

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS: BUILDING ON CALIFORNIA'S AFTERSCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

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By June 1, 2010, select Local Education Agencies (LEA) will need to decide whether or not to apply for School Improvement Grants (SIG) that could range from \$50,000 to \$2,000,000 per year for three years for eligible schools. Two of the four possible SIG intervention models require school sites to identify and integrate strategies that increase learning time¹ for students. This requirement is grounded in an extensive research base that demonstrates students need more time – time that can be utilized in new ways – to acquire the knowledge and skills that is expected of them.² With California facing the largest budget crisis in our history, many LEAs have had to make choices that move in the opposite direction and decrease the time students have in engaging learning environments, such as shortening the traditional school year, reducing after school opportunities and eliminating summer school programs.

Fortunately, even in these difficult times California has retained the largest publicly funded afterschool infrastructure in the nation. In fact, 85 percent of the schools identified by the state as eligible for SIG grants currently have state and/or federally funded afterschool programs, though these programs may only be offered to a small percentage of the student body. Research demonstrates that high quality afterschool programs improve student achievement, increase attendance in the regular school day and positively impact youth safety and social development.³ This new infusion of SIG funds could build on California's existing afterschool infrastructure to rethink how time is utilized throughout the day and year.

This fact sheet is intended to assist superintendents; school board members; District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) Providers; district staff; principals; teachers and afterschool partners to identify and integrate strategies into an LEA's SIG application that build off what high quality afterschool programs can contribute to student and school success by providing a coordinated flow of expectations and connection for students. Included below are school-wide strategies to increase learning time throughout the day and during summer and intersession. In addition, there are also suggestions on changes in policies and practices that can create greater communication, collaboration and alignment between the regular school day, afterschool and summer programs.

As part of the LEA's narrative to apply for SIG funds there are 11 elements that must be responded to. Existing afterschool programs on SIG school sites could be highlighted and integrated into many of these required elements in a variety of ways in order to be contributing partners in the learning communities that are created. Below are a few examples⁴:

NEEDS ANALYSIS

LEAs and school sites will need to conduct a needs analysis prior to

developing their SIG plan. Included below are some sample questions related to afterschool and summer programs:

- How many students, and which subgroups, are currently being served in the afterschool program?
- Do students have access to high quality intersession and summer programs that provide engaging learning environments? If so, how are these opportunities linked to the regular school day and afterschool programs available at the school site?
- How does the afterschool staff utilize high quality instructional materials that are engaging and modified for appropriate use in the afterschool program? How are these aligned to the school day?
- Is the afterschool staff provided effective, timely professional development that offers them the information and tools to create an engaging learning environment afterschool? What evidence supports this response?
- Are there strategies in place that are especially effective in supporting English Language Learners, such as intentionally integrating academic vocabulary into projects and hands on learning activities?
- Are there structured strategies in place to facilitate communication and collaboration between the regular school day and afterschool program? Are these strategies effective?
- Is there a process in place to create harmony and alignment between the goals of the LEA, summer/intersession and afterschool program?
- Describe how afterschool and summer programs have been integrated into the professional learning communities. This may include strategies at the LEA and school site level.
- Does the afterschool staff have access to and understand available data on students who are in the afterschool program? Is this data used to generate and/or modify activities, projects and other learning supports that are aligned with the needs of students in the afterschool program? What evidence supports this response?

SELECTION OF INTERVENTION MODELS

Each of the four intervention models outlined in the SIG application could have implications for afterschool and summer programs, but two in particular – the transformation and turn around models – explicitly call out increased learning time as a necessary strategy. As stated above, virtually all of the school sites (85%) eligible for SIG

funds have existing state or federally funded afterschool programs. Afterschool and summer programs are an evidence-based proven platform for effectively increasing learning time. Below are some proven strategies for LEAs, school sites and afterschool program staff to consider as SIG applications are prepared:

- Significantly increase the number of students who have access to the school site afterschool program. Currently, state and federally funded programs may be limited to a small percentage of the student population. By increasing access to afterschool programs it may help create a culture that values expanded learning and has a greater impact on school-wide student achievement. In addition, if the school site does not currently operate an afterschool program and would like assistance to start one, there are resources at the end of this document that may be helpful.
- Utilize the afterschool platform (e.g. staff, curriculum, facility) as a way to provide engaging learning environments during intersession and summer. Research demonstrates more than half of the achievement gap can be linked to summer learning loss.⁵ With recent budget cuts, intersession and summer opportunities have been severely scaled back or cut altogether. Building off of afterschool programs could be a cost effective strategy to provide engaging learning opportunities for students.
- Integrate afterschool staff in the regular school day to provide enrichment programs. This strategy ensures that more students have access to enrichment programs (e.g. such as art, music, project based learning), while potentially freeing up time for teacher collaboration, planning and professional development.

DEMONSTRATION OF CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT SELECTED INTERVENTION MODELS

LEAs will need to demonstrate that they have the capacity to support SIG schools. Highlighting existing site based programs the LEA can build on and partner with is a strategic way to demonstrate that the LEA can provide that assistance. High quality afterschool programs are already integrating academic support into their approach. Below are a few examples of strategies that are commonly implemented:

- Providing a quiet place and support to complete daily homework assignments
- Offering tutoring in specific subject matter areas
- Providing engaging curriculum that supports the acquisition of core academic skills and content, while fostering a love of learning.
- Requiring attendance in the regular school day in order to attend the afterschool program, which research demonstrates improves attendance rates.⁶

RECRUITMENT, SCREENING, AND SELECTION OF EXTERNAL PROVIDERS

California has an extensive infrastructure of technical assistance providers and program operators in the afterschool field that can support improvement through additional afterschool, intersession and summer opportunities for kids and/or the alignment and integration of the those program elements with the school day. Given that the state of California has over a decade of experience in the

afterschool field, one can find providers with such a track record in County Offices of Education and leading non-profits.

ALIGNMENT OF OTHER RESOURCES WITH THE SELECTED INTERVENTION MODELS

Included in the SIG application is a requirement that LEAs coordinate and align resources in selected SIG schools. Partnering with the school site afterschool program to expand access and/or implement some of the joint practices or policies outlined below demonstrates how the LEA is approaching alignment of other resources with the selected intervention models.

ALIGNMENT OF PROPOSED SIG ACTIVITIES WITH CURRENT DISTRICT ASSISTANCE AND INTERVENTION TEAMS (DAIT) AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT (PI) PROCESS

LEAs that are currently in Program Improvement (PI) or involved in the DAIT process need to identify how they will coordinate their PI or DAIT mandates and SIG activities to improve the performance of its lowest-achieving schools. One of the elements of the Local Education Agency Plan/Addendum (LEAP/LEAP Addendum) that must be updated through the PI or DAIT process actually requires LEAs to outline if and how they will provide additional learning support for students through before and afterschool, summer and intersession programs. The strategies outlined in these documents may be well suited for both the LEAP/Addendum and the LEAs SIG application. In addition, some DAIT teams have also included afterschool coordinators as part of the LEAP planning processes.

MODIFICATION OF LEA PRACTICES OR POLICIES

The SIG application requires LEAs to identify modifications to practice or policy that will enable schools to effectively implement the intervention strategy. Below are a few examples of ways to more fully integrate the afterschool program into the learning community that is being developed:

- Creating harmony and coherence between the LEAP, school site plans and afterschool program plan.
- Working strategically with community partners, such as afterschool program staff, to develop and implement the district's Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) (e.g. addressing the academic and social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students).
- Utilizing the afterschool staff to provide summer and intersession programs.
- Making the afterschool site coordinator a full time position, if this is not already the case.
- Including the afterschool site coordinator in grade level data reflection meetings. This fosters greater communication and collaboration between teachers and afterschool staff and allows the afterschool program to modify the curriculum and projects offered to better support the academic needs of students in the program. Depending on the experience and background of the site coordinator, it may be necessary to provide data training prior to implementing this strategy and ongoing professional support.
- Providing afterschool site coordinators and/or line staff the opportunity to attend professional development training jointly with

teachers (e.g. subject specific and behavioral support professional development). This strategy ensures that all participants understand a common language and utilize complementary strategies to support children.

- Encouraging and providing opportunities for afterschool staff to attend relevant conferences with school site teachers.
- Modifying the professional development training so that is applicable to the afterschool setting and offering it to afterschool staff during hours when they can attend.
- Providing a stipend to a teacher to be the school site/afterschool program "alignment coach." This might include modeling and training afterschool site staff on the content of recent professional development delivered to site teachers.

SUSTAINMENT OF THE REFORMS AFTER THE FUNDING PERIOD ENDS

California's After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program is an ongoing program⁷ and the funding source is constitutionally guaranteed. It is a program that will be sustained after the SIG funds are expended. The strategies outlined in this fact sheet will positively impact practice and student outcomes over the long term.

CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

Many LEAs contract with community based organizations (CBOs) to provide afterschool programs on their school sites. These CBOs are relevant stakeholders and can be identified as supporting a LEA's SIG plan, especially if they are engaged as partners in the process.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Children Now

Children Now's mission is to find common ground among influential opinion leaders, interest groups and policymakers, who together can develop and drive socially innovative, "win-win" approaches to helping all children achieve their full potential. One of the organization's priorities is to disseminate research on and advocate for high quality afterschool programs to ensure children have access to engaging, safe learning environments throughout the day and year. www.childrennow.org. For more information, please contact Samantha Dobbins Tran at stran@childrennow.org or (916) 443-1582

California Afterschool Network

The California Afterschool Network provides leadership and links to state policy makers to support high-quality programs; offers a collective voice to support policies, research, public awareness campaigns and innovative strategies; builds networking partnerships to support opportunities for mutual learning, so that California's after-school programs can keep children safe, inspire learning, and help working families. <http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org> For more, information please contact Andee Press Dawson at apressdawson@ucdavis.edu or (530) 754-0635

California Regional After School Technical Assistance System

The Regional After School TA systems provides training and technical assistance that develops and provides resources supporting safe and educationally enriching environments for children and youths in

before and after school programs throughout California. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ba/cp/cclcregntwrk.asp>

National Summer Learning Association

The National Summer Learning Association works to expand and improve summer learning programs throughout the nation. The Association provides a variety of technical assistance and policy development services to districts and other stakeholders interested in summer learning programs. For more information on these services, please visit http://www.summerlearning.org/?page=services_training or contact Jeff Smink, Vice President of Policy at 443-986-1151 or jsmink@summerlearning.org

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ENDNOTES

1. The SIG regulations define "Increased learning time" as "using a longer school day, week, or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for (a) instruction in core academic subjects including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography; (b) instruction in other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, including, for example, physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations; and (c) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects."
2. For a synopsis of some of the research on the role of time in learning, please visit Mass 2020's online research digest at <http://www.mass2020.org/node/135>; In addition, the SIG regulations states "Research supports the effectiveness of well-designed programs that expand learning time by a minimum of 300 hours per school year. (See Frazier, Julie A.; Morrison, Frederick J. 'The Influence of Extended-year Schooling on Growth of Achievement and Perceived Competence in Early Elementary School.' Child Development. Vol. 69 (2), April 1998, pp.495-497 and research done by Mass2020.) Extending learning into before- and after-school hours can be difficult to implement effectively, but is permissible under this definition with encouragement to closely integrate and coordinate academic work between in school and out of school. (See James-Burdumy, Susanne; Dynarski, Mark; Deke, John. 'When Elementary Schools Stay Open Late: Results from The National Evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program.' Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Vol. 29 (4), December 2007, Document No. PP07-121.) <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/redirect_PubsDB.asp?strSite=http://epa.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/29/4/296>"
3. Vandell, D., Reisner, E., & Pierce, K. (2007). *Outcomes linked to high-quality after-school programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising practices*. Irvine, CA: University of California and Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. Lauer, P.A., Akiba, M., Wilderson, S.B., Apthorp, H.S., Snow, D., & Martin-Glenn, M.L. (2006). Out-of-school time programs: A meta-analysis of effects for at-risk students. *Review of Educational Research*, 76, 275-313.
4. Note: There are a few elements of the SIG plan where afterschool programs may not be relevant (e.g. Inclusion of Tier III schools) and so those elements are not covered in this fact sheet.
5. Alexander, K. L., Entwisle D. R., & Olson L. S. (2007). Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72, 167-180.
6. Newhouse, C. (2008). Afterschool programs in the Central Valley benefit children and youth: Evaluation results from the 2006-2007 school year. Clovis, CA: Central Valley Afterschool Foundation. University of California, Irvine. (2002).; Evaluation of California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program: 1999-2001.; Vile, J.D., Arcaira, E. & Reisner, E.R. (2009). Progress toward high school graduation: Citizen Schools' youth outcomes in Boston. Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, Inc.
7. ASES is based on a three-year renewable grant program. Sites that maintain their attendance targets and other performance outcomes will have stable, continual funding.