

Day for Learning

Moving From Co-Existence to Collaboration



In communities where learning is connected, enriched, and integrated across sectors—in school and out of school—we see collaborative structures and practices that facilitate connection and integration. As outlined in the previous section, there are multiple sources of support—funding, training, technical assistance, and networks—that can and, when properly leveraged, do connect time and quality learning opportunities across sectors of our communities.

What can school, afterschool, and community leaders, not to mention youth and families, do to take full advantage of these supports—to build a new day for learning?

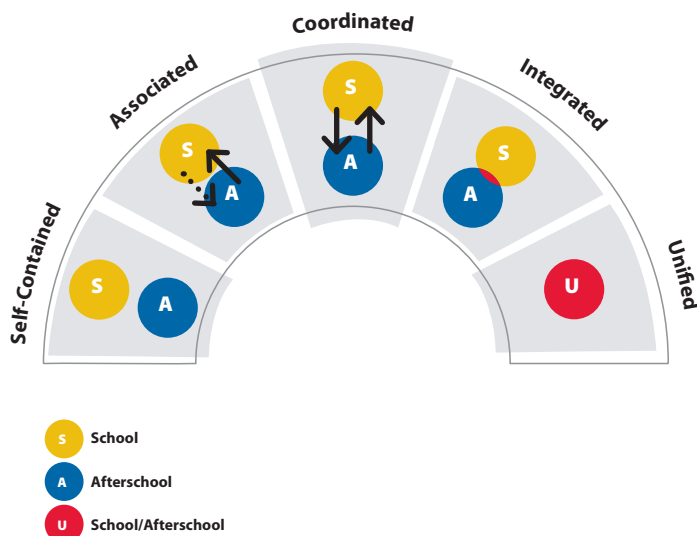
First, participants in this process must approach learning from a new vantage point. In most communities, schools and afterschool programs have often operated independently of each other. Principals have focused on the school day, and afterschool leaders have focused on out-of-school time. As a result, different expectations around learning, play, and care developed; different definitions of “success” emerged; and different professional networks were established.

Under the New Day for Learning vision, school, afterschool, and community leaders work together to develop a shared vision and goals—to connect learning and development for children and adults; to develop common definitions of success; to provide joint professional development opportunities for school and afterschool staff in which they can learn from one another; and to leverage and share funding, space, transportation, and other resources.

As Gil Noam, founder and director of the Program on Education, Afterschool and Resiliency (PEAR), and his colleagues at Harvard University have argued, collaboration typically moves along a continuum.

To move from the self-contained approach on the left of the continuum to integrated collaboration on the right, collaborators must work intentionally across traditional boundaries. Programs need not be fully unified (like the Massachusetts model), but they can be much more integrated and connected.

Five types of bridging intensity between schools and afterschool programs



Keys to Effective Collaboration

1. A Clear Understanding of Needs and Resources

Perhaps the most important first step leaders can take along the path to more meaningful collaboration is to gather information about what needs and resources exist in particular communities, and to establish mechanisms for regularly monitoring both needs and resources. Even in communities where it appears that there are rich out-of-school time resources available to students, in-school and out-of-school time learning opportunities may be disconnected or fragmented; children from high-poverty neighborhoods may not have meaningful access to rich learning opportunities; and learning itself may be timeworn.

Collaborators can begin by asking questions such as:

- Where do young people go after the school day is over? How do they spend their time?
- What are the various learning opportunities available to them (in school and out of school)?
- How many children are able to take advantage of various learning opportunities?
- What do various opportunities cost? How are those costs covered—through grants, vouchers, fees, or some combination of these?
- What do parents or caregivers want and need for the children in their care?
- What kinds of learning opportunities do young people want and need?
- What do business and community leaders want and need?
- What is the school’s vision for learning?
- How is the school day structured?
- What’s missing—in school and out of school?
- How could school and afterschool resources—space, funding, personnel, and time—be shared to build a new day for learning that meets various needs?
- What additional resources are needed? Available?

It is important to keep in mind that needs and resources will vary considerably from community to community and will shift over time. As we develop this resource guide, the United States is in the midst of a severe recession, and both needs and resources are changing rapidly—in Los Angeles, for example, summer school has been canceled for everyone except those who need it to graduate. In order for principals and expanded learning opportunity providers to work together effectively, it is vital for participants to understand the constraints others face, and conversely the opportunities that are available. Visit www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx to find tools for assessing needs and resources.

2. A Shared Vision and Goals

Along with a rich and nuanced understanding of needs and resources, it is also important for leaders to establish a shared vision and goals. Essentially, this means that school, afterschool, and community leaders must work together to craft a vision for a new learning day that reflects the needs, concerns, and interests of all involved. Though challenging, this process is also rewarding and essential if we are to truly build a new day for learning. For examples of visioning and goal-setting tools, see www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx.

The San Francisco Vision: What Will Student Success Look Like in a *New Day for Learning*

All young people will graduate college- and career-path-ready and be prepared with the skills and capacities required for success in school, work and life.

Specifically desired outcomes for young people include the following:

- Academic competence;
- Technological fluency;
- Creative, critical and innovative thinking, reasoning and problem-solving;
- High-level communication skills;
- Environmental, civic and social responsibility;
- Strength of character;
- High-level multilingual and multicultural skills;
- Aesthetic sensibility;
- Collaborative and team orientation; and
- High levels of engagement in one's own learning and direction.

(www.newdayforlearning.org, 2009)

3. Agreement on Responsibilities and Accountability

Agreement on responsibilities and accountability is also an essential component of a successful collaborative relationship, and this may best be outlined in a memorandum of understanding or contract. It should also involve regular communication and tracking. In the online resources that accompany this guide, see www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx, there are several tools and checklists for helping collaborators agree upon, monitor, and continue to improve shared responsibilities and to hold each other accountable.

4. Effective Data Collection, Sharing, and Assessment

Along with clearly delineated responsibilities and accountability, it is also essential to develop agreed upon data collection, sharing, and assessment processes. School administrators, principals, and teachers have come under increased pressure in recent years to ensure that students meet and exceed state learning standards. And recently, 46 states have agreed to work toward commonly agreed upon and internationally benchmarked standards of learning.

At the same time, a number of statewide afterschool networks and city-based afterschool systems have developed quality standards for afterschool. Leaders must work together to connect data collection and assessment systems across sectors. Though some of this work must happen at the national, state, and district levels, principals and afterschool providers can work within these systems to develop processes and protocols that work at the school and community level. For examples and assessment tools, see www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx.

It's also vital for principals, afterschool providers, and other stakeholders to push boundaries on the assessment front—to work together to build and connect authentic assessments, such as portfolio-based evaluations, that go beyond high-stakes tests.

5. Connected Professional Development and Overlapping Staffing Arrangements

Connected professional development is another key building block for effective collaboration. Depending on the school system or community, it can take many forms. In some cases, afterschool or summer educators are also in-school teachers or staff members. In other cases, youth interact with a different set of staff before and after school or during the summer.

By establishing multiple mechanisms for professional development and staffing—joint staff development programs held alternatively at schools or community centers, for example, around agreed upon topics—principals and afterschool providers can bridge this gap. Teacher externships and classroom-based internships can also be used to connect adult learning.

Contract hours for both in-school and out-of-school staff pose perhaps the greatest barrier to shared professional development. To surmount this barrier, both groups can work together to plan professional development time—based on the shared vision and goals—so that there are overlaps in working hours. This creates the possibility for professional learning communities built around topics such as project-based learning or an emphasis on the whole child. Even monthly or quarterly joint planning sessions can be very helpful. For tools related to connected professional development, see www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx.

The Importance of Coordinators, Afterschool Directors, and Liaisons

In conversations with principals and providers of expanded learning opportunities about essentials for effective collaboration, everyone points to the importance of having an expanded learning opportunities coordinator, afterschool director, or staff liaison. Though position descriptions vary, the person in this role serves as a bridge between in-school and out-of-school time, helping to connect people—teachers, afterschool educators, leaders, parents, and students—and learning in different contexts.

6. Effective Communication—Understanding and Connecting Different Learning Cultures

If collaborations are to grow and flourish, everyone must communicate effectively. Leaders must understand and be able to navigate norms, expectations, and communication styles as they operate in different learning arenas, for example:

- How school cultures differ from various out-of-school cultures (e.g. before and after school; summer; school-based vs. community-based; work-place based)
- What communication expectations surround formal and informal learning
- How organizational communication works within different schools and within various community-based organizations
- How cultural norms affect communication styles, (around written or spoken language, for example)
- How key individuals—the principal, teachers, out-of-school time staff, students, and parents communicate
- Barriers to communication, and ways they can be overcome

“When I meet with principals and afterschool directors across the nation, the most common concerns I hear are communication concerns. Effective communication is a prerequisite to just about everything else. Without it, all the good intentions, planning and resource sharing in the world won’t help.”

(Interview with Paul Young, former elementary school principal, NAESP Aligning the Learning Day Trainer and director of the West After School Center, Lancaster, Ohio)

As collaborators work to understand and bridge different communication norms, practices, and styles, they should be guided by a commitment to a shared vision and goals. For tools and resources on communication, see www.naesp.org/Afterschool.aspx.

Expanded learning opportunities benefit from having a staff member, either employed by the school or the afterschool program or shared across both, whose primary responsibility is to coordinate resources among partners, create learning plans for students based on those resources, and facilitate communications and relationship-building. In addition to a designated staff member, expanded learning opportunities should encourage school and program staff alike to participate in governance and leadership committees as well as grade-level and content-specific teams in order to be fully integrated partners.

(“Supporting Student Outcomes Through Expanded Learning Opportunities,” 2009)