

Enriching Arkansas Children's Lives Through High-Quality Out-Of-School Activities



Final Report of the Governor's Task Force
on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs
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Arkansas Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs

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Enriching Arkansas Children's Lives Through High-Quality Out-Of-School Activities: Recommendation Summary

The Task Force recommends that Arkansas take the following actions to support expanded access to quality after-school and summer programs across the state.

Promote quality by:

- Using the framework for quality standards and all of its elements in program expansion, evaluation, and training for after-school and summer programs.
- Expanding the capacity of state agencies to promote quality standards based on the quality framework and to administer programs.
- Determining a suggested number of hours and days per week of participation by after-school and summer program participants needed to produce positive outcomes for children and youth based on research-based best practices.

Improve standards and program evaluation by:

- Promoting quality in after-school and summer programs by adapting minimum licensing requirements for school-age care programs to meet the diversity of after-school and summer programs in the state. These requirements provide the foundation for Arkansas to build higher-quality standards based on national standards.
- Asking all after-school and summer programs to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs with a common standard of measurement, regardless of the funding source.
- Requiring state agencies responsible for out-

of-school time programs to collect common information and report progress on common outcomes for programs.

Expand strategic partnerships by:

- Helping schools and communities find creative ways to connect programs, schools, and communities beyond normal school hours by leveraging existing state and community resources, strengthening public-private partnerships, and formalizing school-community partnerships to build on school-day learning.
- Maximizing the use of existing resources, especially school campuses and other community buildings, to address the need for after-school and summer program facilities.
- Encouraging formal links between schools, other educational institutions and out-of-school time providers. In particular, after-school and summer programs should make explicit program links to the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks.

Link after-school and summer programs of all types to workforce and economic development by:

- Encouraging program-business partnerships in communities to provide students with internship and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Linking regional liaisons to local workforce development efforts to ensure that business and workforce training interests are represented on both a state and local level.

Framework for Quality Standards

The Task Force identified the following key elements for after-school and summer programs that must be addressed in any effort to improve quality. This framework is intended to be flexible enough to apply to a wide variety of program types but concrete enough to offer some elements that, while adaptable, must be addressed in any program, regardless of the ages served, program type, or overall goal. These quality standards include the following:

Safe and Appropriate Program Environments and Facilities: The most basic responsibility of after-school and summer programs is to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to address the safety, health, and appropriate learning environment of participants.

Ongoing Staff Training and Development: Research shows that the quality of the relationship between the program participant and the staff is the best indicator of successful outcomes. Training content must include a thorough knowledge of child and youth development and an understanding of diverse cultural issues; development of skills needed to implement recreational and educational enrichment activities, art; and appropriately serving children and youth with special needs. These professional development opportunities can be provided through public schools, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, and through the effective use of current training opportunities made available by nonprofit youth development and educational enrichment providers.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation: The consensus of the Task Force is that all programs must be evaluated for the purpose of enhancing public accountability. Such evaluation should include both process measures and specific program outcome measures. Improved academic performance includes school attendance, decreased disciplinary problems, homework completion, interest and task completion as well as standard measures of academic achievement.¹⁶ Other measures should take into account the participants' level of engagement, access to a variety of enrichment activities, satisfaction with program offerings, as well as the quality of their interactions with both staff and peers.

Positive Youth Development: Programs should be tailored to developmental stages, special needs, and physical and cognitive abilities of participants. High-quality programs must

promote positive outcomes by providing a variety of opportunities that allow children and youth a voice and a choice of activities that capitalize on their varied interests and abilities.

Parent Involvement: Children are more likely to succeed in school when their parents are fully engaged in their learning. Programs should consider parents and primary caregivers as partners in program development, design, implementation, and evaluation.

Community Collaboration: In order to provide meaningful after-school enrichment programs, a strong spirit of community engagement and collaboration must exist. The state should actively encourage public institutions, schools, private agencies, businesses, faith-based and other community-based organizations, parents, and local community stakeholders to work together to plan sustainable out-of-school programs that meet the needs of local children and youth. School-community partnerships, the involvement of the business community, and utilizing the unique skills and resources in local communities are essential for quality programming and sustainability. By creating a community learning environment that includes such things as service-based learning and mentoring, program participants can match what is being learned in school with real-life applications. Community engagement is crucial if programs are to sustain these enriching experiences and thrive, especially in rural areas of Arkansas. High-quality after-school and summer programs bring together public, private and nonprofit stakeholders to collaborate, leverage resources, evaluate and monitor programs.

Attendance and Participation: Participation in after-school and summer program activities has multiple positive impacts on children and youth. Numerous studies have examined the important relationship between overall participation and outcomes, a key question remains unanswered: How much participation, in what kinds of programs, and for which participants is necessary to improve outcomes for children and youth?¹⁷ This issue of "dosage" is currently being evaluated by researchers and should be seriously considered in issues related to quality and ensuring positive outcomes for program participants in Arkansas. The potential positive outcomes from after-school and summer programs are closely tied to consistent and enduring program participation.

Sustainability Plan: Resource management is a vital part of ensuring program sustainability. An action-oriented sustainability plan must include several key components: effective leadership, continuous program evaluation, multiple funding sources, and vested stakeholders.

Test best practices approaches and lay the groundwork for program expansion by:

- Developing pilot after-school and summer programs to implement the recommendations and next steps of this report (e.g. standards, enhance school-community linkages,

take maximum advantage of new regional liaisons who provide technical assistance that enhances the coordination and sustainability of program resources, etc). Pilots need not be new programs; they may also provide an opportunity to augment existing efforts and/or showcase and document progress of existing efforts.

Strengthen and develop a statewide structure by:

- Creating a statewide system of regional liaisons to support and build the capacity of a full range of after-school and summer programs. Capacity-building activities would include, but not be limited to, program development and quality enhancement, financial and sustainability planning, outcomes and evaluations, effective planning and program implementation.
- Building a system to disseminate information on:
 - a. best practices and outcome measures;
 - b. linking programs to schools and each other; and
 - c. increasing community capacity to provide needs assessment, training, service delivery, evaluation, and technical assistance to support organizations that provide out-of-school services.

Aid program sustainability by:

- Requiring state agencies and encourage state

and local private partners to report expenditures annually on after-school and summer programs to inform state-level financing plans.

- Developing a database of resources for after-school and summer program administrators. Items may include grant opportunities, program evaluations, needs assessment resources, and other technical assistance tools and resources.
- Developing a comprehensive inventory of program supply statewide to inform families of local program opportunities and highlight high-need areas. This inventory could be housed in the aforementioned database to create a single resource for both providers and parents.
- Conducting a statewide public education campaign to educate communities and families about the benefits of after-school and summer programs and where such programs are available.
- Creating an annual statewide after-school “event” to highlight the benefits of programs and unify programs of all types across the state.



Enriching Arkansas Children’s Lives Through High-Quality Out-Of-School Activities

Introduction

Parents in Arkansas have struggled for generations to provide a safe place with adult supervision and positive activities for their children and youth when school is out. In 1950, only 56 percent of families fit the “traditional” family structure of one parent at home, caring for children and youth full-time, while the other parent provided financial support.¹ Today less than one-fourth of American families fit this profile. While women are still the primary caregivers, either as single mothers or part of a two-parent family, they are entering the workforce in greater numbers than ever. Schools are confronted with increasing demands for specific measures of academic performance and test scores, leaving less time for enrichment activities that occur in their communities and that are important for the development of the “whole child.”

Only 20 percent of school-age children and youth’s waking hours are spent in school.² Of this remaining time, 40 percent of the out-of-school time is discretionary and much of it may be spent alone.³ After school, on the weekend, and during the summer are times when children and youth are most likely to be without an adult to guide them in making decisions, and they often do not have the structured and enriching activities that teach them new skills, engage them in positive peer relationships, help them learn healthy behavior, have fun, or keep them safe. A recent study conducted in Arkansas

found that almost half of students are unsupervised after school on a regular basis.⁴ Regardless of gender, race, or grade level, a large proportion of students are unsupervised after school, and this is more likely to be the case with older students.

This unsupervised time also increases the opportunities for youth to engage in unhealthy and risk-taking behaviors that can have long-term implications in their lives.

On school days the hours from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. are the peak hours for teen crime, for children and youth to become victims of crime, for teen sex, for kids

to experiment with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs,⁵ and for 16- and 17-year-olds to be in or cause a car crash.⁶

After-School and Summer Programs Improve Outcomes for Children and Youth.

After-school and summer enrichment activities expose children and youth to real life applications of classroom lessons, or to the arts, music, and other activities that inspire new ways of learning and enhances academic outcomes. Participation in after-school and summer program activities is predictive of academic success as measured

through test scores, absenteeism, school dropout rates, homework completion, school grades, and course enrollment.⁷ These realities are emerging as our nation’s children and youth are competing with peers from across the globe for the best jobs and the promising futures that America has always held out to them.

Goal

The goal of the Governor’s Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs is to develop policy recommendations that support programs in a wide range of settings, including, but not limited to school districts and community and faith-based organizations, by providing opportunities for children and youth to engage in quality after-school and summer programs across the state.

After-school and summer programs can also provide time outside school for physical activity and promote healthy behaviors. Thirty-eight percent of Arkansas youth are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.⁸ With priorities on education requirements, schools alone cannot address the many health needs of students. Unhealthy or sick children cannot learn well. After-school and summer programs can help schools address student health and play a role in Arkansas's efforts to combat obesity.

After-School and Summer Programs Help Working Families and Their Communities.

Changing trends and new realities impact Arkansas students, their families and their communities. More than 680,000 children and youth live in Arkansas. Sixty-five percent of those children and youth live in a household with all caregivers in the workforce. The percent of children and youth in households with all caregivers employed varies by county from a high of 74 percent in Clark County to a low of 54 percent in Monroe County.⁹ When children and youth have structured, supervised opportunities after school and in the summer, working parents do not spend valuable work hours worrying about where their child will go during the summer or whether they are getting into trouble after school. Peace of mind improves work productivity and prevents the loss of time spent calling or checking on children who may be home alone.

After-School and Summer Programs Support Workforce and Economic Development. Businesses gain when after-school and summer programs are available in their communities. In addition to the more obvious benefits of more productive and satisfied parents in their existing workforce, after-school and summer programs help businesses by:

- Improving education of future workers;
- Reinforcing school-day learning, applying concepts that develop skills critical for the future workforce (e.g., use of technology, apprenticeships with local business partners); and
- Providing an opportunity for businesses to shape learning activities that help students develop needed skills specific to their communities outside the traditional school day.



Background

The growing body of research showing the positive impact that quality after-school and summer programs have on student success has generated widespread interest and growing demand for these programs in Arkansas. In 2005, Arkansas joined 38 other states working with the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation's Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks bringing together educators, businesses, law enforcement, youth, parents, and providers seeking to expand access to quality school-linked after-school and summer programs. The state-wide Arkansas Out-of-School Network, a network of after-school and summer program leaders and stakeholders across the state, seeks to strengthen, expand and sustain Arkansas's school-based and school-linked services to children and youth, ages 4-19, during out of school time.¹⁰ In January 2008, Governor Mike Beebe created the Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs to serve as an investigative and advisory body to produce a report to the Governor containing its recommendations for legislation that might be introduced for consideration by the 87th General Assembly. This report outlines the activities, discussions, and thoughts generated by the task force and describes its findings and recommendations.

The importance of structured and supervised activities after school and during the summer has a long and enduring history in Arkansas and across the country. Extracurricular activities provided at local schools, 4-H programs, Boys and Girls Club programs, YMCA, municipal parks and recreation departments, faith-based camps, and scouting programs have long been a part of life for many children and youth. The recognized need to expand art activities, summer-jobs programs, and service-based learning opportunities, and ongoing discussions about extending the school day are testament to the school, parental, and community efforts to make these quality opportunities available to more children and youth in Arkansas. More than 150,000 Arkansas children and youth participate in these and other enrichment activities sometime every year.¹¹ For example, more than 9,000 Arkansas youth participate in the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers Initiative, the only federal program dedicated to after-school and summer programs.¹² The federal Child Care and Development Fund also serves 7,641 school-age children by providing vouchers to 4,930 families who fall within the income guidelines to access after-school and summer care for their children.¹³ The demand for these programs continues.

In Arkansas, and across the country, growing interest in after-school and summer programs is fueled by concerns for improving educational outcomes, closing the educational achievement gaps between low-income and minority children and their peers, and creating an educated workforce that can meet the unique demands of the coming century. New research efforts sponsored by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and many others have added data to support the idea that quality after-school and summer programs are an important part of any community's efforts to keep children safe, support working families, and inspire children and youth to learn.

The Arkansas Supreme Court's *Lake View* decision reminded Arkansas of its responsibility for providing an adequate system of public education and has led

to many improvements in the state's educational system. Despite these positive changes and the investment of significant new resources in the education system in Arkansas, more work can still be done to improve educational outcomes. Governor Beebe stated in his executive order establishing the Task Force that the state also has a moral obligation "to strive to ensure that children of this state have access to a system of education that is not only 'adequate,' but excellent."

In a recent study on closing the achievement gap in Arkansas, researchers from the Clinton School of Public Service and Hendrix College specified that summer learning loss and unproductive time between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are key causes of the achievement gap in Arkansas.¹⁴ The future of Arkansas will depend on making sure that all students thrive and obtain the skills they need to become productive citizens.

The Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs pursued its mission and goals with a clear recognition of the long history of dedicated providers of these programs in Arkansas, the growing body of research that supports the positive impacts of high-quality programs with measurable outcomes, and the critical role that education has in shaping the future economic success of the state.

The Task Force held monthly meetings to hear from after-school and summer program providers, state experts, and the general public about their interests and concerns for after-school and summer programs and it also reviewed the work of other states seeking to define best practices and establish policy recommendations.¹⁵

The Task Force subcommittees met separately and reported monthly to the Task Force on their progress and to review initial drafts of their recommendations. The recommendations presented in this report were adopted by the full Task Force. This report provides a summary of the rationale, guiding principles, and seven major themes that shaped the Task Force's final recommendations. It also includes the specific recommendations made by the full Task Force.

Task Force Recommendations

Arkansas Should Promote Quality Programs

To ensure that positive changes occur and real outcomes are achieved, programs must base their organizational structure, program offerings, staffing requirements and other operational elements on well-established best practices. Some best practices may be determined by the exact focus of the after-school or summer program (e.g., outdoor education versus creative arts). Programs should identify goals and adopt an ongoing process for tracking measurable outcomes for children (e.g., increased school attendance, grade improvements, learning new skills, eating healthier foods, etc).

The Task Force reviewed standards used by other states and municipalities as well as those recommended by credible national organizations. It also reviewed the quality standards proposed by the Arkansas Out-of-School Network. During this review there was a clear mandate to create program standards that focus on the whole child by creating program offerings based on a multi-disciplinary approach.

The academic basis for after-school and summer programs is best understood under the rubric of youth development, which provides the ideal framework for assessing students' unique talents and needs. Successful after-school and summer programs incorporate a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting "the whole child" and his or her family and community.

When describing the type of programs needed to provide an enriching and holistic experience, the Task Force suggested the following school-linked

program content be considered:

- Academic enrichment opportunities for English language learners.
- Academic enrichment opportunities for special education students.
- Special attention and focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills essential to workforce development and economic competitiveness.
- Social-emotional and life-skills-building that include drug and violence prevention, youth leadership, and character education.
- Cultural and artistic enrichment activities that include art, theatre, dance, and music education.
- Physical activity, nutrition, and healthy lifestyles that include recreational and sport activities.
- Telecommunications and technology education that includes parental involvement and family literacy.
- Job training, apprenticeships, and other real-life job experiences for high school students.
- Service-learning and other opportunities to volunteer in the community.
- Exposure to college life by providing positive experiences on higher education campuses, particularly for older youth. Many Task Force members hailed the former AEGIS summer program as an example of this type of opportunity, especially for low-income students.
- Expanded opportunities for credit recovery and academic remediation while in high school.

See the appendix for a list of resources on establishing high-quality programs for after-school and summer programs.



The Governor’s Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Use the framework for quality standards and all of its elements in program expansion, evaluation, and training for after-school and summer programs.
- Expand the capacity of state agencies to promote quality standards (based on the quality framework) and administer programs.
- Determine a suggested number of hours and days per week of participation by after-school and summer program participants needed to produce positive outcomes for children and youth based on research-based best practices.

Arkansas Should Improve Standards and Program Evaluation

The ultimate question that any parent, service provider, program participant, or taxpayer must ask is whether investing in after-school and summer programs will have a positive and lasting impact on the lives of children and youth. Arkansas should ensure that the programs be held accountable for positive outcomes. This requires programs to have

appropriate measures of success and to conduct meaningful evaluations. In return, the state should have a coordinated system that holds programs accountable for positive child and youth outcomes.

After extensive discussions, the Task Force concluded that Arkansas needs to connect after-school and summer program standards with existing standards of quality. The most promising approach appears to be adapting existing minimum licensing requirements in Arkansas for licensed school-age care programs to address the unique needs of after-school and summer programs (see recommendation on Page 10). Considerable overlap exists between child care health and safety regulations and other quality standards appropriate for after-school and summer programs. These minimum requirements provide a foundation for building higher quality standards but will need to be revised to address the needs of children and youth in after-school and summer programs, particularly those for older youth. It is also critical that these standards address potential conflicts with standards imposed on programs in academic settings or under the auspices of national organizations with existing quality standards.

The Task Force strongly urges Arkansas to move beyond establishing a system based on minimum standards to the development of higher nationally recognized quality standards for all after-school and summer programs. For this to be effective, incentives such as financial support and technical assistance would be needed; also, widespread public education would be required to encourage programs to strive to meet higher standards and for parents to recognize the benefits of participation in high-quality programs for their children and youth.

Adapting regulations that are flexible enough to apply to all after-school and summer programs, determining which regulations apply to certain programs and settings, and acknowledging barriers that some programs face in meeting such regulations are all challenges that must be addressed.¹⁸

See the appendix for additional information on adapting child care licensing requirements to promote quality after-school and summer programs.

The Governor’s Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Promote quality in after-school and summer programs by adapting minimum licensing requirements for school-age care programs to meet the diversity of after-school and summer programs in the state. These requirements provide the foundation for Arkansas to build higher-quality standards based on national standards.
- All after-school and summer programs evaluate the effectiveness of their programs with a common standard of measurement, regardless of the funding source.
- Require state agencies responsible for out-of-school time programs to collect common information and report progress on common outcomes for programs.

Arkansas Should Expand Strategic Partnerships

Strategic after-school and summer program partnerships, especially school-community partnerships, at the state and local level are a core requirement for success. Based on communication with those engaged in providing out-of-school experiences in the state, the Task Force determined that sustaining programs in local communities will require that they establish appropriate and enduring links with local and regional educational institutions. The most critical of these are the local school districts where the Task Force suggests the creation of formal links with after-school and summer programs. School-linked programs allow opportunities to share facilities, skilled teachers and other specialized resource persons, materials and supplies. Formal links also enable enrichment activities in after-school and summer programs to connect student activities to what students are learning in the classroom and provide a starting point for broader community engagement in after-school and summer programs.

It is also critical for after-school and summer programs to link closely with other educational institutions such as colleges and universities. These partnerships can provide hands-on experiences for

post-secondary students to apply their specialized training in education, art, physical education, science, and other fields of study and to increase opportunities for K-12 students to learn more about higher education and its benefits. Countless creative opportunities exist. These links also provide a potential two-way recruiting mechanism for higher education institutions to pique the interest of high school students and for after-school and summer programs needing to recruit skilled workers who are currently enrolled in higher education institutions.

As mentioned earlier, positive and enduring outcomes for children and youth participating in after-school and summer programs depend on community engagement from a diverse segment of the community. Health care organizations, businesses, law enforcement, parks and recreation, public libraries, artisans, environmental organizations, and many other potential resources exist in local communities that can provide educational and enriching activities or opportunities.

Strategic community partnerships help create community service and project-based activities. They can involve children and youth as volunteers with garden clubs, elderly care, and varied opportunities to use community awareness skills in practical, enjoyable settings beyond the program site. By teaching children and youth to become better citizens, by enhancing leadership skills, and by encouraging civic engagement, these strategic partners contribute to the positive outcomes gained by participants and build a better community.

The Governor’s Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Help schools and communities find creative ways to connect programs, schools, and communities beyond normal school hours by leveraging existing state and community resources, strengthening public-private partnerships, and formalizing school-community partnerships to build on school-day learning.
- Maximize the use of existing resources, especially school campuses and other community buildings,

After-school and Summer Programs and Workforce Development

FAST FACTS:

- In 1950, 80 percent of jobs were classified as “unskilled.” Today, 80 percent of jobs are classified as “skilled,” and employment growth is expected to be fastest for positions that require some type of formal postsecondary education, such as database administrator, physician’s assistant, or computer software engineer.¹⁹
- Only 40 percent of adults in the workforce in 2000 had any postsecondary degree, and fewer than half of all high school graduates who go on to college obtain a degree.²⁰ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, just 18.2 percent of Arkansas adults 25 and older had a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2006. That’s down from 19.7 percent in 2002.
- Only 32 percent of high school graduates are prepared for college coursework, meaning they require no remedial classes.²¹ In Arkansas the 2007 remediation rate for 4-year colleges was 39.5 percent; for 2-year colleges the rate was 76.8 percent.²²
- More than 70 percent of both college professors and employers said that recent high school graduates were unable to write clearly and had only poor or fair grammar and spelling skills.²³
- American businesses currently spend more than \$60 billion each year on training, much of that on remedial reading, writing, and mathematics.²⁴
- Remedial education costs Arkansas colleges and universities an estimated \$53.8 million annually.²⁵
- U. S. employers rate creativity and innovation among the top five skills that will increase in importance over the next five years,²⁶ and believe stimulating that innovation and creativity is among the top ten challenges of American CEOs.²⁷

to address the need for after-school and summer program facilities.

- Encourage formal links between schools, other educational institutions and out-of-school time providers. In particular, after-school and summer programs should make explicit program links to the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks.

Arkansas Should Link After-school and Summer Programs of all Types to Workforce and Economic Development

After-school and summer programs help businesses and working families. In particular, quality, accessible programs have the potential to:

- Keep the current workforce productive and focused during work hours by knowing their children are safe;
- Extend ways to educate the future workforce in an increasingly competitive and global economy;
- Address community- or region-specific skill deficiencies identified by business partners (e.g., technical training in a specific area, high school

diploma completion, etc.); and

- Help communities recruit new businesses and sustain growth by pointing to expanded opportunities for children and youth.

With strategic program-business partnerships, the opportunities are endless, and such partnerships involve the broader community in expanding quality after-school and summer learning opportunities.

Governor Beebe has vigorously promoted the interdependent link between education and economic development in Arkansas. That connection resonated with Task Force members discussing the impact of after-school and summer programs on working families and, at the same time, task force members saw the need to create more hands-on experiences for participants to connect what they are learning in school with real life experiences. Work-study programs, internships, apprenticeships, job site mentoring, summer employment opportunities, and other skill development for older youth fit into the vision for after-school and summer programs. The link between after-school and summer programs

with Arkansas's workforce training and economic development efforts emerged as a recurring theme.

Research supports the positive impact that access to quality after-school and summer programs has on working families. The gap between parents' work schedules and their children's school schedules amounts to as much as 25 hours per week.²⁸ Polling shows that 87 percent of working mothers say the hours after school are when they are most concerned about their children's safety,²⁹ and that this "after school stress" can lead to distraction that causes lower productivity and high turnover and absenteeism for working parents. Knowing that their children and youth are in safe, structured, and supervised programs, working parents are more focused and productive at work.

The Task Force further realized the potential benefits of linking workforce needs and economic development with after-school and summer programs in order to broaden the appeal of these programs in local communities. There is a pay-off to businesses, communities, schools, working parents and students who participate. A broad range of after-school and summer programs linked to workforce investment builds critical partners from the business and education community, and encourages programs to work closely with local workforce boards and other entities. The link between workforce investment and after-school and summer time creates more job-training, apprenticeships, work-study, or school credits for participants. This approach is particularly important in making after-school and summer opportunities relevant to older youth.

For this approach to be successful, local after-school and summer programs can work with local business and community partners to better understand local workforce needs. In turn, businesses can learn how programs can play a critical role in creating a well-trained workforce. Working in partnership with business has great potential for building community support, generating new program offerings and resources, enriching the lives of children and youth, and supporting economic development efforts in local communities across the state.

The Governor's Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Encourage program-business partnerships in communities to provide students with internship and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Link regional liaisons to local workforce development efforts to ensure that business and workforce training interests are represented on both a state and local level.

Arkansas Should Test Best Practices Approaches and Lay the Groundwork for Program Expansion

Given the current economic realities facing Arkansas, with competing demands for limited new state revenues, the Task Force took a practical approach to the next step forward. While there are well-researched best practices for quality after-school and summer programs, Arkansas must proceed thoughtfully to implement a statewide expansion. Recognizing the widespread demand for quality programs, Arkansas should develop multiple pilot after-school and summer programs to test best practice implementation and create innovation at the local and state level. Creating a system of regional liaisons to support after-school and summer programs and establishing pilot programs will require state revenues. These pilot sites would be required to develop partnerships, adhere to quality standards, measure what is accomplished, and illustrate what is possible to achieve. Pilot sites are not intended to replace existing programs but to enhance existing school-linked programs or create new partnerships between a variety of current and new service providers. These "best practice models" will test a variety of community-driven approaches to providing high quality after-school and summer programs and inform future statewide implementation efforts.

It is also important for Arkansas to continue its efforts to reach out to local communities to explore ways to build community support and public understanding of how after-school and summer programs enhance the education and economic future of Arkansas.

The Governor's Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Develop pilot after-school and summer programs to implement the recommendations and next steps of this report (e.g. quality standards, enhance school-community linkages, take maximum advantage of new regional liaisons who provide technical assistance that enhances the coordination and sustainability of program resources, etc). Pilots need not be new programs; they may also provide an opportunity to augment existing efforts and/or showcase and document progress of existing efforts.

Arkansas Should Strengthen and Develop a Statewide Structure

The Arkansas Department of Human Services, the Arkansas Department of Education, and the Arkansas Out-of-School Network have worked closely during recent years to shape the agenda that has led to a statewide approach to expanding after-school and summer programs. However, to take these programs to the next level of implementation will require that Arkansas evaluate what is currently in place and strengthen the coordination, access to resources, and structure needed to improve access to quality after-school and summer programs in Arkansas. The Task Force was very concerned about the state's ability to provide a structure for building the capacity of current and future after-school and summer programs and sustaining high quality programs in local communities. Statewide expansion of high quality after-school and summer programs will create a multitude of administrative duties. These could include identifying additional financial resources, providing technical assistance to programs, and overseeing a single statewide network and multiple local networks that bring together key partners.

A variety of state agencies have the potential to assume responsibility for this structure. These include the Arkansas Department of Human Services, the Arkansas Department of Education,

and the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board. The agency could contract with an appropriate statewide organization to support the structure on a day-to-day basis. The Task Force makes no recommendation for which state agency should assume responsibility for creating and administering this structure.

Arkansas should consider the creation of a system of regional liaisons that:

- Brings communities together to promote after-school and summer programs;
- Provides technical assistance and training activities;
- Helps to identify funding opportunities and community links to promote sustainability; and
- Promotes methods of accountability.

These regional efforts would require education, child care, youth development, and workforce development groups to support and inform the full range of after-school and summer programs in their designated area. The Task Force discussed the possibility of dividing the state into geographic regions established by the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board, given the interest in more explicit links between after-school and summer programs and workforce efforts.

It is also important for these regional liaisons to develop a statewide group and forum to communicate regularly on the common barriers, identified resources, and shared experiences that inform best practices in the local communities where they are working.

Regional liaisons would:

- Facilitate communication across local, diverse networks to build grassroots support for after-school and summer programs over the long term,
- Share information about funding opportunities and how to maximize, braid, and/or leverage federal, state, local and private funding sources,
- Help programs take advantage of national and state trends in after-school and summer programming,
- Educate the public, including community leaders and organizations, about the benefits of

- after-school and summer programs,
- Create partnerships among programs, organizations, and businesses,
- Convene and facilitate meetings of community leaders from the private and public sectors to plan for after-school and summer program development based on the expressed needs of a particular region/community,
- Provide technical assistance to programs on quality standards,
- Offer feedback to state-level stakeholders (e.g., policy makers, program administrators, etc.) on the expressed challenges and opportunities for programs in their regions,
- Develop strategies to recognize and improve after-school and summer programs at the community and regional level (e.g., poetry competitions, public forums where students talk about their experiences),
- Research the need for and supply of after-school and summer programs in their region/communities; and
- Form a statewide council of regional liaisons to mirror diverse representation needed in local communities.

The Task Force suggests that the state allow interested organizations, with established partnerships and track records, to apply for funds to serve as the administrative entity for these regional liaisons through a Request-for-Proposal process. Organizations may include, but would not be limited to: two-year colleges, universities, public schools, public libraries, United Ways, and other nonprofits.

The Governor’s Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Create a statewide system of regional liaisons to support and build the capacity of a full range of after-school and summer programs. Capacity-building activities would include, but not be limited to, program development and quality enhancement, financial and sustainability planning, outcomes and evaluations, effective planning and program implementation.

- Build a system to disseminate information on:
 - a. best practices and outcome measures;
 - b. linking programs to schools and each other; and
 - c. increasing community capacity to provide needs assessment, training, service delivery, evaluation, and technical assistance to support organizations that provide out-of-school services.

Arkansas Should Aid Program Sustainability

All of the discussions about expanding access to high quality after-school and summer programs eventually led to questions of resources and finding revenues to support these programs. The Task Force explored federal and state funds currently being used and those that could potentially be used to support programs. A survey of current providers was conducted to determine the extent to which they are currently making use of those funding sources identified by the Task Force. Many discussions were held with legislative and administrative officials to determine the funding landscape in Arkansas.

Information gathered from the after-school and summer program survey suggests that 80 percent of after-school and summer programs used two or more sources of funds. Federal funds from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC), the national School Lunch Program, and Americorps funds were the most widely used by school-based programs. Other federal funds used to support after-school and summer programs included Child Care Development Block Grants, Workforce Investment Act, Safe and Drug Free Schools, Title I, and Rural Achievement funds. State funding sources used to provide after-school and summer programs included funds from the school funding formula, health and mental health services, substance abuse prevention, and law enforcement support. Perhaps the most flexible, and therefore most promising, source of state funding for after-school and summer programs was the “poverty funding” provided to local school districts based on their population of students

participating in the National School Lunch Program. Only 20 percent of the programs participating in the survey indicated that these funds were being used to support after-school and summer programs. After-school and summer programs also use activity fees, membership fees, private foundations, parent fees and corporate contributions to fund programs in local communities.

In addition to funding sources, transportation issues also need to be considered when addressing sustainability. Transportation to and from programs remains a large barrier to program accessibility, which the Task Force views as a key component to program success and sustainability. Transportation needs are determined by the location of the program within the community, and transportation costs affect the total cost of the program services in urban and rural areas.³⁰ School districts may play a key role in expanding transportation to programs by adding stops for programs located within their bus routes, adding or changing bus schedules to adapt to activities after school, and/or offering additional enrichment activities on campus. The use of school facilities for extended day enrichment programs may be most effective in reducing transportation costs.

The main focus of the task force was providing enough support to existing programs to take better advantage of available funds so they could move toward higher quality standards and develop strategic partnerships at the local level. The recommendations on how to sustain programs with existing resources were based on the following assumptions:

- Available information suggests that a range of federal, state, local, and private funding streams are available, but it is not clear that they are being fully coordinated at the state and local levels.
- Some existing programs may not be taking full advantage of all available resources (e.g., food and nutrition funds, etc.)
- There is a strong need to strengthen public/private partnerships at the local level.
- Arkansas needs more grassroots networks of after-school and summer program supporters and opportunities to gain new supportive partners.

Arkansas needs to increase the capacity of new and existing after-school and summer programs to ensure quality and sustainability. The first step, on both a state and local level, is to maximize resources.



The Governor’s Task Force recommends the following next steps:

- Require state agencies and encourage state and local private partners to report expenditures annually on after-school and summer programs to inform state-level financing plans.
- Develop a database of resources for after-school and summer program administrators. Items may include grant opportunities, program evaluations, needs assessment resources, and other technical assistance tools and resources.
- Develop a comprehensive inventory of program supply statewide to inform families of local program opportunities and highlight high-need areas. This inventory could be housed in the aforementioned database to create a single resource for both providers and parents.
- Conduct a statewide public education campaign to educate communities and families about the benefits of after-school and summer programs and where such programs are available.
- Create an annual statewide after-school “event” to highlight the benefits of programs and unify programs of all types across the state.

Conclusion

The Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs developed the recommendations in this report through a careful and deliberate process that included many voices and diverse opinions. The Task Force members are confident that, if these recommendations are put in place, Arkansas will take a huge step forward in creating young Arkansans with strong academic skills and who are better prepared for their careers and who are healthier and more fully developed as citizens. From arts to apprenticeships to academic enrichment or sports, programs offered to students after school and in the summer months can inspire children and youth to learn in new ways and to engage in their communities. Implementing these proposals will not come easily. Governmental officials, business leaders, nonprofit professionals, school administrators and teachers, and parents will all have to invest considerable energy to make this vision a reality. We are very grateful that we had the opportunity to help make a difference in the lives of Arkansas's youth and are committed to continue our work to realize the promise that these proposals represent.



Summer vegetable garden, Inner City FutureNet, Little Rock

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