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## RECOMMENDATIONS ON AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT  
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### INTRODUCTION

After-school programs are a beacon for the millions of working families in California who need a safe, enriching environment for their children in the hours after the last school bell rings. These programs provide caring adult supervision, varied enrichment and recreation activities, and academic assistance for children and youth. Research has shown after-school care produces tangible developmental, social, and academic benefits for children,<sup>1</sup> while also leading to long-term cost savings for communities.<sup>2</sup> Investments in after-school programs promote positive child and youth development, while helping to divert costs associated with risky behavior, child victimization, and juvenile crime – all of which occur at higher rates when after-school options are limited.<sup>3</sup>

In 2002, California voters passed Proposition 49, the After School Education and Safety (ASES) Act, to secure ongoing funding for permanent, universal after-school programs at elementary, middle, and junior high schools throughout the state. Funding through Proposition 49 will bring significant change to California's after-school care landscape: adding up to 5,000 new programs, serving perhaps a half-million more children, and bringing an estimated 20,000 new jobs to the field.<sup>4</sup>

The initiative was structured to increase funding for California's existing state-funded, after-school services in the first fiscal year when state general fund expenditures exceed 2000 levels by at least \$1.5 billion. As defined in the initiative, funding for after-school programs could increase from the current level of \$121.6 million to \$550 million. The Legislative Analyst's Office now forecasts that this Proposition 49 "trigger" may not take effect until FY 2008-2009, due to state deficits and the current administration's disinclination to increase revenue through tax increases. Nonetheless, California would be wise to begin preparations immediately to ensure the upcoming more than four-fold increase in after-school investment produces measurable results and can serve as a model nationally.

Sections of Proposition 49 calling for the creation of universal grants – and setting the maximum levels of spending for those grants – cannot be changed without another vote of the people. However, many sections of the law can be amended with a simple majority vote of the Legislature. The recommendations that follow represent the best input from the after-school and school-age child care field about what the Legislature, the California Department of Education (CDE), and others in state government can do through Proposition 49 to ensure California is successful in building strong, effective after-school programs for children.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #1**

### **Change ASES Program funding formulas to ensure quality after-school care.**

#### ***Background***

The funding parameters that underlie the ASES Program are based on a formula that has been little changed since 1998, despite the fact that the costs of running programs have increased with greater state demands for academic and enrichment services. Funding is determined by students' daily attendance, with a reimbursement rate of \$5 per pupil per day. To cover the remaining costs of running an after-school program, grantees must raise local matching funds or in-kind donations (not including facilities) totaling at least 50% of the of the state's contribution. This funding formula raises three issues that can and should be addressed. First, the reimbursement rate is not high enough to cover the cost of providing after-school program activities to meet the expected outcomes. Secondly, some programs – in particular, low-income and rural communities, which are most in need of safe, enriching after-school programs – are challenged to raise the matching funds and face limited access to local dollars. These communities will likely need extra support to succeed under Proposition 49.

Finally, there is concern that the overall quality and effectiveness of after-school programs might be hampered by elements of the ASES funding formula. For example, though research has shown children receive greater benefits when after-school program staff are trained, funding tied to students' daily attendance means programs can never be reimbursed for staff training time when students aren't present. Additionally, it's important to note that quality after-school care works in tandem with other supports for children and families. The formula to "trigger" Proposition 49 means that after-school programs could be protected even as other systems – such as social services – face cuts. Significant cuts to these systems could destabilize after-school programs' efforts to work as part of a larger safety net to reduce childhood victimization and juvenile crime, improve student behavior and well-being, and support families' ability to work outside the home.

#### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. The Legislature should provide resources to support an analysis by CDE, state researchers, and representatives of the after-school field to study the true cost of providing quality after-school care. This would include an assessment of costs related to supplies, curriculum, training, technical assistance, administration, inclusion of children with special needs, and staff recruitment and retention. CDE should report findings to the Legislature within eighteen months to allow policymakers time to plan for the long-term costs of providing, not only a greater number of after-school programs, but also effective, quality programs under Proposition 49.
- B. Before implementation of Proposition 49, the Legislature should review the above study and consider increasing programs' per-pupil reimbursement rate to reflect the true cost of offering quality ASES programming. Funding for the increased rate should be based on the above analysis by CDE and should be supported out of the general Proposition 49 allocation.
- C. To ensure low-income and rural communities are not prevented from accessing ASES funding because of an inability to raise matching dollars, the Legislature should work to identify additional funding, including federal after-school program dollars and private funds, to help cover the cost of the 50% local match in vulnerable communities, where meeting this requirement might not otherwise be feasible.
- D. The Legislature also should work to identify funding to support staff training. These funds should be set aside to reimburse programs for up to four days of professional development at a rate based on programs' average daily attendance. After-school programs should be required to schedule these training days in coordination with the school to limit hardships for families.
- E. The Legislature should reject budget proposals that would cut needed funding for social services, juvenile justice, or other supports that work in tandem with after-school programs to benefit children, youth, and working families.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVE #2**

### **Define a role for community-based organizations in implementation of Proposition 49.**

#### ***Background***

Because it is supported out of the budget for education and administered by the California Department of Education (CDE), the ASES Program requires that a school or other local educational agency (LEA) be the fiscal agent for after-school funding. Nonprofit organizations and other community-based groups can partner with an LEA to apply for the grant and provide after-school services on school sites or their own sites, if safe transportation is available. YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, and other community-based organizations (CBOs) and school-age care providers serve up to 85% of all children in after-school care, while state-funded programs and federally funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers serve the remainder. Many CBOs have been providing after-school services for as long as a century with notable results. Yet schools less familiar with the grant-making process may not know how to capitalize on CBOs' expertise or may perceive disincentives to working with them. While community-based organizations, city representatives, law enforcement, and others are invited to participate in a planning process for each ASES program, these groups often are not integrated into the after-school program on a long-term basis. In some communities, there is evidence that, instead of expanding the overall capacity of after-school care in a region, the ASES program may be drawing children away from long-standing, after-school providers and into new, school-based ones. More clarity in the law would ensure community-based organizations are given a definitive role in Proposition 49 implementation, so schools benefit from CBOs' experience and achieve positive outcomes for youth, while also increasing the overall availability of after-school care in a community.

#### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. Because not all schools are likely to apply for universal grants, the Legislature should provide resources for CDE to study schools' readiness for and interest in applying for funding under Proposition 49. Within three years, CDE should report back with this analysis to help the Legislature better plan for the disbursement of grants and discretionary funds.
- B. CDE should integrate CBOs into planning efforts around implementation of Proposition 49.
- C. LEAs applying for Proposition 49 funding should continue to be required to involve CBOs in the application process. If a CBO already provides services to a significant number of children at a given school, that school should receive the sign-off of the CBO in its application for funding.
- D. The Legislature should approve an amendment within the next two years that more clearly defines the role of CBOs in ASES program delivery. CBOs should be permitted, with a school's sign-off, to become fiscal agents for ASES programs.
- E. To ensure overall after-school program capacity grows, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, working with the Governor's office and the Legislature, should convene a group to develop strategies to ensure that growth in the ASES Program under Proposition 49 complements and expands existing systems and community-level services. This effort and its follow-up activities would help ensure the intent of the law is met with a greater number of after-school slots available and more children served overall in after-school care under Proposition 49.
- F. The Legislature should provide resources to CDE to facilitate changes in the grant payment process to ensure funding supports materialize early and reliably, creating more incentives for CBOs and other quality after-school program providers to apply for funding.

### **POLICY OBJECTIVE #3:**

#### **Revise the criteria for measuring ASES Program outcomes.**

##### ***Background***

The intent of the ASES program is to provide both academic support and enrichment activities in order to improve student attendance, behavior, and academic performance. The current criteria by which ASES programs are evaluated in order to qualify for recertification of grants every three years includes student attendance data and standardized test scores. But effective after-school programs provide a wide range of services that supplement academic activities, such as tutoring and homework help. Programs provide recreation and physical activity; enrichment through art, music, drama, sports, technology, and the sciences; activities that support students' emotional and social development; events for parents and families; and character development and leadership activities. Research has found these after-school activities are equally important – not only in promoting children's health and well-being – but also in supporting learning engagement.<sup>5</sup> School-day attendance, student behavior, homework completion, and other positive outcomes increase when quality after-school programs provide this full spectrum of services. By contrast, too much emphasis on measuring after-school programs' impact on standardized test scores can result in unrealistic demands on ASES providers and narrowly designed program activities. Broadening the criteria for evaluation of after-school programs would allow providers to offer the full range of content they know works most effectively in assuring that students attend programs regularly and receive all the academic and developmental benefits of a quality after-school program.

##### ***Recommended Actions***

- A. CDE should work with a task force, including representatives of the education and after-school fields, to examine recertification and assessment issues. This task force should produce recommendations for new evaluation criteria within eighteen months.
- B. Based on the work of the task force described above, CDE should develop more appropriate measures for assessing after-school programs' impact on school success, as well as its impact on enrichment and the broader development of children and youth. Any new evaluation tools that may be needed in order to measure more relevant indicators of after-school program success should be developed and tested before implementation of Proposition 49 to ensure new tools are effective and that programs and schools can reasonably employ them in evaluation.

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##### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Based on 2001 evaluations by the California Department of Education of state-funded after-school programs and independent evaluations of LA's BEST, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and other programs cited in Children Now's publication, *After-school Care for Children: Challenges for California*, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The Rose Institute on State and Local Government reports that each at-risk youngster diverted from a future path of crime can save society between \$1.4 million and \$1.7 million over that person's lifetime.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, *America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime or Youth Enrichment and Achievement*, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Blueprint Research & Design, *Some Assembly Required: Building the Workforce for California's After School Programs*, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Source: *Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success*, Dr. Beth Miller. 2003.