

ESSA and Afterschool: Tips for Planning and Executing a Meeting with Your School Principal

(Note language is for principals at the “school” level. In meetings with superintendents and school boards – you can change “school” to “district” at the state level, you may change “school” to “state department of education”)

Principal of a Title I School¹ :

Send an email and let them know you would like to learn more about the school’s approach to education under ESSA and to help them be aware of partners in the community working on well-rounded student success (see a sample letter at ESSA.afterschoolalliance.org). Ask for approximately 30 minutes, or even 15. Feel free to follow up with a phone call if you don’t hear back. (Note: If the principal is hard to reach, don’t give up, relationships take time. If you do not have a child of your own in the school, you might coordinate with a parent of a student or a teacher in the building to make the initial contact. Send occasional updates and photos from your program. Invite the principal to an event with students and parents at your program to help incentivize the principal to engage. Thank them for the work they do, they are busy too!)

- a. **Begin the meeting asking what their vision and goals** are for the school and how things may be changing under ESSA.
- b. **Share what your program or your child’s program (or a potential program if one doesn’t yet exist) does and ways you might collaborate.** Suggestions include ways afterschool programs help students stay engaged in education, build their academic and life skills, connect them with caring adults, help provide them with a safe space and nutritious snack at times of day when they might be stressed or hungry in other environments, support families’ connection with education, build relationships and leverage other community partners. Mention that afterschool combines academic supports but is NOT an extension of the school day – it responds to the needs of families and

focuses on the whole child and student choice and voice. Don’t be discouraged if they don’t know as much as you’d like – you are the expert!

- c. **Think about bringing a fact sheet or two** (ESSA.AfterschoolAlliance.org) on how afterschool programs support attendance, academics, STEM, graduation rates (if high school) and more.
- d. **Begin using the “school day” language** to talk about how collaboration between the school and afterschool programs might look. You may find our 10 questions below helpful. Mention, if you’d like, that you may also be planning to ask these same questions to the superintendent and school board at the district and state levels if the principal mentions it is an area outside her or his purview. But, be clear that your goal is to understand if there are ways to work with and support all levels of the school system and not to challenge anyone’s work.
- e. **Listen and Share. They may say no to everything or direct you to someone else.** You just want to build a relationship where they are aware of programs in their community or what programs can offer and where you can talk again. Perhaps invite them to a quality local program so they can see one in action.
- f. **Thank them for their time.** Follow up with an email and digital copies of the materials you brought. Continue to send them updates about your work every few months.

¹ <https://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/6256-6-tips-for-talking-with-the-principal>

10 Questions to Explore with Principals on Afterschool and School Day Collaboration²

1. Is the school aware of **how many students currently participate** in some form of afterschool program? Would the school be willing to understand how many students have access and participate? And to provide this information for parents and students on school report cards?
2. Would the school be willing to add questions about afterschool and summer programs to the **current needs assessment** to help understand how many students and families have access to and participate in these programs? If so, additional questions for the needs assessment could include: Do students have someone to help them with their school work at home? A way to exercise and have engaging activities after school? A way to have a healthy snack or dinner? How many parents feel they can support their children with school work? How many parents are available after the school day ends?
3. Would the **school be willing to collaborate with afterschool programs** using Title I funds to support intentional academic and enrichment supports for students? Could the school provide funding for academic tutors or transportation (like KY does) for example as is done in some schools with Title I? Can the school **stagger the services of support providers** such as guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists and others so that students in afterschool programs can have some access to them after the school day ends?
4. Can afterschool program staff be a part of **trainings** offered to school day teachers using Title II professional development funds (at the school or district level) so that all adults responsible for supporting student learning are informed about issues such as trauma informed care, social and emotional practices, restorative justice, or high quality hands-on learning?
5. If applicable, would the school staff like to observe or be trained in some of the hands on, **project based learning** being done in afterschool programs, including in **STEM**? If so, could this be paid for with Title II funds or Title IV A funds?
6. Would the school work with the district to ask for a **Community Schools Coordinator** with Title IV A funds that could connect more community resources to the students?
7. Does the school have populations of **English Language Learners or Migrant, Homeless, or At Risk** students or other populations that could be supported by a partnership with out-of-school time providers? (Paid for with various Title funding streams)
8. Is the school focused on **health and wellness initiatives** that afterschool programs offering physical activity and nutritious meals and snacks can supplement after the school day? (Paid for with Title IV A)
9. Can afterschool programs support **family engagement efforts** and coordinate with the school so that working parents have accessible avenues of communication and participation with the school and can be offered engaging and educational activities for themselves and their families during before school, after school and summer hours? (Paid for with state and district family engagement funds or school level funds)
10. If it has not already done so, would the school/district like to **apply for a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant** to get Title IVB funds to be able to get funding for high quality comprehensive afterschool and summer programming for a minimum of \$50,000 a year for at least 3 years?

Find out more @ ESSA.AfterschoolAlliance.org

²These are ten high level questions - additional follow-up questions from the conversation will help you explore in more detail. Don't expect to ask all of these questions - be selective based on your knowledge of the current offerings at the school and the relationship with afterschool providers in the community. Given what you know about the local context, select questions from the following that are likely to elicit conversation.