

AFTER-SCHOOL FOR ALL? EXPLORING ACCESS AND EQUITY IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Issue 4 • July 2003

IN THIS COMMENTARY

- 1 Definitions and Basic Facts
- 2 Is There Equal Access in After-School Programs?
- 4 Is There Equity in After-School Programs?
- 5 How Can Program Planners and Policy Makers Address Access and Equity Challenges?

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The Out-of-School-Time Policy Commentary series is written and published by
The Forum for Youth Investment
with support from the

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

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SUGGESTED CITATION:

The Forum for Youth Investment. (2003). *Out-of-School-Time Policy Commentary #4: After-School for All? Exploring Access and Equity in After-School Programs*. Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Available online at www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/comment/ostpc4.pdf

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“For all” is a powerful commitment that is promised more often than it is attained. Funding is the primary reason that social programs which aspire to the “for all” goal fall short of it, but that is not the only reason. Access and equity challenges can intervene to create gaps in where and when services are provided, which populations are offered services, which ultimately use the services, and which actually benefit from them. As after-school advocates, policy makers and program leaders build on the momentum of the past several years, these and other key questions are surfacing in the context of community conversations, research studies and legislative language.

While recent public commitments by Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Afterschool Alliance to make “after-school for all” a reality by 2010 mean this will be a front-burner issue, it is still an ambitious idea. In this commentary, we push beyond some of the basic numbers to take a close look at questions related to access and equity, in order to surface tensions and share concrete recommendations for addressing concerns at the policy and program levels. To do so, we drew heavily on new data from California Tomorrow and a handful of other reports and studies. We also talked with Delia Pompa of the National Association for Bilingual Education; Amy Scharf and Laurie Olsen of California Tomorrow; and Jennifer Peck of the Bay Area Partnership. Their ideas and comments are integrated throughout.

DEFINITIONS AND BASIC FACTS

The terms “access” and “equity” often appear as a bundled pair in human services and civil rights literature. They have complementary but distinct meanings, however, that are associated with different tensions and challenges.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines access as “the ability or right to approach, enter, exit, communicate with, or make use of.” In the context of after-school programs, therefore, access refers both to availability and participation. Equity, on the other hand, defined as “the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair,” includes but extends beyond concerns about availability and participation to raise important questions about the content and nature of programs themselves. Access is about availability and participation; equity is about fair treatment. Being clear about these terms and, in particular, bringing an equity lens into conversations about access, can help turn an isolated request for bus vouchers into a broader discussion about lack of infrastructure, or a call for a culturally-sensitive curriculum into a conversation about systemic racism.

Access is about availability and participation; equity is about fair treatment.

What do we know about participation in after-school programs? Not enough. The numbers are rough. But numerous studies lead us to two conclusions:

OVERALL, SUPPLY IS NOT MEETING DEMAND

- In 1998, the National Opinion Research Center found that after-school program availability met only half the demand among elementary and middle school parents.
- More recently, a 2003 U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey of 86 cities reported that only one-third of those children needing after-school programs were enrolled.
- The Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) 2001 evaluation results paint an even more dramatic picture of the availability of opportunities in Seattle, Boston and Chicago, showing a very modest percentage of children having access to regular programming.

**TABLE 1:
ESTIMATED SUPPLY OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN THE
MOST CITIES IN RELATION TO TOTAL NUMBER OF
ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN**

	Number of Full-Time Spaces Available	Number of School-Age Children	Percentage of Children Served
Boston	8,000	56,000	14
Chicago	35,000	350,000	10
Seattle	14,000	40,000	35

Halpern, R., Spielberger, J., & Sylvan, R. (2001).

Limited budgets and inconsistent definitions of what is meant by “after-school programs” continue to hamper data collection efforts. Nonetheless, it is safe to estimate, based on these and other findings, that demand for after-school programs is outstripping supply by roughly a 3:1 ratio. If only one-third of school-age children who need programs have access to them, then a critical next question is which one-third? Are after-school programs reaching the diversity of youth who need them?

DIVERSITY IS THE NORM FOR MOST AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

“From coast to coast, small towns to big cities, after-school programs around the United States enjoy and struggle with the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that has come to define our nation.”

— CALIFORNIA TOMORROW

Consider the following statistics from California Tomorrow's recently released report on after-school programs around the nation (California Tomorrow, 2003). Among the 273 programs responding to the survey:

- only 11 percent serve a single ethnic group;
- more than 90 percent serve some youth of color;
- 57 percent serve between two to four different ethnic populations;
- 89 percent serve two or more language groups;
- more than 40 percent enroll a majority of youth from low-income households; and

- almost 60 percent report serving one or more youth with physical disabilities.

IS THERE EQUAL ACCESS IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS?

The good news is that in the past several years we have witnessed an expansion in programs and an emphasis on serving those in communities of greatest need. The recent expansions made possible by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and large-scale initiatives in cities like Boston, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago have greatly increased access for a greater number and range of children and youth. But a look inside of communities reveals that access to individual programs remains uneven. Access varies by geography, by community and by individual youth and family characteristics. Low-income and rural communities are often underserved. Immigrant youth are often underrepresented because of outreach challenges, older youth because of funding priorities and poor youth because of ancillary costs — transportation, fees — and because there are fewer opportunities available in their neighborhoods.

WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE LIVE IMPACTS THE QUANTITY OF OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM

While program expansion over the past several years is promising, we must not forget the basic reality that families' financial circumstances and geographic location play a huge role in determining the kinds of educational (and other) opportunities children and youth can access. Chapin Hall researchers Joan Wynn and Julia Littell demonstrated in 1989 that, while demand was relatively consistent across neighborhoods, the quantity and variety of programs was dramatically higher in an affluent Chicago neighborhood (71 activities per 1,000 youth) than in a low-income Chicago neighborhood (23 activities per 1,000 youth). Despite progress in increasing citywide statistics, these income-related variations in program availability still present a huge challenge:

- In Detroit, a study commissioned by the Skillman Foundation (1995) found that “fifteen (of the city's 38 recreation centers) are located in communities with the lowest population densities; 16 of the communities in the three highest categories of population density do not have a center. Only one center is in a community with a high density of youth.”
- According to a 1999 Future of Children report by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the families least likely to be able to access after-school programs are those living in low-income neighborhoods.

RURAL PROGRAMS FACE UNIQUE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

The same Future of Children report noted that in rural areas especially, the availability of programs only covers an estimated one-third of the population of children with employed parents. Coordinating and securing transportation for participants is often one of the first challenges facing programs in rural areas, as they typically serve a large geographic region. The economic base in these communities is frequently more limited than in urban and suburban areas, so youth and adults alike tend to face greater struggles with high unemployment rates and poor local economies.

One major resource many rural programs lack is access to a range of potential community partners, an essential ingredient to long-term sustainability. Rural areas often have few employers, civic organizations or local funders. As one after-school administrator explained at a conference for grantees hosted by the Mott Foundation: “I would [go to grantees’ meetings] and hear about all these partnerships. And I would think, what was I not doing? Where I live, there are no business partnerships. If there was a business to partner with, twelve schools would be in line for it, and you can bet that ‘so-n-so’ beat me to it.”

THE “BASICS” — PROGRAM FEES, TRANSPORTATION AND ENROLLMENT SLOTS — PRESENT SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS FOR MANY YOUTH

Program costs, transportation and limited space create significant barriers to full participation. California Tomorrow found that while 80 percent of the programs that responded to their survey served some low-income youth, 57 percent charged more than nominal fees for program participation. Forty-one percent of programs served mostly low-income youth, yet of those, nearly 30 percent charged more than nominal fees and had no sliding scale provisions. Utilization rates appear strongly linked to program characteristics such as cost and accessibility, resulting in waiting lists at free programs and empty spaces in programs that charge fees.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation reported that school-age child care programs that are open three to four hours a day cost between \$2,500 to \$4,000 annually per child and that the vast majority of after-school programs are funded through parent fees. As a consequence, programs primarily serve children from middle-income families and are located in middle-class communities.

The Extended-Service Schools (ESS) initiative engaged primarily low-income, urban children and youth in after-school programs in several cities across the country. The

ESS evaluation found that of the programs studied, eight of ten reported operating at capacity — serving as many students as possible with available resources. Still, enrollment limitations required that three of the ten programs cap enrollment during one or both years of the study, and one program limited the number of days per week youth could register. The evaluators also noted that while ESS programs were successful in recruiting low-income youth who reflected the demographics of their schools, “the youth most in need of academic and developmental support typically still do not join.”

OLDER YOUTH ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY UNDERSERVED

In part due to how after-school programming has been framed at the policy level (e.g., child care for working parents), and in part because of funding priorities and competing obligations (e.g., sibling care, employment), older youth tend to have fewer opportunities to participate in after-school programs than younger children. A recent U.S. Conference of Mayors’ report found that 48 percent of cities surveyed report an upper age limit of 14 for participation in their after-school programs.

The Forum’s Greater Resources for After-school Programming (GRASP) project revealed trends in out-of-school time programming in four cities around the country. In Kansas City, less than one-quarter of organizations

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS COMMITTED TO EQUITY: SPOTLIGHT ON HANDS ACROSS CULTURES

In the Española Valley of northern New Mexico, Hispano and Native American communities have thrived for generations, with robust ethnic and linguistic traditions, strong spiritual roots, a self-sustaining agricultural base, and a local culture of craftsmanship. In recent years, with the backdrop of a declining economy and shifting social trends — such as high drop-out rates and the highest number of heroin overdoses per capita in the country — young people from both the Hispano and Native American populations have experienced a dramatic loss of their cultures and languages.

In 1995, the community established the Hands Across Cultures Corporation (HACC), a nonprofit organization that runs several after-school, youth and other programs. Drawing on local traditions and relationships, Hands Across Cultures aims to help young people ages 6 to 18 heal from the pain of poverty and marginalization, supporting risk prevention, community development and personal and academic growth through cultural awareness, sharing and pride.

La cultura es cura (the culture is the cure) is the central message and the organizing principle of all HACC activities. Over the eight years of its existence, the program has incorporated cultural elements into a variety of school- and community-based projects. Because of strong staff-youth understanding and palpable respect for young people’s histories, participants feel truly “seen,” sometimes for the first time. For the community as a whole, HACC seeks to re-inspire a lost sense of both the past and the future. As one young woman said, this can make all the difference: “That’s where I get all my strength, knowing that I have traditions, culture and my language.”

This snapshot is based on a larger profile in California Tomorrow, 2003.

Visit Hands Across Cultures Corporation online at www.hacc95.org/index.htm.

reported providing out-of-school activities and supervision for youth age 16 or older. In Chicago, less than 30 percent of organizations reported offering any structured opportunities to youth after age 18. More than 85 percent, on the other hand, offered programming for elementary-aged children.

Time use data indicate that program participation drops off in middle school, ostensibly because older youth are not interested in formal programs. Yet, both anecdotally and through formal surveys, young people tell us otherwise. Nationally, more than half of teens surveyed by the YMCA in 2001 wished there were more programs available after school, and two-thirds of those surveyed said they would participate in such programs if they were available.

IS THERE EQUITY IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS?

Programs showing promising attention to equity issues, like those profiled in sidebars throughout this commentary, share several characteristics. They share similar understandings, philosophies and models, including cultural embeddedness, support for identity development, cross-cultural and anti-bias learning, strong youth leader-

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS COMMITTED TO EQUITY: SPOTLIGHT ON PRESCOTT CIRCUS THEATER (FORMERLY THE PRESCOTT CLOWN TROUPE)

The array of offerings at the Prescott Circus Theater include magic, acrobatics, juggling, hip hop dance and unicycling. An elementary after-school program in Oakland, California, that provides performance opportunities for participants, the Prescott Circus Theater operates in one of the city's economically under-resourced neighborhoods. Among the program's key strengths include its contributions to building a strong sense of community in the Prescott Elementary School and its conscious development of young people's identities through culturally-conscious approaches, emphasis on neighborhood connection, and attention to personal development.

The Circus Theater runs year round and is open to all fourth and fifth grade Prescott students. Participants of differing academic levels, learning styles and performance abilities come together several times a week to receive training from professional artists in various areas of circus arts. The group performs as many as fifty paid and volunteer shows each academic year at school assemblies, hospitals, homeless shelters, conferences, holiday celebrations, and other community events and venues. The program continues during the summer, when the students participate in additional training, performance, academic and recreational activities.

Because of the Circus Theater's largely African-American population, the program works to incorporate African and African-American elements into the group's learning and performances. For example, the students learn and perform still dancing in a tribute to the African roots of stiling. Their repertoire also includes hambone body drumming, a practice which started when drums were taken away from African slave communities because of their powerful communication strength. As the members of the Circus Theater work with their instructors on circus elements like these, they not only grow to master the activities on a practical level, but also come to understand the historical significance behind them.

This snapshot is based on a larger profile in California Tomorrow, 2003.

ship, and staffing practices designed to directly respond to diversity and equity. According to California Tomorrow's research, these program characteristics are much less prevalent than more "tangible" elements such as academics, recreation and safety. There is reason to believe that some children and youth will be unable to benefit from the "tangibles" unless the "intangibles" exist. As the California Tomorrow study points out, however, there are also sound reasons to believe that the "tangibles" differ from program to program in ways that consistently disadvantage low-income and minority students.

PROGRAM CONTENT APPEARS TO DIFFER BASED ON RACE AND CLASS

Echoing Littell and Wynn's findings from over a decade ago, California Tomorrow's survey found that programs in more affluent areas are more likely to provide an enrichment focus and more specific types of programming. In contrast, programming in low-income areas tends to be more generic. For example, the arts program in a low-income community consists of basic arts and crafts activities, while the arts program in a wealthy community provides opportunities for exploring and developing specific skills in areas such as ceramics, drama or drawing.

Resource shortfalls do not tell the whole story, however. The California Tomorrow study found some low-income programs were able to provide an integrated, holistic educational experience. California Tomorrow described one such project-based arts program in a low-income, mostly Latino elementary school: "Because of an interest in 'integrating academics into enrichment activities' (from organizational mission statement), the program consciously incorporated state math, literacy, and social science standards into identity-focused painting, drawing, and cultural projects. As students worked to complete art projects on themes related to their cultures and histories, they also received instruction and practice in skills such as measurement, writing, research and presenting their ideas in a public forum."

California Tomorrow also noted that a smaller number of elements tended to be found in programs serving predominantly African-American youth as compared to programs serving other groups. "Predominantly African-American programs tended to have the lowest per capita budgets. These programs had the fewest resources to work with." Twenty percent offered no sports or recreation compared to only 6 percent of white-majority programs. Thirty percent offered no enrichment components at all. And only a third of African-American programs focused on arts and crafts compared to 57 percent and 71 percent of Latino and white-majority programs respectively. The most com-

mon elements in these programs included life skills, snacks/nutrition, parent involvement, field trips, academic tutoring and mentoring. Scharf also noted that the incidence of fewer elements in African-American majority programs appeared to be linked to the basic issue of resources — e.g., older facilities and fewer materials — and found solid evidence that staff commitments were strong in those programs despite resource challenges.

Programs based in predominantly Latino communities offered a wider array of program elements than these other two groups. They also offered more culturally-specific programming. In addition to the “typical” complement of offerings found in other programs, almost all of the Latino-majority programs offered English as a Second Language instruction, arts and crafts, field trips, prevention programming, sports and community service programming. Yet despite the general trend of offering a broad array of program elements, less than 50 percent provided home language development support.

HOMWORK SUPPORT IS SPOTTY AT BEST

One of the key things educators and parents want after-school programs to do is to help students complete their homework. But for many students, homework completion is dependent not just on dedicated time, but on dedicated support. California Tomorrow noted that the typical program serving predominantly low-income youth of color featured “study hall” as the primary academic component. This was certainly the case for one program serving African-American and Latino youth that they visited:

“During this study hall, 40 students struggled to complete seven or eight different homework assignments, many of which they did not understand. Two or three staff members circulated around the room, offering brief moments of practical help, but most felt they did not have enough time to address the conceptual questions underlying many young people’s difficulties. As a result, many students left with little more content knowledge or skill than they arrived with, notwithstanding the fact that they felt they had done their homework.”

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND LGBTQ YOUTH APPEAR TO BE PARTICULARLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

While the most global concerns center on key inequities related closely to class and/or race, California Tomorrow’s study points to these three populations as particularly underserved and/or unacknowledged in programming considerations such as training and staffing decisions. For example, while 56 percent of programs served more than one language group (and 25 percent served English lan-

guage learners), half of programs had no staff that spoke the home languages of these participants.

Forty percent of program directors reported not receiving training to address issues concerning students with physical disabilities (one-third had no training for mental and behavioral disabilities), though school-based programs did better in securing staff with the necessary training (using special education teachers from the school) and had more legal and policy supports for access and inclusion.

Researchers reported a general lack of awareness that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) youth populations exist, and less than 10 percent of program directors were trained to address LGBTQ needs. Urban and community-based nonprofit programs were much more likely to provide access to LGBTQ youth and to support them explicitly.

HOW CAN PROGRAM PLANNERS AND POLICY MAKERS ADDRESS ACCESS AND EQUITY CHALLENGES?

By acknowledging them. The after-school movement is growing into its own at a time when state budgets are hemorrhaging. Policy makers wanting to respond to the demand will undoubtedly have to argue that after-school programs produce big results for a modest price. There is enormous pressure to find ways to maintain or increase

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS COMMITTED TO EQUITY: SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH ACTION

South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!) is a nonprofit, community-based organization based in Elmhurst, New York, dedicated to helping low-income South Asian youth empower themselves. The young people in the program are of South Asian descent — coming from countries such as Bangladesh, Guyana, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago — and are from various religious and regional backgrounds. SAYA! is the only known agency of its kind in the United States, and was created in 1996 by a group of South Asian professionals who recognized the need to develop and support young South Asian leaders. According to their Web site, SAYA! achieves this goal by “building cultural, social and political awareness to combat the issues and stereotypes South Asian teens face everyday.” In addition to leadership training, SAYA! also offers academic and career support, drop-in activities, athletic development, school-based counseling and case management, and safe space activities such as Desi Girls on Da’ Rise, a program where South Asian girls come together to discuss issues and conflicts they face growing up in the U.S.A.

The main leadership program at SAYA! is ARISE, a co-ed youth community-organizing group working toward social justice. ARISE explores South Asian community issues and creates projects and campaigns to stimulate change. Each year, ARISE selects an issue to organize around, such as having teachers receive proper training before working with immigrant students.

Through SAYA!, many youth have come to better understand the challenges and issues their communities are facing, and have become proactive by choosing to be leaders and seeking ways to address their concerns and to achieve justice for their community.

This snapshot is based on a larger profile in California Tomorrow, 2003.

Visit South Asian Youth Action online at www.saya.org.

the numbers served and to link outcomes to academic performance and, for middle and high school youth, risk reduction. These pressures make it all the more important that access and equity questions be asked and answered. Without a clear focus on who is being reached and how they are being supported, the answer to the “which third?” question is likely to become “the third that is easiest to reach and easiest to teach.”

What resources and incentives could policy makers and planners put in place to increase the likelihood that access and equity issues are on the radar screen? California Tomorrow’s study and our observations point to several solutions: more training, better data, flexible approaches, targeted resource allocation and the development of a healthy mix of school- and community-based programs.

These recommendations are not new. They reinforce the solutions called for by those committed to increasing both the quantity and the quality of programming available. Improvements in access and equity are almost impossible to imagine outside of the context of these broader basic commitments.

PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR STAFF TRAINING

“Many funding agencies, in trying to ensure that their funds support services rather than overhead, often cap the percentage of a youth program’s budget that can be used for administration, the broad category that usually includes staff training.”

— ANDREW HAHN AND GORDON RALEY

Key Staff Skill Areas	Programs Reporting Training Is Needed	Programs Receiving Training	Size of Gap
Working with youth/families not fluent in English	68%	23%	45%
Working with gender-specific groups	69%	29%	40%
Facilitating cross-cultural understanding	82%	44%	38%
Understanding cultures of particular groups	88%	51%	37%
Working with youth and families in poverty	79%	42%	37%
Addressing gender bias	71%	35%	36%
Culturally-sensitive discipline and management	86%	51%	35%
Working with gay and lesbian youth and families	44%	10%	34%
Anti-racist, anti-bias curriculum and approaches	77%	44%	33%
Working with youth with disabilities	84%	61%	23%
Dealing with behavioral and mental health issues	94%	72%	22%
Conflict resolution	94%	81%	13%

Source: California Tomorrow, 2003.

While many programs continue to struggle to best meet the needs of young people, the challenges facing the after-school field do not represent a lack of interest on the part of providers. According to California Tomorrow, significant gaps exist between the desired and actual training of after-school program staff. For example, while only 23 percent of staff received training in working with non-English speaking families, 68 percent of directors identified a need for such training (see Table 2: After-School Staff Training Needs).

FACILITATE THE COLLECTION OF MORE, BETTER DATA

“We saw programs that didn’t see there were whole populations they weren’t serving. They didn’t have the data to compare to the demographics of the school or the neighborhood. In the programs that were disaggregating, staff said it really began to shape their programs.”

— LAURIE OLSEN

The California Tomorrow study found that four in five programs do some level of data collection for internal and external purposes, but less than 30 percent of programs collect the kind of data needed to assess how well different types of youth are served. Of those, only 11 percent do any kind of analysis of differences between groups. When programs did this analysis, however, they found significant differences in who participates in various components of the program, and clearly different impacts on different groups.

Delia Pompa underscored the importance of collecting and disaggregating data that will help shed light on access and equity questions in the after-school arena, and emphasized the role that policy should play in ensuring such questions are answered: “Policy needs to be deliberate and specific about the needs of children. For example, if the feds [federal policy makers] had not said that data had to be disaggregated in Title 1, it wouldn’t have happened.”

ENCOURAGE EQUAL OUTCOMES BUT DIVERSE RESPONSES AND APPROACHES

“High standards for all doesn’t mean the same approach for all.”

— DELIA POMPA

Looking back at our original definition of equity — “the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair” — gives us a window for understanding how equity principles may call for shifts in resource allocation or our application of “best practices.” Pompa’s comment reminds us of the importance of being flexible on both fronts.

There is broad agreement that after-school programs should not look like school. But it is not always clear what they should look like in terms of specific practices and program components that directly address the increased

pressure to address academic needs. For example, what can and should after-school programs do to help students complete their homework that is consistent with the mission many programs have to provide a more flexible, student-focused environment than school?

These basic questions become even more difficult to answer when programs are asked to not only acknowledge but capitalize on the diversity of their attendees. Not only should after-school programs not look like school, it is also clear that they should not be forced to look like each other, while still being held accountable to basic common standards of quality.

ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO RESPOND TO NEED

There is also broad agreement that building an infrastructure for after-school programs requires increasing public funding. But it is not always clear how that funding should be distributed. In California, concerns about the equitable distribution of funds through Proposition 49, the After School Education and Safety Program Act of 2002, are already surfacing. According to Jennifer Peck of the Bay Area Partnership, “Some communities are much more able than others to identify matching funds. Our fear, which is based on experience and a lot of conversations with providers, is that the lowest income communities will be least likely to apply because they don’t think they can make it work financially.”

So even policies designed to achieve access “for all” require focused attention to access and equity challenges. If, for example, grants do not cover all costs associated with developing, staffing, running and evaluating a program, affluent schools are likely going to be better positioned to utilize the funds.

SUPPORT BOTH SCHOOL- AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

A healthy system of after-school opportunities should draw on a range of community resources including schools as well as grassroots nonprofits, faith-based organizations and public sector institutions. Each type of provider has strengths and capacities that affect its ability to create programs that youth from different backgrounds can access and use. California Tomorrow found that while school-based programs tended to be better equipped to serve youth with physical and/or learning disabilities, programs that attended to the concerns of LGBTQ youth were more likely to be run by nonprofit organizations.

The after-school movement has changed public expectations about what can and should be available to children and youth in the out-of-school hours. Poll after poll shows taxpayers are prepared to forgo tax cuts in order to ensure

youth have the extra supports they need to become the competent, confident, caring contributors they so plainly want to be. We believe it is absolutely critical that the system of after-school opportunities created be one that young people and families use voluntarily. This means the challenge is on those who create and fund programs to constantly ask whether neighborhood, family and population differences in use reflect differences in interest or in access and equity. It is critically important that the system being constructed in cities and towns across the country be built on a deep and respectful understanding of the desires families have and not simply on an analysis of the choices that they make in an imperfect market.

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