Denver’s After School Initiatives

"The city is committed to supporting and enhancing Denver’s after school programs because we know they make a difference in young people’s academic and social success and in the strength of our economy and community." — John Hickenlooper, Mayor of Denver

Denver: A National Model for Citywide Collaboration

Denver’s promotion of quality after school and out-of-school time opportunities for all youth is a national model. Its creation of funding streams, assessment of programs, and coordination of efforts is helping to ensure that programs across the city are of high quality, accessible, and sustainable.

Denver’s collaborative efforts include:

- The City Leaders Engaged in After School Reform (CLEAR) Initiative began in 2005. Denver was chosen nationally as one of eight cities to receive a CLEAR grant from the National League of Cities. The grant has supported efforts to develop a city-wide infrastructure to advance after school programs, including conducting a needs assessment and creating an online database to help families locate programs in their neighborhood (www.denvergov.org/denvermaps).

- The Lights on After School Initiative, LOAS, created in 2003, is a partnership between Denver Public Schools Foundation, the City and County of Denver, and Mile High United Way. LOAS has achieved incredible results in a short time, including:
  - Raising and distributing more than $6 million to support after school programs in 91 Denver schools
  - Developing a common set of quality standards for LOAS-funded after school programs
  - Developing the Denver Spotlight, an assets-based professional development institute for after school programs
  - Demonstrating impact with youth, including improved school attendance, improved school engagement, and improved Colorado School Assessment Program (CSAP) scores

- Denver Quality Afterschool Connection (DQUAC), a coalition of more than 25 youth-service providers, formed in 1998 to coordinate efforts to increase the quality and capacity of out-of-school offerings for Denver’s children and youth.

- Colorado AfterSchool Network (CAN) convened in 2004 to represent existing associations of school-based and school-linked programs and key policymakers. With nearly 1,000 members statewide, CAN’s goals are to:
  - Build public will for after school programs
  - Inform policy development
  - Improve the quality of after school programs
In 2006, Denver assessed the current state of after school programs across the city. The assessment, conducted by the Colorado AfterSchool Network through an online after school provider survey, examined the availability, quality, capacity, and impact of after school programs. Nearly three-quarters of the more than 200 after school programs responded, representing more than 600 program sites.

The assessment found that:
- The mean number of after school programs per neighborhood is five
- Some neighborhoods with the highest need (number of youth, high-poverty and juvenile crime rates) are under-represented
- 52% are serving youth that are English language learners (mostly Spanish-speaking)
- The most common sources of funding come from foundation grants, Lights On After School grants, and fees for service
- Several programs are adopting quality standards, but few are monitoring their implementation

Denver's Children and Youth

Denver has approximately 120,750 school-age children and youth between the ages of 5 and 17. Citywide, 41% of children are elementary-aged, 38% are middle-school age, and 21% are high-school age.1

Denver's school age population is diverse. Denver Public Schools reveal that 80% of students are of color.2 Citywide, approximately 36% of youth are Latino, 32% are White, 11% are Black, 2% are Asian, and 1% are American Indian. Those who self-identify as another race are 19%.3

### Availability of After School Programs

Out-of-school time, particularly the hours between 3-6 p.m., are commonly cited as the time when youth are most at risk for engaging in unhealthy activities, such as crime, substance use, and sexual activity.4 To maximize opportunities for youth to participate in constructive learning activities and minimize their participation in risky activities, out-of-school programs should ideally occur year-round for a minimum of 2-3 hours per day. According to the survey, the mean number of days per week that after school programs are offered is 3.80. Further findings indicate that, of the organizations responding:

- 78% offer programming during after school hours
61% offer programming during the summertime
19% offer programming before school
49% offer programs 2-3 hours per day

The neighborhoods with the highest needs (large number of school-age youth, high poverty, high rate of crimes committed by youth and against youth) included:
- College View/South Platte
- East Colfax
- Elyria/Swansea
- Five Points
- Globeville
- Lincoln Park
- Mar Lee
- Montbello
- Northeast Park Hill

Quality of After School Programs
A study by Johns Hopkins University found that effective after school programs are capable of addressing three developmental needs critical to healthy youth development: academic, recreational, and cultural/social. The after school provider survey found that after school programs are offering a variety of positive activities that meet these three areas of support, including:
- Arts programming (49%)
- Academic programming (52%)
- Social skill building (40%)
- Recreation activities (40%)

Impact of After School Programs
An evaluation conducted in 2006 on the impacts of after school programs funded through Lights On After School found that participation in after school programs:
- Improved attendance during the regular school day
- Improved CSAP scores in reading and math

In addition, three-quarters of youth surveyed indicated that their after school programs helped them increase their connection to school and do better in school overall.

Variety of After School Activities by Age Group

![Variety of After School Activities by Age Group]
Findings from the assessment of after school programs pointed to a number of ways that Denver’s civic and education leaders, as well as after school program providers, can further ensure quality, accessibility, and sustainability.

City leaders can support quality after school programs by:

- Conducting annual assessments and mapping of after school programs, needs and capacity
- Providing targeted funding for after school programs in underserved neighborhoods and neighborhoods with the highest need
- Encouraging programs that apply for funding from the City to demonstrate a funding match to promote sustainability
- Ensuring that programs receiving city funding have adopted quality standards
- Continuing to sponsor professional development opportunities
- Providing opportunities for emerging youth leaders in after school programs to become involved in leadership opportunities
- Supporting the development of a central coordinating entity to coordinate after school infrastructure, resources, and programming in Denver

School leaders can support quality after school programs by:

- Providing access to facilities for programming at low or no cost to program providers
- Creating shared staff positions between the school day and after school programs
- Applying for grants as co-applicants with after school programs and coordinating program implementation
- Coordinating with after school programs to engage parents
- Hosting orientation nights for all after school programs operating in the school at the start of each school year
- Coordinating data collection and sharing data on student outcomes with after school programs

After school providers can support quality after school programs by:

- Ensuring all staff receive ongoing professional development
- Adopting and adhering to a set of quality standards
- Ensuring after school programs are culturally and linguistically appropriate to the youth and families served
- Coordinating with school personnel to align after school learning with school day learning
- Improving capacity to collect data on youth attendance and program outcomes

For more information or to view the full report, contact:
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References
1 Claritas data, 2005.
3 Claritas data, 2005.
6 JVA Consulting LLC, 2006.
7 Ibid.