

# Network keeps kids busy after school in hard-hit city

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**PROVIDENCE, R.I. &mdash;**[Project Education: Edutopia](#), a partnership between WRAL-TV and the George Lucas Educational Foundation, explores a program that keeps youth safe and engaged after school in Providence, R.I.



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[Innovative program entertains kids after school](#)

Providence residents saw an special need for middle schoolers, who are too old for child care but too young to be left alone, in a city with the nation's third highest child poverty rate.

"We're not a city where lots of parents have the resources to go hire a teacher for a violin lesson or go hire a tutor for something special," Mayor David Cicilline said. "So if it doesn't happen in a system that we built for them, it won't happen."

Local education leaders and the city banded together in 2004 to found the [Providence Afterschool Alliance](#), or PASA. It's a network of more than 200 organizations that provide high-quality, after-school programs for middle schoolers.

"We divided the city into AfterZones, and what they do is connect the middle school and a public library and a rec center and create really a campus of activities for kids," Cicilline said.

PASA's key to success is being considered cool by urban middle schoolers. It offers activities that most schools don't: a martial arts class, animal care, scientific experiments, musical instruction and the arts.

"Kids just really connect when they see a hands-on leader really electrified by what their passion is and transferring that knowledge and skill over to them," PASA Executive Director Hillary Salmons said.

The program is having success; attendance at school sites is up, and children are choosing the AfterZones over the streets.

PASA is also dedicated to helping other communities implement [their own after-school networks](#).

"It's really about seeing the potential to make connections, seeing assets in your community everywhere and having sort of a can-do spirit that there's never enough we can do for kids," Salmons said.

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