

SB 638 (Torlakson, 2005)

Achieving After School Program Excellence: Improving Accountability & Enhancing Student Outcomes

Summary: SB 638 will streamline California's state and federally funded before and after school programs; provide more flexibility on a local level for providing high quality before and after school programs in elementary, middle and high schools; and increase accountability for positive student outcomes.

SB 638 creates a direct grant mechanism for both the State After School Education and Safety (ASES) program and the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st Century) programs as well as creates new accountability measures to ensure programs are impacting student attendance, academic and behavioral development, and a student's readiness to learn during the school day.

Background: In 1998, with the enactment of AB 2284 (Torlakson), SB 1756 (Lockyer) and AB 1428 (Ortiz), California created the nation's largest state-funded before and after school program, now called the After School Education and Safety (ASES) program. In 2002, California began administering the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which adds \$136 million to California's \$121 million investment. Also in 2002, California voters passed Proposition 49 to increase the state's investment in after school and to ensure that every public elementary and middle school could access state funds for after school programs.

Proposition 49, if fully implemented, could more than quadruple state funding for after school programs from the current \$121 million to \$550 million, an increase of \$428 million. The Governor's January Budget proposes to make this new funding available in the 2006-07 fiscal year.

If Proposition 49 fails to roll out successfully due to program inaccessibility and limited demand for dollars or hasty program implementation, it will be a major setback not only for after school in California but for the entire children's policy agenda.

With the implementation of Proposition 49 approaching, SB 638 seeks to address major barriers associated with financing high-quality after school programs. It is critical that each of these barriers is addressed before Proposition 49 significantly expands the number of after school programs operating in California under the current, flawed system. It is also critical that currently funded sites have the opportunity to create high-quality programs for students through flexible and accountable structures.

Specifically, this bill does the following to strengthen both before and after school programs and increase accountability to the state's taxpayers:

1) Creates a new direct grant mechanism for ASES and 21st Century grantees, which would eliminate excessive paperwork and provide more flexibility for program start-up and on-going management.

- Reduces paperwork for the Department of Education and programs by providing funding up front to programs with quarterly attendance reporting.

- Minimizes the burden of fronting costs: Many schools and other grantees in low-income communities cannot easily cover program costs while waiting for a reimbursement for services from the state.
- Accounts for fixed costs: A program's costs are mostly fixed and attendance in the program is voluntary. Issues like transiency, competing activities, safety, busing, care for siblings and other things affect program attendance, no matter how attractive a program is.
- Allows programs to ramp-up operations: New programs need time to refine program operations, build partnerships, and gain community support. A purely attendance-based system results in the appearance of "underperformance" and funding underutilized.

2) Streamlines and shortens the application process by allowing fundamental program quality elements to be demonstrated in a more concise and standardized fashion.

- Allows for statewide consistency and focus on key program quality elements while making it easier for applicants to prepare applications and for the Department of Education to process them.

3) Creates a new accountability and evaluation system for ASES grantees. This system will hold programs accountable for youth resiliency and academic outcomes, such as school attendance, behavior, and readiness to learn.

- Currently, the accountability system for these programs is weak. Test score changes are being reported by programs, but the state can do little with this information since an after school program cannot alone be held accountable for test score increases. There are alternative, more accurate measures of an after school program's success and more effective ways for the state to evaluate and support the improvement of programs.
- To ensure checks are in place for underperforming programs, measures will be put into place, including: 1) A required review and technical assistance plan put into place by the state if student attendance levels are significantly below projections; 2) An adjustment of grant amounts if student attendance levels are significantly below projections.
- Sites will still report student attendance on a quarterly basis to the Department in order to assure accountability for serving the number of students proposed.
- Programs will have options of measures to report to demonstrate student outcomes for academic improvement and youth resiliency.

4) Prioritizes current public school recipients of ASES and 21st CCLC funding and low-income public schools for Prop 49 funds.

- Under current Proposition 49 language, existing ASES grantees are guaranteed continued funding. Since 21st Century grants will expire soon, are serving similar populations of students, and have similar program goals, these sites should receive this same "grandfathering" option to continue providing high quality programs for low-income students.
- While all children can benefit from safe after school activities, it is very clear that socio-economically disadvantaged students have a far greater need for publicly subsidized after school programs. In order to fund programs at acceptable levels in a resource-constrained environment, it is critical that more funds are targeted to lower-income communities.

5) Increases the maximum ASES grant amount and eligibility formula available for before and after school programs to increase the number of students served per site and increase program quality.

- Proposition 49 sets a very low rate and maximum for funding both low-income and universal after school programs - \$50,000 per elementary site and \$75,000 per middle school site at a reimbursement rate of \$5 per day per child. This current rate is far too low to support a quality program, and the maximum allows very few needy children to be served per site. The combination of low rate and low maximum makes this program unfeasible for low-income schools to operate.
- Higher grant amounts make the program more attractive and economically feasible to implement for low-income schools.
- The new maximum is consistent with the 21st Century program grant amounts for low-income elementary and middle schools, an amount found to create quality outcomes for participants.
- Proposition 49 sets aside additional funding for low-income schools. Allowing these schools to apply for more funds is consistent with the initiative approved by voters.

6) Decreases the local match requirement for ASES programs to 33%.

- While the local matching requirement is important for generating community-level commitment to the program, the state must avoid creating an unequal playing field in the competition for ASES funds. Some communities will have great success with generating local match, while others, such as in rural communities with few local businesses or other sources of match, will be at a real disadvantage. The match should be an important tool for generating community support – not a disincentive for applying or a disadvantage to resource-constrained communities.

7) Redesigns the 21st CCLC program to maximize the use of federal funds in the wake of Proposition 49 being implemented. The redesign would do the following:

A. Create a direct grant mechanism identical to ASES.

B. Increase amount available to fund high school grants.

In past 21st Century competitions, demand for high school grants far exceeded the amount the state had allocated (only 6% of the total). With safety and high school graduation rates such key issues in many communities, it is important to provide more resources for after school enrichment at high schools. Also, all current public elementary and middle school programs that would qualify under 21st Century can instead be funded under Proposition 49, which frees up more funds under 21st Century for high school programs.

C. Increase funds for non-school grantees

Federal law requires that 21st Century funds be offered to non-school entities such as community-based and faith-based organizations (with local school district approval). Since many new elementary and middle schools will be funded under Proposition 49, we can provide more funds under 21st Century to non-school applicants who are partnering with local school districts. Public school applicants would still qualify for 21st Century funding.

D. Increase access grants for enhancement and expansion of low-income elementary and middle school after school programs already receiving 21st Century funds.

In the current 21st Century program, money is set aside to ensure equitable access to programs for all students, in the form of supplementary “access” grants. As with the high school grants, there is much more demand for these access grants than there are funds available. With freed up 21st Century funds, we should increase access grants for 21st Century grantees that have critical needs such as transportation and other services to enhance program quality.

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Status: Assembly Education Committee—Hearing Date Pending