

After School Program Recommendations for the California Working Families Policy Summit 2002

Submitted By
FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS CALIFORNIA &
CALIFORNIA SCHOOL-AGE CONSORTIUM
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Introduction

In 1998, California's legislature initiated the now named Before and After School Learning & Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Programs (BASLSNPP), which provides local after school education and enrichment programs. In Winter 2001, a broad-based coalition of after school advocates (including Fight Crime: Invest in Kids CALIFORNIA, Foundation Consortium, Children Now, Boys & Girls Clubs, California School-Age Consortium and others) organized a series of regional meetings to gather community input to inform policy development around after school programs. Specifically, attendees were asked to address questions of program quality and program expansion in the context of both the current BASLSNPP law and the stated goal of "after school programs for all children in need."

More than 1,000 stakeholders from around the state – including individuals representing school based programs, community-based organizations, law enforcement, labor, county and state government, and legislative staff – participated in these meetings. The initial framework of this document, *After School Recommendations for the California Working Families Policy Summit 2002*, reflects what was learned at the regional meetings from community members and professionals.

These recommendations are intended to strengthen the impact and success of the Before and After School Learning & Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Programs. Given the effectiveness of after school programs in improving student academic success, reducing juvenile crime and victimization of youth, and providing safe, productive solutions for children and youth during out of school hours, these recommendations are timely and relevant for the current and near future legislative sessions.

I. Expand Before and After School Learning & Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Programs.

Background

About 100,000 children and youth in 1,000 elementary and middle schools are served by the BASLSNPP. Nearly one million low-income children and youth with two working parents or a single working parent are without access to publicly funded after school programs.

Recommendations

- A. Maintain existing funding level; and
- B. Each budget year that allows, add 100,000 new children and youth to the program.
Approximate cost for state funds is \$1,000 per child/youth served, or \$100M total for 100,000 new children/youth served.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS CALIFORNIA
2910 Telegraph Avenue, Suite 300
Oakland, CA 94609
(510) 836-2050 fax (510) 836-2121
www.fightcrime.org/ca

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL-AGE CONSORTIUM
111 New Montgomery, Suite 301
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 957-9775 fax (415) 957-9776
www.calsac.org

II. Institute COLA and Cash Match Increases for BASLSNPP

Background

The BASLSNPP is funded by the state at the rate of \$5/day/child or youth. A 50% local match is required; the match may be in-kind or cash. Since the program began serving communities in 1998, no COLA has been appropriated to the program. Funding for the program is not adequate to assure that the program is of high quality. Local in-kind matches—as opposed to cash matches—may not serve the purpose of building the local community financial support necessary to sustain programs.

Recommendations

- A. Award an annual COLA;
- B. Award a retroactive COLA for each of the years that the program has been in operation without being awarded a COLA; and
- C. Require that at least 50% of the required local match be in cash.

III. Address Staff Recruitment, Retention and Training

Background

The BASLSNPP requires only the minimal staffing qualifications for instructional aides; however, the program requires that there be an educational and literacy component and an enrichment component. The national turnover rate for after school providers is 40%, in large part due to the low pay, no or limited benefits and part-time hours. Untrained staff may be overwhelmed by the expectations and skills needed to work with school-age children on academics and tutoring, behavior guidance strategies, and creating positive outdoor and indoor environments/settings.

National research has shown that quality after school programs that are effective in improving students' academic performance, self-esteem, and behaviors are staffed by well-trained, consistent professional staff. Acknowledged staff retention practices include jobs that offer benefits and adequate wages, professional recognition and appreciation, and the competence and capability to conduct ones job. The absence of these can be expected to result in burnout or failure.

Recommendations

- A. Provide a COLA or increase daily reimbursement rate for BASLSNPP to help programs provide more competitive salaries and pay scales;
- B. Include after school providers in the CARES bill that financially rewards child care providers for professional development accomplishments and longevity in service;
- C. Investigate a tiered-reimbursement for programs/grantees that demonstrate staff retention and professional development tracks;
- D. Develop a state pool of funds to cover after school staff benefits, continuing education and training costs;
- E. Require BASLSNPP grantees to demonstrate good faith efforts to coordinate work hours of instructional aides during school hours with after school program hours to create full-time positions with benefit; and
- F. Include the after school field (i.e. policy, professional development, funding, and other issues) in the Master Plan for California Child Care.

IV. Provide Adequate and Available Facilities for After School Programs

Background

The BASLSNPP operates on school sites after school or adjacent to school sites during the after school hours. After school programs need dedicated and appropriate space to provide their unique, and complementary service. Although shared classroom space may be suitable for the educational/tutoring component of the after school, the enrichment, recreation and/or life skills programming exceeds the traditional classroom space capabilities. Like the regular day classroom programs, after school programs need dedicated management space as well.

Recommendations

- A. Require program grantees to dedicate space for after school management and supplies; and
- B. Allow schools to contract out to provide the program off site.

V. Provide Program Flexibility for Service Hours and Financial Reimbursement

Background

The BASLSNPP requires that programs be open for three hours after school and at least until 6:00 P.M. every school day. The program is reimbursed on a per student per 3-hour day attendance at \$5.00. School days end at various times sometimes causing some after school programs that are required to be open until 6:00 to exceed the 3 hours funded by BASLSNPP. In addition, requiring students to stay until 6:00 P.M. may conflict with family schedules that allow for students to return home earlier. This is also a safety concern during the winter months for students walking home after dark. Lastly, a student may miss a day of after school due to sickness or scheduling conflicts, and yet, the after school program has ongoing daily expenses to operate for all enrolled students.

Recommendations

- A. Reimburse programs for extended hours of providing after school services beyond the required three hours daily; and
- B. Reimburse programs on a per student enrollment based on a 15 hour per week total, as long as the average weekly enrollment is 80% of the time or better.

VI. Expand and Include Off-Site Locations as Service Providers of BASLSNPP

Background

The BASLSNPP is restricted to after school services hosted on or adjacent to school sites. Often school locations are not in the same neighborhoods where families live. The current provision limits schools in their options for after school programs. Experienced after school providers, such as community-based organizations and non-profits, do not have the opportunity to offer leadership in providing after-school services. Concerns have been raised over CBOs being granted public funds to provide after school services off-site without being licensed.

Recommendations

- A. Allow school districts to contract with CBOs for off-site programs, as long as safe transportation is provided and educational components of the program are aligned with the student's regular school of attendance. Schools would remain the fiscal agent; and
- B. Initiate a dialogue that will result in the creation of appropriate health and safety guidelines to be observed by all after school providers, regardless of funding and regulatory auspices, who serve children and youth out of school time.

VII. Involve the High School Students and High Schools

Background

High school students need safe, enriching places to be during after school hours. The BASLSNPP is available only in elementary and middle schools. Yet there are almost 500,000 high school students from low-income families without access to publicly-funded after school programs.

Recommendation

- A. Provide state funding for pilot programs that involve high school students. These programs may involve students in a variety of activities including those to promote academic achievement and community service which may include services as a resource for elementary and middle school after school grantees.