

Interviews with Continuation School Afterschool Programs

As part of our effort to better understand continuation high school settings and the role of afterschool programs, we visited two continuation schools with 21st Century CLC programs to talk directly with afterschool youth, program staff, and school-day teachers. These interviews do not necessarily represent the entire school or afterschool program. However, they do offer important perspectives and illustrate the variation among school settings. Because they represent only snapshots, we have chosen to keep the names of the schools and those interviewed as anonymous.

Interview with School “A”

School A is a continuation high school that serves about 250 students. Upon approaching the school on the day of the interview, the Site Coordinator was standing outside the campus talking to a number of youth. He introduced us to “Evan,” a graduate of the program last year and a strong participant in the afterschool program. Evan was eager to talk about the afterschool program. We asked him a series of questions, and his responses are below.

Interviewer: *Why did you come to this school?*

Evan: “I was a gang banger. I was causing problems in my other high school. One day they called me into the office and told me I wasn’t welcome at the school anymore and I was being transferred to this school. That made me very angry.”

Interviewer: *Did you have personal goals you wanted to accomplish at this school?*

Evan: “Yes, my goal was to protect my own turf. I spent all my time when not here smoking weed and trying to figure out how I was going to mess up class.”

Interviewer: *In what ways did this school serve your needs?*

Evan: “The principal is really cool. He hired afterschool teachers into the school that looked like us. We needed people who understood where we were coming from. The math teacher helped me a lot—it’s helping me now in my construction job. The principal saw what we needed and got it for us. He saw that we needed school. Just by hiring [the afterschool Site Coordinator] it was 85% better than when I started.”

Interviewer: *Tell me about the afterschool program.*

Evan: “They got us interested in all sorts of things.

Instead of smoking weed and trying to figure out how I was going to mess up the class—I was playing soccer! We had a team with uniforms and played other teams. Running up and down the soccer field made me quit smoking!

“The program didn’t just help us in school, it helped us in life. I learned in the afterschool program how to get my hands dirty. But mainly the staff believed in us.” – Former afterschool participant at School A

The program didn’t just help us in school, it helped us in life. I learned in the afterschool program how to get my hands dirty. But mainly the staff believed in us. They showed us that by spending time with us—you know? They spent their Saturdays and Sundays with us when they could have been spending it with their families. They spent time and that was really important.

We also had the opportunity to talk with Ms. Q, a school day teacher at School A, and the Site Coordinator of the afterschool program at the school. We told them we wanted to ask them some questions about the afterschool program. Ms. Q put her finger to her lips and said, “SSShhhhhhhh! The students don’t know the difference between day school and afterschool – we want to keep it that way!”

Interviewer: *Why are these students here instead of attending a traditional comprehensive high school?*

Ms. Q: “They come to graduate. We are their last stop.”

Site Coordinator: “The most common reasons are: truancy, they were kicked out of their school for behavioral or health issues; some have deep issues with their family; or, they come from the system. We are the only continuation school with special education.”

“We look at where the students want to go and what’s in the way. We really look at how to make our program integrated with the school day. The staff has been really supportive.” – Afterschool Site Coordinator

Interviewer: *Do the students have personal goals they are seeking to accomplish at this school?*

Ms. Q: “To graduate.”

Site Coordinator: “Some have a sense. We help them by creating the ESLR [Expected School-wide Learning Results] blueprints in partnership with the school. We look at where they want to go and what’s in the way. We really look at how to make our program integrated with the school day. The staff has been very supportive.”

Interviewer: *In what ways does this school serve the students’ unique needs?*

Ms. Q: “Well for one thing, we have the afterschool program. We offer different programs, for example counseling. The students choose classes that they want. We have each student complete an ESLR. There are three components: Academic; Life; and School. We give them skills to function as productive citizens.”

Site Coordinator: “They focus on personalized education and programming – addressing what the students want. They are also a great resource for parents.”

Interviewer: *In what ways does this school not serve the students’ unique needs?*

Ms. Q: “We don’t have enough health and preventative workshops. We have a lot of students on drugs and we don’t adequately address that. We need to learn about healthy eating!”

Site Coordinator: “Always an issue of resources and time. The principal pays teachers to do afterschool programming, but the needs are so high. We need books for the machinist class – our ratios need to be 1:4.”

Interviewer: *In what way is the afterschool program supporting the school’s mission? What is the afterschool program offering that a school day does not?*

Ms. Q: “The big thing that the afterschool program does is support the ESLRs. They expose the students to things they haven’t been exposed to. They make actual products so they feel ownership. The kinds of things that they get exposed to and produce a product in are things like: Beats; Fashion; Arts; Drivers Ed; Go Green and the Laney internships.”

Site Coordinator: “An example is our Internship Program. We connect kids to construction and welding and this is the gateway to college. This program keeps kids from dropping out. We also really support teachers and we provide credit recovery.”

Interviewer: *What else is needed in afterschool that would better serve the students’ needs?*

Ms. Q: “There needs to be more creative ways for teachers to be involved. We need more incentives for kids to come to program after lunch. We most definitely need flexible funding. We definitely see school attendance improving. This school is the place to be – the afterschool program must be connected to the school day – and it is here – from the kid’s perspective there is no difference between day school and afterschool.”

Site Coordinator: “We need space! Look at this place – it’s so small. If we just had a gym facility – how do we run basketball on ½ court, how do we run soccer with no field? The partnership between the school district and the city needs to be strengthened.”

“We connect kids to construction and welding and this is the gateway to college. This program keeps kids from dropping out.” – Afterschool Site Coordinator

Interviewer: *How would you describe the mission of the afterschool program?*

Site Coordinator: "Our mission is to graduate students, but we're not graded on that through the grants – we are doing something different, we have to, but we don't fit the mold the California Department of Education has cast for us."

Interview with School "B"

School B is a continuation school that serves over 250 students. The afterschool program at School B is funded by the 21st Century CLC grant. The program serves an average of 60 young people per day and offers academic support classes, including one-on-one tutoring, before-school help, an online credit recovery program, and a job readiness and training program. The program also provides a number of enrichment activities, including music, cosmetology, afterschool sports, digital media, and weight lifting.

The visit to School B began at 1pm and the afterschool program building was bustling with youth. The day before the interview was marked by the funeral of a student who was murdered. The students talked about the event and shared photographs on their phones of the funeral. The afterschool program coordinator stated that there were not many students at school because of events surrounding the shooting.

We spoke with four students who were hanging out with their school day teacher, Mr. M. After much discussion of the student who was killed, the students agreed to answer some questions. Below are their responses.

Interviewer: *Why are you here at this school?*

Youth: "I didn't want to stay at my other high school;" "My probation officer made me come;" "I stopped going to school for a while."

Interviewer: *Do you have personal goals you are seeking to accomplish at this school?*

Youth: "Earn credits to graduate;" "Finish school."

"The kids would be lost without [the afterschool program]. The afterschool staff play with the kids, love them, and listen to them. They can relate to the kids, whereas the teachers in the school cannot."

- School day teacher

Interviewer: *In what ways does this school serve your needs?*

Youth: (All youth replied that it does not serve their needs.)

Interviewer: *In what ways does this school not serve your needs?*

Youth: "The teachers don't care about students;" "They don't teach. They just hand out worksheets;" "They have low expectations. Except for Mr. M [a school day teacher]. He's real cool. He can relate;"

"They don't make us work hard enough, we need to be challenged – but some students fail themselves by not taking advantage of what little there is here."

Interviewer: *What do you like about the program?*

Youth: "[The afterschool program] is helping me get a job. Helped me with a resume, job application and references;" "They help us get ready for college. We earn extra credits;" "They actually teach us things."

Interviewer: *I have a question for Mr. M. What do you think about the afterschool program?*

Mr. M: "The kids would be lost without it. The afterschool staff play with the kids, love them, and listen to them. They can relate to the kids, whereas the teachers in the school cannot. I appreciate the real life application the afterschool program offers. The students here are eager and hungry to learn."

"The school is credit-driven, not learning-driven....the afterschool program offers more enriching learning experiences."

- Afterschool staff member

We also talked with the afterschool Site Coordinator and an AmeriCorps member who worked at the afterschool program. Their responses are below.

Interviewer: *Why are these students here instead of attending a traditional comprehensive high school?*

AmeriCorps Member: "To complete credits, many have intense home issues, some are pregnant, many come from juvenile hall."

Site Coordinator: "They have fallen behind in school and behind in credits. They are here to catch up and go back to their home school or graduate from here with 190 credits. Or, no other school will take them."

Interviewer: *Do the students have personal goals they are seeking to accomplish at this school?*

AmeriCorps Member: "The number one goal is to graduate."

Site Coordinator: "Depends on the kid. They either want to finish school/graduate or they don't have a goal."

Interviewer: *In what ways does this school serve the students' unique needs?*

AmeriCorps Member: "They offer credits that they need to graduate, they offer flexible scheduling. An example is that the kids were getting to school late in the morning so they changed the start time from 8:30 to 9:00."

Site Coordinator: "Not well. There is a counselor and a therapist on campus every other Wednesday for one hour. They have really low standards for the students and they let them out early."

Interviewer: *In what ways does this school not serve the students' unique needs?*

AmeriCorps Member: "They are credit driven and not learning driven, so that means that they don't teach. There needs to be more full-time counselors to deal with the multiple issues the youth come with. The teachers have very low expectations for the students."

Site Coordinator: "There is no health clinic, no family planning. A lack of resources in general. There is no special education. We had a resource specialist just come into the school two months ago."

Interviewer: *In what way is the afterschool program supporting the school's mission?*

AmeriCorps Member: "We offer classes for credit. We read their transcripts and help them know what they need to do to graduate. They often have 200 credits – but they are usually not the right ones to graduate. We provide work opportunities and have a Resource Center."

Site Coordinator: "We completely support the goals of the school. Maybe accomplish them better than the school."

Interviewer: *What is the afterschool program offering that a school day does not?*

AmeriCorps Member: "More enriching learning experiences. The afterschool staff are more similar to them than the teachers. We spend a lot of time with them on the weekend and going on fieldtrips."

Interviewer: *What else is needed in afterschool that would better serve the students' needs?*

AmeriCorps Member: "More therapists and a supportive principal."

Interviewer: *How would you describe the mission of the afterschool program?*

AmeriCorps Member: "To do what the school doesn't do. Be a supportive, open place for students."

Interviewer: *Can you describe your relationship to the school-day program?*

AmeriCorps Member: "Well, I'm here all day. The school staff ask me to do all the things they don't want to do, so I'm the Prom coordinator, the Year Book coordinator and the Debate teacher. We think we are moving to a case management strategy next year with the kids – get really involved in their lives. I'm young and I want some experience. I want to work with young people."

"The afterschool program [at School B] does what the school doesn't do....[it's] a supportive, open place for students."

- Afterschool staff member

These interviews were conducted by Stacey Daraio, Senior Temescal Associates and edited by Sam Piha and Laura Karosic, Temescal Associates (www.temescalassociates.com).