

Promising Practices in Citywide Afterschool Initiatives

CityWorks

Planning and Collaboration Strategies That Build Strong Citywide Afterschool Initiatives

Fort Worth After School

In 1873 Captain B.B. Paddock illustrated Fort Worth as the center of a circle with proposed rail lines radiating out in all directions in a picture resembling a tarantula. Before the first railroad entered the city in 1876, the tarantula map was established as a promotional plan for Fort Worth to attract railroads to the city. The plan worked and the tarantula name stuck for the Fort Worth railroad. The metaphor is not lost on Fort Worth's mayor's office and schools as they endeavor to collaborate with a multitude of community organizations, agencies, businesses and other youth development organizations on a citywide afterschool initiative.

Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) has a total enrollment of over 80,000 students. Sixty percent (60%) of the students are economically disadvantaged. The student population is very diverse with 48.2% Hispanic, 29.8% African American, 19.9% White, and 2.1% Other. The 2001-2002 general operating fund budget exceeded \$470 million. During 2002-2003 over 4200 students have participated in Fort Worth After School at 52 campuses. Sites are managed by either a full-service provider selected by the school or are self-managed by the school. There are seven different organizations that provide full-service programming. All programs are bound to quality and safety standards as set by the Fort Worth After School Coordinating Board.

The history of Fort Worth After School is one of strategic planning and broad collaboration. Through several task forces dating back to 1995, joint meetings of the school and city council, Our City Our Children initiative, and others the groundwork for the Fort Worth After School collaboration was laid. The city also had a history of providing afterschool programs through the Weed and Seed program which offered safe havens at selected locations in high crime neighborhoods. Other organizations such as the YMCA, Clayton Child Care, Boys & Girls Club, and Camp Fire also provided afterschool opportunities.

In March 1997 the Fort Worth City Council and the FWISD passed a resolution to support and promote city/school cooperation. The purpose of the resolution was to stimulate collaborative planning, avoid duplication, pool collective resources, streamline administrative processes and facilitate on-going dialogue (King, 2002). By September 1999 the Task Force for After School Programs

CityWorks is an initiative of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) working in collaboration with existing communities that provide high quality out-of-school time programming to youth and children. CityWorks builds on the successful foundation of the "Cross-Cities Network for Leaders of Citywide Afterschool Initiatives" (CCN), which brings together leaders of after-school initiatives from 21 major cities across the United States. In bringing the experience of stakeholders, service providers, schools, and community organizations together, NIOST can learn and share strategies for strengthening the infrastructure for out-of-school time activity. By sharing best practices of the CCN, CityWorks seeks to strengthen and enhance citywide afterschool initiatives and the communities they serve.

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Task Force Representation

The creation of a Task Force is not an unusual occurrence in large initiatives. However, it is the scope of representation and tasks that often makes the difference between ineffective and successful initiatives. One of the strengths of the Fort Worth Task Force for After School Programs was the breadth and depth of its representation.

Five broad sectors/organizations were represented on the Task Force including the following positions:

Fort Worth Independent School District

- Deputy Superintendent
- Director of Student Affairs
- Administrator, Student Affairs
- Coordinator of Community Based Programs

City of Fort Worth

- Assistant City Manager
- Chief of Police
- Director of Parks and Community Services
- Deputy Chief of Police Department
- Fiscal Administrator of the Police Department
- Senior Planner of the Police Department
- CDBG Contract Compliance Supervisor

Our City Our Children

- Director
- Program Coordinator

Crime Prevention Resource Center

- Executive Director
- Tarrant County Juvenile Services
- Assistant Director

Representation on the Board was partly flavored by the potential source of funding for the project. City and school district leaders were looking to tap into funding from a Crime Control and Prevention District to help get the project off the ground, so it made sense to include a pivotal role for the Crime Prevention Resource Center and County Juvenile Services. The Task Force struggled with the expected turf and governance issues. Each of the organization representatives came to the table looking for the best ways to support the initiative. Knowing their individual agendas had to converge

toward a common goal to be successful, the members learned to appreciate other organizations' strengths and abilities. Forging bonds across different community services provided a foundation for collaboration. Equally important was the fact that the representatives to the committee were at a high level in each of their respective organizations. They came to the table with the authority to make decisions and also to implement the work themselves. It was as much a working

Task Force Planning Process

The Task Force moved ahead with its mandate to discuss collaborative efforts to provide afterschool programming for the children of Fort Worth. Task Force members explain that they really took their time in looking at what was currently happening on the national landscape and how best to adopt those practices for Fort Worth.

Policy issues the Task Force needed to address included:

1. How would the different stakeholders collaborate?
2. What would be the program emphasis - academic or recreational?
3. Where would the program's administrative function be housed?
4. Which populations would be targeted for service
5. How should costs be recovered?

In order to answer these questions, there were three action areas infused into the Task Force planning process:

- **Learning together:** A literature review and research on best practices occurring in other citywide initiatives.
- **Assess existing needs:** Survey and collect information on existing programs and the need and demand for services in Fort Worth.
- **Recommendation:** To propose a structure of a joint venture between the city and FWISD.

The Task Force analyzed information from several sources to determine the need for afterschool programs, including the Citizen Survey administered

"Each of the organization representatives came to the table looking for the best ways to support the initiative."

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by the city and the Parent Survey about afterschool programs initiated by the Task Force. Focus groups were conducted with principals and youth and the Task Force completed an in-depth inventory of all activities or programs occurring at elementary and middle school sites throughout Fort Worth. The Task Force also examined criminal activity data in the surrounding community. A broad sweep of existing programs inventoried included those funded or operated by FWISD, the City of Fort Worth's Parks and Community Services Department, The Fort Worth Police Department, Community Development Block Grants, and the United Way.

During the planning process representatives built the necessary trust to confidently pursue a comprehensive joint project. The task of presenting their findings and

The Transition from Task Force to Coordinating Board

Along with creating a mission statement and outlining a recommended model for governance, site selection, evaluation, and coordination the Task Force transformed itself into a new role as Coordinating Board. All of the organizations represented on the Task Force were slotted roles on the new Coordinating Board. Its role is to oversee the overall program and selection criteria, assess evaluation information, recommend future direction and standards, and monitor the funding picture. A Director and two Program Coordinators, part of FWISD, administrate the day-to-day program operations.

Through the planning process and transition to Coordinating Board there were many lessons learned. Task Force leaders reiterate the importance of dedicating adequate time to the planning process. Had they not had the time to build the necessary foundation for collaborative work -- the work would not have continued. It is important to resist time constraints that force quick decisions/recommendations without substantial rationale behind them.

Another essential element of the planning experience was that the Task Force established clear goals, which became the basis for decision making. The goals provided a consistent filter through which to see potential choices on many complex issues. Establishing clear goals doesn't mean the goals can't be changed --- but that there is a strong foundation in

"The task of presenting their findings and recommendations to a larger group of their colleagues, served to bring the Task Force together around a shared responsibility and risk."

which to root any adjustments. The Task Force also had a vision for funding throughout the planning process. Lack of clarity on funding can stymie a planning process at midstream and render months of work irrelevant.

As Fort Worth After School completes its third year it has successfully provided afterschool enrichment programs to 52 sites and serves over 2600 on a daily basis. The planning and collaboration process undertaken by the original Task Force provided critical groundwork on which to launch a citywide afterschool initiative. These planning and collaboration strategies employed by the Task Force provide a useful framework for other city leaders and stakeholders engaged in building citywide afterschool initiatives.

Resources: Interviews conducted for this publication:

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Reference:

King, T. C. (2001). Fort Worth After School: A case study.

Washington, DC:
Afterschool Alliance.