



After-school Programs: A Teaching Laboratory for Future High-Quality Teachers

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Nationwide, an estimated 6.5 million children in grades K-12 participate in some kind of after-school program. About 1 million of them are in centers supported by the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program,¹ a federal program with about \$1 billion in annual funding making, it the largest one of its kind.

After-school programs in California play an increasingly important role by supporting students to meet and exceed state academic standards. They provide academic assistance, educational enrichment, literacy activities and youth development in a safe and organized environment during critical after-school hours.

Moreover, in California, after-school programs create new jobs and build a sustainable workforce of highly trained individuals, some of whom are committed to teaching as a profession. Currently, 137,000 positions are available within the after-school workforce in California, the equivalent of nearly 75% of the elementary teacher workforce or all police and firefighters in California combined.²

Valuable partnerships

In Fresno, CA, and cities around California's Central Valley, partnerships between the California Teaching Fellows Foundation, local colleges and universities, and county education offices have opened doors for college students who choose to work with children as a career. This opportunity allows college students to gain valuable early field experience by working in after-school programs.

By effectively managing the employment cycle in after-school programs, a ladder is created for college students to become after-school tutors, after-school program coordinators, and, ideally, gain their credentials and become teachers, counselors or eventually administrators. This career ladder is designed to accompany and enhance the educational experience while helping college students build an understanding of education in a greater social context.

This program provides after-school workers are provided opportunities to help them become leaders and decision makers, as well as possibly being awakened to a sense of service, mission and professionalism. On average, after-school program staff members will have completed thousands of hours of classroom time before they begin their final student teaching.

Therefore, after-school programs are a proven method to recruit and retain a pool of future teachers by developing a prepared workforce that is committed to and supports the well-being and empowerment of today's youth.

Just one example

One company helping create and organize after-school programs is SoluNet, a 100% minority-owned company that provides educational consulting services for 22 K-12 school sites in California's Central Valley by connecting regular school to after-school program sites. The company creates an environment that provides staff continuity and high quality programs by consulting on topics such as staff recruitment, staff retention, strategies and techniques for orientation, supervision, professional development, staff motivation and empowerment.



SoluNet believes that partnering with school districts and working closely with the school's community is essential. Developing effective, high quality programs could not take place without understanding each school site's needs and goals.

After-school program jobs create an employment cycle for college students and help recruit and retain future teachers. SoluNet prepares college students to become future high quality teachers by giving them preparation and real life training by working at a school site. When these college students enter the workforce, they will be aware of the challenges a teacher faces with every day. Moreover, these future teachers will already be familiar with the regular school's teachers and parents.

Having strong staff is the key to high-quality youth programs. For programs to make a difference in children's lives, they must be high quality.³ After-school program staff members are selected by SoluNet based on their strengths. College students are placed in SoluNet's school sites according to their talents and skills, matching the school site's needs. As a result, high-quality after-school programs are shaped based on staff abilities, and then continuously improved by providing professional development to the staff.

The student is SoluNet's main customer. By understanding the customer's needs, the company understands the value it needs to deliver to customers. The company has analyzed the process steps to continuously eliminate waste and create value. A dynamic, customer-focused process in after-school programs creates a workforce pipeline of high-quality future teachers. There are three end products: a staff that provides its best work, high-quality after-school programs and, ultimately, a stronger and more successful school.

Summer camp

SoluNet's services and programs is one example of how quality can be applied with limited resources. The company's 22 school sites are low-income, high-minority schools.

In addition, the company created the After-school University, a hands-on educational summer camp, at no cost, for more than 500 students in Fresno. Partnering with California State University-Fresno and other organizations, SoluNet has provided students the opportunity to engage in fun academic and enrichment activities in a college environment.

Additionally, the company offers school districts and educational agencies the expertise and tools needed to create higher quality educational opportunities and change within the community. A team of educational professionals and consultants design and implement high quality after-school programs, as well as other programs, while promoting growth and learning among children, and building positive relationships.

SoluNet strives to inspire others to do great things as it focuses on providing an environment where great leaders can flourish and ensure every student gets a chance to pursue growth through education.

References

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3. The Forum for Youth Investment, “Strengthening the Youth Development/After-School Workforce,” www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/content/strengthening-youth-developmentafter-school-workforce.

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For more information about SoluNet, visit www.solunet.us.