

Column



What will happen to after-school programs in a Trump administration?

Providers need to make themselves heard to influence those decisions



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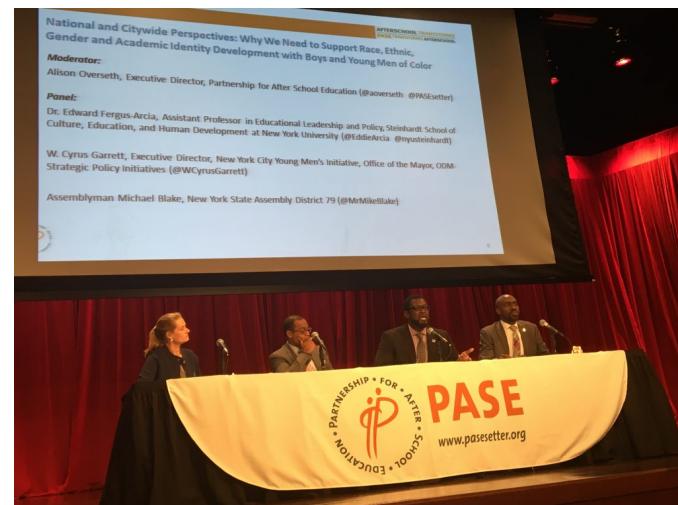
Column by **ANDRE PERRY**

December 20, 2016

There's been plenty of speculation about U.S. Secretary of Education nominee Betsy DeVos and her potential impact on traditional schools. We know that President-elect Donald Trump favors [school choice](#), which could mean an expansion of taxpayer-funded vouchers and other alternatives to traditional public schools.

But how will the Trump administration impact students after the last bell rings for the day?

We are not yet hearing about its possible influence on after-school programs, even though much is at stake.



Alison Overseth, Edward Fergus-Arcia, W. Cyrus Garrett and Michael Blake address attendees of “Pockets of Hope,” at New York University.

Children spend most of their time outside of school. Almost [one in four families](#) (23 percent) place their children in after-school programs. [Educating students in poverty requires considerably more time than the traditional school calendar offers](#), and after-school programs can provide that time and instruction.

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Trump promised on the campaign trail that his first budget would include an additional \$20 billion that will be raised by “reprioritizing existing federal dollars.” Trump said it would be

While many school districts are adding additional instructional time through their own after-school programs, more time doesn't necessarily bring higher quality. Schools are part of the problem.

Many students have little choice but to go elsewhere to help cope with the effects of low-performing schools, poverty and biased policing.

In many ways, after-school programs not associated with a school district are even more focused on addressing youth's needs than schools are. That's because they lack a central

used to create a block grant dedicated to “the 11 million school-aged kids living in absolute poverty.” Trump can cut or enhance these funds.

institution — like a school district — that adults are also invested in protecting.

Collectively, after-school programs that are not part of a district are primed to take advantage of the choice rhetoric that’s been bandied about in recent weeks.

“After school is choice,” said [Gina Warner](#), president and CEO of the [National After School Association](#). “Parents decide what programs they put their children in after school.”

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Warner sees a tremendous opportunity for after-school and out-of-school time providers to change the conversation about better choices and options. Out-of-school time (OST) is parlance used interchangeably for what we commonly refer to as afterschool programs.

According to an [Afterschool Alliance study](#), 10.2 million children (18 percent) participated in an after-school program in 2014. But if the after-school sector can’t get a seat at the table in this next administration, they may be on the menu.

Funding from the government’s [21st century community learning centers](#) has made many programs outside the schoolhouse possible.

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In spite of what's at stake, we don't hear from OST leaders because just like their school counterparts, they've become fixated on improving outcomes – albeit the wrong ones.

Children spend most of their time outside of school. Almost one in four families (23 percent) place their children in after-school programs. Educating students in poverty requires considerably more time than the traditional school calendar offers, and afterschool programs can provide that time and instruction.

They attempt to winnow success and quality to a few consistent, measurable variables. Being “data driven” is muffling providers nearly mute around root causes of inequality like poverty and racially biased expulsion and suspension.

We don't need improved systems as much as we need new ones, but I've witnessed OST leaders in conferences push quality improvement as a radical step toward change.

In particular, funders have strongly encouraged after-school programs to adopt [Youth Program Quality Intervention \(YPQI\)](#), a data-driven continuous improvement model. It's become a rallying cry.

We can continue to improve programs. But to what end? Improving programs of a broken system won't usher systemic change. Parents need real alternatives that drive systemic change.

Last week, I attended [Pockets of Hope: A Citywide Summit on Protective Practices for Boys of Color in Afterschool](#) sponsored by the New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development and the [Partnership for After School Education \(PASE\)](#).

The conference paid particular attention to ways practitioners can rely on research about what works, along with ways they might discuss what they'd most like to actually learn more about from a research agenda.

Panelists shared examples of “pockets of success” that are doing a good job serving youth and families.

A particular highlight for me was hearing how various programs partnered with [Edward Fergus-Arcia](#), an assistant professor in educational leadership at NYU. Fergus-Arcia spoke of the need to “build a community of practice focused on identifying and strengthening protective practices that support boys of color and other vulnerable youth in after-school settings.”

“We [scholars] have to do research based on questions that practitioners actually have,” Fergus-Arcia noted.

But Fergus-Arcia put quality improvement in perspective. “We have to remove the risks without seeing people as risks,” Fergus-Arcia said. He encouraged audience members to use research to improve programs, but also to have a strategy aimed at removing underlying conditions of poverty, high-crime neighborhoods and underfunded schools.

For instance, having money follow the child — the basis for vouchers and choice initiatives — can be something after-school providers rally behind. Warner wrote [a blog](#) on the potential of a DeVos administration, referencing her work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Warner saw an opportunity to fund much-needed GED programs.

“Many students were pushed out after the October 1 count and schools kept the per-pupil expenditure for that child when they left,” Warner said, referring to the date officials determine how many students schools can budget for.

In Louisiana, many schools did their best to retain students to maximize budgets — until October 1.

Warner added: “Older youth who either were pushed out or left school to pursue a GED program could have used those funds. The providers certainly could have.”

She also added that if money leaves with youth, schools would have incentive to keep students in school, or provide resources for a true alternative.

The after-school sector can take a page out of the charter and school choice playbook and start strategically placing leaders in positions of power. Many who are involved in after school programs tend provide direct, in-your-face service to students; they don't do policy work.

But a single mindedness to repair youth and families who've been injured by the status quo can blind providers' responsibilities to go upstream and change the structures and conditions that actually cause the harm.

"Radical change won't come about from developing different measures," Warner said. "We need a different conversation. We need to be in the discussion."

First, after-school leaders will need to stop seeing themselves as the problem that needs fixing. Even more than school-based experts, OST leaders should lend their voices as authorities on choice policy.

This story was produced by [The Hechinger Report](#), a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education.

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