

## Promising Practices in Afterschool

NIOST is one of six national organizations across the country that has been funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to collect promising practices in afterschool. Each organization collects practices from different geographic areas and program auspices.

NIOST's focus is identifying system building and infrastructure practices from the 20 cities across the country participating in the Cross-Cities Network. Practices are collected on an ongoing basis and are submitted to the AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research where a review team evaluates the practices to ensure they are valid. Once practices pass successfully through the review process, they are posted to the [www.afterschool.org](http://www.afterschool.org) web site so that others may learn from them.

To learn more about the Promising Practices Initiative or to submit your own practice, please visit [www.afterschool.org](http://www.afterschool.org)

Or

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[www.niost.org](http://www.niost.org)

# Promising Practices in Citywide Afterschool Initiatives

## Building Infrastructure to Support Afterschool Partnerships

### DeKalb County's Family Technology Resource Centers

DeKalb County Public Schools in Georgia created the Family Technology Resource Center (FTRC) program in 1996. It has a multi-purpose strategy converging around the goals of providing high quality learning opportunities for children during the afterschool hours, promoting school/family integration, and building the technological skills of the community. There are over 98,000 students in the DeKalb County public schools attending 139 schools. In 1999, DeKalb County had the fastest growing poverty rate (15.7%) in Georgia. More than half the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and the student body is 86.5 percent minority.

Founders of the FTRC were very cognizant of the overwhelming need for positive opportunities for children and youth in the afterschool hours in DeKalb County. They also considered the many years of research that show that greater family involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving a high-quality education. In fact, in a 1994 report, the U.S. Department of Education cited over 30 years of research indicating that the starting point of American education is parent expectations and parental involvement in their children's education. The report discussed how schools and families can develop partnerships, how local communities can connect with families and schools, and how businesses can get involved with family support and participation in education.

One of the ways that DeKalb County schools identified to provide high quality learning opportunities for children and promote family involvement was to support the advancement of both student and family technology skills during the out-of-school time hours through a family technology center. The Family Technology Resource Centers were designed to provide a setting where parents, children, and other community members can engage in educational experiences together during non-traditional school hours. The FTRC is an innovative approach to afterschool programming through its design of "bringing the whole community in" and establishing a "learning hub in the local neighborhood." With funding through the Georgia Partnership in Education, the first Family Technology Resource Center opened in 1996. The goals of the Family Technology Resource Centers are:

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- Provide a fully equipped classroom environment that will allow parents and children the opportunity to participate in educational experiences together;
- Provide equal access to computer training to all segments of the community;
- Enhance parent knowledge of computing skills so they can help support their children's education and improve their own employment opportunities;
- Raise the general level of education in the community; and
- Strengthen partnerships among key stakeholders including schools, parents, businesses, and community and government organizations.

## The Family Technology Resource Center Model

Currently there are 24 FTRC's located in schools throughout the DeKalb County school system. Centers are open free of charge for 24 hours each week after traditional school day hours. The Family Technology Resource Center serves as the foundation for afterschool programming in schools with centers. Typically the centers open immediately following regular school hours and operate from the hours of 3:30 - 8:00 PM and then again on Saturday mornings. School-age children participate in academic enrichment, technology skills/application training, and cultural arts activities. Tutoring is offered to assist those students experiencing academic difficulties. Pre-school children participate in story time and creative arts and play activities.

The centers are simultaneously open to adult participants. Adult participants learn personal computing skills, job related technical skills, and basic and advanced literacy skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Some centers also offer keyboarding, GED classes, test preparation, job skills, and parenting skills. There is also a complete PC Skills course offered at several centers. The course takes approxi-

mately 11-13 weeks to complete. Adult participants in the FTRC are required to volunteer at least 15 hours a week back to the program. Volunteer contributions include activities such as: media center assistance, mentoring students, reading to children, answering phones, hall monitoring, and setting up bulletin boards.

There are trained technical facilitators at each FTRC site. The facilitators provide initial orientation for new users, assist participants and answer questions, in addition to tracking attendance and course completion. Courses are available to DeKalb County parents, students, senior citizens, other county residents, and school system employees.

Each of the FTRC is advised by a formal Advisory Board composed of local community members, teachers, and business partners and is chaired by the school principal. The Board sets priorities for the center and through its leadership ensures that the programming at the center reflects the desires and needs of

the local community. Program site hours, curriculum, and staffing strategy are all formulated by the Advisory Board. In addition, each of the centers has a site coordinator who bridges the connection between the center and the central district office. There is a monthly site coordinator meeting with the central

FTRC administrators. This small central school district office, headed by the FTRC Director, coordinates the implementation of new centers and manages their financial sustainability. It is incumbent on the local advisory board to manage the centers with the needs of the community in mind. The central district office makes sure that the resources to support them are in place.

**The Family Technology Resource Center serves as the foundation for afterschool programming in schools with centers.**

## Building the Model/What Needs to be in Place

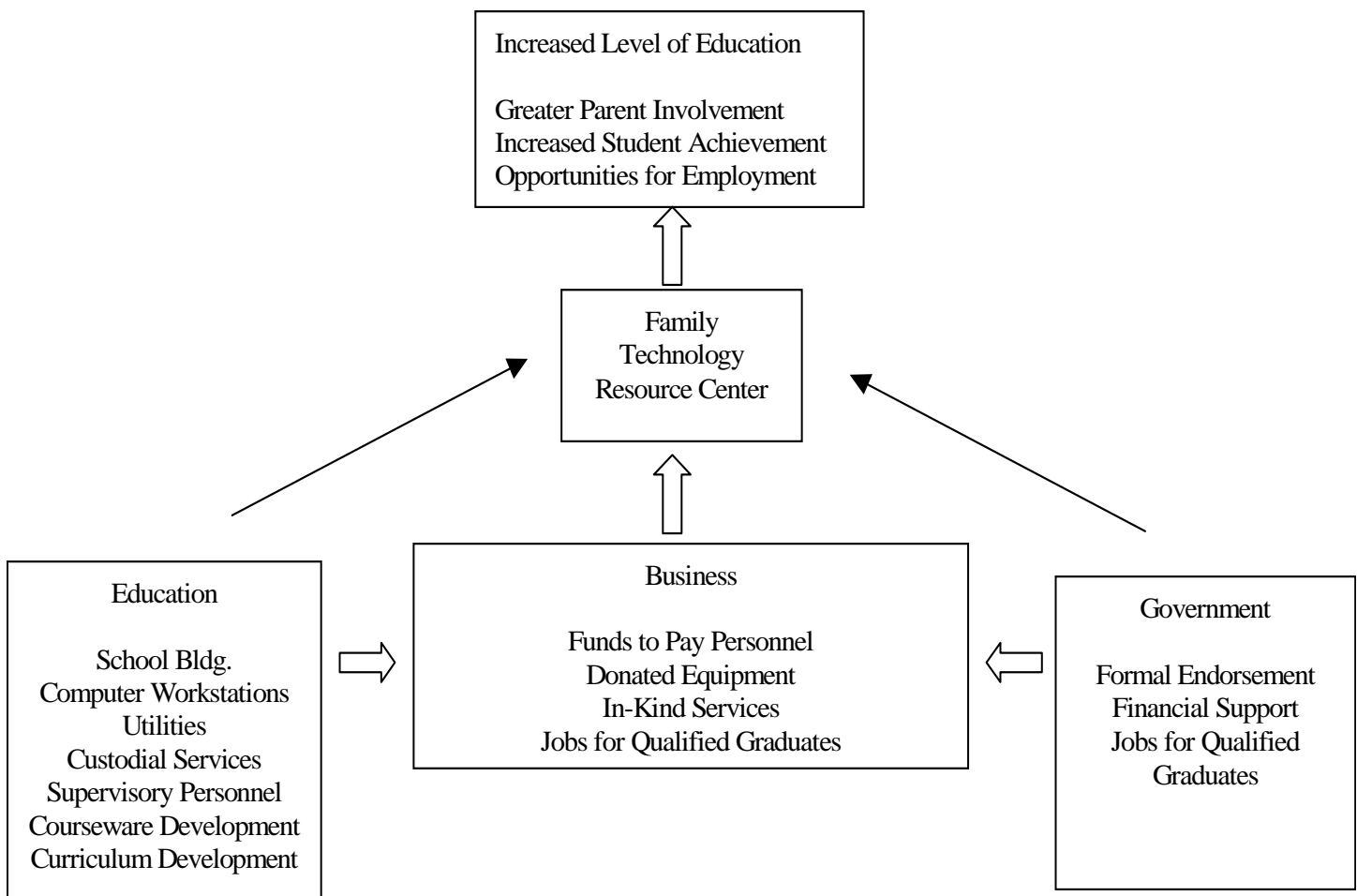
At the program level, many organizations can im

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plement technology building initiatives and after-school opportunities. It is much more challenging to organize and sustain a city or countywide agenda. DeKalb County envisions the FTRC as a partnership between business, education, and government and outlines the relationships in the following diagram:

## **Family Technology Resource Centers: A Partnership Between Business, Education, and Government**



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One of the key infrastructure resources the project already had was the school technological equipment. The next step was to bring in people and bring in opportunity, and leverage the investment that the community already had in place (the schools). Family Technology Resource Center Director, Dr. Mindy Salvo, cites the following components to building a system of Family Technology Resource Centers to support the whole district:

- Collaboration with community members
- Collaboration with local businesses
- Utilization of volunteers
- Flexible program structure at sites
- Trained staff
- Committed funding stream

Each of the components plays an important role in the realization of a successful FTRC. When the FTRC initiative started, one very enthusiastic business partner was involved. As the centers were implemented around the county, other businesses joined as funders, members of advisory boards, and as potential employers. Business partners participate in a job fair focused on summer jobs for youth. Fortune 500 companies, major hospitals, health centers, and government agencies have all hired FTRC program graduates.

Requiring participants to volunteer back 15 hours to the centers solves many staffing issues, as well as preserves a local commitment and orientation to the centers. Retaining some flexibility in the implementation of each center recognizes that each school has its own particular characteristics and strategic plan and keeps the focus on meeting the needs and timeline of the school community. By using a systemic approach to providing high quality services, the burden of financial sustainability is off the individual school and community. The district has stepped forward to develop and provide the resources that allow the principals and local Advisory Boards to give attention to their central task of serving the educational needs of the com-

munity.

## Evidence of Success

DeKalb County Schools holds up increased student achievement in reading and math, student school attendance, and parental participation as evidence of success of the FTRC. Some schools where parental and community involvement was minimal have seen a major shift in involvement since the opening of the FTRC. Many of the centers are operating at full capacity with waiting lists.

In its core belief document, the DeKalb County School System of metropolitan Atlanta specifies that "a community is only as strong as the contributions of its members toward the common good." Through the Family Technology Resource Centers, DeKalb County Schools helps fulfill its own role as a contributing member to the community by enhancing the out-of-school time learning experiences of its children, youth, and families.

## Resources:

Interviews conducted for this publication:

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## Reference:

U.S. Department of Education. (1994). Strong families, strong schools: Building community partnerships for learning. A research base for family involvement in learning. Washington, DC: Author