



NGA Center for  
BEST PRACTICES

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## EXTRA LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

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National attention to extra learning opportunities, or before- and after-school programs, for children and youth has grown exponentially in the last few years for several reasons. Governors, school leaders, and teachers are increasingly accountable for ensuring that all students meet high academic standards. Millions of children are at risk of not performing at high academic levels *and* have no place to go after the school hours. They are missing opportunities to learn and grow. Children also are at risk for being victims of crime or participating in anti-social behaviors that have serious consequences and costs to society. Creating more extra learning opportunities, increasing program quality, and moving toward long-term sustainability requires building strong public will in support of after-school programming. For these reasons, the federal government, private foundations, national organizations and associations, states, and communities have begun to invest both in after-school.

The C.S. Mott Foundation Mott has committed more than \$100 million over several years to promoting after-school programs, including forging a unique partnership with the U.S. Department of Education to support the 21st Century Community Learning Center program. With assistance and guidance from the Mott Foundation, the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices is participating in a collaboration of six national organizations working on after-school issues to provide technical assistance to states. The After-school Technical Assistance Collaborative (ATAC) includes NGA, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of Chief State School Officers, The Finance Project, the National League of Cities, and the Afterschool Alliance. The assistance ranges from providing examples of state policy and best practices to facilitating in-state planning meetings to move state after-school agendas forward. This support complements the technical assistance NGA already provides to Governors.

ATAC selected four states to which they would offer to provide customized technical assistance on this issue: Maryland, Mississippi, Texas, and Wisconsin (ATAC will soon expand its efforts to include other states). As its first activity with Mississippi state stakeholders, ATAC organized and facilitated a meeting on April 10, 2001. Mississippi was selected in part because various stakeholders in the state had already shown commitment to supporting and expanding after-school activity. Prior to this meeting, Governor Musgrove sent a team to the November 2000 NGA Regional Forum on Extra Learning Opportunities. In addition, a different team of people attended the Disney Institute in Orlando, Florida, a conference sponsored by the Mott Foundation and the Afterschool Alliance. Both teams were charged with developing state action plans.

The purpose of the April 10 meeting was two-fold: (a) an effort to bring the two teams together as well as to invite other key stakeholders working on improving before- and afterschool opportunities for children and youth in hopes of arriving at a common vision for afterschool in Mississippi; and (b) to provide the Afterschool Technical Assistance Collaboration (ATAC) ways it can be of assistance as the state progresses with an afterschool plan.

A window of opportunity exists to vastly improve the quality of and access to before- and after-school programs for children and youth. The probable devolution of the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program to state education agencies will require leadership and considerable effort to implement the requirements and coordinate this program with other after-school programs in the state. Although the MS Department of Education will have administrative authority over this grant, Governor Musgrove can guide the state in building the necessary infrastructure to support the coordination of this new state activity with other after-school programs. While providing more and better after-school programs is not a panacea to improving academic achievement, extra learning opportunities have been proven to boost student learning, and states should integrate them into their education reform strategies.