THINK OUTSIDE THE CLOCK

PLANNERS LINK AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS TO CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

By the staff of The Wallace Foundation

For most teachers and parents, education prime time takes place in the weekday hours between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. from roughly Labor Day to Memorial Day. But in recent years, growing numbers of policy makers, city officials, and educators have been eyeing the expanse of time outside these temporal borders and asking a simple question: What can communities do to help children grow and learn after the school bell rings?

The concern is that too many children and teens, especially the poor, are left to their own devices after school and over the summer. The result is long hours filled, at best, with idleness and boredom, and at worst with risky behavior. What's needed, say those focusing on out-of-school time, is a way to allow poor children to occupy these hours with the types of learning opportunities and wholesome experiences that other children take for granted, from the arts to sports to extra academic help.

In short, there's a movement in the United States to make good after-school and summer programs available to those who need them most. "Kids need to have safe spaces," says Paige Ponder, acting head of the Office of Student Support and Engagement, which oversees out-of-school time programs enrolling 92,000 children and teens in the Chicago Public Schools. "They need productive relationships with adults, opportunities to do and learn things in a way that are not typical within the school day, and time just to hang out in a safe and productive environment."

WHY EDUCATORS SHOULD CARE

Why should this be of note to teachers, administrators, and those who lead professional learning — a group that already has a lot to think about?

Perhaps most important is growing recognition that good out-of-school time is good for children. These are hours when children can pursue worthwhile endeavors not covered in the school curriculum, develop new skills, reinforce classroom lessons, and mature in healthy ways. "Recent studies indicate that high-quality, well-managed and structured out-of-school time opportunities can help youth develop critical academic, social, and emotional attributes and skills, especially if offered consistently and persistently over time," said a recent RAND Corporation report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation (McCombs, Bodilly, et al., 2010).

Educators have a closer-to-home reason for paying attention to out-of-school time, too: Carefully crafted after-school and summer programs could play a role in solving vexing education problems facing city youth. In Chicago, for example, Ponder is looking at after-school programs as a strategy in the effort to decrease the school dropout rate. "We don't want out-of-school time to be a couple more hours of the same thing students have been doing all day," she says. "But it if feels really different from what they have been doing all day, you can re-engage their brains and get them enthusiastic again."

There's a practical consideration, too. Educators could well be bumping into out-of-school time programs in the places where they work. School buildings are often the nerve center of after-school and summer activity, with public school classrooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias serving as the settings for everything from chess matches and play rehearsals to basketball practice, homework help, and snack time. Furthermore, school-day staff members, including faculty, can be important figures in out-of-school time. Sometimes, program organizers turn to teachers to help them get the word out about their offerings, as was the case in Washington, D.C., after market research there revealed that teachers are major influences on young teens (The Wallace Foundation, 2008). And researchers in New York City found that a group of after-school programs that employed a master teacher or education specialist had a higher attendance rate than similar programs without these positions (Russell, et al., 2010; see box at right).

In addition, parents want high-quality after-school and summer programs, and families in which the need is especially great are seeking programs with an academic bent. One survey found that more than half of lower-income (52%) and minority (56%) parents would go out of their way to find an after-school program that set aside time for their children to do homework in a supervised setting. This was almost double the percentages for white and higher-income parents (Duffet & Johnson, 2004). Demand for summer programs is equally high. About 56% of parents whose children do not currently participate in summer learning programs are interested in signing up their kids — that's about 24 million children and teens (Afterschool Alliance, 2010a).

A final reason educators should be paying attention to out-of-school time is that government officials are. Over the last decade or so, federal policy makers who want to turn otherwise-unused hours into an opportunity to reinforce classroom learning have backed their idea with dollars. In fiscal year 2010, the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, established with $40 million in 1998, distributed $1.6 billion to the states for after-school academic enrichment for students in high-poverty, low-performing schools (Afterschool Alliance, 2010b).

CITYWIDE PROGRAMS

Washington officials are not the only ones with out-of-school time on their minds.

City leaders, too, have been eying the potential of out-of-school time, and many have landed on a similar approach to advancing it: putting together the pieces of what amount to citywide systems of out-of-school time programming. Typically in cities, out-of-school-time programming is fragmented. Individual programs — and the government agencies and private funders that finance them — work in isolation from one another. The many, varied organizations involved in some way with out-of-school time include libraries, parks departments, YMCAs and other private program providers, housing agencies, police departments, city hall, and, of course, schools.

The idea behind out-of-school time systems is to coordinate the after-school workings of all these groups so they op-

> ### Key role of master teachers in out-of-school time
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> A recent study sponsored by The Wallace Foundation looked at an after-school program for middle school students in New York City. The community centers, called "Beacons," are based in public schools. "When we compared the 20 Beacons in the top attendance quartile with the 20 Beacons in the bottom quartile in terms of the percent of participants meeting a 216-hour attendance objective, we found that more Beacon directors in the top-quartile Beacons reported having a master teacher or education specialist on staff than did the directors of the bottom-quartile Beacons. Specifically, 67% of top-quartile Beacons had master teachers or education specialists on staff, while only 19% of bottom quartile Beacons did" (Russell, et al., 2010, p. ii).

erate in sync to achieve at least three goals: better programs, increased attendance, and data-based decision making about these and other important out-of-school time matters. Data collection and analysis is new for the out-of-school time field. Before system-building efforts began, cities often lacked even the most rudimentary information about their collections of out-of-school time programs, including the number of children enrolled citywide (McCombs, Orr, et al., 2010).

A soon-to-be-published report from the National League of Cities looks at about two dozen cities with out-of-school time system-building efforts under way, and The Wallace Foundation has helped finance out-of-school time efforts in five others. The Wallace-supported efforts are in Boston, Chicago, New York City, Providence, R.I., and Washington, D.C. Another indicator of interest in out-of-school time systems is growth in the National League of Cities Afterschool Policy Advisors Network, a group of city leaders who share information about out-of-school time system building. When the network was launched in 2005, it had 22 member cities. Today it has more than 400. The ventures vary widely according to the needs and circumstances of their locales, which range from small cities (Charleston, S.C., population 108,000) to large (Chicago and New York), and include places as diverse as Denver, Spokane, Grand Rapids, Mich., and Nashville. Some efforts are led by private, nonprofit groups, others by school systems or other municipal agencies, such as family services departments. What all have in common, however, is a hope to turn what is now a largely haphazard arrangement of after-school programs into a more coherent whole.

Building an out-of-school time system isn't easy. It's tough to pull together so many different organizations with so many different interests. And whether the fledgling ventures will endure is an open question, especially in tough economic times. But the systems do hold promise, according to the RAND Cor-poration report, which was in part an evaluation of work in the cities with Wallace-supported efforts. "This initiative provided a proof of principle — that organizations across cities could work together toward increasing access, quality, data-based decision making, and sustainability," the report said (McCombs, Orr, et al., 2010, p. 74).

ROLE OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Public schools, as the sites of much out-of-school time programming, have a central part to play if out-of-school time systems are to develop successfully. The after-school planners interviewed by RAND stressed that they needed buy-in from the schools to make sure that school buildings would house programs, "that facilities would be open, and that responsibility for maintenance, heating, cooling, and insurance would rest with the schools." In several cities, the out-of-school time program placed an after-school coordinator in school buildings "to ensure full school cooperation, active recruiting efforts for after-school programming, and coordination between school-day and after-school activities" (McCombs, Orr, et al., 2010, pp. 68-69).

For cities on the cutting edge of out-of-school time system building, linking classroom learning to after-school activities presents exciting possibilities. Take Providence, R.I., which, with Wallace support, has emerged in recent years as a national model for out-of-school time system building. There, out-of-school time organizers are working with the school district to develop after-school and summer activities that promote literacy, develop math and science skills, and, when they can, reinforce the learning requirements outlined in the district curriculum. See an evaluation report of the program in Kotloff and Korom-Djakovic, 2010.

In 2006, a nonprofit organization, the Providence After School Alliance, began to set up out-of-school time programming in a number of the city's public middle schools. The project draws on a wide range of community organizations to provide activities: the Providence Police Activities League, the local Y, the U.S. Tennis Association, a local theater group, and even the zoo, to name a few. But teachers are very much part of the scene, too, working with students on academic skills in the programs' required daily learning-time session and also leading activities that come from their own out-of-school interests, horseback riding, web design, and Ultimate Frisbee among them.

Providence organizers are also striving to have the rigors of the school-day curriculum and the hands-on buzz of after-school activity influence one another. Last summer, for example, planners established a four-week, interdisciplinary summer learning program for 7th and 8th graders who had tested just at or slightly below proficiency in math and English. Organizers hoped that this could stem summer learning loss and give children an academic boost when they returned to school in September. The program aimed to help these children build

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Standards and professional development

In examining the out-of-school time sites that receive support from The Wallace Foundation, researchers explored how leaders at the sites work to improve the quality of their programs. Setting standards and offering professional development were key strategies, along with assessment systems to monitor providers, contractual mechanisms, and evaluating outcomes.

Professional development varied across the sites. Providence's offerings didn't initially align with standards, though they have since been adjusted. New York City invested heavily in professional development and offered onsite technical assistance for some programs. Some Boston sites used coaches to assist staff. All those interviewed by the researchers found the coaching extremely helpful.

Source: Bodily, et al., 2010.

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general literacy and numeracy skills, and when possible, learn some of the material specified in Providence's core curriculum. Teams made up of English teachers, math teachers, educators from the science-based out-of-school time programs, and after-school coordinators worked together to design four compelling but content-rich sets of activities to carry out these goals.

The Bay and Me was a typical program, the result of a collaboration between school teachers and educators from Save the Bay, a nonprofit organization working to restore the ecological health of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay. The children spent only about 40% of their time in the classroom. The rest of the time, they could be found at Save the Bay, in marshlands, on beaches, and aboard a boat that plied the bay's waters. Students drew on algebra to do things like calculate the number of gallons of water produced by rainstorms. They also learned some of their vocabulary words with the tried-and-true method of hearing and using words in context. The meaning of "brackish," for example, became clear when the children sampled the slightly salty water they were studying.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND IN SCHOOL

Providence is assembling other out-of-school time collaborations with teachers as well. Last fall, the Providence After School Alliance brought together representatives of 20 out-of-school time programs, 10 middle school math and science teachers, and university professors in areas like math and science education to figure out ways to incorporate science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) concepts into after-school programs. Among other things, organizers hope to develop a web page of ideas for deepening their STEM-based out-of-school time curriculums. The group also developed a document detailing the key elements of inquiry-based learning that each is committed to using in out-of-school time work.

Patrick Duhon is at the center of much of this activity. He is director of expanded learning in Providence, a position that currently is paid for by a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and that gives him two bosses — the head of the Providence After School Alliance and the superintendent of the Providence Public School District. For Duhon, out-of-school and classroom time are two sides of the same coin for city young people. Both strive to give children and teens what's required to grow, learn, and succeed, he says.

"We are looking at kids who are coming to us with so many needs," Duhon said. "The minute they walk into kindergarten, there's already a significant education gap between them and their counterparts in suburban districts. There's no way school alone can give them everything they need. So we need as many adults as possible working together for them."

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