

THE COLLABORATIVE
for BUILDING
AFTER-SCHOOL
SYSTEMS

October 13, 2011

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

The Honorable Mike Enzi
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Enzi,

The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS) writes to thank you for releasing your draft of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. CBASS is a coalition of intermediary organizations in eight jurisdictions nationwide dedicated to increasing the availability of quality expanded learning opportunities. We believe in strong partnerships between schools and community partners that increase learning time through a full range of enrichment opportunities.

We very much appreciate that the draft maintains the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and its formula-to-state and competitive-to-local structure. We are also pleased to see that partnerships are a required part of the program. As nonprofit intermediary organizations, we believe programs that foster strong partnerships between community-based organizations and local school districts are the best way to support student success.

We also believe that your suggested policy to expand learning time by significantly adding hours to the school day, week, or year has the potential to increase student learning and engagement when done in close collaboration with community partners and with local investment. We want to work with you to ensure that the 21st Century Community Learning Center program supports the highest-quality learning and enrichment programs to promote full day learning strategies. In order to achieve that goal, we recommend the following changes:

Ensure Local Choice. The draft is silent on who makes the decision about which approach to use under section 4401(b)(1). As currently written, the federal government or state educational agencies could prioritize or direct local communities to use one approach over another. We strongly believe that the approach used should be one that is best for the community, chosen by the community.

Recommended language:

- *Special Rule. Insert a new special rule: “Special Rule. In implementing the 21st CCLC, state educational agencies and the U.S. Department of Education may not give priority, preference, or direction about whether communities use 21st CCLC for (1) before school, after school, or summer learning programs and/or (2) a redesign and expansion of the school day, week or year that includes the creative integration of academic enrichment strategies that build on effective after school and summer learning approaches.”*

Ensure Strong Partnerships: While the draft requires partnerships between districts and eligible community partners, it also includes a Special Rule (Section 4401(b)(2)(B)) that gives broad authority for districts to apply without a partner. In our experience in urban, rural, and suburban communities alike, there are strong partners in every community that can enhance, support, grow, and strengthen the quality and quantity of services for children. This provision, in practice, is an invitation to “opt out” of partnerships that will lead to lower quality and fewer services for children.

Recommended language: Strike Section 4401(b)(2)(B).

The requirements for expanded learning time programs should be updated to further emphasize the role of partners and the importance of enrichment activities.

Recommended language: In section 4401(b)(1)(C) Strike section (iv) and replace with: “(iv) for teachers and nonprofit partner staff to engage in collaboration and professional planning, within and across grades and subjects.”

The draft is unclear which entity may be the fiscal agent in the partnership. In some communities, the district may be the best fiscal agent. In other communities, the community partner may be best fiscal agent. It should be clarified that either partner can be the fiscal agent.

Recommended language: Strike Section 4401(b)(2)(A) and replace with: “Eligible Entity – (A) In General – The term ‘eligible entity’ means a partnership of: (i) 1 or more high-need local educational agencies in partnership with one or more nonprofit organizations with a demonstrated record of success in designing and implementing before school, after school, summer learning, or expanded learning time activities; or (ii) 1 or more nonprofit organizations with a demonstrated record of success in designing and implementing before school, after school, summer learning, or expanded learning time activities, in partnership with 1 or more high need local educational agencies.”

Also add a section 4401(b)(2)(C): “(B) Permissible Partners — Partners may include public organizations or institutions.” (Note: we recommend striking the current B above)

In the Title IX definition of expanded learning time, partnerships should also be recognized.

Recommended language: Strike section 9101(a)(27)(C) and replace with “(C) instructional and support staff, including nonprofit partner staff, to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development, including on family and community engagement, within and across grades and subjects.”

Support Programs that Use Research-Based Strategies: It is important the 21st Century Community Learning Center support quality as well as innovation. The draft language requires “research-based evidence” in the local grant contents as well as in the priority section. We support the use of research-based strategies to inform effective program design. However, requiring all programs to have research-based evidence of effectiveness up front, could cause innovation to lose out. In addition, we believe that the use of research-based strategies should be a condition for all programs, not a priority for some.

Recommended language:

Strike 4404(b)(2)(i) and replace with “Evidence that research-based strategies for student achievement and engagement will be utilized in the program;”

Strike 4404(g)(A).

Ensure that programs have the capacity to succeed by strengthening the role of intermediaries to support systems-building efforts. Districts and community partners need co-management capacity in order to leverage the strengths of external entities. Expanded learning opportunity programs need extra support to meet their goals and help all students achieve. Providers often lack resources, training, systems, and strategies to succeed. Intermediaries help schools and nonprofits excel at direct student services, while providing the wrap-around services needed to build capacity, sustain and grow scalable programs, and get results. There is a need to build capacity and systems across programs to increase the return on investment, ensure sustainability, and improve results.

Recommended language:

In section 4401(b) add a new section (4), —(4) Intermediary. The term —intermediary means a non-profit organization with expertise in training, forging public-private partnerships, systems development, capacity building, improving scalability, and evaluation of expanded learning opportunities.”

In Section 4404(g) insert a new (E), —(E) include an intermediary as a partner.

State activities. 4402(c)(3)(B) after “part” insert “in partnership with high-quality local, state, or national intermediaries”

Ensure Many Children In Need Have Access to Quality Programs. We agree with the draft’s provisions to target services to low-income children. However, we are concerned that the universe of eligible schools is too small when limited only to sections 1116(b) and (c)(2). The 21st Century Community Learning Center can complement and support school turn-around efforts in the lowest performing schools, but that is not the only place that it adds value. These programs can help keep schools from falling into the lowest performing category and help children stay in school and graduate. We recommend that the language continue to target to children in need, but not to only the lowest performing schools.

Recommended language: add “and subsection (b)(3)(iii) and (iv) of section 1111” after “1116” in section 4403(a)(3).

Remove Cap on Renewals. We agree that the check-in on grants at least every three years is an important way to improve program quality. However, limiting the renewal could hamper very successful programs from serving more children well.

Recommended language: In sections:

4403(a)(8) strike “for an additional period of not more than two years”;

4403(a)(13)(A) strike “2-year”; and

4404(f) strike “of not more than 2 years”

Clarify Local Activities Section. In section 4405(a), the language includes “before school, after school, summer learning, or expanded learning time activities” which we support. However, (a)(1) then repeats the activities as expanded learning time programs or initiatives.

Recommended language: Either strike (1) or add after “initiatives” the following: “or high-quality before school, after school, or summer learning programs.”

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. We would be happy to discuss them further with you at your convenience. Please contact Jennifer Peck (jennifer@partnerforchildren.org, (510) 830-4200 x1601), Partnership for Children and Youth or Jessica Donner (jdonner@tascorp.org, [\(646\) 943-8738](tel:6469438738)), Collaborative for Building After-School Systems, if you have questions.

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