



# Action Agenda

Adopted October 22, 2008

## Introduction

Montgomery County has a strong tradition of supporting its children and youth through a wide variety of out-of-school and after-school activities to keep children in safe and supportive, caring learning environments. However, the County also has been challenged in developing a system for the out-of-school time hours that make programs easy to access and affordable for all children and youth. The Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families' report, *The 2007 Status of Out-of-School Time in Montgomery County*, outlined County residents' deep interest in out-of-school time activities, and the lack of a coherent system of out-of-school time activities in the County.

The County Executive, Board of Education and County Council have expressed a keen understanding of the need to build this system and have demonstrated their interest in moving it forward so that there are more safe, affordable, fun, and learning activities for more youth in Montgomery County. In an effort to capture community input about what is needed to improve the system of out-of-school activities this draft *Action Agenda* is now available for community input to launch the next steps toward achieving the vision that successful in school and in life within the following Children's Agenda Outcomes:

- Success for Every Student
- Young People Prepared for the Workplace
- Young People Making Smart Choices
- Children Safe in Their Home, School and Community

## Next Steps: Excel Beyond the Bell Partnership

We envision that the Excel Beyond the Bell Partnership will involve and engage all Montgomery County residents and stakeholders who share the vision that all Montgomery County children and youth are successful in school and in life. We believe that the out-of-school hours provide an opportunity for all youth to reach their full potential. The Partnership will include parents, youth, elected officials, providers, advocates, agency representatives and others who will support and build a sustainable system offering safe, quality, and accessible out-of-school time programs. The Partnership will engage new allies and leaders to implement the *Action Agenda* and meet periodically to coordinate efforts in the out-of-school time community. This *Action Agenda* will serve as a broad framework to allow the out-of-school time community and its partners to identify, individually and collectively where they may contribute most effectively to improving the system of out-of-school activities.



# The Action Agenda

## VISION:

All Montgomery County children and youth are successful in school and life.

## MISSION:

To inspire children and youth to realize their full potential by building a sustainable system offering safe, quality and accessible out-of-school time programs.

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES:

The Action Agenda has four goals each then having key strategies that will lead to achievement of that goal. This working document will serve as a broad framework to allow the out-of-school time community and its partners to identify, individually and collectively,

- The goals and strategies needed to achieve the Excel Beyond the Bell vision and mission
- Specific activities and milestones that will constitute progress on the strategies; and
- Where each partner can contribute most effectively.

As a result, there will be

- Increased numbers of youth participating in quality Excel Beyond the Bell programs
- Increased variety of quality Excel Beyond the Bell programs and opportunities
- Increased funding and sustainability of programs and system infrastructure; and
- Better resource allocation to fit community needs and youth preferences.

At May 29, 2008 Symposium and through June 13, 2008 stakeholders were encouraged furnish input and make suggestions on the goals and strategies and to identify their contributions to achieve the Excel Beyond the Bell vision and mission through an online survey. Based on this input, the Partnership finalized the Action Agenda and created a work plan for making progress on priority strategies over the next year.

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## The Action Agenda Goals and Strategies

**Goal One: *Montgomery County residents of all generations will understand and support the value of out-of-school programs in preparing children and youth for positive futures that help sustain the local quality of life.***

Ongoing, strategic communications efforts are essential to raise awareness about the importance of out-of-school time and the need for all stakeholders to share in the creation and sustaining of high quality programs. Information must be available and easily accessible to all interested stakeholders with key messages and approaches tailored to various interests. Communication within and across the several components of Excel Beyond the Bell will ensure that efforts are coordinated. An array of communications tools can be used including a website, written materials, listservs, print and broadcast media, forums, personal conversations, and building on partners' already established communication networks.

Advocating for supportive policies, programs and resources uses a combination of statistical information and the experiences of youth, families and providers to make a compelling case for action. Our audiences for communication and advocacy extend to those households who do not have children but whose support and investment in Excel Beyond the Bell is crucial to prepare the next generation of county residents. Excel Beyond the Bell must be strong and stable enough to survive changes in policy-makers.

### Indicators of Progress:

- Political support for increased and sustained public resources and private partnerships is ongoing.
- The community widely believes that participation in out-of-school programs is important and desirable.
- Children and youth consistently want to participate.
- Families are aware of programs and how to access them.
- Visible advocacy efforts advance resources and quality.

### PROPOSED Strategies:

- Excel Beyond the Bell will be the emerging framework for communicating about out-of-school time programs and systems-building.
- Youth, parents, community members and organizations, and donors will inform and guide Excel Beyond the Bell development.
- Opportunities for advocacy will be created.
- Policy makers and donors will be educated with resulting commitment to out-of-school time programs.
- Parents and their children and youth will have easily accessible information on available out-of-school time programs.



***Goal Two: Out-of-school programs will be safe, developmentally appropriate and well run; all people who work with children and youth will be skilled in engaging them and supporting their intellectual, social-emotional and physical development.***

Successful local after school system-building requires the presence of agreed-upon standards with consistent support to organizations and their youth workers in achieving these standards through a system of youth worker professional development. Standards are the baseline of program quality with guidelines for facilities, health and safety, program activities and staff patterns and qualifications. Standards are not imposed but implemented in an atmosphere of learning and continuous quality improvement.

Program quality, implementation of program improvement strategies, outreach, and youth retention can all hinge on the presence of a stable and skilled staff. Staff must be well-trained, well-compensated and consistent to contribute to high quality programs that meet the needs of children and youth. All kinds of experiences - formal and informal - are valuable in the professional development of practitioners. A variety of approaches to and types of training are necessary to build the range of skills needed to provide high quality services for youth.

**Indicators of Progress:**

- Out-of-school time providers are working to achieve and exceed standards
- Youth workers use their increased knowledge and skills in their programs
- Families ask about quality factors when looking for programs
- Children and youth have frequent attendance and report high satisfaction with programs

**PROPOSED Strategies:**

- Program standards and core youth worker competencies will be developed and used to guide quality enhancement.
- A Professional Development System will enhance the competencies of youth workers and their organizations.
- Career pathways with appropriate compensation and recognition will help recruit and retain youth workers in out-of-school time programs.



### ***Goal Three: An intentional mix of public and private funding and resources will create and sustain accessible, high quality programs.***

Decisions about what should be financed in the areas of quality, affordability, access and infrastructure must be made against how various funding streams can be used. To succeed in developing and sustaining our system, we must work to ensure maximum effective use of current resources; seek all public funding sources at local, state and national levels; build partnerships between public and private funders; and increase flexibility in funding so we can better support the variety of organizations and array of out-of-school time needs.

Expansion of programming is dependent on the availability of adequate and appropriate space in schools and community settings along with sufficient transportation resources. The responsibility for supporting space and transportation should be somehow addressed across all public agencies as they have mutual interest in increased out-of-school time program access.

#### **Indicators of Progress:**

- Public and private funding is increased and sustained.
- Strategic decisions are made about how various sources of funding can support direct services and other system components.
- Funding is invested in quality programs.
- Space and transportation are decreased barriers to program expansion.

#### **PROPOSED Strategies:**

- Standard cost frameworks for direct services and other system components will be developed.
- Ongoing accounting of current public and private investment in out-of-school time programs will occur.
- Public funding will be maximized and used to leverage private sector dollars within the Excel Beyond the Bell partnership.
- Policies and procedures will promote access to public space for all programs.
- A mix of transportation resources will enable youth to get to and from programs safely.

## ***Goal Four: Data that describes need and demand for programs, their availability, and their impact on youth will be available to guide decision-making.***

Information about the market's supply and demand is critical to building effective and sustainable after school programs. Lack of comprehensive data impedes appropriate program planning and development and allocation of funding, staffing, and system resources. Having a greater understanding of the participation in and need for after school programs, as well as parents' priorities regarding what they want in their children's after school programs, can guide stakeholders and policymakers in shaping and supporting the best possible after school program opportunities for children and youth.

Public and private investors in out-of-school time must be confident that their funding will reap mutual benefits. Data that show the numbers of children and youth served, the quality of the programming and the development of youth are needed to convey their return on investment

### **Indicators of Progress:**

- Data describing the gaps between program availability and community needs are current.
- Data describing individual program performance and the overall system's performance are available.
- Data are used for decision-making.
- Data are used for continuous quality improvement.

### **PROPOSED Strategies:**

- Regular data collection and analysis regarding the needs and desires of children, youth and families for out-of-school time programs will occur.
- Regular data collection and analysis regarding the supply and capacity of public and privately operated out-of-school time programs with comparison against the needs and desires will occur.
- A universally agreed-upon accountability system will give data on how many youth are served; how well; and the degree to which out-of-school time programs have made an impact on youth (our vision and mission)

