

# STATE BUDGET CASE STUDY: ILLINOIS

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## ACCOMPLISHMENT

A new appropriation of \$12.2 million for new afterschool programs was included in the 2006 budget bill. In addition, funding for the Department of Human Services' Teen REACH program, a long-standing statewide program, was increased by approximately \$3 million, despite moves to cut funding in initial budget proposals.

## BACKGROUND

Proposed cuts by the administration to Teen REACH and other after-school supports have impacted budget strategies in recent years. Afterschool advocates successfully defeated proposed cuts to Teen REACH and other afterschool programs for the past three years. This year, advocates pushed for an additional \$10 million for afterschool. When the administration proposed a 13 percent cut to Teen REACH, advocacy efforts again shifted to restoration of funding during legislative negotiations. At the end of the budget negotiations and unbeknownst to major players in the Illinois After-school Alliance (the advocacy component of the Illinois After-school Partnership), the \$12 million was added as a line item for new programs in individual communities with funds predominantly earmarked for legislators who pushed for new programs in their districts. The new \$12 million, administered by the State Board of Education, is not connected to existing programs through legislation. Increased Teen REACH funds were also a welcome, if late surprise. During the session, Teen REACH funds were partially restored to only a nine percent cut. Following negotiations, Teen REACH actually received an increase over current levels through a reallocation of agency dollars, resulting in \$20.5 million being awarded in grants to programs.

## NETWORK INVOLVEMENT AND ACTIVITIES

Providers always point to needed resources, so the Illinois After-school Alliance concentrates effort on the budget process on multiple levels— from grassroots organizing to statewide leadership outreach. Before details are proposed by agencies or the administration, the Alliance communicates need for new funds across the comprehensive set of programs, and highlights existing examples, including Teen REACH, Summer Bridges, and others. Focus on Teen REACH in recent years has been in response to proposed cuts.

During the summer of 2004, Illinois After-school Alliance staff began budget discussions as part of ongoing communications efforts. In fall 2004, at the request of the Alliance, legislators in the House and Senate circulated letters with 115 signatures asking the governor to increase funding for afterschool in his budget. In early 2005, before the governor's budget proposal was released, Alliance leaders and an afterschool provider met with staff in the governor's budget office to communicate the need for new funds. The budget staff also was copied on all subsequent communications with legislators.

Key partners, such as Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, have been instrumental in garnering grassroots, law enforcement, and other support and leadership in communities. Communications tools such as Alliance action alerts, fact sheets and outreach to members have helped the message reach legislators from their constituents—from parents to law enforcement officials. The Alliance also regularly taps existing relationships with legislators to carry the issue.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Alliance leaders still struggle to connect the dots on what happened at each stage of the budget process. Because much happened behind closed doors and involved so few people, it is hard to find ways to take direct credit. Yet, outreach and work with many partners over several years seems to have made a large, indirect impact. In addition to understanding what happened, the Alliance will have to determine the right way to communicate the “win.”

The new funds are linked to, and coordinated with the existing system of afterschool supports. The Alliance and the Partnership will support the State Board of Education in the implementation of the new funds. In the future, the education of policy makers may require a new level of information. Legislators are positive on the issue, but not all may understand the systemic implications of new line items, like sustainability, that are outside of current support systems. An ongoing challenge will be to determine how to thank the legislators that fought for their “piece of the pie,” but also convince them of the importance of maintaining programs already connected to the system. Funding outside of the system after the budget is finalized following the start of the new fiscal year can stress agencies, make people scramble, etc., to keep things connected and provide seamless services. At the same time, legislators have been fighting cuts by the governor for the past three years; continuing to engage them over the long term will be a challenge.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Illinois After-School Partnership director Jennifer Becker Mouhcine shared a number of lessons learned about the efforts of the Alliance.

1. *Engage the governor’s budget office.* This was the first year the Alliance reached out to this office. While the governor initially made cuts to Teen REACH, budget staff were engaged on the issue of afterschool, and a line of communication is established for future conversations.
2. *The basic lessons of advocacy still ring true.* Cultivate champions; mobilize providers, parents and others impacted by afterschool. Strategic and regular outreach at all levels can produce unanticipated results as stakeholders across the state carry the message.
3. *The budget process is not transparent and or predictable.* Many decisions are hashed out in a back room at the end of the day. Despite large-scale support, unless you have connections to the top four power players behind closed doors, outcome will be hard to anticipate.
4. *Keep powerful and informed supporters close.* Those powerful leaders in your network can keep their ears to the ground on issues, especially behind closed doors. Talk to these players (other advocates, legislators, etc.) regularly.
5. *Have faith that network activities lay the groundwork for unanticipated success.* The Partnership and the Alliance have communicated the afterschool message for many years. While the successes were not predictable, without this groundwork, legislators would not have kept the issue on the front burner. Alliance leaders have been working with some legislators to help determine new revenue strategies (e.g. video game tax) so that the partners do not seem to always have a hand out for a piece of limited budgets.

## **NETWORK DETAILS**

State Network: Illinois After-school Partnership

Fiscal agent: Illinois Center for Violence Prevention

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Partner groups involved in effort: The Illinois After-school Alliance (the advocacy arm of the Partnership), Partnership agency leads (Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education), Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *Illinois*, Voices for Illinois Children, member providers and other local partners.