

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 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

Or

Contact NIOST, Center for Research on Women, Wellesley College, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02481

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Promising Practices

Creating Infrastructure to Support Community Involvement

Profile

As early as 1968 Community Education Centers were operating in many of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLS). Today there are 16 comprehensive centers operating in St. Louis elementary and middle schools serving 17,000 to 22,000 youth and adults. The community education initiative is managed by the school's Community Education Office and receives its primary funding from the city government and the public schools.

All of the community education centers have afterschool programs for youth, including tutoring and homework assistance, cultural enrichment, recreation, organized team sports, violence and drug prevention, and other activities that enhance academic achievement. The mission of the community education centers is to create and support a nurturing educational environment through which children, families, and other neighborhood residents will experience success.

For the purposes of community education, the city of St. Louis is divided into 16 regions. Within each region there is a Community Education Center and a Community Education Specialist that reports to the SLS Community Education Office. The Community Education Specialist's role is to facilitate the center's connection with the community and the integration of other school communities in the region.

As part of the Missouri School Improvement Program the St. Louis Public School district has adopted 15 action strategies to meet accreditation standards. Included in the action strategies is the goal to "utilize community education programs and after-school activities to promote instruction and preparation for the Missouri Assessment Program." Specifically the district's goal is to provide and assist schools to design afterschool tutorial and other academic strengthening opportunities that support MAP instruction and preparation in the community education centers.

Produced by the [National Institute on Out-of-School Time](http://www.niost.org) for CityWorks.
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This publication was made possible by a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.
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Community Involvement

The involvement of community members through the Community Council at each community education center is one of the strengths of the St. Louis afterschool model. The Community Council consists of local residents, parents, service providers, elected officials, local business leaders, clergy, and youth. Afterschool program leaders view the councils as central to the stability and quality of each community education site. The council partners with administration in determining programs and activities, in addition to allocating resources to support the center's objectives. Most importantly, the council links the people and organizations of the community with the school.

Many of the impediments to student achievement can be addressed through the resources of the community. Providing leadership for the community education centers through a community council focuses the agenda of the center directly on the issues and concerns that resonate in the neighborhood. Each center's community council also sends a representative to a combined regional council that is staffed by the Community Education Office.

There are two essential partners necessary for a successful community education center model: parents and representatives from the community. The role played by parents and other community members is multifaceted and significant such as providing perspective on specific services needed in the community, accounts of the struggles and strengths of their neighborhoods, and spreading the word about the community education center's services and goals (Children's Aid Society, 2001). Afterschool leaders in St. Louis emphasize how important it is to the success of the community education center's model of afterschool to have consistent and meaningful parent and community input.

Pull Quote

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References:

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