

# The After-School INSTITUTE

*A DRUM MAJOR FOR THE AFTER-SCHOOL  
FIELD:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL  
INSTITUTE (TASI) OF BALTIMORE,  
MARYLAND*



*Photo courtesy of Marshall Clarke Studios*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report represents a unique contribution to all stakeholders involved in the after-school world. It represents documented information about the important role of intermediaries in the after-school field. With many of the changes, regulations, policies, and new systems of accountability that affect the daily operation of after-school programs, intermediary organizations have begun to increasingly play a critical role in brokering professional development, technical assistance, fundraising, and dissemination of valuable information. This report documents the creation and the progress of Baltimore's after-school intermediary organization, The After-School Institute (TASI), and the critical role that it plays in both networking and professional development for all after-school entities in Baltimore, and to some extent in Maryland and the eastern region of the U.S.

Over the last ten to fifteen years a growing number of policymakers in education, juvenile delinquency prevention, and recreation realized the importance of keeping children in environments that were safe, stimulating, enriching, and positive during the non-school hours -- and so did funders. TASI came into existence in the late 1990s, when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the Safe and Sound Campaign for a ten-year project to address five priority areas to improve children's health, education and safety, including after-school opportunities in Baltimore. That funding helped establish Baltimore's After-school Strategy, an effort to increase the quantity, quality and utilization of after-school programs in Baltimore. There are several components to the strategy including quality standards, fund allocation, fund development, evaluation and the establishment of a training and technical assistance center. That center is TASI, and it has responsibility for training the workforce who provides services to the children. To build capacity of programs to deliver quality services that result in positive outcomes for youth, it provides training, technical assistance, a regular networking opportunity, extensive communication, site visits and an annual regional conference. Funds to establish TASI were provided by the Open Society Institute, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Aaron and Lillie Straus Foundation and it is currently funded by Baltimore City Government, Open Society Institute, Maryland AIDS Administration and various small grants and fees-for-service.

At the time of TASI's establishment, there were already some standards in place for some after-school staff, but these standards were inapplicable for older youth who are served by the strategy and constitute a great number of the after-school population. TASI provided training on the newly developed standards for Baltimore, bringing these standards from lists standards and indicators to actual practice. In the true sense of the word, by serving as an intermediary, TASI had the foresight to anticipate the needed areas of training based upon rules and policies being handed down, but they also had the prudence to be responsive to the needs of the providers in the field. This report helps the reader understand that as the after-school policies increasingly become a fixed part of educational systems across the country, the existence of an intermediary organization is essential for a number of reasons. These reasons will be briefly explained in this summary of the report, but readers are encouraged to read the entire case study, as it provides specific examples of the role that TASI has played that could be replicated across the country.

Intermediary organizations such as TASI serve as a buffer for many of the demands and requirements being placed on the different after-school providers. Issues of universal qualifications, centralized access to professional development, workshops, evaluation, sustainable funding and many other requirements can be quite a heavy burden to shoulder for individual providers. TASI's ability to continue to shoulder these responsibilities is a benefit to individual providers, and to systematic initiatives. This enables providers to do what they do best: provide quality direct services to their clientele.

When systematic initiatives are launched, it usually takes some time for the initiative to indeed function systematically. Activities such as networking and conducting workshops usually help systematization to become more of an infrastructure. This networking task of intermediaries helps to eliminate or reduce potential multiplying of mistakes made by one or more agencies on a large scale by constantly sharing information. It also fosters peer mentoring and collaboration. In Baltimore, TASI has taken the lead in bringing together the various service provider agencies for monthly network meetings, and has also been able to turn them into a network of providers of peer mentors and collaborators, as opposed to competitors. This vast and strong network presents a formidable group for advocacy for sustainable funding. A proven example is the creation of the Collective Fund Group comprised of members of the network, Safe and Sound and TASI that successfully convinced Baltimore City to invest \$17 million of Baltimore's surplus funds in children's programs, including after-school programming, capacity building and contract monitoring.

There is also the role of research and funding. Although TASI is not necessarily the entity that secures funding for the providers, TASI's strategic position as a part of the strategy triangle makes it crucial to both Safe and Sound (the strategic planning, coordinating and fundraising arm) and the Family League (the fundraising, fund allocating and contract monitoring arm). Through workshops, technical assistance, conferences, research briefs, and self studies, the organization is able to work directly with the provider agencies as well as with the strategy teams to build the capacity of programs to deliver quality services that result in positive youth outcomes and ensure that what is funded meets the standard of what is required, and in turn is evaluated properly to yield important findings.

Finally, there is the role of training, technical assistance, and more importantly professional development. From its inception, in its capacity as an intermediary one of the most critical roles that TASI has played has been to serve in the role of providing quality professional development to practitioners. This role has required TASI to remain in a constant state of alert. This means following closely funding, policy and research trends and sharing these trends and preparing the network of service providers for what is to come. TASI plays a role of informing research and practice. At a time when both the field and the populations being served continue to expand rapidly, there is a great need for qualified youth workers who have the appropriate training to work with "older" after-school youth, TASI provides professional development opportunities that will create positive and effective services and outcomes.

In conclusion, this report should be seen as a useful resource for duties and districts intending to implement after-school initiatives system wide. This report has shown that the centralization of professional development, technical assistance, networking, conferences, and sometimes funding and fundraising is very beneficial to the intermediaries and the entities providing the services. This is especially the case if the organization is willing and able to be proactive and responsive at the same time. While there are still many lessons to be learned about how to comfortably work with the entities within the strategy triangle and with the organizations out in the field, this case study provides important information to current and future groups seeking to initiate similar efforts. In the case of TASI, it has worked for the city of Baltimore, and to some extent in Maryland and the eastern region of the U.S.

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