



**Comments Submitted to New York State Education Department (SED)  
Regarding SED Development of Contract for Excellence Regulations and Guidance  
May 22, 2007**

The experience of NYSAN's school and community-based practitioners across New York State, along with a growing body of state and national research, shows that high-quality afterschool programs are distinctly able to provide the types of engaging, individualized learning opportunities that New York's most struggling students need.

In the regulations and guidelines that have been issued to date by New York State Education Department (SED), it is not clear that school districts may use funds governed by the Contract for Excellence for afterschool programming. We urge you to provide districts with guidance about how they may support high-quality afterschool programs. Specifically, we request that the next version of regulations to be brought forward to the Board of Regents include afterschool as an explicit option within the section regarding "student time on task" or "lengthened school day," and that the Department's upcoming guidance to school districts for the 2007-08 Contracts (due July 1) make clear that strategies to achieve increased student time on task or lengthened school day may include high-quality afterschool programs.

This request is supported not only by research and by the experience of NYSAN members in the field, it has also been endorsed by Governor Spitzer. In his State of the State address delivered in January 2007, Governor Spitzer said, "We know that more time in the classroom – in the form of longer school days, a longer school year, and after-school programs – also makes a difference."

Below we outline the latest research on the links between participation in afterschool programs and student academic performance, and suggest the quality standards that SED incorporate to ensure that Contract for Excellence funding will support effective programs.

**Why Afterschool Programs Work:**

To improve in-school performance, children need the kind of learning opportunities that quality and engaging afterschool programs can provide. We have seen time and again that for most struggling students, teaching the same way in an extended day or extended year doesn't make much of a difference. But engaging students in more time in learning "afterschool style" does make a difference, by providing individualized, small group and project-based instruction, and deploying a variety of non-traditional mediums – use of the community, hands-on science, technology, the arts, and service learning – to engage students. Afterschool programs do this through a more varied and flexible staff structure than schools alone can provide. High-quality

afterschool programs have high adult to child ratios, including certified teachers, youth workers, community programs, and volunteer tutors and mentors.

Such program structure and staffing, frequently delivered in partnership with a community-based partner organization, gives struggling students the kind of personalized attention and support that can make a real difference in their academic and personal success. Indeed, the availability of afterschool programs is particularly important for those students most at-risk of dropping out. These students often cite boring classes and the lack of a positive relationship with teachers as the reasons why they don't come to school. Quality afterschool programs, on the other hand, keep students engaged with interesting ways to reinforce their school day learning and give them the one-on-one attention that regular classrooms often cannot provide. Moreover, delivering afterschool programs in partnership with community agencies benefits students and the school by bringing in volunteers from the community, helping to engage parents, and often raising additional resources from outside of the normal school realm.

### **Research on Afterschool Programs and Student Performance:**

There is a substantial research base of studies that document the effectiveness of afterschool programs in supporting student academic achievement – both directly, through tutoring, homework help and other academic support and enrichment, and indirectly through increasing student attendance and engagement in the regular school day. Below is a quick summary of some of the most robust and comprehensive of these studies. The attached Fact Sheet from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time provides additional research citations. We would be happy to provide you with more detailed information about any of this research.

*Attending high quality afterschool programs contributes to young people's success in school and is correlated to increases in standardized test scores and grades.*

- A synthesis by researchers at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) of studies conducted over a 20-year period indicates that out-of-school time activities can have positive effects on the reading and math achievement of low-performing or at-risk students. (Lauer et al., 2004) A more recent review by these same authors analyzing 35 research studies makes similar conclusions. (Lauer et al., 2006)
- A summary produced by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time on the leading studies in the field summarizes well-researched findings by the Search Institute, Public/Private Ventures and several others that out-of-school time activities are associated with increases in academic achievement and other important measures of positive youth development. (NIOST, 2007)
- In a study of one of the country's largest afterschool initiatives – LA's Best in Los Angeles – participating students demonstrated higher academic achievement on standardized tests of math, reading and language arts. In addition, language re-designation rates favored LA's BEST students when compared with non-participating students. Evaluation results also revealed that students' regular school-day attendance improved once they began participating in the afterschool program. (Huang et al., 2000)
- A five-site evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs' national Project Learn program found average grade increases over the 30-month study period were greatest for program youth

– afterschool participants increased their average grades by 11% while comparison youth increased their average grades by only .4%. (Schinke et al., 2000)

*Young people’s school-day attendance improves if they participate in afterschool programs.*

- The After-School Corporation (TASC) found in an evaluation of 96 programs that school day attendance increased for pre-K to eighth grade participants compared to non-participants, especially for students in grades 5-8. (TASC, 2005)
- Low-income teenagers who participated in an after-school program in several large American cities were more likely to be high school graduates (63%) compared to non-participants (42%) and more likely to go to post-secondary schools (42%) compared to non-participants (16%). (NIOST, 2003)
- The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network lists afterschool opportunities, and several other strategies often delivered in afterschool settings, among the 15 effective strategies that have the most positive impact on reducing the school dropout rate. (Smink, 2007) In a longitudinal study, researchers at UCLA found dropout rates among LA’s BEST students are 20% lower than the overall district dropout rate. (Huang et al., 2005)
- A new study by the Chapin Hall Center for Children finds that youth in Chicago's After School Matters program have better class attendance, lower course failures and higher graduation rates. Researchers found that students who participated in the program missed fewer days of school than their classmates, and that students who participated most frequently failed fewer core academic courses. (Goerge et al., 2007)

*Positive academic outcomes are often achieved through comprehensive, high-quality afterschool programs that address a wide range of youth development goals.*

- A meta-analysis of 73 evaluations of programs showed that afterschool programs succeeded in improving youths’ feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, school bonding (positive feelings and attitudes toward school), positive social behaviors, school grades and achievement test scores. They also reduced problem behaviors (e.g., aggression, noncompliance and conduct problems) and drug use. In sum, afterschool programs produced multiple benefits that pertain to youths’ personal, social and academic life. (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007)
- Afterschool programs can support the development of a range of non-academic competencies and characteristics that, in turn, support young people’s academic learning. They help to eliminate the consistent barriers to learning faced by young people. For instance, afterschool programs can offer a level of engagement and specific supports that may “reach” youth that have otherwise been unreachable because of disruptive behavior, lack of interest, poor sense of self, or repeated failure. (Hall et al., 2003)

*Program structure and consistent participation matter.*

- In a recent report by the William T. Grant Foundation, programs demonstrating characteristics that the authors label SAFE – Sequenced, Active, Focused and Explicit – and that utilize instruments to measure program quality, were found to be associated with positive outcomes for participants. (Granger et al., 2007)

- The benefits from afterschool programs intensify as children and adolescents continue their involvement over a succession of years. (Vandell et al., 2006) Children’s gains are more profound if they participate regularly (an average of 3 days per week) *and* over time. (Simpkins Chaput et al., 2004)

In summary, this research suggests several conclusions that should be incorporated into SED’s guidance regarding funding for afterschool programs under the Contract for Excellence. These conclusions are:

- ***Operating Hours & Attendance*** –Programs should be funded to operate at least daily and throughout the school year. Preferably, communities should determine hours of operation that best meet children and families’ needs, including operating during school holidays, evenings, summers and weekends. Programs should be held accountable for attracting students to participate with sufficient intensity and duration to achieve the desired academic and youth development outcomes.
- ***Staffing*** – Programs should adhere to national best practices regarding staff-student ratios and staff qualifications. The most successful programs have high staff-student ratios and employ staff and volunteers who are experienced working with young people and trained in the specific activities they are conducting (whether academic, enrichment, recreational, etc.).
- ***Program activities*** – Programs should include, but not be limited to, academically focused support and enrichment activities. Successful programs offer students a variety of academic support, enrichment, recreational and personal development activities that are developmentally appropriate to the age of the participating students.
- ***Partnerships*** – Partnerships between schools and community-based organizations should be strongly encouraged to ensure that programs meet family and community needs and draw upon the diverse approaches, resources and expertise of both school and community partners.

### **Indicators of High-Quality Afterschool Programs**

While the research cited above makes clear that afterschool programs can have a significant impact on academic achievement for the neediest students, it is also clear that the components and characteristics of a program matter. We recommend that the Contract for Excellence guidance define the quality standards and outcomes that school districts must incorporate in using new state funds for afterschool programs.

Fortunately, SED has already adopted a comprehensive, research-based framework for defining high-quality afterschool programs. Developed by NYSAN, the Program Quality Self-Assessment (copy attached) is a 10-point set of standards drawn from leading national research and best practices that identifies the key indicators of quality programming. SED requires afterschool programs funded through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) program to use the NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment. In addition, the New York City Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) has adapted the NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment as its framework for monitoring programs funded by the City’s innovative Out-of-School Time (OST) initiative.

In developing Contract for Excellence guidance, SED should use the NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment as a guiding framework and draw from the specific requirements and outcomes set forth in SED's 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program, New York City's OST initiative and the state's Advantage After School Program administered by OCFS. A selected summary of the requirements of these programs is attached.

**Suggested Language for the Contract for Excellence**

As stated above, we request that Contract for Excellence regulations and guidance for 2007-08 explicitly instruct school districts in how they can use their increase in foundation aid to support afterschool programs. Afterschool programs should be an allowed strategy within the areas of "student time on task" and/or "lengthened school day." To ensure implementation of high-quality programs that contribute to improving academic achievement for the neediest students, SED should identify the quality standards and outcomes that school districts must incorporate based on the research, frameworks and program models cited above.

The members of NYSAN welcome the opportunity to provide further information and serve as a resource in any way that would be helpful as SED continues to refine the Contract for Excellence and further the state's efforts to improve educational opportunity for all our children and youth.

Thank you.

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