RESULTS FOR AMERICA

Economic Mobility Catalog: Case Study

Expanding access to after school programming: Providence, RI

K-12 education   Elementary & Middle School Success   High School Graduation

MORE ABOUT THE STRATEGY USED IN THIS CASE STUDY: Afterschool programs

At-a-Glance

Summary

- In the early 2000s, the Providence Public School District (PPSD) struggled with academic performance and low high school completion rates. Given the complexities of large-scale school reform, then-Mayor David Cicilline looked to strengthen the coordination of out-of-school time (OST) programs as an additional way to improve youth outcomes . At the time, Providence had high-quality OST programs, but they were fragmented and unevenly distributed throughout the city and also had a notable gap in options for middle-school aged youth.

- In 2004, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) was formed to coordinate high quality OST programming for middle school students in Providence. PASA acts as an intermediary, handling administrative and logistical matters for existing OST programs (e.g., providing students with transportation and meals). By assuming these responsibilities, PASA allows OST providers to focus on delivering and improving their programming.

- Keys to the program's success include strong support from leaders in city government and PPSD; an ongoing, collaborative relationship with city officials; strong relationships with organizations that provide logistical support; and a dedication to measuring program quality.

- Challenges faced by the program include differing priorities and partnership expectations among the various partner schools, balancing the needs of a range of different OST providers, and responding to the immediate and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Accomplishments

25% Among participants who attended PASA programming for two years, <u>school absences declined</u> by 25 percent, and <u>math performance increased</u> by about one-third of a grade, among other signs of academic improvement.	**1,000+** Before PASA's launch, an estimated 500 middle school youth participated in after school programming in Providence. Within <u>five years</u>, approximately 1,700 students per year engaged in PASA-supported after school programming, hitting a peak of over 2,000 middle and high school students per year immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2022-2023 school year, over 1,300 students were served by March, with three more months of new programs to go.	**18,000** Since the 2004-2005 school year, over 18,000 Providence middle and high schoolers have participated in after school programs partnered with PASA.

- **National recognition from education policy leaders:** PASA has been evaluated, profiled, and praised as an exemplary model for after school coordination, receiving recognition from national leaders in the education policy arena, including the <u>RAND Corporation</u>.

- **PASA model adopted in localities across the country:** PASA's track record of impressive impact has inspired cities and school districts across the country, such as <u>Nashville, TN</u>, to adopt their model for coordinating after school program delivery.

- **Success of middle school model prompts high school expansion:** In response to interest from PASA participants in continuing programming beyond middle school, PASA expanded to begin serving high school students. To date, PASA has served over 7,300 high school students.

Overview

What was the challenge?

- **Struggling public school district:** Providence Public School District (PPSD) has long struggled with low academic performance and high school completion rates. The 2002 RI Kids Count's <u>annual factbook</u> showed that PPSD lagged far behind other Rhode Island school districts in measures of attendance, reading proficiency, and overall school performance.

- **City leadership seeks to address after-school space:** Recognizing that youth spent significant portions of their day out of school, newly-elected Mayor David Cicilline sought to improve youth outcomes by strengthening citywide after-school programming, which <u>varied significantly</u> in availability and quality by neighborhood.

- **Assessment of after-school landscape reveals little programming for middle school students:** An assessment of available programming across PPSD identified middle school as an area that lacked accessible programming relative to the offerings available for elementary and high school students.

- **Low capacity for coordination:** The City of Providence had a network of high quality after school providers and programs, but the existing providers were highly fragmented, and the City lacked the capacity to coordinate the offerings in a way that could improve reach and impact.

What was the solution?

- **PASA acts as a citywide coordinating intermediary:** The Providence After School Alliance (PASA) was formed as an independent non-profit organization to provide logistical support for after-school programming in PPSD middle schools. It later expanded to support select PPSD high schools as well. PASA coordinates between schools, program providers, families, and city leaders to recruit youth and ensure that programs are delivered efficiently and effectively.

- **Contracting with local providers:** Existing providers, including local non-profits, independent artists and practitioners, teachers, and social workers, contract with PASA to participate in the broader afterschool network that PASA has developed. Program offerings span STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) topics, arts, sports, and more. High school students also have the opportunity to take credit-bearing courses through the State of Rhode Island's All Courses Network.

- **Partnerships with the city and school district provide critical services:** PASA works closely with the City of Providence and PPSD to secure space for programming, including school buildings, public parks and recreation centers. PASA also coordinates with the PPSD bus service provider to arrange free transportation to and from programs and with the PPSD meal provider to provide free meals for all PASA programs.

- **Developed out of community-wide collaboration:** The planning process that established PASA included over 100 participants from across the city and state. Participants in the planning process developed the logistical structure and quality standards that would become the basis of PASA. The group included representatives from across the local after-school, K-12 education, and youth development landscapes.

What factors drove success?

- **Strong advocates across city leadership:** In 2003, newly elected Mayor David Cicilline was a vocal advocate for expanding after-school programming. His administration was a critical convener of local leaders as PASA began to take shape. Subsequent mayors have continued to support PASA and chair PASA's Board of Directors. PASA also maintains supportive relationships with the Providence City Council, PPSD Superintendent, and the Providence Police Department Chief, with the latter two sitting on PASA's board since its inception. In addition to consistent funding from the City of Providence, this broad, high-level backing helps PASA maintain support from local leaders across sectors and effectively confront issues as they arise.

- **Collaborative relationship with city government:** In addition to mayoral presence on PASA's Board, the city also assigns a staff member from the mayor's office to serve as a dedicated point of contact for PASA. This staff member works closely with PASA to make connections with potential partners, navigate relationships with city departments, troubleshoot obstacles, and more.

- **Citywide partnerships enhance logistical capacity:** Along with support from the highest levels of local government, PASA has fostered strong partnerships with actors across the city to ensure consistent, high-quality programming. These partners include PPSD, which provides building access, busses, food service, and janitorial staff; the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, which ensures students and staff can access sites; AmeriCorps, which provides volunteers to a number of OST programs; and more. PASA staff working in schools coordinate closely with these partners to ensure that out-of-school program providers have the logistical supports they need.

- **Emphasis on measured quality:** PASA conducts regular internal quality assessments at the system, program, and youth levels. The Every Hour Counts <u>Framework for Measurement, Continuous Improvement, and Equitable Systems</u> is used as a foundational measurement tool; the Weikart Center's <u>Youth Program Quality Assessment</u> is used to assess program quality; the NIOST <u>Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes</u> and the Partnerships in Education and Resilience's <u>Holistic Student Assessment</u> are used to measure social-emotional outcomes. PASA also periodically contract with external evaluators to measure the impact of specific programs and the model as a whole. These quality metrics are used as an opportunity for feedback and dialogue with individual providers to determine programmatic strengths and areas for improvement.

- **Independence from city government:** While Mayor David Cicilline and other city officials were early backers, PASA was set up as an independent nonprofit organization, not as an initiative of local government. By limiting PASA's association with a single mayoral administration, PASA has been better positioned to gain support from each successive mayor.

What were the major obstacles?

- **Collaboration with individual schools:** Relationships with school staff are integral to PASA's model, as the schools are a major provider of programming space and help with student recruitment. However, between high rates of staff turnover and competing priorities within individual schools, it is difficult for PASA to maintain close working relationships with all partner schools.

- **Balancing diverse program needs:** Each of the schools and OST program providers that PASA works with has different needs. PASA addresses this challenge by coordinating widely-applicable services, like transportation and meals, as well as more tailored supports aimed at certain types of programs (e.g., volunteer-run programs). However, offering such a range of services and ensuring each partner is connected to the appropriate resources requires a high level of coordination.

- **Considering resource disparities in program evaluation:** To measure the impact of the OST programs it supports, PASA uses quality measurement tools that assess programs' pedagogical approach, the physical environments they operate in, and more. While certain elements measured by these tools are within the control of PASA or its partner programs, others primarily reflect the resources available to the program or the school it operates in (e.g., having comfortable, sturdy furniture). This means that programs operating in well-resourced environments typically outscore those working in under-resourced ones. While each of these elements relate to program quality, PASA has wrestled with whether it is fair to rate programs using factors outside of their control.

- **Pivot to offering safe programming during COVID-19:** In March 2020, PASA had to rapidly respond to the changing landscape of after-school program provision during the COVID-19 pandemic. PASA pivoted to more virtual and outdoor offerings, with outside space provided by the City's Parks and Recreation departments. With a return to in-school programs during the 2021-2022 academic year, the pandemic also demanded increased collaboration with the district office and individual schools around health and safety measures, like contact tracing, and support from janitorial staff to implement heightened cleaning and safety measures while also responding to the increased mental health and social-emotional needs of the adolescent participants.

Timeline

APRIL 2001
Annual RI Kids Count Factbook shows low availability of supervised programming for middle school students

RI Kids Count releases its annual Factbook, which shows that in 2000, nearly 70 percent of middle school children throughout the state are regularly left without adult supervision after school ends, a rate significantly higher than the national average.

JANUARY 2003
David Cicilline begins mayoral term with priority on supporting children during and outside of the school day

Then-Mayor Cicilline takes office after campaigning with a focus on supporting Providence youth. The same month, an analysis of the OST landscape in Providence is published, which reveals that although the city has a relatively large number of high-quality OST offerings, the logistical and coordinating capacity of the broader OST landscape is prohibitively low, with large disparities in affordability, availability, and quality across neighborhoods.

APRIL 2003
Providence selected for Wallace Foundation $1 million planning grant

The Wallace Foundation forms a new, nationwide initiative to promote increased coordination and efficiency in the provision of OST services. The Foundation partners with then-Mayor Cicilline, selecting Providence as one of five cities to receive a $1 million planning grant to develop a citywide OST coordinating system.

SUMMER 2003

City leadership forms Learning in Communities working group to coordinate planning process

Then-Mayor Cicilline and RI Kids Count convene a planning committee composed of over 100 city leaders, after school experts and service providers, and families. The committee identifies successful existing providers and conducts family focus groups and surveys to assess needs, ultimately recommending an independent citywide coordinating nonprofit with a focus on middle school. The following Spring, Market Street Research validates the working group's focus on middle school with the release of a report on the PPSD after school climate that shows high demand and low supply of programming for middle school students.

JUNE 2004

Wallace Foundation provides $5 million to fund OST coordination effort

Impressed with the planning committee's work, the Wallace Foundation awards RI Kids Count a $5 million grant to implement the planning committee's recommendations over the next five years.

JULY 2004

PASA is established, Executive Director hired

At the working group's recommendation, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) is established to coordinate citywide OST efforts. Then-Mayor Cicilline is closely involved in the hiring process for PASA's first Executive Director, Hillary Salmons, who had been a central figure on the planning committee. Salmons quickly begins work on a multi-year implementation plan at the Wallace Foundation's request.

SPRING 2005

PASA issues initial Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

As one of its early operational activities, PASA issues two RFPs to establish coordinating councils and identify service providers for the first two programming hubs, or AfterZones. Each AfterZone serves as a "neighborhood campus" consisting of two or three middle schools, as well as nearby community-based facilities, like libraries, parks, and museums.

FALL 2005

First AfterZone sites are established and begin offering programming

By the start of the 2005-2006 school year, two AfterZone sites are up and running, delivering OST programming to local middle school students. Early offerings focus on high-interest activities in order to attract youth and develop proof of concept.

SPRING 2008

PASA grows to include five distinct AfterZone sites

Between the Fall of 2005 and the Spring of 2008, PASA adds three new AfterZone sites, each with a dedicated coordinating council composed of staff from PASA, schools, and program providers that provide operational and advisory oversight.

AUGUST 2011
Report identifies strong impacts of PASA programming

A Wallace Foundation commissioned report prepared by nonprofit research organization Public/Private Ventures reveals that school absences decrease by 25 percent for students who participate in PASA programming for two consecutive years.

FALL 2011
PASA pilots expansion to high school after-school programming

PASA partners with PPSD high school Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex to pilot an expansion to offer credit-bearing OST Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) to high school students. They begin staffing up their new high school after-school model, The Hub, and eventually expand the ELO model to several high schools over the next few years.

MAY 2015
Wallace Foundation report demonstrates PASA's national impact

The Wallace Foundation releases a report on growing trends in the after school landscape across the country. The report identifies various ways that after school efforts throughout the country have been inspired by Providence's efforts and successes implementing PASA.

WINTER 2016
State launches Advanced Course Network

The Rhode Island Department of Education releases an RFP for the 2016-2017 academic year to expand access to college and career readiness courses outside of the school day. PASA becomes a network provider of high-school level ACN courses, shifting the ELOs that were funded by individual schools to the more-reliable ACN source. This move also opened access to all Providence high school students instead of just those in specific schools. (Advanced Course Network is later renamed All Course Network.)

FALL 2016
PASA takes over high school 21CCLC grant

While shifting the credit-bearing programs to a community-wide approach, the 2016-2017 academic year saw an expansion of PASA's high school work to non-credit bearing OST coordination at Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex (which hosts two high schools within the building).

FALL 2019
PASA expands to third high school

In the fall of 2019, PASA expands to coordinate after-school programming at a third PPSD high school, Hope High School. In the first year at all locations, PASA builds on existing school-wide programs.

SPRING 2020
PASA pivots programming in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

With significant support from partners, PASA is able to continue providing programming for students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The City of Providence helps PASA secure outdoor programming space until PASA was able to return to the school buildings in September 2021.

FALL 2021
PASA returns to school buildings

AfterZone and Hub programs return to Providence school buildings. In the 18 months since last in the buildings, PPSD, program providers, and PASA all experienced significant staff turnover while the students became accustomed to heading home immediately after school. PASA focused the first year back on re-establishing school-based relationships and adjusting previously existing systems and procedures to meet the new demands of post-Covid operations.

Implementation Process

How did leaders confront the problem?

- **Providence school district lagged behind the rest of the state:** From academic performance to behavioral metrics, Providence Public School District (PPSD) schools consistently struggled to keep up with the state as a whole.

- **New mayoral leadership prioritized after-school programming:** David Cicilline was elected Mayor of the City of Providence in 2002 and entered office with a focus on youth development, leadership, and entrepreneurship. Recognizing the difficulty and complexity of major education reform, then-Mayor Cicilline augmented those efforts with a focus on improving after-school programming.

- **Wallace Foundation approached Providence to invest in out-of-school time:** In the early 2000s, the Wallace Foundation was looking for opportunities to invest in improving access to out-of-school time (OST) programming and identified the City of Providence as a promising environment for after-school reform. The foundation awarded the city a $1 million planning grant to develop a long-term strategy to improve after-school offerings citywide.

- **Planning committee recognized opportunity for greater coordination:** The statewide non-profit RI Kids Count oversaw the planning process and convened a planning committee composed of OST program leaders, city officials, youth, and families. The planning committee surveyed the existing after-school landscape. There were a number of high quality providers already serving the city's youth, but the citywide coordinating capacity was limited. The committee identified the need for a coordinating intermediary that could better connect students with quality opportunities and provide logistical support where needed.

How was the strategy designed?

- **Creating a coordinating entity outside of city government:** To ensure that an intermediary organization would not be excessively influenced by short-term politics, the after school planning committee and then-Mayor Cicilline decided to establish an independent non-profit organization rather than work within the City of Providence.

- **Qualitative research identifies middle school as the highest priority:** Recognizing that elementary and high school students were already relatively well served by existing programs, the planning committee decided to concentrate their initial efforts on middle school students.

- **Community planning process:** To determine the implementation strategy, the planning committee recruited over 100 people from across the Providence education landscape. These stakeholders were split into two teams, one handling logistical investment, the other responsible for designing quality metrics. The teams spent six months exploring national after-school standards, engaging in asset mapping, and framing organizational and quality assurance structures.

- **Focus on coordination over program delivery:** To build on the existing strengths in the city's after-school space instead of competing with providers, the planning committee determined that the newly established entity would play a purely coordinating role, connecting students to programs, working with schools and facilities to manage program logistics, collaborating with city officials, and providing professional development opportunities and resources for programming providers.

- **Committee drafts three-year development plan:** With the organizational structure established, the planning committee delivered a three-year development plan to the Wallace Foundation that outlined how the organization would scale throughout the city over time.

How was the plan implemented?

- **Partnering with an existing non-profit to pilot the PASA model:** The planning committee identified an existing statewide education non-profit, The Education Partnership, to pilot the PASA program model. The Education Partnership agreed to establish PASA within their organizational umbrella, allowing PASA to focus on program implementation rather than building organizational capacity.

- **Identifying programming vendors:** PASA issued two Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to identify and select initial providers to deliver programming for its first two AfterZones. AfterZones are "neighborhood campuses" consisting of two or three middle schools, as well as nearby community-based facilities, like libraries, parks, and museums.

- **Placing staff in PPSD middle schools:** PASA supported partnering nonprofits to hire and collaboratively manage site-based program staff responsible for coordinating after school programming logistics at the school level, with one to two staff placed in each AfterZone. These school-based staff manage recruitment, transportation, and coordination with PPSD staff on logistical matters. Over time, those staff members shifted from working for community partners to PASA directly.

- **Coordinating transportation to and from programming:** PASA coordinates transportation and funding to all non-school based programs activities. PPSD funds yellow bus service to transport middle school students home at the end of the day, and PASA utilizes 21st CCLC funding to provide public bus passes to high school participants.

- **Establishing staggered programming schedule:** In order to provide students with flexible and varied programming and to maximize efficiency in offerings, PASA developed a staggered schedule that allows students to attend multiple types of programs in a single week.

- **Demonstrating early impact:** After its first year, PASA garnered local and state-level recognition and had established a track record of success. Building on this momentum, PASA reformed as an independent entity separate from The Education Partnership. This new organization was dedicated entirely to PASA's mission of coordinating free, high-quality after school programming throughout Providence.

How was the approach funded?

- **Wallace Foundation provides $1 million planning grant:** In 2003, the Wallace Foundation selected the City of Providence as an inaugural recipient for their after-school initiative and provided the city with $1 million to develop a coordinated strategy to improve after-school programming throughout Providence.

- **Successful planning process yields additional $5 million Wallace Foundation implementation grant:** Impressed with the after-school strategy developed by the planning committee, the Wallace Foundation provided an additional $5 million to establish and implement PASA through 2009.

- **City of Providence helps raise nearly $5 million to match Wallace Foundation grant:** The City of Providence led a fundraising initiative to identify private funders to match the Wallace Foundation implementation grant, and received contributions from Bank of America and The Rhode Island Community Foundation.

- **Growing financial commitment from local and state government**: By PASA's third year, then-Mayor Cicilline committed $200,000 from the city's general fund for operational and programming costs. The city has continued to provide funding in the nearly two decades since, with support increasing over time. PASA also receives funding from the Rhode Island Department of Education for the All Course Network courses for which it serves as an intermediary. These are standards-aligned, credit-bearing OST courses that aim to enhance students' workforce readiness and social-emotional skills.

- **Leveraging 21st Century Community Learning Center funding:** In the early years, PASA provided guidance and logistical support to local after-school organizations applying for federal 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grants, which fund academic and extracurricular enrichment programs throughout the country. Over time, PASA's partner organizations have gradually released administrative ownership of the 21st CCLC funding to PASA. This enables program providers to focus their energy on program delivery rather than applying for grants.

- **Diverse funding streams maintain a stable operating budget:** PASA currently operates with an annual budget of roughly $2 million, $900,000 of which comes from federal 21st CCLC funding. Over time, the organization has built on its strong base of private and local, state, and federal funding sources. Some of PASA's more recent funders include the Mott Foundation and the United Way of Rhode Island.

How was the approach measured and refined?

- **Established clear program quality assessment process:** Since its inception, PASA has implemented a transparent and consistent quality assessment process for all its programs. PASA has mechanisms in place to ensure all programs continually track the two main quality metrics: student participation (including retention) and program quality. The assessment process is meant to act as an opportunity for feedback and to identify strength and growth areas for each program.

- **Regular internal and external evaluation:** In over 18 years of operation, PASA has frequently partnered with external organizations for independent evaluations, including RAND Corporation, which produced a series of reports highlighting PASA's model in 2010. PASA also produces annual grant reporting for their various funders, measuring the number and type of programs offered and the number of student participants and their levels of engagement, disaggregated by demographic background.

- **Including after school programming for high school students:** By 2011, PASA began offering programming through The Hub, which adapts its AfterZone model for high schools. The Hub provides high school students with opportunities to earn course credit, access academic and life guidance, and develop career-oriented skills during OST programming.

- **Delineating system, program, and youth outcomes:** In 2015, PASA was selected as one of three city intermediaries to engage in RAND Corporation's developmental evaluation of the Every Hour Counts Framework for Measurement, Continuous Improvement, and Equitable Outcomes.

- **Defining a Graduate Profile:** With consideration of the known long- and short-term outcomes of PASA's OST programs as well as the essential skills necessary for academic and career success throughout the United States, PASA engaged over 100 partners in a process to identify and define the skills and mindsets youth gain through participation in all AfterZone and Hub activities: communication, engagement in lifelong learning, perseverance, problem solving, and teamwork.

- **Shifting to state structure for credit-bearing high school programming:** After establishing the extended learning opportunities programming model for high school students, PASA shifted its credit-bearing courses to the state's newly established All Courses Network, which allowed state funds to support these programs rather than individual school budgets, increasing financial security.

- **Adjusting offerings based on market research:** PASA engages in regular feedback sessions to understand what kind of programs youth and parents want, adjusting their annual requests for proposals accordingly.