



# Supporting Student Success Iowa

**Iowa's Plan to Ensure Quality Afterschool  
Opportunities for All Iowa Youth**

October 2008

As members of the Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team, we believe that meaningful afterschool opportunities should be accessible to all children and youth in Iowa. Iowa's Plan to Ensure Quality Afterschool Opportunities for All Iowa Youth outlines a common vision for the state to embrace a coordinated approach to educating Iowa's students for the 21st Century.

Iowa prides itself on its high-class education system. However, there is increasing pressure on the K-12 education system to meet academic standards during the typical school day. Before and afterschool programs offer a unique opportunity for Iowa to prepare our students academically, socially, and civically, and to ensure that we are preparing our students to compete in today's global economy.

Iowa has a high percentage of working families, and many Iowa children are left unsupervised for some period of time after the school day ends and before parents are off work. Iowa is not only facing an increasing aging population, but a workforce and skills shortage in the near future, only exacerbated by difficulty retaining youth in the state. Afterschool programs not only keep kids safe after the school day ends, but can offer exposure to new skills and career opportunities in the state.

The benefits of before and afterschool are clear – high quality programming helps connect students to the learning day, engages both academically advanced students and those with unique learning barriers, and reduces dangerous behaviors such as drinking, drug use, and sexual activity. Afterschool programs also offer youth unique experiences they may not otherwise have, and engage communities in visionary thinking about how afterschool can impact the local economy, workforce, and community partnerships.

To be successful in expanding our expectations to meet the demands of the 21st Century, we must create a coordinated, seamless system of supports that connects to early childhood, postsecondary education, and the workplace. The plan developed by the Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team outlines specific steps for the state to take to implement a state-level infrastructure driven by communities, families, and youth. Ultimately, to maximize meaningful, quality opportunities for all Iowa's children and youth, we must create strong partnerships between the state, communities, businesses, parents, providers, and youth. This plan is meant to begin the conversation and start the process toward ensuring Iowa's students are provided opportunities to be successful and reach their goals in life beyond high school.

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**Representative Deborah Berry**

Iowa General Assembly

**Senator Nancy Boettger**

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### Introduction

Supporting Student Success (S3) is a policy-focused effort that brings together state level officials with the goal to institutionalize afterschool policy and funding for all Iowa children with a specific focus on middle and high school aged youth. The work is supported in Iowa by the Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association and National Conference of State Legislatures, with financial support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The vision of the S3 State Leadership Team centers on the notion that the state of Iowa must play a strong leadership role in afterschool efforts statewide. The S3 State Leadership Team recognized from the outset that it is critical to develop an approach that focuses on community, family, and youth leadership, and that the state has a responsibility in establishing goals, accountability measures, standards, and a common vision that ultimately leads to afterschool opportunities for all children and youth in Iowa.

The S3 State Leadership Team, after undertaking a number of information-gathering activities and internal discussions on afterschool opportunities for intermediate and secondary age youth, has identified several key components of a statewide plan to engage all children and youth in high quality afterschool programs. Key components of the statewide framework include multi-state agency level involvement; community-driven programming; research-based quality standards; parent, community, school, and state level collaboration; availability of technical assistance and resources; and dedicated funding for older youth.

Supporting Student Success brings many state leaders to the table that play a role in developing Iowa's mission and direction for services and programming for Iowa's youth – from infancy through entrance into work and post-secondary education. The team includes:

- Jeff Anderson- Iowa Department of Human Services
- Representative Deborah Berry (D-22)- Iowa General Assembly
- Senator Nancy Boettger (R-29)- Iowa General Assembly
- DeAnn Decker- Iowa Department of Public Health
- Tony Dietsch- Iowa Workforce Development
- Brooke Findley- Iowa Afterschool Alliance
- Emily Hajek- Office of the Governor
- Dr. Jim Reese- Iowa Department of Education
- Bill Roach- Iowa Attorney General's Office
- Shanell Wagler- Iowa Department of Management, Office of Empowerment

### Building a Foundation for Supporting Student Success

In order to frame initial discussions on how best to provide and support afterschool opportunities in Iowa, the S3 State Leadership Team sought input from school administrators and community leaders, toured model programs in San Francisco and Boston, visited afterschool programs in Iowa, and undertook extensive research on engaging children and youth in extended



learning opportunities. The information-gathering activities and internal discussions of Iowa's State Leadership Team, although early-on focused primarily on middle and high-school aged youth, built upon the research and information to develop a comprehensive, formalized structure for providing afterschool opportunities to all Iowa's children and youth.

### *Tour of Model Programs in Iowa, San Francisco, and Boston*

Iowa's State Leadership Team was determined to best understand what quality afterschool opportunities looked like in practice, and how such programs are supported and enriched by state policies and infrastructure. Iowa's team traveled to two model programs: Beacon Program, Presidio Middle School Site of San Francisco, California, and Quincy 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center of Boston, Massachusetts. These tours presented the team an opportunity to study quality afterschool programs first-hand and to speak with their peers regarding best practices in providing and supporting such programs. National and state leaders in extended learning opportunities joined Iowa's State Leadership Team on their tour and at follow-up discussions.

The team also learned more about the diverse programs offered in Iowa through visits to AdventureTime Family Services in Urbandale, and Boys and Girls Club in Des Moines, and a presentation from Hispanic Education Resources in Des Moines. AdventureTime is a parent-funded program for elementary and middle school youth offered at the school. The Boys and Girls Club is located in Carver Elementary School in Des Moines, and is a national model for public-private partnerships in sharing infrastructure and resources. Hispanic Educational Resources (HER) provides gang and violence prevention, career exploration, job shadowing, teamwork, and confidence building activities, and funding into the future is uncertain. Both programs discussed the importance of quality, a connection with the school day, and challenges associated with funding.

### *School Administrator and Community Leader Focus Groups*

The Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team gathered qualitative data from school administrators and community leaders about the availability, quality, and need for afterschool opportunities for middle and high school age youth. Two focus groups were conducted – with community leaders and school administrators – asking participants to identify issues related to access and demand, program outcomes, student needs, and barriers to implementation. Common themes emerged from both groups and are noted below:

#### **1. There is a wide disparity in types of programming, ages served, and cost**

The community members and school administrators reported a variety of types of programming offered in their communities, including YMCA programs, gender-specific programs, mentoring, sports, and leadership development. Although there have been programs targeted specifically at "at-risk" youth, participants reported the need to integrate those youth into a program that serves all children and youth. This approach eliminates stigma and provides opportunities that all youth need to be successful.

*Sometimes there is a stigma involved. School districts and community leaders may look at offering these types of programs as a sign of the education being of poor quality, even though that's not the case at all. (School Principal)*



### **2. The age at which a child is able to be left unsupervised depends on various factors**

In both focus groups, participants were hesitant to identify a specific age at which a child is able to spend time after school without adult supervision. Most participants referred to factors such as decision-making capacity and connections to adults in their lives as necessary in making these types of decisions.

*(Being able to be left unsupervised) depends on the age and the connectedness of the program they're involved in. Do they feel connected? Do they feel like they're a stakeholder in their family, in their homework? (Community Leader)*

### **3. Success depends on community-specific solutions, parental involvement, positive relationships with adults, and student-directed programming**

Afterschool programs are successful when they meet the needs of the community, youth, and parents. Participants expressed frustration about engaging parents and getting their “buy-in” to the importance of the programs. Parents often do not see the value in paying for programming for their middle and high school age youth who may be given a choice to participate or stay home alone. Many participants reported that student-directed programming was especially successful with older youth, and a key component to any program should be to assist in forging positive relationships with adults.

*They should have parent and student input in the beginning, from start to finish. You get better buy-in with students. (Community Leader)*

### **4. Systemic factors influence student behavior and engagement**

Participants in both focus groups referenced community and statewide challenges that impact student outcomes and engagement. Focus group participants noted that violent, criminal, and mischievous behavior from students has increased. Participants named systemic factors that influence their communities and that afterschool programs must be aware of and address, such as poverty, transience, immigration, and working families.

*There are behavior issues, financial issues, multiple families living together, and cultural issues. (Community Leader)*

*Transportation, availability of trained staff, facilities, funding, marketing of the program, and getting community support are all issues. (Community Leader)*



### 5. Money and “buy-in” are significant barriers to implementation

Funding is limited, especially for transportation, facilities, and staff. Policy boards and communities may see a risk in starting an afterschool program, citing stigma and spending as the reasons. Money and “buy-in” are interrelated – when communities and parents do not buy-in to the need for programming for older youth, they do not want to make the investment.

*We tend to lose the kids in high school and junior high, and these kids are always at-risk. (Community Leader)*

*There are ... costs that come in the form of political costs, meaning that it is going to cost someone for adding a new program. (School Principal)*

#### ***Extensive Research on Extended Learning Opportunities***

Best practices abound nationwide on providing and supporting afterschool opportunities at the local, state, and national levels. Iowa’s State Leadership Team undertook extensive research on afterschool, including models for state-level structures for supporting and funding afterschool, national and state quality standards, and foundational research on the important role of quality afterschool in state education systems. Iowa’s State Leadership Team used their comprehensive research to inform their discussions on a statewide framework for afterschool opportunities in Iowa, as well as framing discussions with potential partners in the private and public sectors.

#### **The Plan**

Historically, Iowa, along with most other states, has placed primary responsibility for youth outcomes on the education system in the form of academic achievement. Not only is this impractical because of constraints on time and capacity, but this view fails to acknowledge the diversity and breadth of the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Iowa has recognized the need to expand expectations for well-rounded youth who are not only successful academically but are prepared for a competitive global economy. The development and expansion of the Iowa Core Curriculum represents Iowa’s emphasis on success beyond graduation rates, and requires that youth also be proficient in such areas as financial literacy and workplace skills.

Iowa’s Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team recognizes that the state must take a coordinated approach to educating our youth. There are currently many types of programs that support academic, social, workplace, and civic outcomes for youth in Iowa. However, there is not much consistency or coordination in approach, types of services, or funding. Multiple funding sources exist at the state level, and support programs in an irregular fashion. The Department of Human Services provides child care assistance for eligible families, the Department of Public Health supports substance abuse prevention programming, and the Department of Education provides grants to support programs in communities throughout the state.

This plan reflects the discussions led by the S3 team in collaboration with stakeholders and with recognition of other efforts currently underway to support coordinated afterschool opportunities throughout the state. For example, the S3 team worked closely with the Iowa Afterschool Alliance for the development of Iowa’s Blueprint for Afterschool, a plan for ensuring access to affordable high quality afterschool in Iowa for youth ages 5-17. This plan identifies next steps for state leaders to implement the strategies outlined in the Blueprint.



## Supporting Student Success: Iowa

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The members of the S3 team are well-integrated into the short- and long-term policy goals of their state agencies, and this has allowed the team to pursue ideas within the context of current policy considerations and agency goals. Certainly, this plan cannot be pursued without recognition of the significant impact of recent disasters on the state's economy, infrastructure, and people. As the state recovers and builds better systems of supports and services for its citizens, afterschool should be at the forefront of discussions about how to leverage resources and get high return on investment in programming to improve academic outcomes, civic engagement, and social and workplace skills. The plan outlined in this document strives to set out a long-range plan for implementation of afterschool funding and policy in Iowa, beginning with establishment of an Afterschool Council.



### **How is Afterschool Defined?**

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) defines afterschool programs as programs [that] provide experiences that are meaningful and beneficial to children, youth, families, and communities by offering safe, engaging, and enriching environments for children and youth when they are not in school. Quality afterschool programs utilize a youth development philosophy that incorporates the strengths and assets of youth to build their skills and broaden their experiences. Afterschool programs not only assist youth with academic issues, but help them develop career paths and volunteer opportunities, build social skills, and become civically engaged, as well as provide preventive, gender-specific, and other specialized programming. These ongoing, continuous programs occur before school, after school, in the evenings, weekends, school and other breaks, school in-service days, or for late starts or early dismissals. They can be offered by a school, by a contractor with a school, by a community-based organization, or other partnerships at a school or other location. These programs might also be referred to as “extended learning opportunities,” “out-of-school” programs, or “enrichment” programs.

*Youth development is defined by the Center for Youth Development Policy and Research as “a combination of all of the people, places, supports, opportunities, and services that young people need to be happy, healthy, and successful.”*

### **Afterschool in Iowa**

Before and afterschool opportunities in Iowa currently exist as a broad variety of programs with diverse goals and results, little coordination, and little systemic support. About one-third of school districts offer before- or afterschool programs, and fewer offer summer programming. YMCAs, YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, community education programs, and school-age child care make up the majority of non-school based program offerings. According to a 2005 survey by the Iowa Afterschool Alliance, the majority of school-based programs say their primary function is child care. Though before- and afterschool and summer programs are almost certainly offering some type of learning activities, Iowa’s afterschool system may be more realistically described as a system of child care that is straining against its own limitations to provide high quality learning and youth development in out-of school settings.

Iowa’s afterschool emphasis on child care is clear when we look at how programs are funded and the change in availability of programs as youth get older. For all types of program providers, parent fees comprise 66% of funding, and Child Care Assistance pays for nearly a quarter (Research Institute for Studies in Education, Iowa State University, 2006). Middle and high schoolers are less than half as likely to be served than elementary age children as eligibility for Child Care Assistance stops at age 12, and parents may feel that programs are more of a luxury than a need as their children get older. Many youth also provide sibling care, cutting costs for their families considerably as they grow older. Clearly, out-of-school time for older youth is not being leveraged enough for extra learning opportunities that could enhance student achievement and/or career path development.

Currently there are no formal systemic mechanisms in Iowa for ensuring school-age youth have access to the tools required for appropriate development and skill-building outside of the K-12 public education school system. In 2006 and 2007 the Iowa Legislature appropriated about \$1 million to before and after school grants. Administered through a competitive grant process, these grants served more than 1100 students at 13 sites statewide in 2006. The greater need, however, is evidenced in the total dollars requested in 2007: over \$4 million was requested by programs – four times the actual amount of funding available.



Currently, only one Federal funding stream is devoted to afterschool programs: the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. These Federal funds are meant to supplement, not supplant, state funding for afterschool. However, until 2006, no state funds specifically supported afterschool programs in Iowa. Unlike many other states, Iowa relies heavily on parents to fund before and afterschool programs - about two-thirds of the costs of afterschool programs are paid by parents in Iowa (Research Institute for Studies in Education, Iowa State University, 2006). Grant funding is innately unsustainable, and without a formal, state-level mechanism for afterschool funding, programs will continue to rely on such unpredictable funding sources.

### **Making the Case – Why Afterschool is Important for Iowa**

Numerous studies have shown that afterschool programs positively impact all children and youth – afterschool programs offer students the opportunity to be safe after school while experiencing academics outside the traditional classroom, perhaps with experiential learning activities, mentoring, wellness programs, and participation in community service projects. Afterschool programs are now more vital than ever before as the traditional school day becomes increasingly rigorous and schools strive to prepare students to compete for jobs in a global marketplace. The report “A New Day for Learning: A Report from the Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force,” details the pressure of increased rigor in our schools with clear exasperation:

...Students [are] coping with realities never imagined even one generation ago – and public schools [are] trying to respond to growing academic demands by overloading an outmoded structure. In the six- to seven-hour day, basically unchanged for decades, many educators must cram more subject-matter coverage – with extra drill in reading and math... - and administer more standardized testing as an answer to the pressure to improve student achievement. (12)

Afterschool programs, while offering children and youth a safe environment after school lets out, also take up where the traditional school day has left off, offering students the opportunity to enjoy fun and engaging activities and learning at the same time. Afterschool has proven effective at connecting students to the topics taught in school via non-traditional classroom methods – and has been proven effective at engaging both academically advanced students as well as those students with unique learning barriers. All students learn best in environments where curriculum is reinforced and relevant learning opportunities are provided. These environments also provide unique opportunities to expand not only academic skills, but workplace and citizenship skills to help children and youth succeed throughout life.

Research shows that involvement in afterschool creates improvements in school attendance, engagement in learning, and improved test scores and grades for all students involved in afterschool programs. In fact, building students’ personal and social skills creates cascading impacts on academic skills and self-esteem. Teens who do not participate in afterschool programs are three times more likely to be truant and use marijuana or other drugs compared to teens who do participate in afterschool programs. They are also more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, and engage in sexual activity (Afterschool Alliance, 2008). According to the U.S. Department of Justice, teens not involved in afterschool programs are also five times more likely to be D students as compared to students involved in afterschool programs, 75% of whom are A or B students (2001).

Iowa, now more than ever, can benefit dramatically from afterschool programs due to the state’s high numbers of working families, transitioning demographics, and workforce needs. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, Iowa ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of the percentage of working parents (72%) with children under 6 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In the 2006 Iowa Youth Survey, 73% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 85% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported spending one to five hours or more per day unsupervised (Research Institute for Studies in Education, Iowa State University, 2006). While this gap in time between school



schedules and parent work schedules highlight public safety and child care issues, just as importantly, it also represents missed opportunities for learning. Additionally, parents miss an average of eight days of work per year because of issues related to afterschool care, costing businesses up to \$300 billion per year (Afterschool Alliance, 2008).

The opportunity that exists to better leverage the learning time of Iowa's children and youth through coordinated and purposeful afterschool opportunities is especially attractive as the state considers some troubling student impacts from poverty and increasing family mobility. Historically a state with a fairly homogenous population, the last two decades have ushered in demographic changes that impact Iowa communities and schools in a number of ways. Hispanic students in Iowa's public school system have increased 600 percent in the last twenty years, followed by increases in the percentage of American Indian students by 162 percent, African American students by 109 percent, and Asian populations by 80 percent. The number of Limited English Proficient students in Iowa has more than doubled in the last ten years. In addition, the statewide percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch is 32% (Iowa Department of Education, 2007). Many urban districts report that the student body enrolled in individual schools may change by as much as 50% from year to year due to high mobility of families.

Minority status and poverty in these populations contribute to a significant student achievement gap. For instance, in the 2005-2007 time period, 4th graders not eligible for free and reduced lunch were 85.3 percent proficient on Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) reading comprehension, while 4th graders who were eligible were 65.6 percent proficient. In the same period, 72.4 percent of 8th graders whose primary language is English were proficient on ITBS reading comprehension, while 8th grade students who are English Language Learners were 31.8 percent proficient (Iowa Department of Education, 2007).

There is a known summer learning gap that impacts all students, regardless of income level or race, but affects lower-income youth more significantly. Research commissioned by the Nelli Mae Education Foundation found that although children in all socioeconomic groups progress at the same rate during the school year, lower-income youth lose skills and knowledge during summer months while middle-income youth continue to learn or maintain (Miller, 2007). Summer learning losses are often the result of a lack of access to resources, and research shows that "summer learning losses in reading are a main cause of the widening achievement gap in reading between lower- and higher-income youth" (Fairchild, McLaughlin, and Costigan, 2007).

Iowa faces a major workforce shortage in the immediate future. The Iowa Works Campaign predicts that there will be 150,000 more jobs in Iowa than qualified workers to fill them by 2012 (Iowa Works Campaign, 2006). This shortfall of workers can be remedied through various types of training and education but is likely exacerbated by the fact that, although Iowans graduate high school at a fairly high rate (90.7% in 2005, according to the Iowa Department of Education), that rate of success does not bear out for bachelor's and advanced degree attainment. In 2006, while Iowa had a high school graduation rate of 88.9%-- 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation, it ranked 37<sup>th</sup> nationally in population reporting a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Iowa's students need support to make it not just "to the finish line"—but through it.

***I see the skills gap affecting their work opportunities. They won't be able to do the work required because they won't be able to get into school or get into employment without basic skills. (Community Leader)***



Additionally, parent- or student-assessed fees are less feasible for programs serving older youth in middle and high school, when students and parents are much less likely to pay fees if they feel that youth otherwise could stay home alone unsupervised. Older youth do not respond to the typical afterschool model, and require an innovative approach that considers their unique needs and interests. Afterschool programs must be flexible and creative in developing an approach and activities that work for this population and their families.

### *Success of Afterschool in Iowa*

In Iowa, numerous programs have demonstrated positive impacts of afterschool on the children and youth they serve. Afterschool programs not only help children broaden their horizons but also give children an opportunity to be a part of positive group. A survey conducted of the 2006-2007 Iowa Department of Education grantee afterschool programs show improvement in school attendance, and improved reading and mathematics scores, as well as improved overall academic performance (Iowa Afterschool Alliance, 2007).

According to the Adventure High School Afterschool Program, offered by the Des Moines Public Schools, for the 2006-2007 school year, 80% of the students participating set long-term career focused goals and 80% of students earned the credit necessary to advance to the next grade level. Similarly, 89% of the participants maintained or increased their academic performance and 79% maintained or increased positive behavior. Additionally, 90% of the parents saw an increase in their child's self-confidence and 80% reported an increase in assertiveness. In an afterschool program that took place in the Clinton School District in Iowa, of the total participants, 76% of students scored intermediate to high in math and 89% of students scored intermediate to high in reading.



### Vision and Guiding Principles

The vision of the Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team is that the state of Iowa will be a **leader** in afterschool efforts statewide. It is critical that Iowa demonstrate leadership at the state level by developing a clear vision and expectations of the state, communities, parents, youth, and Iowans in ensuring all Iowa's youth have access to high quality opportunities that will support and enhance their skills and aspirations. The S3 team developed Guiding Principles to inform and support the goals and next steps for afterschool in the state of Iowa. The following guiding principles ensure that the plan developed by the team, and the steps implemented by Iowa's policy leaders, ultimately benefit Iowa's youth, parents, and the future of our state.

Iowa's afterschool infrastructure should provide:

1. Meaningful and continuous opportunities for all children and youth, with an emphasis on middle and high school age youth
2. Universal access to quality programming
3. Partnership and alignment with other systems, including early childhood, post-secondary education, and workforce systems
4. Shared goals and outcomes by families, communities, and state level partners with the state as the leader

The Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team members recognize the significance of this undertaking. Implementation of an afterschool policy and funding infrastructure for all of Iowa's youth must be developed thoughtfully and with involvement from all stakeholders. This plan developed by the S3 team is intended to provide an outline of next steps for state leaders to engage stakeholders in long-term planning and implementation of afterschool opportunities in Iowa that benefit communities, youth, families, Iowans, and the state's economy and quality of life.

All of Iowa's communities, youth, and families are distinct, each with unique needs and strengths. Before and afterschool opportunities must be accessible and meaningful to effectively impact student achievement, goals, and outcomes. Additionally, they must not exist in a vacuum – before and afterschool opportunities must align with students' educational activities and goals, and collaborate at the state and community levels with other systems such as early childhood, post-secondary education, and workforce. Most importantly, the state must provide leadership and partner with communities and families to establish expectations for quality and access to necessary resources and technical assistance.



### **Components of Iowa's Afterschool Infrastructure**

The Supporting Student Success Team has identified six key components to creating a sustainable infrastructure for afterschool in Iowa:

#### **1. Multi-state agency level involvement**

A guiding principle of the S3 team reflects the need to align opportunities for youth along the entire continuum of services – from early childhood to the workplace and post-secondary education. This involves collaboration among key state agencies that serve youth, and reflects a need to eliminate, to the extent possible, silos and duplication of services. Therefore, it is necessary that Iowa creates a multi-state agency infrastructure that engages and involves all agencies providing guidance and direction for youth programming in the state. Of course, one state agency will likely be the “home” for afterschool, but the infrastructure must accommodate significant involvement of other state level youth-serving agencies. The state’s role is to provide the vision and direction of afterschool in the state, establish an infrastructure for delivery of funding, establish standards for quality programming, engage stakeholders in development and implementation of the afterschool vision, and provision of technical assistance and resources.

*Systems are disengaging from finding out what's wrong with the family or the individual. (Community Leader)*

#### **2. Community-driven programming**

Iowa is a unique state because of a strong tradition of locally driven policies and practices. A significant amount of autonomy exists within Iowa’s 99 counties and 365 school districts. The advantage to this is that communities are often able to address distinct issues creatively and within the domain of the local policies and practices. Communities in Iowa define themselves differently – as an urban area, as a city or town, as a county, as several counties – and Iowa has typically been supportive of this notion of self-identification of community. S3 recognizes that communities know best their needs and strengths, and should be empowered to identify issues and develop solutions that work for them. The challenge with creating a statewide infrastructure for afterschool is to provide the leadership and supports necessary for communities to drive the programming and outcomes, and to ultimately benefit Iowa’s citizens.

*I would be careful about creating a model program for statewide use. Each school is different. And, each school has different areas of concern and issues. (School Principal)*

Therefore, the state must establish a flexible, local model of delivery of afterschool programming that embraces the knowledge and strengths of communities. Community entities should be eligible to apply for funding if they meet certain requirements of the state. To be eligible, the entity must collaborate with the educational institutions of the community, and must engage diverse stakeholders in the identification of the needs of the community, including early childhood, post-secondary, workforce, and business partners. Community entities would then distribute funding to programming in the community that meets guidelines established by the state, including quality standards, outcome measures, and establishing programming that is supportive of the unique needs of the community. The entity leading the collaborative community effort will vary across the state – it may be a school or school district, a local community youth program, or the workforce development center in that community; the options are endless.



### 3. Research-based quality standards

In its leadership role, the state has a responsibility to develop and measure age-appropriate, quality standards that create a level of consistency and equity statewide. To ensure maximum effectiveness in utilization of resources, initial and ongoing evaluation of quality must be a component of Iowa's afterschool infrastructure, with a shared responsibility for oversight among the state and communities.

A strong quality component will play a significant role in combating Iowa's deficiency in programming for middle and high school aged youth. Research indicates, and the Supporting Student Success focus groups revealed, that successful programming for older youth looks much different than programming for younger children. Iowa has an opportunity to emphasize the importance of programming for older youth with age-appropriate standards and targeted funding, and to benefit Iowa's economy. Successful programs allow girls to learn to love science or engineering, expose young people to careers they never considered before, and motivate students to set goals and achieve them.

The Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team recommends adoption of common quality standards for all afterschool programs in the state. According to the National AfterSchool Association, there are five components that define quality afterschool programming (the same quality standards embraced by the Iowa Afterschool Alliance in Iowa's Blueprint for Afterschool):

- Positive Human Relationships and Interactions – Programs should promote positive relationships between young people and adults, and young people and their peers. Programs should have a ratio of adults to young no higher than 1:15.
- Effective Programming – Programming should be tailored to meet the needs and interests of parents, youth, and their peers. Activities should be youth-centered and age-appropriate, and should include academic and youth development goals and outcomes.
- Appropriate Environment – Programs should be welcoming and safe with the appropriate furnishings, supplies, and materials.
- Strong Partnerships with Young People, Families, Schools, and Communities – Programs should utilize appropriate strategies to engage all stakeholders. This includes developing regular communication with parents, connecting with teachers, and engaging community organizations and businesses.
- Effective Staff and Administration – Programs should provide ongoing training opportunities for their staff and volunteers, have sufficient and sustainable funding and have clear policies for everyone involved in the program.

### 4. Parent, community, school, and state level collaboration

Iowa's youth are faced with many demands and challenges – more rigorous academic standards are expected within the current school day, and in Iowa, most parents are out of the home working for several hours after the school day is over. The state must provide leadership to assist and empower Iowa's youth, families, and communities to leverage the learning day and link with community resources. Effective collaboration among stakeholders in communities can provide superior



funding and programming opportunities, and enhance sustainability. The state should require that eligibility for funding is only met by demonstrating true collaboration – of funding, resources, and relationships. The state must also coordinate and leverage resources at the state level to ensure wise investments and elimination of duplication of services.

***They should have parent and student input in the beginning, from start to finish. You get a better buy-in with students. (Community Leader)***

The S3 leadership team recognizes the importance of school-based and school-linked programs to maximize learning opportunities and ensure connection with the school day. According to the University of Nebraska, school-based programs are primarily administered by schools, with the schools making decisions regarding program implementation and curriculum, and funding. Programs and activities take place primarily on school grounds and are linked to the school day through curriculum. School-linked programs are primarily organized and administered by an organization outside of the school. The school is the primary access point for program participants and may work with the organization in implementing the program. Program activities may take place on or off school grounds, and are linked to school through academic assistance and progress monitoring. Funding often comes from multiple sources and is not controlled by the school. The state must require afterschool programs funded with state funding be school-based or school-linked.

### **5. Availability of technical assistance and resources**

The state-level infrastructure for afterschool in Iowa must incorporate access to technical assistance and resources for communities and programs. Many communities identify afterschool as a value and a solution to community-specific problems, but face barriers such as buy-in from parents and community leaders, funding support, and youth engagement. Many quality programs are started and fail, because of a lack of planning and support in their communities. If Iowa is going to make a significant investment in afterschool, there must be a place for communities and programs such as these to go for assistance in creating solutions to their dilemmas. The state-level technical assistance collaborative should involve all state agencies that provide guidance, policies, and services for youth programming. Communities and providers should have access to and be aware of expertise, research, and best practices offered by the partner agencies. One-on-one technical assistance consultations and regional trainings should be made available to all programs funded through the state. It is crucial that Iowa set a clear expectation of quality, and back it up with support to ensure it is accessible to all communities across the state.



### 6. Dedicated funding for older youth

The statistics in Iowa are startling. In 2006, 73% of 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 85% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported spending one to five hours or more per day unsupervised. Although our state enjoys a high graduation rate, attainment rates of advanced degrees is low (42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation for degrees beyond bachelors), and Iowa is facing a shortage of 150,000 workers by 2012. Additionally, with a high percentage of afterschool programs relying on parent fees, programs for older youth are not very realistic for families who are barely making ends meet.

***I want to move away from the socio-economic labels because I think it paints students in a negative way. And, that label means that we serve less kids because people don't want to access the help due to the label. (School Principal)***

This is a matter of economics; Iowa must expand opportunities for middle and high school aged youth to be exposed to career and post-secondary educational opportunities, to advance their academics, and to be productive citizens outside of the classroom. This is more challenging than it may seem. Programs across the country have struggled for years to create programs that are meaningful for older youth. Children and youth “vote with their feet,” and especially for older youth, if they do not feel engaged or invested, they will not participate. The Supporting Student Success plan also aims to change the myth that afterschool is only for “problem” kids, youth with disabilities, and those who are not succeeding in school. This belief is especially damaging to programs trying to serve older youth since they have more freedom to choose whether or not to attend. Successful programs in Iowa are engaging youth from the start, and asking them to develop the goals and activities of the program. Programming for older youth empowers the youth to do things they never imagined, such as middle schoolers in Cedar Falls who are running a bank branch in their school.



### **Iowa's Blueprint for Afterschool Five Strategies:**

Iowa has a responsibility to its children, families, and communities to provide access to high-quality, affordable afterschool for all Iowans. The provision of these opportunities ensures access to cultural, civic, recreational, and educational opportunities that can effectively provide Iowa's young people the tools needed to develop skills to be competitive in the global economy and life. The successful provision of afterschool opportunities for all Iowa's youth will only be realized through the coordinated implementation of the following five strategies:

1. Develop policies and sustainable funding to construct a statewide infrastructure that systemically strives to increase the accessibility and quality of afterschool programming.
  - This statewide system will engage leadership to spur changes in statewide policy, funding, administration, oversight, and quality outcomes.
2. Ensure afterschool is community-driven.
  - It is important for afterschool programs to be designed and sustained by meeting the needs of the community in which it serves.
3. Develop and implement common standards of quality.
  - As a larger statewide investment is made in afterschool programming, it is imperative for common standards of quality to be instituted to ensure that appropriate outcome measures are met.
4. Promote effective collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders.
  - Local collaborations and partnerships can create opportunities for the highest quality programming at the lowest price: pooling resources and opportunities.
5. Provide technical assistance and resources to communities, families, and afterschool programs.
  - Technical assistance should be offered to programs to promote program success and sustainability in the form of staff development, curriculum development, and quality and safety standards.

For the full text of Iowa's Blueprint for Afterschool, please visit the Iowa Afterschool Alliance website at [www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org](http://www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org).



### Engagement of Youth

The most critical stakeholders that must be engaged in the planning, development, and implementation of an afterschool infrastructure in Iowa are youth. To be successful in this effort, the state must find ways to meaningfully incorporate youth in afterschool planning and activities. The Supporting Student Success team has identified three key areas in which youth not only must be involved but will provide invaluable input. It is the responsibility of the state and local communities to create the partnerships necessary to make youth an integral part of the afterschool leadership at all levels.

- Involve youth at the state level. Youth should be involved in the planning process for implementing the afterschool infrastructure in Iowa. There must be at least one youth member of the state-level afterschool council being recommended by the S3 team. In reaching out to stakeholders and collecting additional information, the Council should not underestimate the value of youth involvement and feedback.
- Involve youth at the community level. Young people should be a part of the community level team, and should assist in identification of community and youth needs, priority setting, and tracking of outcomes.
- Involve youth at the program level. It is important that programs, especially those serving middle and high school age youth, empower young people to partner with organizations in development of programming. Youth should be involved in planning, developing opportunities, exploring new interests and activities, and creating ownership of the program's outcomes.

### Next Steps for State Leaders

So how do we get it done? Iowa is in a unique position to embrace the convergence of many factors and efforts outlined in this document that point to, not only the benefits of implementing a coordinated statewide afterschool infrastructure, but the necessity of such an infrastructure to the state's economy and quality of life.

Members of the Supporting Student Success Leadership State Leadership Team are not naïve in their expectations. The state has significant responsibilities already, and disaster recovery efforts will consume our resources and time for years to come. At the same time, the state has a responsibility to identify needs and leverage resources to get the best investment over time. High quality afterschool programming can address some of the state's most pressing issues – rising costs of expenses and goods (child care is one of the highest expenses for many families with children), an impending workforce shortage, increasing demands on state educational systems to meet performance measures, and population shifts that indicate young people are leaving the state for better opportunities.

The path has already begun to be constructed – state funding for afterschool programming did not exist three years ago. The leadership provided by the Supporting Student Success team members has been instrumental in creating the momentum necessary for real change, and with this document, they support efforts to continue to make necessary steps to raise the profile of the need for a coordinated afterschool infrastructure in Iowa. The following five steps outline the actions state leaders must follow to institutionalize the components in this plan.



### **1. Develop a state-level Afterschool Council**

The Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team recommends that there be a state level Afterschool Council, which would build on the work of the State Leadership Team. The Afterschool Council should be convened by stakeholders, and should set the foundation for an oversight body to oversee administration and funding for afterschool opportunities. In order to best lay this groundwork, the Council should be an inter-disciplinary, private-public body, with representation from the state agencies with interest in afterschool opportunities, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance, four legislators from the Iowa General Assembly, and five members of the public, to include parents, youth, afterschool program providers and business representatives. State agency representation will include the Governor's Office, the Departments of Education, Human Services, and Public Health, Iowa Workforce Development, Criminal Juvenile Justice Planning, the Iowa Attorney General's Office, and the Department of Management/Office of Empowerment. The Supporting Student Success State Leadership Team also recommends information-sharing and collaboration between the Afterschool Council and the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD). To ensure information sharing and ongoing communications with the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD), the S3 State Leadership Team recommends that a member of ICYD serve on the Afterschool Council and a member of the Afterschool Council participate in ICYD meetings.

The purpose of the Afterschool Council will be to review and develop quality indicators and standards, identify the makeup and duties of the state level oversight body, develop the technical assistance collaborative, recommend legislation and funding, and determine next steps for the oversight body. The Council should maintain the framework set forth by the State Leadership Team and continue efforts to include stakeholder input and involvement with youth, parents, afterschool providers, and community members. These opportunities will also pave the way for another important task of the Council, which is to develop a strong outreach and education component to providers and communities. It is the aim of the State Leadership Team to maintain and strengthen a community driven system, in which the state provides leadership, guidance, and clear quality expectations, and communities determine their own needs and opportunities to meet those needs. The Council will issue a report to the Governor and Iowa General Assembly with their findings and recommendations. The Council will be time-limited, and unless otherwise indicated by the Governor or Legislature, their duties would be complete once meeting the outcomes and benchmarks outlined in the plan.

### **2. Assess resources dedicated to afterschool at the state level**

Afterschool programs are currently funded primarily with parent fees, child care assistance, some federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding, and limited Department of Education grant funding. However, there are programs conducting activities, such as substance abuse prevention, healthy behaviors, and workforce skills development that may be considered afterschool programs and activities within a larger umbrella of coordinated afterschool programming. The Afterschool Council should direct an assessment of all resources dedicated to afterschool at the state level. The S3 team recommends a committee comprised of experts from each state agency, and a representative from the Legislative Services Agency to conduct the assessment. The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD), a coordinated effort of multiple state agencies, should be engaged in this effort. The assessment will have multiple uses, including making the case for coordination, identifying potential duplication of efforts, and identifying current need and availability.



### **3. Assess and develop quality standards**

Quality standards will be at the heart of the work of the state-level oversight body. Communities will be responsible for conducting a comprehensive evaluation, with qualitative and quantitative components, to measure success. Communities will conduct an assessment of needs and direct funding to meet those needs. The expectation is that each community will develop a unique set of outcome measures based on the activities being funded and the outcomes expected, but the state will require certain minimum standards for all programs funded with state dollars.

The S3 leadership team reviewed many quality standards and recommends those included in this plan. However, the S3 team also recognized the importance of stakeholder involvement in discussions about the common quality standards that must be implemented across all programs. This task should not be taken lightly, as all communities, regardless of needs, population served, or type of programming, will have to follow a core set of expectations. The Council should review and develop quality standards to recommend to the Governor and General Assembly to ultimately be adopted by the state-level oversight body. Distinctive quality standards for programs serving middle and high school aged youth should be assessed and recommended as well. This work should be done in close collaboration with the Iowa Afterschool Alliance's Quality Workgroup, which has analyzed hundreds of quality standards to determine the best standards for Iowa.

### **4. Design the technical assistance collaborative**

Utilizing examples and best practices from Iowa and other states, the Afterschool Council should develop guidelines for the make-up and duties of the technical assistance collaborative. The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development currently provides technical assistance and support to state agencies regarding youth development, and the state-level technical assistance collaborative should engage this infrastructure that is already in place. The S3 team recommends development of a committee comprised of key state agencies, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance, representatives from the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development, and afterschool providers to identify the best approach for Iowa to provide technical assistance and resources to afterschool programs. The Council will be responsible for identifying strategies for delivery of technical assistance, considering accessibility, the need to create a diversity of formats and modes of delivery, and fiscal constraints. The Council should also define strategies for networking and sharing of best practices. The Iowa Afterschool Alliance consists of many afterschool programs in Iowa and should be involved in decisions about connecting with providers across the state.



### **5. Develop policy and funding recommendations to implement accessible, quality afterschool statewide**

The Council should develop recommendations for the Governor and the Iowa General Assembly, to include policy and funding recommendations. The Council's recommendations should clearly stipulate the amount of funding required to implement the afterschool infrastructure in Iowa, and the phases for implementation. As part of this approach, the Council will need to estimate the number of afterschool programs and youth served in the state. A phased-in approach to funding or programming may be incorporated, and emphasis should be placed on programming for older youth (including dedicated funding for programs serving middle and high school aged youth). In addition, policy and funding recommendations should include a plan for education and outreach with parents, youth, providers, and communities about afterschool in Iowa and the development of a state-level infrastructure.

To accomplish this task, a committee should be developed that comprises state-level decision-makers, including key state agency directors. The Council will share and present the framework for state-level infrastructure to guide the committee's efforts to establish policy and funding recommendations. The committee will rely on the expertise of the Council to assist in identifying needs and gaps in the system, with a goal of creating a shared state-level approach. This component of the process is critical to providing the Governor and General Assembly the information needed to implement the guidance provided in this plan.

#### **Responsibility of the state and communities**

It is the intention of the Supporting Student Success Leadership Team to create a community driven system where the state provides leadership, guidance, and clear quality expectations, and local communities determine needs and how to meet those needs in a way that is appropriate in their local areas. The Leadership Team recognizes that local communities are the best conduit to determine and respond to area needs. The Leadership Team also identifies the state as a natural fit to provide the leadership needed to guide communities to quality standards.

The state's role will be to establish a "home" for afterschool, establish an oversight body with authority, dedicate resources to this body, and set quality standards for afterschool programs funded by the state. Through these activities, the state will provide the support and infrastructure needed for quality standards to be implemented in afterschool programs. By establishing a "home" for afterschool, the state provides a natural resource for afterschool programs to access regarding quality standards.

The role of local communities will be to conduct community assessments, coordinate planning in collaboration with educational institutions, establish priorities, and report outcomes to ensure that quality standards are being met. Through these activities, local communities will be empowered to guide and plan for the direction of afterschool programs in their areas, while still being provided with the necessary tools to do so.



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