

Case Study: North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs (NC CAP)



The North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs (NC CAP) was created through the leadership of Governor Mike Easley to bring the state's afterschool providers, community leaders and policymakers together to build a network that addresses the afterschool program issues of quality, accessibility, and sustainable funding. Soon after its formation, the Center decided to bring the state's business leaders to the table, a natural move because the Center is housed at The Public School Forum of North Carolina,

which has 20 years of experience working with the business community on education issues. The Center did so by convening a series of regional meetings for business leaders, community leaders and afterschool providers, which eventually grew into a statewide summit for business leaders about afterschool programs.

NC CAP "WORKING PARENTS AND AFTERSCHOOL" SURVEY

After two rounds of regional meetings, the Center noticed that businesses weren't thinking about surveying employees to see how a lack of afterschool programs affected them and their work. The Center created a web-based survey and asked local businesses that were large employers to administer it to their employees. These companies were Cisco Systems, Nortel and PSNC Energy. (The online nature of the survey necessitated that all employees have computers, which is why NC CAP approached larger companies.)

"The goal of the survey was to raise awareness among business leadership about how lack of afterschool programs has an effect on their employees, with morale, productivity and retention," Ms. Daughtry said. "We knew this was the case, but we wanted businesses to see for themselves, and we wanted proof and reliable information, not just a sense of the truth."

Beyond this sense of the problem, the surveys also revealed some surprises, such as that afternoon worries are not just for working mothers. For example, 90 percent of the respondents mentioning concerns with afterschool in Cisco Systems' survey were men, which surprised the company. Other surveys also revealed that even employees without kids were affected by the lack of afterschool programs if they were a member of a team that had a parent on it.

The Center presented these analyses to the businesses, and several businesses were asked to present the findings at the third round of regional meetings.

A copy of the NC CAP survey is available in this toolkit.

THE BEGINNING

NC CAP always had an awareness of the importance of engaging business, partly because of its history with the Public School Forum, and it was a priority early on. "Maybe not from day one, but day two," Gail Daughtry, NC CAP's director, said. The Center already had some institutional knowledge on the subject and was able to capitalize on some existing connections when it decided to engage the business community. "Our main goal for business outreach was to increase their awareness about this issue," Ms. Daughtry said. "We realized this was an issue for the future, and we realized that if we wanted to increase access to afterschool programs and make them quality, we needed to talk to everyone from their own perspective, to people who would look at it differently."

The Center began its outreach by designing a series of five regional meetings throughout the state to bring stakeholders together to discuss program quality and share their expertise. Each one-day event was assigned a location that would be accessible to the regional participants and still have a grassroots feel, so big cities were not the automatic choice. That year, for instance, one location was in Lake Junaluska in Haywood County.

Each meeting's audience was to be split one-third each among policymakers, business leaders and afterschool providers, and each constituency would have a speaker on the agenda. "Each meeting's agenda was focused on business issues, but we tried to find people who spoke to everybody to help them realize it was in their interest," Ms. Daughtry said. "We included statistics and data from the national perspective and from state and local law enforcement, education and business leaders." To ensure the balance and to find each region's key leaders, each region had its own planning group that helped decide whom to invite, based on the group's knowledge of the community. Those chosen were sent a copy of the agenda and an invitation from the governor's office.

MEETING BYTE:

One of the speakers at the first round of regional meetings was the editor of the Asheville Citizen-Times. He had volunteered at an afterschool program. When he spoke at the meeting, he brought photos he'd taken and talked about his experience and why he got involved, which actually generated some press coverage. He really took it upon himself to investigate the issue.

Another feature of the meetings was gathering feedback from participants, Ms. Daughtry said. In groups, people wrestled with what they saw as the local issues, barriers to quality and access, and promising strategies and solutions. After the meeting, the Center sent the participants a follow-up publication that included all the data featured at the meeting and a compilation of the participants' ideas. "Capturing their findings and reporting it back to the participants in this way let them know their input was important," Ms. Daughtry said.

The Center has convened three rounds of regional meetings so far, each in a different city, with demand and interest growing with every round. "We expected subsequent years to get smaller, but they didn't," Ms. Daughtry said. "We've had lots of return participants. Average attendance per meeting has been about 185 people, and we have long waiting lists and have had to turn people away."

Having repeat participants is a good thing, though, because each round of meetings has built on the one before it. For example, participants in round two talked about quality standards that had come out of the previous year's discussion of hurdles to quality and access. Participants were also asked to share their talents by choosing a

MEETING BYTE:

A superintendent who attended one of the first regional meetings commented that his reason for choosing which community to live in was guided by the quality of afterschool his kids could get. He and his wife both worked, and afterschool had varied in other communities they'd lived in, so quality afterschool made their new community attractive.

specific area in which they felt they had some expertise and wanted to offer continual input, such as mentoring or staffing. Another component of round two was a panel on creating local intermediaries. That is, formalizing relationships within the counties so the participants could continue working together as they were at the meeting. This discussion was later followed with technical assistance workshops on establishing and sustaining these intermediaries.

GROWING FROM REGIONAL TO STATEWIDE

The regional meetings encouraged the Center to convene, with the governor's office, a statewide afterschool summit. The statewide summit had a business component, including an address from Donna Klein, president and founder of Corporate Voices for Working Families. NC CAP thought more of the state's business leaders should hear what Ms. Klein had to say, so they decided to bring business leaders together for their own statewide forum.

"Our goals for the business forum were to sustain momentum, heighten awareness, keep building understanding, and find new champions," Ms. Daughtry said. "We also wanted to share the information from the surveys and enlist more people to do them so we could accumulate more data to make a compelling case for afterschool as a workplace issue and a state issue. There have been economic downturns in the state, and afterschool programs could strengthen the economy by preparing the new workforce and supporting the current one."

For the statewide business forum, the Center sought out businesses that had a background in and knowledge of education issues to ensure that all the participants would have some level of understanding, Ms. Daughtry said. The Center tapped its regional network planners, local boards of education and North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry, which serves as the state's chamber of commerce. In fact, the group's president/CEO wrote a letter of support for the meeting, as did policymakers such as Senator Elizabeth Dole and former Governor Hunt. These letters were attached to the invitations to underscore the importance of and broad interest in the issue, Ms. Daughtry said. The Center issued both electronic and paper invitations that were followed up with phone calls.

The event itself turned out to be a great success, which Ms.

AFTERSCHOOL SUCCESS STORY

The agenda for the statewide meeting included some “Outstanding Afterschool Alumni” to emphasize that afterschool programs can develop the future workforce. One alumnus talked about how afterschool helped him overcome his impoverished background, find his first job and get an opportunity to see professionals at work. This showed him the personal and professional traits needed for success, and the experience gave him direction for college and career. Afterschool also gave him a way to develop his leadership skills by tutoring and mentoring others in the program. He has since graduated from Davidson College, and he now works for Wachovia Bank. He is also a part-time student at working toward his Masters in Business Administration.

Daughtry attributes to the following components:

- * The host: GlaxoSmithKline agreed to host the forum, and the company actively participated in outreach to the invitees.
- * The venue: It was the right size and had good acoustics.
- * The audience: The make-up of the audience was roughly one-third business, one-third public officials and one-third philanthropic and nonprofit organizations. Few program providers attended because NC CAP wanted the meeting to really be about business, and the provider work happens at the regional meetings. However, it was important to have someone there representing the providers to answer questions, but NC CAP kept it at the leadership level by inviting the director of the North Carolina Division of Child Development.
- * The agenda: Recognizable business leaders such as Donna Klein of Corporate Voices for Working Families, Ruth McCullers Lee of Cisco Systems and Annette Byrd of GlaxoSmithKline were on the agenda. NC CAP also made a point to write attendee participation into the schedule so they could share their stories and be part of the process. That feedback ultimately helped NC CAP refine its own messages and priorities, Ms. Daughtry said. “We learned from them that we needed to think about how our priority considerations meshed with what state

leaders had already asked them to do.”

MOVING FORWARD

As NC CAP continues with its annual convenings, the Center is also working to expand its knowledge of afterschool in North Carolina. For example, the Center plans to ask more businesses across the state to do the survey, including reaching low-income workers who might not have computers.

The Center has also begun mapping the afterschool landscape in the state, noting the location of programs compared to the need. NCCAP is partnering with youth in afterschool programs across the state, taking the statewide initiative on mapping into communities to empower them to continue that work. “We want to put tools in the hands of grassroots leaders who can assess their community’s needs and educate the community about local needs and possibilities,” Ms. Daughtry said.

LESSONS LEARNED

- * It’s important to provide openings for peer-to-peer conversations. For example, after the statewide business forum, the participants asked NC CAP to set up an e-mail exchange. If business leaders can talk to each other, they can engage each other very effectively. This kind of communication helps carry on your message, which is something all afterschool advocates should ask businesses to do.
- * Make sure that when you talk to businesses you speak their language and be on point with something you think they’re already interested in, whether it’s a business issue or something else such as education. Tie your message into what you know is already important to them.
- * Have a good database of national and local statistics, and be ready to answer hard questions in terms of research. You have to be able to provide credible proof that afterschool is a good investment. Surveys are an effective way to prove how afterschool programs, or lack of them, affect a business’s bottom line. For example, before NC CAP did the business survey, it also surveyed parents across the state to show businesses that afterschool is an issue for families. They also conducted an access survey among the program providers to determine needs and priorities.

- * When it comes to media coverage (which is important because businesses love free, positive media), reach out beyond education reporters. NC CAP started targeting business reporters and have been getting more and different kinds of coverage, and in a section of the paper that business leaders definitely read.
- * Deciding which businesses or industries to target is hard, so use the connections you already have. For example, a member of one of the regional planning committees tipped NC CAP off to how important hospitals are in their region, which NC CAP hadn't thought of as being "business." Real estate agencies were also interested participants. But the moral of the story is that NC CAP learned and gained a lot from the regional planners. They have a wealth of information, which is important, and they have relationships, which are the key to success.