

## Status Report: New Orleans Afterschool, January 2007

### Introduction

**As with everything in New Orleans, the landscape of afterschool services has changed dramatically since Hurricane Katrina.** Before Hurricane Katrina, children in New Orleans had over 200 afterschool programs located in schools, nonprofit organizations, community centers, housing developments, recreation centers, and churches. Now, with approximately 28,000 public school children in New Orleans there are only 42 afterschool sites, serving less than 25% of the targeted population. As many families strive for normalcy by seeking new housing and returning to work, the need for afterschool programs is vital.

In January 2007 the Greater New Orleans Afterschool Partnership surveyed a sampling of the operating afterschool providers in order to supply various stakeholders with this status report on the current state of afterschool in New Orleans.

### Key Findings

**Afterschool providers in New Orleans are working collaboratively in a climate of limited resources and challenging circumstances to optimize afterschool programs and services for children and youth.**

Afterschool programs in New Orleans vary widely in scope and format. At one end of the spectrum are five-day-a-week programs offering academic and enrichment opportunities and at the other are activities and services offered on a smaller scale or those of a particular program design, such as literacy, dance, or art.

Despite a growing number of afterschool offerings in the eighteen months following Hurricane Katrina, these survey results point to a number of troubling gaps:

- Survey responses indicate that programs are **servicing less than 25%** of the estimated 28,000 public school age children currently in New Orleans.
- Despite the fact that nearly 80% of the afterschool programs in New Orleans are located in public schools, the **Recovery School District**, the largest school operator, **has only two schools that offer afterschool programming.** Leaving over fifteen state-run schools without afterschool programming.
- Access to convenient and affordable afterschool programming is most **limited in those areas that suffered the most severe flooding** from Hurricane Katrina. Lakeview, Gentilly, the Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, and New Orleans East all have limited or no afterschool programs.
- Those areas of the city with the **highest rates of crime are also the neighborhoods with limited afterschool programming.**
- The overwhelming majority of afterschool programs in New Orleans focus on elementary and middle school students.  
**Only a handful of the current programs serve youth between the critical ages of 13-18.**

## **Areas for Immediate Action**

### **Administration**

Programs are struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff. Nearly all of the programs surveyed report losing lower wage staff due to competition in a higher wage environment. Also, all programs report some level of loss in association with facilities, equipment, and/or materials. Providers and staff request ongoing technical assistance, training, and support to improve the quality of and access to their programs.

### **Funding**

Public Funding for afterschool programs falls significantly short of needs. The Louisiana State Department of Education has been slow to release needed funds for afterschool programming. Contracts for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Center grants were not finalized until January 2007, six months after programs began serving students. Furthermore, the handful of New Orleans programs awarded 21<sup>st</sup> Century funding had their programming budgets cut from 40% to 60% by the State.

Private funding has also been difficult for programs to access. Many private and corporate funders have cited a lack of infrastructure as the rationale for their reluctance to invest in afterschool recovery efforts, yet recovery will be unlikely without resources.

### **Mental Health**

The children in New Orleans are suffering from various post-traumatic stress disorders. Survey respondents report that students continue to exhibit behavioral changes such as lack of sleep, less attentiveness, more hostility, and increased emotional outbursts. The lack of mental health services and consistent school nursing leaves students and families with few options for improving children's overall mental health.

### **Transportation**

Lack of transportation is hindering student participation in afterschool programs. All public schools in New Orleans are now "open access" schools, meaning students are not required to attend the school closest to their home. While this has opened public education choices to families, one negative result is that children often do not attend a neighborhood school and must rely on personal or public transportation if they want to participate in a program that extends beyond the regular school day.

## **Conclusion**

All New Orleans students deserve quality afterschool care that keeps them safe, provides critical child care for working parents, lowers juvenile crime rates, and inspires learning through creativity and opportunities for enrichment and discovery. The results of providing quality afterschool, research shows us, are healthier families, safer neighborhoods, better school day attendance, enhanced academic performance, and students who are involved and engaged in their education.

**Quality afterschool programs address many of the ills that face our families and ultimately help create a better New Orleans for all citizens. It is our hope that those who read this status report will dedicate much needed resources to this critical issue.**