



National League of Cities



Ensuring the Success of Children & Youth in American Communities

A Joint Position
of the
National League of Cities – Institute for Youth, Education, and Families,
Learning First Alliance,
And
National Collaboration for Youth

October 25, 2002

This school year, the odds are that over one-third of students do not have a safe place to go after school. Forty percent of middle and high school students feel unsafe traveling to and from school. Fewer than 50 percent of secondary school students receive support from three or more non-parent adults. Approximately 11 percent of 16-24 year olds are considered dropouts.¹

Changing these odds requires schools, social service agencies, and local governments to collaborate with families, faith-based organizations, and other community members. Because the lives of children and youth are greatly influenced by all of these sectors, all must be held accountable in providing America's youth the safe and supportive environments, the challenging experiences and opportunities, and the positive relationships necessary for achieving these outcomes. No one sector can do it alone.

Our three organizations call on leaders of the local municipal, education, and human service sectors to engage in discussions about the full range of positive outcomes each community wants for its youth, how to provide effective environments for youth before, during, and after school hours, and how to hold every sector accountable for its role in ensuring that the community's young people are successful.

There is now research-based agreement on key outcomes for youth, the key attributes that all youth settings should share, and the need for collaboration to achieve success. This research is synthesized in two reports. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* is a landmark analysis by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, and *Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools* is a consensus report from the Learning First Alliance, a collaboration of the nation's leading education associations. These two recent research-based reports are a call to action for those who want to improve the odds of success for our children and youth.

These reports outline four key aspects of children and youth development: physical; intellectual; psychological/emotional; and social. Children and youth develop physically, intellectually, psychologically and socially, in school, at home, in community-based programs and agencies, in places of worship, and elsewhere in the community. Research indicates children and youth learn and develop best

¹ *Lights On Afterschool*, Afterschool Alliance, p.1; *The MetLife Survey of The American Teacher 2002*; *Student Life: School, Home and Community*, Exhibit 5.4; Search Institute, 1999, as cited by America's Promise, The Alliance for Youth; Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001, Tables 14, 108.

in settings that provide safety, supportive relationships, high expectations, positive social norms, appropriate structure, opportunities to build knowledge and skills, opportunities for service, and opportunities to belong.

Importantly, settings in which youth are successful also integrate family, school, and community efforts, which the National Research Council report defines as “concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school and community.” Achieving this integration requires overcoming the fragmented funding streams and the diverse professional cultures of schools, government, community organizations and other institutions with roles in helping children and youth succeed.

Although all sectors influence child and youth development, educational institutions are most often held accountable for the successful development of young people. Yet, schools cannot and should not be expected to do this alone. No school district can by itself do all that needs to be done to improve our public schools – increase student achievement, reduce dropout rates, address the teacher shortage, and ensure students are ready to learn.

Achieving successful outcomes and ensuring that students are in good schools—and positive after-school and summer settings—are the shared responsibilities of many partners, including elected officials at all levels of government, leaders of community-based organizations, and social service agencies. Schools play a central role in building stable communities and improving outcomes for our young people. The quality of public schools and the other supports for young people are closely linked to the long-term prospects of our communities. They are critical to young people’s future success as citizens, parents and productive members of our economy.

This is not uncharted territory. Already, municipal leaders and broad-based community coalitions around the nation are mounting collaborative, community-wide strategies to transform schools into centers of community life. Where communities band together to create these opportunities for youth, their young people will be better prepared to enter adulthood with the knowledge, skills, and character to be productive members of our diverse and democratic society. Communities that do this are taking school-government-community partnerships from “nice to do” to “essential for success.”

The evidence is clear about the kinds of opportunities and settings that enable children to be successful. Beginning discussions around these issues is only the first step. In order to translate conversations into strategies and actions, communities should develop and pursue a long-term commitment to the goal of safe and supportive learning communities that foster all aspects of child and youth development. Communities should define their outcomes, develop and implement measures and indicators to monitor their progress toward achieving those outcomes, and use their data to improve their community and school programs. Finally, all stakeholders must hold themselves publicly accountable for improving the odds for their children and the community.

We counsel that changing the odds for our children and youth requires intentionality of effort and long-term commitment. Success is not dependent solely on boosting test scores or the effectiveness of a youth program or the strength of a parent involvement strategy. It is about all those things and more. It is about sharing responsibility and accountability for all children and youth in our communities.

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Learning First Alliance, founded in 1997, is a permanent partnership of leading education organizations working together to improve student learning. The Alliance members are: the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council of Chief State School

Officers, Education Commission of the States, National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association, National PTA and the National School Boards Association. (For more information, go to <http://www.learningfirst.org>)

National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) is an association of more than forty leading national nonprofit providers and supporters of youth development programs. Most of these "household names" of youth services have local affiliates or branches that serve particular communities and neighborhoods within them.² Together, the members of the NCY and their affiliates reach tens of millions of children and youth in virtually every community in America. They are bound together by a shared commitment to provide a united voice for and with youth; to improve the conditions for young people in America; and to help young people reach their potential and become caring and responsible adults. (For more information, go to <http://www.nydic.org>)

National League of Cities (NLC) is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal governments throughout the United States. With a membership of 1,800 cities and towns, as well as 49 state associations, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for 18,000 U.S. cities that serve 225 million people across the U.S. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the NLC, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers, and other local leaders can play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

The Institute is a national resource, providing **guidance and assistance** to municipal officials, compiling and disseminating **information** on promising strategies and best practices, building **networks** of local officials working on similar issues and concerns, and conducting **research** on the key challenges facing municipalities in these core program areas. It collaborates with a broad range of national partners and works with the nation's 49 state municipal leagues to reach local officials in up to 18,000 cities and towns across America. (For more information, go to <http://www.nlc.org/iyef>)

Resources for Communities

Learning First Alliance. *Every Child Learning: Safe and Supportive Schools*. November 2001.
Ordering Information
ASCD Stock No. 301279
Contact the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development at

² NCY members include: Alliance for Children & Families, American Camping Association, America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth, Association of Junior Leagues International, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Boy Scouts of America, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Camp Fire USA, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, Center for Youth As Resources, Child Welfare League of America, Citizens Scholarship Foundation of America, Coalition for Juvenile Justice, Communities in Schools, Coalition for Residential Education, Families, 4H & Nutrition, Girl Scouts of the USA, Girls Incorporated, Hostelling International—American Youth Hostels, Joint Action in Community Service, KaBOOM!, National Alliance for Hispanic Health, National Crime Prevention Council, National 4H Council, National Mental Health Association, National Mentoring Partnership, National Network for Youth, National Urban League, National Youth Employment Coalition, Points of Light Foundation, The Salvation Army, Save the Children, Search Institute, United Neighborhood Centers of America, United Way of America, Volunteers of America, Women in Community Service, YMCA of the USA, Youth Crime Watch of America, YWCA of the U.S.A.

1-800-933-ASCD (2723) extension 2 or, in the Washington, DC, metro area, (703) 578-9600. You may mail your order to ASCD, P.O. Box 79760, Baltimore, MD 21279-0760 or order from the ASCD website at www.ascd.org.

National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations. *After School Collaboration: When It Works—Why It Works, A Literature Review*. 2001.

Ordering Information

Obtain order form at www.nydic.org, click on “Publications,” and follow instructions or phone (202) 347-2080, ext. 19.

National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations. *Dimensions of School/Community Collaboration: What It Takes to Make Collaboration Work*. September 2002.

Ordering Information

Obtain order form at www.nydic.org, click on “Publications,” and follow instructions or phone (202) 347-2080, ext. 19.

National League of Cities. *Improving Public Schools* Action Kit. 2002.

To receive a free copy of the Improving Public Schools action kit, leave a detailed message at 202/626-3014 or e-mail reid@nlc.org. The action kit may also be downloaded in PDF format from NLC’S website at http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/files/reports/waterfall1.pdf

National League of Cities. *Expanding Afterschool Opportunities* Action Kit. 2001

To receive a free copy of the Improving Public Schools action kit, leave a detailed message at 202/626-3014 or e-mail reid@nlc.org. The action kit may also be downloaded in PDF format from NLC’S website at: http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/files/reports/afterschool.pdf

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, Eds. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002.

Ordering Information

Contact the National Academy Press at 1-800-624-6242 or, in the Washington, DC, metro area, (202) 334-3313. You may also mail requests to the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Box 285, Washington, DC 20055, or go to <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309072751/html>.

Coalition for Community Schools The Coalition for Community Schools works toward improving education and helping students learn and grow while supporting and strengthening their families and communities. <http://www.communityschools.org>