

Leadership and Political Will

The State of Cities

Municipal and community leaders — whether they gained their position through election, appointment or more organic community processes — have been critical in moving an out-of-school agenda in cities around the country. Elected officials are often the critical force behind citywide out-of-school efforts. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino spearheaded the city's successful 2 to 6 initiative, resulting in increased public and private investments and a marked growth in program capacity. San Diego Mayor Susan Golding sparked a massive increase in after-school programs with her call for before- and after-school programs in every one of the city's elementary and middle schools. LA's BEST, that city's flagship after-school initiative, owes its success in large part to the support of two consecutive mayoral administrations. Elected officials occupied a bully pulpit in all of the GRASP cities, arguing that all children (and sometimes all youth) deserve access to high-quality after-school programs. In some cases, mayors and city council members have moved beyond words, helping to motivate significant public investments in programming and infrastructure.

In addition to this top-level leadership, a variety of other leaders and leadership bodies — city agencies and their directors, community organization and intermediary leaders, members of the business community and neighborhood leaders — help to focus public attention and community resources on out-of-school issues. For instance, the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) in San Francisco — until recently under the leadership of Deborah Alvarez Rodriguez — has played a critical role in supporting the

city's rich network of community-based organizations. DCYF has also leveraged federal, state and city dollars to move city-wide initiatives, and has supported city-wide agenda setting focused on children and youth. Agencies like this one, as well as nonprofit intermediaries like New Futures for Youth in Little Rock and YouthNet of Greater Kansas City, are as central to a successful out-of-school agenda as are supportive elected officials.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

What roles do leadership and political will play in supporting out-of-school opportunities?

How can political will and leadership increase the capacity of out-of-school time programs?

What contributes to out-of-school time being a priority to political and community leaders?

There needs to be a balance between top-down and bottom-up leadership, with multiple levels or entry points. Such a balance must protect local diversity and strengths while somehow leveraging citywide leadership.

— A Chicago stakeholder

While these leaders are important in every city, the breadth, depth and nature of leadership varies across cities. During a series of meetings in one GRASP city, none of the civic and philanthropic leaders — including high-ranking representatives from major foundations and corporations — were willing to step out in front as a lead on the project. It soon became clear that leadership has a collective character in this particular community; the city's leadership moves together, and no one is eager to get out in front. Another GRASP city is rich in high-level political leadership from the mayor on down, but neighborhood-based leadership and community organizations are often left out of the mix in important decisions, and the depth of this leadership is much less significant. In another, while the mayor is supportive of out-of-school programming, the real movement comes from other city officials and nongovernmental entities.

Recognizing the diversity of leadership approaches and configurations in cities is important. Yet, a scan of cities reveals several bottom lines. First, demonstrated

The GRASP project is a time-limited, focused effort to help four cities — Chicago, Little Rock, Kansas City and Sacramento — document the opportunities and infrastructures that support young people in the out-of-school hours, and to develop "big picture" plans for better supporting children and youth. GRASP was initiated by the Forum for Youth Investment with the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.



Helping organizations that invest in youth, invest in change

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Tolman, J., Pittman, K., Yohalem, N., Thomases, J., & Trammel, M. (2002). *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda: Lessons and Challenges Across Cities*. Takoma Park, MD: Forum for Youth Investment.

commitment to the issues on the part of political decision makers and leaders of all sorts is vital — and this commitment must be rooted in an understanding of the issues. Second, the capacity of these leaders to move resources, broker connections, bring people around a common table and enact strategy is vital — and these capacities are far more important than the specific positions, in or out of government, that they occupy. Third, while different cities have different leadership styles, inclusive leadership — operating from the bottom up and the top down, from inside and outside of government — is necessary in order to move an out-of-school agenda.

Critical Issues, Lessons Learned

Top city officials provide vital voices and political force behind an out-of-school agenda. In Chicago, the mayor was the driving force behind *Blueprints for Change*, a vision document that resulted in the creation of YouthNets — publicly funded community centers that combine program delivery and coordination functions — in 24 of the city’s 25 police precincts. The mayor’s wife, in turn, is the leader behind a new citywide effort, *After School Matters*, that aims to provide out-of-school opportunities to a majority of the city’s 12- to 18-year-olds. In Little Rock, both the mayor and the city manager are vocal proponents of the city’s investment in Prevention, Intervention and Treatment programs. The mayor was a leader in the city goals-setting process that resulted in the funding for these programs. In one city, a commitment to an “after-school opportunity for every child” by a top city official was enough to move advocates and providers into new collaborations — even when the pledge was not followed by significant activity. Mayors can also be unlikely allies, as in another city where a mayor looking to make up for dramatic cuts in youth programs came on board to support a new out-of-school initiative.

City departments with strong leadership and responsibilities that bridge multiple areas can move vision into reality. Having top city leaders lend their voice to out-of-school issues is important. But it takes a coordinating agency or department inside city government to turn that voice into a meaningful, effective commitment to young people. A scan of these governmental coordinating bodies in the GRASP cities reveals several common features. First, the leadership of these institutions must be politically

CITY SNAPSHOT: CHICAGO

Chicago’s out-of-school system is blessed with committed and influential public leadership. The long-term commitment of Mayor Daley and his wife has played a critical role in two of the city’s most significant out-of-school initiatives: the citywide *Blueprints for Change* that lead to the creation of community-based youth centers called YouthNets, and the recent launch of a large-scale initiative called *After School Matters*. Other public-sector leaders help to bring the Mayor’s commitment to life. B.J. Walker, Mayor Daley’s chief of human infrastructure, “really gets the idea of youth development, and has a portfolio that cuts across all the relevant institutions,” according to one stakeholder. Renae Ogletree, director of the Youth Services Division of the Chicago Department of Human Services, brings remarkable credibility with community organizations and concerted focus on key challenges — standards development and coordination, for instance — to her work. The leadership of the Chicago Public Schools has helped combine potentially fragmented investments in school-based programming — 21st Century dollars, desegregation funds, private foundation dollars, and numerous other streams — into a more cohesive effort. That these public sector leaders share compatible visions for out-of-school programming — emphasizing a broad range of supports and focusing needed attention on adolescents and older youth — means that efforts across jurisdictions complement and reinforce one another.

This public leadership is both a blessing and a curse. According to many stakeholders, community-based organizations and the nonprofit sector need to take a more active leadership role in out-of-school time. Stakeholders identified the need to cultivate this nonprofit leadership; they also expressed a concern that community-based organizations have not been given a seat at the table when important decisions are made. This call for community-based leadership reflects a deep desire to balance top-down and bottom-up leadership, and to create multiple levels and entry points for leadership.

savvy, with connections to and credibility among both elected officials and to community-based providers. Second, the agency should have jurisdiction over, or at least connection to, the range of government bodies that touch the out-of-school hours — workforce development, parks and recreation, city-funded youth programs, health and human services, etc. — and its mandate should reflect this broad picture of who and what it takes to support young people. Third, the agency should have sufficient clout and staffing to act as a convener and broker, with easy access to the city’s political leadership and a say in how resources are dispersed. Institutions with such characteristics are rare — but they do exist in some of the GRASP cities, and where they do not exist, their functions are sorely missed.

The Beacons (school-based community centers) in New York City grew in ten years from just ten sites to 80. They survived across a change in mayoral administrations. Why? Because they became popular in communities. Their expansion was driven by local political demand of city council members. As their visibility grew, a local constituency developed that demanded the Beacons. City council people heard from parents, “we want one of those.” Or else they could see that their colleagues had one of these things — that did events, that attracted concentrated attention, that was visible as a community resource. It just became very attractive.

— A New York City stakeholder

Grassroots and civic leaders need to be welcomed to the table if the effort is to be successful. Leadership inside government, when not matched with and linked to community-based leadership, can result in efforts that are top-down and not fully embraced by community organizations and neighborhood constituencies. A number of emerging city initiatives examined through GRASP do not adequately focus on building neighborhood support or give meaningful roles to community-based organizations. The results: atrophy of community infrastructure and power, disenchantment on the parts of parents and neighborhood residents, and a distrust of city government. But alternative models do exist. Chicago’s YouthNets and youth collaboratives are designed to support neighborhood-based coordination and leadership, and funding through Little Rock’s Prevention, Intervention and Treatment program goes to existing community-based organizations, rather than to public institutions.

Cultivating stable leadership is critical; so is building efforts that will survive inevitable transitions in leadership. Political support for out-of-school programming lasts for one of two reasons. In cities like Chicago, support is consistent and significant because the leaders who support it are not going away. Mayor Daley is a stable political force in the city, and his commitment to the issues is deep. In other communities, New York and Los Angeles for instance, support for out-of-school programming is relatively secure because of the depth of leadership advocates have developed, and because the initiatives are designed to cultivate their own political will. Initiatives like the Beacons in New York and LA’s BEST in Los Angeles are visible enough, popular enough and attractive enough to the politicians whose districts are home to these programs that they are nearly guaranteed ongoing support.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP: LESSONS FROM THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

Through its Extended Learning Opportunities Initiative, the National League of Cities (NLC) is assisting a select group of municipal leaders as they work to expand after-school opportunities for children and youth. According to NLC, municipal leaders play a critical part in the out-of-school mix — and the roles they can take on move far beyond providing funding, though this is clearly a critical role. What follows is an excerpt from the NLC’s toolkit on expanding after-school opportunities.

Municipal governments frequently provide direct financial support for after-school programs run by local agencies. These funds augment resources otherwise available through federal and state grants, private contributions and fees paid by parents. City investments in after-school opportunities can have a big impact, even when they are modest in size and scope, because local officials can utilize these funds in ways that leverage other resources and respond to the community’s greatest needs.

At the same time, municipal financing is only one of the ways that city leaders can strengthen after-school initiatives. Mayors and city council members can serve as a catalyst for far-reaching efforts that address a number of other key challenges, including:

- Promoting partnerships
- Building public will
- Assessing local resources and needs
- Improving quality
- Broadening access
- Financing a citywide system

In each of these areas, municipal officials can play leadership roles by focusing public attention on key issues, convening major stakeholders and setting an agenda for citywide progress. The stature and influence of mayors and other city leaders are often essential in order to bring community partners to the table and to develop local action plans.

City officials may be tempted to think of after-school programs as someone else’s responsibility. Most of the funding for after-school initiatives will not flow through the city’s budget, and most of the programs operating in the community will not be run out of municipal agencies. Nonetheless, city officials are uniquely positioned to create the framework for community-wide collaborations upon which genuine and lasting progress depends.

Source: Ouellette, Mark. (2001). *Expanding Afterschool Opportunities: Action Kit for Municipal Leaders*. Washington, DC: National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Contact Information for Local Efforts

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Contact Information for National Resources

The Institute for Youth, Education and Families, National League of Cities is examining the role of municipal leadership in the out-of-school field through a multi-year technical assistance project with several cities around the country. Resources, including a tool kit for elected officials, a database of promising practices and other materials, are being developed over the course of this project. For more information, contact:

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