

WINNING COMBINATIONS:
THE PASSAGE OF PROPOSITION 49
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INTRODUCTION

Proposition 49, the After School Education and Safety Act, won the support of 56.6% of California voters on November 5, 2002. Voters declared their belief that all children in the state should have access to quality, affordable afterschool programs. They recognized that these programs make children, youth and their communities safer, stronger and smarter.

The success of Proposition 49 (the Initiative) is a tremendous boost to afterschool in the national spotlight and especially in California. In the past several years, universal afterschool has grown from an unattainable goal to a potential reality. To continue to capitalize on recent growth in afterschool programming, it is essential to examine creative ways to reach the goal of afterschool for all, especially at the state level. Despite a severe budget crisis, California voters recently found such a creative alternative with the passage of Prop 49, which will provide each of the state's elementary and middle schools the opportunity to establish an afterschool program. This resounding cry of support signals a new catalyst for developing systems of afterschool throughout the country.

This paper highlights the growth of afterschool in California and examines the factors leading up to Proposition 49, those key elements to the Initiative's success and the demographics of its supporters.

BACKGROUND

Several years of progress in building afterschool programs in California and around the country laid the groundwork for the inception and passage of Proposition 49. Beginning in 1997 in California, a group of advocates, afterschool leaders and policymakers came together to write legislation for a statewide, school-based afterschool program. Based on the successes of several large programs in Los Angeles (LA's BEST), Sacramento (START) and San Diego (Critical Hours, now 6 to 6), supporters wanted the program to target high-poverty, low-performing schools and school districts.

In 1997, State Senator Deborah Ortiz sponsored a pilot program with \$3.5 million in funding for afterschool literacy and extended-day programs targeted at low-income youth with working parents. New and established programs such as LA's BEST, Sacramento START and those in San Diego, again proved that afterschool programs are successful in keeping kids safe, improving academic achievement and helping working families. Recognizing the great investment afterschool programs offered, the legislature passed three identical bills in 1998 to expand the program and provide \$50 million in new funding.

The new legislation created the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program (ASLSNPP), which was designed to provide educational and enrichment programs after school in public schools across the state. Like its predecessors, the program placed particular

emphasis on serving low-income communities. The program boasted an educational component aimed at providing tutoring and homework assistance complemented by enrichment activities including arts, recreation and prevention programs.

Boosted by proven success and popularity, as well as an expanded coalition of advocates, stakeholders and policymakers, the ASLSNPP continued to grow. In 2000, the legislature allocated an additional \$35 million. The following year, in 2001, \$14.85 million was added for a before school component (then known as BASLSNPP) and \$14.85 to the afterschool program. As of April 2002, 238 educational enrichment programs had been funded with a total of \$117.5 million annually¹.

Simultaneous to the growth in funding for BASLSNPP, a system grew to support the infrastructure of the program at the state level and strengthen the quality of afterschool programs. The California Department of Education (CDE) joined with a private consortium of 16 foundations to establish a unique public-private partnership. Known as the California AfterSchool Partnership, the system has been recognized nationally for its achievements in supporting the infrastructure of BASLSNPP and individual programs. CDE's expertise in administering state programs combined with the Foundation Consortium's ability to add both the necessary private resources and the flexibility to work with many different groups in the private sector proved a winning combination. The Partnership provides a comprehensive system of mentoring, training and technical assistance to programs.

Evaluations of BASLSNPP programs by the University of California at Irvine, released in May 2001 and February 2002, confirmed that the combination of academic focus, enrichment and programmatic support was working. Participating students' test scores improved by as much as 2.5 times those of their non-participating counterparts. The program saved the state approximately \$11 million in 2001 and a projected \$20 million in 2002 by lowering retention rates and decreasing truancy. And youth attending programs reported an increased interest in school and a desire to learn.²

At the same time, the momentum for growth in afterschool programs burgeoned at the national level. Corporations, foundations, nonprofits and national policy organizations were coming together to call for expansion of funding and infrastructure for afterschool nationally and in states. The federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative grew exponentially from a \$40 million program in 1998 to \$254 million in 1999, \$486 million in 2000 and \$846 million in 2001 before beginning to level off at \$1 billion in 2002.

While afterschool programs were still expanding, it was beginning to become evident that momentum wasn't moving as quickly as it had been and a shift was in progress. As the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative grew to \$1 billion in federal funding, it outgrew the capacity of the federal government to administer the program. In 2002, responsibility for administering 21st CCLC shifted to state Departments of Education from the federal department. At the same time, both federal and state coffers grew increasingly strapped. In these tight budget

¹ California Department of Education, December 2002.

² *Evaluation of California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program: 1999 – 2000*, Department of Education, University of California at Irvine, May 2001.

times, legislators did not seem likely to provide the consistent growth in funding for afterschool programs that had become necessary to support established infrastructure and growing need.

As it had been quickly established as a national model for a statewide system of afterschool, BASLSNPP had enjoyed consistent but small growth. Proponents of the program fought hard year after year and were aware that the need was much greater than the legislature's commitment. This fact combined with the recent fiscal trends did not bode well for the program's immediate future. And while the program did boast strong evaluations, anecdotal evidence and widespread agreement that it made sense, legislators did not seem to find the political will that they would need to fully fund the program.

It became clear that the time was ripe for the voters in California to show their support for the program at the ballot box.

A NEW CAMPAIGN BEGINS

Arnold Schwarzenegger has long been a champion for children and youth. In 1990, President George H.W. Bush appointed Schwarzenegger Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. Soon after, the actor and philanthropist became involved with afterschool programs in inner city Los Angeles and co-founded the Inner-City Games Foundation to fund afterschool programs. Amid rumors of a run for California's highest office, Schwarzenegger and a team of expert political consultants began examining the idea of a ballot initiative on afterschool programs,

STAGE ONE: INQUIRY

Having worked with afterschool programs for years and started Arnold's All-Stars, a program in Los Angeles, Schwarzenegger proved intimately familiar with the issues surrounding afterschool from the program to the policy level. Through Arnold's All-Stars and other programs, he increased his familiarity with BASLSNPP and began to see the opportunities for growth in afterschool at the state level. Simultaneously consulting with afterschool leaders and policy experts through initial meetings and the general public through polling and focus groups, Schwarzenegger and his team quickly realized that an afterschool initiative was not only possible, but probable, and a strong political move.

With more than 18 months until the November 2002 election, Arnold and his team began an earnest push toward victory for afterschool programs. The first several months of the campaign may have proved the most critical to success. The experienced political strategists working on the campaign knew that in order to win in November 2002, they would need to determine three things: what kind of policy would work best, what policy the public would support and what policy key stakeholders and opinion leaders would support.

STAGE TWO: POLLING, WRITING, COALITION BUILDING

To determine how to craft the Initiative, the campaign enlisted the help of several policy experts with varying specialties and political leanings. Because the initiative process is complicated, it proved essential to have a legal expert with specific experience writing initiative language. The campaign enlisted both private initiative lawyers and the lawyers at the California Teachers

Association, who were both initiative and education experts. In their primary consultation with afterschool policy experts at the Afterschool Alliance and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *California*, the campaign learned of the coalition of advocates, afterschool leaders and policymakers that had been working to improve BASLSNPP over the past several years. Several policy changes were recommended by groups within the coalition and taken under consideration by the campaign. Finally, the campaign brought in former state finance directors to shed light on the cost of various initiative options and how best to fund those options.

Knowing that the final draft of the Initiative would have to score well with voters, the campaign took all of their options directly to those voters. In a series of focus groups and polling, voters were questioned about issues including their support for afterschool as a concept, their support for universal afterschool and how they would be willing to fund the program.

“Support for the concept was initially very high,” according to George Gorton, campaign manager. Voters liked the idea of building on an existing program, growing it to a universal scope and doing it through the initiative process. However, voters proved less interested in some of the more specific policy changes that afterschool advocates had suggested to the campaign. Although specific policy questions are key to determining quality afterschool policy, they can be difficult to explain in an initiative context. Often, more complicated policy issues find better success through the legislative process.

Several funding options for the Initiative were proposed by interest groups, policy organizations and others. Schwarzenegger and his advisors conceived a plan where the cost of the program would be borne by future growth in state revenue and implementation would be delayed until such time as new state revenue became available. “I am keenly aware of the fragility of our economy and the resulting weakness in state revenue,” Schwarzenegger said. “That’s why I chose to fund this not out of new taxes, but out of growth in state revenues.” While controversial among some liberal think tanks concerned with the possibility of strapping government resources for other social programs, the funding mechanism ultimately gained the support of conservative and liberal groups alike.

Despite the appeal of various issues to California voters, Gorton cautions that these ideas should not be applied across all voters in every state. Each state has a different set of issues and a different set of demographics and therefore it is critical before running an initiative campaign in any state to conduct thorough polling and focus groups.

Having determined the initial sentiments of voters, the campaign then took draft language of the Initiative to those key stakeholders who could either act as supporters or opposition. “The primary goal of the early stages was not to have any well-funded opposition,” explained Camden McEfee, a primary campaign consultant. Gorton agreed that neutralizing well-funded, potential opposition groups is key to winning an initiative campaign. The campaign, including initial supporters Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *California* and Schwarzenegger, its most prominent spokesperson, began approaching key education groups, unions and taxpayer organizations.

Gorton and McEfee again agreed that a key to these early meetings was to examine and possibly reconsider certain provisions of the Initiative if necessary to neutralize opposition and gain

support. This flexibility coupled with the strong reputations of the political strategists, the dedication of Schwarzenegger as the primary sponsor, a confidence in their ability to win based on polls and focus groups and the proven nature of the program itself, brought a number of unlikely supporters to the campaign.

STAGE THREE: RAISING MONEY

Having gained initial support for the Initiative among policy experts, voters and key stakeholders, the campaign turned to raising money. Major fundraising began about 12 months before the election and continues even after the campaign has ended.

Beginning with his own contribution of \$1 million, Initiative sponsor Arnold Schwarzenegger helped raise a total of close to \$7 million, according to the California Secretary of State. The majority of money was raised through Schwarzenegger's personal contacts, statewide PACs and individuals. In addition, the campaign held several large-dollar fundraisers. According to McEfee, the greater the visibility of the issue and its sponsor through both paid and earned media, the easier the job of fundraising.

The campaign spent a total of more than \$9.2 million and more than \$3.5 million on campaign advertisements alone³. According to both supporters and opponents of the Initiative, roughly \$3-5 million is an accepted amount of money to spend on a campaign in California. Of those expenditures, the largest amounts would go to campaign ads and petition circulation, approximately 40% and 15% respectively.

STAGE FOUR: FINAL SUCCESS

During these first three stages, the foundation for a winning campaign was laid. Supporters and opponents alike concede that the campaign was likely won in the first several months, even before the proper signatures had been collected to place the Initiative, now known as Proposition 49, on the ballot. While the ensuing campaign remained important to victory, the majority of the keys to success occurred in its inception.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR VICTORY

No campaign finds success based upon any one factor. Timing, public support, quality staff and supporters, a strong issue or candidate and a lack of significant opposition are among the primary reasons for a successful campaign. Prop 49 boasted all of these factors. Based upon research and interviews with campaign staff, supporters and opponents, several key elements have been identified as forming the basis for the Initiative's victory:

- Proven issue and program
- Broad based coalition
- Knowledgeable, passionate, persuasive proponent
- Sufficient campaign dollars
- Simple initiative
- Targeted audiences

³ Exact campaign fundraising and expenditure information is available through the California Secretary of State, www.ss.ca.gov. To extrapolate amount spent per voter, please note the total number of registered voters in the November 2002 election was 15,303,469 and the total number of ballots cast was 7,594,228. This information is also available through the Secretary of State.

- No significantly funded opposition
- Experienced political strategists

Each of these identified keys to success are important on their own, but essential when combined.

Proven Issue and Program

Proposition 49 built upon the successes of an attractive issue and an effective program. Messages associated with general support of afterschool as an issue, i.e. keeping kids safe, helping working families and improving academic achievement, proved appealing to the electorate and potential endorsers. Afterschool proved itself to be something that close to 80% of Californians could support according to early campaign polls. Even detractors such as the League of Women Voters, while not supporting the specific funding provisions of Prop 49, claimed support of afterschool as an issue.

Cited by numerous proponents from the California Taxpayers Association to campaign staff, documentation of the accomplishments of the existing BASLSNPP programs proved crucial to building a large base of champions. California Department of Education (CDE) studies on the program's effectiveness, coupled with cost savings analyses from both CDE and conservative Claremont McKenna College's Rose Institute of State and Local Government, were vital to gaining the support of key stakeholders and the public⁴.

Broad-Based Coalition

Since at least 1997, the group of afterschool leaders, advocates, stakeholders and policymakers supporting afterschool in California had grown increasingly more diverse. Prop 49 proved the culmination of this effort. While boasting a strong base among a broad spectrum of youth advocates and some bipartisan support, the coalition needed to grow its conservative backing. Led by the well-known Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Initiative capitalized on the current support for afterschool and built one of the broadest political coalitions in recent California memory. "I am particularly proud of the many educators, law enforcement organizations and leading taxpayer groups who [have] signed on, like the California Teachers Association, the California State Sheriffs' Association and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. Nearly one hundred mayors, hundreds of elected officials, and over one thousand PTA leaders, police officers, sheriffs, police chiefs, district attorneys, crime victims and education leaders [have] endorsed Prop. 49", declared Schwarzenegger in the fall of 2002.

Built with careful planning, strong messages and personal appeals, the coalition covered the political spectrum from law enforcement to teachers associations and from older Californians to taxpayer groups. According to a few of the groups, including AARP and the California Taxpayers Association, support for Prop 49 was easy once the issues were explained to them from the perspective of their particular constituency. Each group then added its unique perspective on why the Initiative was important to arguments made to California voters and its own constituency. With such a broad base of support, voters seemed more easily swayed to support the Initiative.

⁴ These studies are available at www.afterschoolalliance.org in the Research Links section.

Knowledgeable, Passionate, Persuasive Proponent

Building a broad-based coalition that spanned the conservative as well as the liberal would not have been nearly as easy or effective without a strong Republican leader. Arnold Schwarzenegger could be considered his own factor to success. However, in looking to help other states conduct similar efforts, it is important to examine Arnold's involvement for what specific elements it added to the campaign.

Repeatedly, supporters and opponents alike cited Arnold's knowledge of afterschool, his passion for the issue and his persuasiveness as impressive and essential. While wonderful to also have in the form of a Hollywood celebrity, it is possible to find these same attributes in well-known political figures, celebrities, athletes, etc., in any state. Many also agreed that having one knowledgeable, passionate and persuasive proponent was not essential, but that this role could be filled by more than one person or by an organization. However, it is important to acknowledge the significance of name and face recognition in any political campaign.

Sufficient Campaign Dollars

Passing a ballot measure, even a compelling one, requires substantial funding. While a strong grassroots campaign can be run with a small amount of funding, in order to achieve broad-based support, it is almost essential to have a strong funding base. In the case of the Initiative, major funding was contributed and raised by its primary supporter, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Businesses, unions, non-profit organizations including taxpayer groups and individuals recognized the importance of supporting the Initiative fiscally as well as substantively.

In any political campaign, it is important to have the financial backing to allow for outreach to voters in the form of events, forums and advertising. Though the amount of money necessary to run a strong campaign varies from state to state, the significance of a sufficiently funded campaign should not be overlooked.

Simple Initiative

The initiative process is a unique way to create public policy. Unlike legislative statutes, which can be notoriously complicated, initiatives often are more successful if their primary message is simple enough for the average voter to understand. To this end, polling voters on what factors they find important in creating an initiative is essential. In early polling, the Prop 49 campaign found that voters were supportive of afterschool programs but confused by the intricacies of policy related to afterschool. Thus, the Initiative made no significant changes to the existing program, and the campaign made an effort to discuss policy specifics as little as possible in the public eye. Instead, the campaign stuck to the messages it found voters could easily understand: afterschool programs keep kids and communities safe, are cost effective, improve academic achievement and help working families.

The campaign decided not to raise taxes in order to pay for the program. Needing to find some source of revenue, they worked with policy experts and former state directors of finance to find an alternative. Funding the program out of growth in state revenue was something that proved attractive to voters, conservative supporters and the campaign alike. While this proposal

garnered its fair share of opposition from more liberal-leaning groups including child care advocates, it was easy for voters to understand and support in tight financial times.

Finally, the concept of universal afterschool proved important to building the coalition of supporters as well as to appealing to voters. That this was a program that would benefit all California schools, with special resources also targeted to the most low-income schools, was widely popular.

Targeted Audiences

In initial polling on the concept of afterschool, state funding for afterschool and various specific funding mechanisms, the campaign identified their base and areas of needed improvement. The base of voters was clearly among minorities, women and Democratic voters. The lowest support numbers came from men, Republicans and older Californians. These numbers are not surprising for what is known in conservative circles as a “spending initiative.”

Depending on voter demographics in a particular state, it is important to assess a campaign’s target audiences. When an issue’s polling base is also the majority of voters in that state, it becomes important to drive that base, i.e. encourage the base to get out the vote. However, if the potential swing vote represents enough votes to overwhelm the base, it is important to appeal to that vote. According to Gorton, in a state such as California, this issue’s base of voters does not always represent a plurality on election day. Thus, the campaign chose to appeal to the lowest areas of support to gain swing voters and focused the majority of its attention on Republican males and older voters as target audiences. Campaign commercials were the primary appeal to target audiences. The campaign concentrated its paid media in areas that boasted high levels of seniors and Republican males.

No Significantly Funded Opposition

Much of the success of the Initiative occurred in the early days of organizing. From the beginning, one of the primary goals of the staff was to eliminate opposition with the potential to fund an anti-Prop 49 campaign. A commonly held belief among political analysts and campaign strategists is that if a voter is confused and uncertain on a ballot initiative they are more likely to vote against change rather than in favor. Therefore, a paid opposition running competing commercials and pushing to get out an anti-change vote could be the end of any campaign. The Prop 49 campaign approached potential opposition who had money to damage the campaign and made concessions if necessary in order to gain their support, or, at the very least, neutralize them. Several political observers acknowledged that a well-funded opposition might have complicated the campaign.

Experienced Political Strategists

Recognizing the importance of great political strategists both within and outside of the campaign is necessary. The Initiative benefited not only from years of experience running initiative campaigns, but expertise within California politics and within the issue. Not the least of these seasoned strategists was the Initiative’s main proponent, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Political strategists, afterschool and policy experts are available within any state and should be identified before beginning a successful campaign.

CONCLUSION

California is one of the more populous states in the nation, with one of the most complicated electorates and arguably the largest economy. Upon passage of Prop 49, Arnold Schwarzenegger said that he hoped that “as goes California, so goes the rest of our nation.” There are many national and state groups that share Schwarzenegger’s desire and determination. Although arriving in a position where the concept of a universal afterschool initiative was possible and then further to where that initiative could pass took years in California, it is entirely possible that it could happen more quickly in other states and locales. Foundations for the elements of success are available in every state, whether there is a statewide program or a strong city-level program, and whether there is \$50 million to fund programs and a campaign or \$500,000. If the winning combinations demonstrated by the Proposition 49 campaign are instituted in similar forms across the country, we can begin to get to the goal of Afterschool for All.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin O'Hara is a political consultant focusing on education issues. Ms. O'Hara researches and writes about state coalition building, education policy and research. Her primary focus on afterschool programs is a natural extension of her work with FowlerHoffman LLC and the Afterschool Alliance. Ms. O'Hara advised the planning and execution of strategic communications, grassroots organizing and advocacy campaigns at the state level, and also contributed to the overall message and material development and strategy for the Alliance.

A native of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, Ms. O'Hara previously worked with the Bill Bradley for President campaign and as a consultant to MusicToday.com, a music merchandising company, on their transition from a bricks-and-mortar to an e-business. She graduated from the University of Virginia with a Bachelor of Arts in African and African American Studies and American Government.

Ms. O'Hara currently serves on the Board of Directors for the California School-Age Consortium, a training, advocacy and networking organization dedicated to supporting and advancing quality, affordable and accessible school-age care.