

AFTERSCHOOL *news*



Rural Afterschool Programs: Challenges and Solutions

Afterschool programs in rural areas face many of the same challenges that programs in urban areas do: limited funding and difficulties recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff. Rural programs also face unique challenges such as higher poverty rates¹ and impeded access to health care, social services, and transportation due to geographic isolation. Below are five strategies rural programs can use to address those challenges.²

Build coalitions to help with transportation. Invite parents, day-school staff, community leaders, and funders to brainstorm solutions to transportation challenges. Possible ideas include identifying new transportation funding sources; changing school bus routes; using existing public transportation resources; or partnering with other community organizations like childcare providers, service centers for elderly, or religious institutions.

Identify possible funding sources. Public service organizations, foundations, corporations, and individual contributors are potential funding sources. Although these organizations may not focus exclusively on afterschool programs, their goals may align with those of your program. They can also offer in-kind contributions or subsidized services like reduced rent, discounted utilities, and volunteers.

Increase the number of trained staff members. Appropriately trained staff can help ensure that afterschool activities are meaningful and beneficial to the students who attend. You can increase the number of trained staff members by recruiting day-school teachers, providing professional development, and recruiting retirees with relevant skills to work or volunteer at the program.

Use existing volunteer organizations to recruit staff. Organizations like AmeriCorps, 4-H Afterschool, the Parent Teacher Association, Experience Corps, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and the Boys and Girls Club can serve as a source of potential staff for afterschool programs.

Maximize resources. Local schools and community colleges can provide space, transportation, materials, and technology resources that help make an afterschool program successful. A community college can give students access to career education and college counseling.



Local schools and community colleges can provide space, transportation, materials, and technology resources.

The SEDL National Center for Quality Afterschool helps state education agencies and local practitioners develop high-quality programs for academic enrichment as well as youth development activities.

www.sedl.org/afterschool

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. (2007). Rural America at a glance: 2007 edition. *Economic Information Bulletin*, 31.

² Collins, A., Bronte-Tinkew, J., & Logan, C. (2008, May). Strategies for improving afterschool programs in rural communities. *Research-to-Results Brief*. Retrieved January 3, 2008, from www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2008_05_05_RB_RuralOST.pdf



RECOMMENDED *resource*

VIRTUAL ACADEMY FOR AFTERSCHOOL

This interactive professional development resource includes five online courses for professionals in a variety of afterschool and out-of-school settings. Each course includes links to help align afterschool to day-school learning, effective instructional strategies, guided practice in project planning, and evidence-based instruction models that keep students engaged.

www.sedl.org/afterschool/academy



Photo by Wheatland School District

“Focus on developing a flexible, replicable program design that provides consistent, high-quality services.”

TARA AROZ

grant coordinator and
program director

Wheatland School District Afterschool Programs

YUBA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Not only are the four afterschool programs in Wheatland School District (WSD) located in a rural area in Yuba County, California, but two of them are also located on an Air Force base. In addition to the usual challenges that rural afterschool programs face, these programs experience high student turnover due to the military population. Grant coordinator and program director Tara Aroz says that rural programs have many benefits. It is easy to use word-of-mouth communication to get feedback from participants and also to promote the program. The communication appears to work because the afterschool programs are very popular. When the program recently opened enrollment, the first parent was in line at 8:30 a.m. for afterschool student enrollment that opened at 7 p.m.

Aroz suggests that rural afterschool leaders “focus on developing a flexible, replicable program design that provides consistent, high-quality services.” WSD helps its afterschool programs by centralizing some services in the district’s Grant Services Department, which provides district-wide support services, technical support, and staffing resources. Afterschool staff also work closely with schools and other district programs to maximize resources. “The programs have become highly effective in sharing school classrooms, computer labs, office equipment, and staff,” says Aroz. To maintain consistency across the programs and district, afterschool leaders also align district, school, and program goals with community, student, and parent needs.

IN YOUR words

What do you think President Obama’s policy toward afterschool programs should be? (Select all that apply.)

- Provide more grants.
- Provide more training and technical assistance.
- Fund research to identify high-quality programs.
- Create a certification program or career ladder.
- Nothing. Out-of-school programs do better with less government involvement.
- Other

To participate in this survey and view results, submit your vote at www.sedl.org/afterschool/afterwords/survey200901.html

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Editor: Laura Shankland
Designer: Shaila Abdullah

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TRAINING tip

Take Advantage of Technology

It used to be that living in a rural community created a barrier to high-quality training for afterschool staff. Today, afterschool programs can use the Internet to take advantage of online training that requires no travel time or associated costs. The SEDL National Center for Quality Afterschool has several online training resources, including the Afterschool Training Toolkit and the Virtual Academy for Afterschool. Now afterschool staff can learn what high-quality afterschool programs look like without leaving the building.

EVENTS calendar

Feb. 18–19 Using the Afterschool Training Toolkit for Professional Development
www.sedl.org/cgi-bin/mysql/afterschool/news.cgi?announcement=44
AUSTIN, TX

For more events, visit our calendar at www.sedl.org/afterschool/training/calendar.html.

Newsletter available online at www.sedl.org/afterschool/afterwords