.



HELPFUL HINT

Use different colored folders for each grade level. At the beginning of the school year, share the portfolios with each student's new school day teacher to facilitate communication and collaboration from the start.

Engage Families

Step 1

Cultivate a family-focused staff that has an asset-based perspective of families. Build trusting relationships with families through frequent and positive communication. Encourage afterschool staff to help bridge communications between school personnel and families.

Step 2

Solicit family input. Conduct a needs assessment by surveying families about their schedules, interests, needs, and preferences. Also, ask school teachers how afterschool staff can help bridge communications with families.

Follow Up

Create programming that brings together families, afterschool staff, and school staff that focuses on the needs of families.

- Schedule subject led nights hosted by a school teacher that gives families strategies to support their children.
- Develop a Family Council with afterschool staff and invite school teachers.
- Hold monthly potluck dinners for families and school personnel.
- Set up workshops about the social and emotional development of youth facilitated by the school's guidance counselor.

GOAL

To foster relationships between families, afterschool staff, and school staff that support students' academic and emotional growth.

HELPFUL HINT

For more engagement ideas refer to *Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family Centered Practices in Afterschool*. Visit www.uwmb.org/documents/EFI/EFI-Family-Guide.pdf

Support Professional Development

Step 1

Have afterschool program staff identify learning and academic areas in which they could use professional development.

- 1) Consult school day personnel for ideas that enhance knowledge of specific school areas.
- 2) Invite school day teachers to attend mutually beneficial workshops.
- 3) Advocate for afterschool program staff to participate in in-service school-based professional development opportunities.

Step 2

Have afterschool program staff write down questions in advance so that pressing issues and needs are addressed. Ask the trainer to review relevant afterschool materials and make recommendations for improving learning activities.

Follow Up

- Make sure knowledge gained doesn't rest with just one individual. Support a process for afterschool program staff to share skill development.
- Schedule a follow-up training that incorporates hands-on activities afterschool staff can use to address student learning needs.

GOAL

To provide professional development training to afterschool program staff in order to improve afterschool program learning activities.

HELPFUL HINT

Find a convenient time for afterschool program staff, school day teachers, and the trainer to meet. For example, after the afterschool program ends or before it starts.

Develop an Afterschool Curriculum

Step 1

Talk to the principal about your desire to create a curriculum development team composed of school day teachers and afterschool program staff. Communicate your idea to model an afterschool curriculum that is aligned with the school day curriculum calendar.

Step 2

Agree on curricular area of focus (science, social studies, math etc.). Design templates for afterschool lesson plans (include goals, lesson objectives, instructional guidance, materials needed, etc.). Designate lesson plans to be developed among team members.

Follow Up

- Get feedback from school day teachers and afterschool staff and students.
- Field test these activities in afterschool classrooms with teacher and program staff observation tools. Analyze results and revise as necessary.
- Host forums to discuss how to align afterschool activities, curriculum, and themes with what is being taught in school.

GOAL

To connect afterschool learning with academic areas taught during the school day to reinforce education enrichment during afterschool hours.

HELPFUL HINT

Institute a weekly theme in afterschool programs that relates to what is being taught in school. Have all snacks, activities, crafts, and recreation surround this theme.

Maintaining the Partnership

- ***Always keep the principal up-to-date.*** Create a regular and consistent communications technique (meeting, e-mail, voice mail, personalized notes, etc.)
- ***Maintain professionalism*** in all interactions with school staff and defer when necessary.
- ***Follow through*** on all commitments made to the school.
- ***Publicly honor your champions.*** Ask principal to honor staff working with you. Include thank you's and updates in school news.
- ***Keep it fresh.*** Continually look for ways to liven up your value-add to school staff. Be timely and reflect often on the status of your relationship with the school.
- ***Connect your lesson plans and activity schedules to school themes, topics, lessons.*** Plan afterschool activities and curriculum that enhance the skills and content currently taught in school. Ask teachers to review and offer suggestions.
- ***Engage ALL afterschool program staff.*** Create opportunities to keep all members of your afterschool staff involved and informed. Jointly develop workplan for connecting. Give frequent updates. Delegate work. Share best practices.

Helpful Resources

Websites to Surf

Afterschool Alliance www.afterschoolalliance.org

Afterschool.gov www.afterschool.gov

Beyond the Bell www.beyondthebell.org/PrincipalGuide.pdf

Center for Afterschool and Community Education
www.caceafterschool.org

Coalition for Community Schools www.communityschools.org

Forum for Youth Investment www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

Harvard Family Research Project www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp

Learning Point Associates www.learningpt.org

National Afterschool Association www.naaweb.org

National Institute on Out-of-School Time www.niost.org

National Training Institute for Community nti.aed.org

National Youth Development Information Center www.nydic.org

Nellie Mae Education Foundation www.nmefdn.org

Office of 21st Century Community Learning
www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html

Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency www.pearweb.org

Policy Studies Associates, Inc. www.policystudies.com

The Promising Practices in Afterschool System www.afterschool.org

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory www.sedl.org

United Way of Massachusetts Bay www.uwmb.org

U.S. Department of Education www.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html

Publications to Review

Beyond the Bell Toolkit®
(<http://www.beyondthebell.org>)

Building school-community partnerships: Collaboration for student success
Sanders, M. G. (2006). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Links to Learning: Curriculum Planning Guide for Afterschool Programs.
National (NIOST) School Age Notes, January 2005 (www.schoolagenotes.com)

New Directions for Youth Development: Theory, Practice, and Research
Gil G. Noam, Editor-in-Chief. <http://www.josseybass.com/go/nydy>

School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action (2nd ed)
Epstein, J.L., Sanders, M.G., Simon, B.S., Salinas, K.C., Janshorn, N.R., &
VanVoorhis, F.L. (2002) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

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