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# Providence after-school program becomes national model

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PROVIDENCE — The Providence School Alliance’s AfterZones program, which is the city’s network of neighborhood programs for middle school youths, is in the spotlight again.

A report released by the National League of Cities on Tuesday identified AfterZones as one of the nation’s most innovative city programs for children and families.

The organization’s first State of City Leadership for Children and Families report highlights innovative city programs in early childhood development, education, youth-violence prevention, youth-civic engagement and family economic success. It also cites emerging and established trends in those fields.

National League of Cities Executive Director Clifford M. Johnson said the report is about putting together the “interesting things that cities are doing” so that other cities might replicate them. “We’re really looking to accelerate change and the rate of progress in cities,” he said.

Johnson said the report shows that even as cities grapple with the worst budget outlook in decades, mayors and other municipal leaders are maintaining a “strong commitment” to children, youth and their families.

The report was compiled by the league’s Institute for Youth, Education and Families after extensive research, but no independent evaluations on the effectiveness of any of the programs were conducted, according to Johnson.

“Some of these innovations are quite new and the jury is still out on whether they are effective. This is just an opportunity to list up what is new and promising,” he said.

Providence’s AfterZones was included among 32 innovations that are “truly one of a kind” because of its unique way of coordinating preexisting neighborhood programs and services so they are more accessible to

young adults, said Johnson.

AfterZones is also unique in that it focuses on middle school age children, rather than elementary school age children who are traditionally at the center of after-school activities.

The middle school years, Johnson said, have historically been a “missed opportunity.” AfterZones offers a way to “keep middle school kids out of trouble” and enhance their learning, he said.

The AfterZones are overseen by the Providence After School Alliance, a nonprofit organization created by [Mayor David N. Cicilline](#) in 2004 with funding from the Wallace Foundation and Bank of America, to improve the city’s after-school services.

The city has three AfterZone “campuses,” where neighborhood middle schools, libraries, recreation and community centers, community-based programs and licensed child-care providers are linked under a joint decision-making body with funds of up to \$400,000 a year from the alliance to help strengthen existing programs and develop new ones.

Through the AfterZones, students can sign up for sports, recreation, art, music, dance, filmmaking, and theater programs; academic programs in math, literacy, and science; field trips; youth leadership opportunities; and college and career exploration.

Alliance funds allow AfterZones to coordinate communications, to develop a transportation system among the different locations, and to share public relations, administrative, facility and technology costs.

“It’s this ability to organize at a neighborhood level that stuck us as key to the program’s success,” said Johnson. “A lot of cities have a diverse network of church or nonprofit-based programming, but there is no coordination between organizations. It’s decentralized.”

According to the league’s report, Nashville, Tenn., has begun to implement the AfterZone model.

Other after-school programs highlighted in the report include St. Paul (Minn.)’s Circulator Bus, Louisville (Ky.)’s Every 1 Reads, and Chicago’s After School Matters.

The report is being released with the closing Tuesday of the league’s ninth annual National Summit on Your City’s Families, which ran through the weekend in Boston. It will be available on the league’s Web site at [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org).

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