

# Promising Practices for Integrating the School Day & Afterschool



## Examples from San Francisco

One of the core goals of afterschool programs is to provide youth with learning opportunities. Research indicates that afterschool participants benefit when there is alignment or integration between their afterschool program and school day experiences. As researcher Priscilla Little from the Harvard Family Research Project states, “[T]here is increasing understanding that meaningful links between out-of-school time (OST) programs and schools are essential to supporting children’s learning and development in both settings.”<sup>1</sup>



“Meaningful links” between afterschool programs and the school day does not, and should not, mean that afterschool programs look and feel like students’ school day experiences. On the contrary, these linkages should ensure that the unique flexibility, creativity, and youth development-friendly nature of a student’s afterschool experience is aligned to reinforce their experience in the classroom.

While evidence mounts and practitioners anecdotally agree to the benefits of such linkages, many communities struggle with how to successfully create and maintain integration across the school day and afterschool program. Below is a summary of some promising practices from several school-based afterschool programs in San Francisco to help add to the growing body of knowledge on this topic.

### Summary of Promising Practices for Integrating the School Day & Afterschool

#### Adult Roles & Relationships

- ◆ Unifying Around Shared Vision & Goals
- ◆ Extending & Overlapping Roles
- ◆ Extending & Overlapping Communications & Support Systems
- ◆ Building Shared Knowledge Through Professional Development

#### Programmatic Alignment

- ◆ Using Intentional Strategies to Align Curricula
- ◆ Echoing Consistent Messages Related to Behavior

#### Family Engagement

- ◆ Building Relationships with Working Parents
- ◆ Underscoring the Importance of a Balanced Experience

## Adult Roles & Relationships

### Unifying Around Shared Vision & Goals

Beyond acknowledging the important impact afterschool programs have on students’ school success and school climate, school communities need to ensure afterschool is integrated into the school’s broad vision and goals. The first step is creating a shared vision and setting goals for how the afterschool program plays a role in reaching the school community’s goals for its students. The next step is communicating and implementing that shared vision and goals to both school and afterschool staff.

In 2008-09, several school communities used the school district’s new Balanced Score Card process to begin defining

this type of shared vision and goal. In the ideal scenario, school day staff, afterschool staff, parents, and the principal discussed how the afterschool program helped the school reach its identified goals. Then those afterschool strategies were documented in the school site’s Balanced Score Card, which is a school site plan for the approaching academic year. The Afterschool for All Initiative developed a flyer to provide some ideas for how school communities could incorporate afterschool into their Balanced Score Cards. To read *Examples of How to Integrate Afterschool into Your SFUSD School’s Scorecard*, go to [www.DCYF.org](http://www.DCYF.org).

“Ongoing communication with school-day teachers is critical to the success of our academic support program.

We maintain strong connections through monthly progress reports about each program participant to their teachers.

Tutors write about the subject areas covered that month and ask for skill-building strategies in particular content areas. Teachers then return the form to our staff with information about youth’s school-day performance, comments about the tutors’ work with program participants, and other suggestions that would strengthen tutors’ academic support of our youth.”

*-Claudia Jasin,  
Executive Director,  
The Jamestown Community  
Center*

### **Extending & Overlapping Roles**

Some school communities have experienced success when they find ways to intentionally create overlap for staff between the school day and afterschool program.

For example, some staff working in Gordon J. Lau Elementary School’s afterschool program also work during the school day by leading games and providing supervision during recess and tutoring students. This allows the teachers and other school-day staff to develop a relationship with the afterschool staff, as well as provides the afterschool staff an opportunity to develop a more robust relationship with the students.

Similarly, many schools enhanced integration by employing teachers and school-day staff in afterschool programs. Not only do these staff have content expertise that other afterschool staff may not possess, but they can also help ensure that the school’s academic and behavior goals are infused into the afterschool program.

Some school-day staff report that interacting with students in the afterschool program setting enhances their perspective of students’ abilities and talents that might otherwise not be demonstrated in their classroom.

### **Extending & Overlapping Communications & Support Systems**

An integrated school community uses the same (or closely aligned) communication and support systems for its school-day and afterschool staff.

School communities reported success when principals communicate critical information to both school-day and afterschool staff, and ensure that there are channels of

communication for staff to share information with the principal.

In terms of support systems, Hillcrest Elementary School has successfully involved afterschool staff in addition to relevant school-day staff in Student Success Team meetings to diagnose and address challenges a particular student is facing.

### **Building Shared Knowledge Through Professional Development**

Several school communities expressed a desire for joint professional development attended by both school-day and afterschool staff, or at least access to some of the same trainings (given the logistical challenges of joint training).

Shared professional development opportunities for school-day and afterschool staff would expose them to the same concepts—whether specific to a literacy

approach or a behavior management framework—that would reinforce what students are taught and enhance the consistency of how staff interact with students, regardless of time of day.

Joint training sessions would also bridge the time gap for some staff whose work schedules might otherwise preclude them from getting to know one another in a professional setting.

## Programmatic Alignment

### Using Intentional Strategies to Align Curricula

There are several ways to intentionally align school-day and afterschool curricula. Hillcrest Elementary School aligns curricula by inviting afterschool staff to attend teacher planning meetings so that afterschool activities can be planned to match the themes or units that will be taught during the day in each grade.

McKinley Elementary School's afterschool program uses a method called "front-loading" to address alignment. Frontloading is a process of intentionally exposing students to vocabulary, concepts, and skills they will later learn, either during the school day or in future afterschool program activities. At the beginning of the school year and typically mid-year, staff from the After School Enrichment Program at McKinley Elementary School meet with the grade level teachers to learn about what they plan to teach throughout the upcoming semester. The

afterschool staff then identifies ways to introduce those skills in afterschool activities before the teachers cover them in class.

For more examples and tips on how to implement frontloading, please read the complementary *Frontloading* brief at [www.DCYF.org](http://www.DCYF.org).



### Echoing Consistent Messages Related to Behavior

School communities also voiced the need for behavior guidelines to be consistent between school-day and afterschool program hours in order to reinforce to students that afterschool is a core component of the school. Some schools have multiple afterschool providers on campus and desire common norms for behavior across each afterschool program and the school day.

Grattan Elementary School addresses this aspect of integration by inviting all afterschool staff from each of its three on-site afterschool programs to an orientation to learn about the "Grattan Way," their school-wide behavior norms. These behavior norms are also included in any contracts with afterschool providers.

## Family Engagement

### Building Relationships with Working Parents

Since many parents work, their only opportunity to interact with staff from the school may occur when they pick up their child from his/her afterschool program. This point of contact with the parent or caregiver provides the afterschool staff a unique opportunity to share information about the students' progress during the school day and afterschool, which of course necessitates afterschool staff being in communication with school-day staff.

At Gordon J. Lau Elementary School, the school community delegated the planning of many parent outreach efforts to afterschool staff given their strong relationships with so many parents. Many afterschool programs also host family nights or other events to celebrate the culmination of a project or provide students an opportunity to demonstrate new skills or talents. For example, the Afterschool Collaborative at Horace Mann Middle School typically attracts hundreds of family members for its weeknight events. Family engagement can be enhanced significantly by integrating both afterschool staff and the school-day staff efforts.

## Underscoring the Importance of a Balanced Experience

Several schools described the ongoing challenge of parents viewing their afterschool program as solely a place and time for their children to complete their homework. While most schools view that as a key component of afterschool programs, most hope that students also have the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning activities, enrichment, recreation, and other activities that they may not be exposed to during the school day.

Many schools expressed a need for afterschool and school-day staff, particularly teachers, to both play a role in explaining to parents that students would benefit most from participating in enrichment and other types of learning activities during afterschool programming to foster their whole development.



## San Francisco's Afterschool for All Initiative

In response to the desire to make San Francisco a “family-friendly” city with a strong public school system that values the role of afterschool, Mayor Gavin Newsom and then Superintendent of Schools Gwen Chan made a pledge in late 2005 to support the creation of a citywide afterschool system. This afterschool system would address existing challenges and aim to provide “afterschool for all” elementary and middle school children by 2010. Since that time, the city, school district, private funders, parent representatives, and community partners have been working together as the *Afterschool for All Initiative* to meet those goals.

For more information about SF's Afterschool for All, visit [www.DCYF.org](http://www.DCYF.org).

### Footnote:

<sup>1</sup> Harvard Family Research Project. (Fall 2006). Promising Strategies for Connecting Out-of-School Time Programs to Schools: Learning What Works. *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume XII, Number 1 & 2, Fall 2006

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