

# Sample Editorial: Expand School-Community Partnerships to Support Our Children's Well-being (675 words)

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This opinion piece models a way to advocate for very specific policy goals using the framing strategies recommended for the human services field. By using the *Constructing Well-Being Narrative* while simultaneously avoiding communication “traps” identified through framing research, this piece makes a fairly complex and obscure piece of federal legislation accessible for the public, and positions it as a sensible step toward the larger goal of supporting community well-being. As policymakers read the opinion pages as a proxy for public opinion, writing editorials is a strategy worth deploying regularly. The narrative structure provided in *Talking Human Services* makes this work easier, as it offers an template and themes that can be adapted to many policies over time.

When, as a community, we make sure that everyone can reach their potential and fully contribute to our communities, we all benefit. Maximizing the potential of the people who are our neighbors, our workforce, and our civic body ensures that our communities remain vibrant places to live, work, and play.

To keep our society functioning, and even thriving, we must always be on the lookout for places where our policies and programs can do a better job of supporting people in fulfilling their potential. This year, we have just such an opportunity. Congress will consider reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), legislation that sets many policies and priorities for our nation's schools, and therefore plays a crucial part in supporting the well-being of communities across the country. This policy has been revised many times over the decades to meet new challenges and our changing needs, and this upcoming reauthorization is no exception. There are a few important updates to ESEA that would make a major difference in our ability to support children's potential and well-being, especially when it comes to the regulations and funding regarding out-of-school learning opportunities.

Among other things, the ESEA encourages schools to partner with other organizations in the community. Typically, these organizations offer programs that engage kids in the afternoons, on the weekends, or during the summer. Because children's well-being is built from many materials – social relationships, academic skills, and good emotional capabilities and mental health – these kinds of learning experiences are important resources. ESEA helps provide those materials by supporting programs that range from early childhood education to tutoring, from afterschool mentoring to summer camps, from college preparation programs to recreational activities, and from leadership and civic engagement programs to swimming. They offer different ways for children to learn, as these programs can be flexible and involve hands-on activities or field trips. These programs give all youth the chance to

Leading with a tested Value rather than the “news peg” establishes this as a message for everyone, not just those who are already interested in a specific policy domain.

Framing policy debates as opportunities to work toward shared values – rather than remedies to dire crises – is an essential means of engaging the public. Crisis messaging has the counter-intuitive effect of depressing, rather than building, public concern.

Using the Construction Explanatory Metaphor to set up out-of-school programming offers a way to establish these opportunities as essential resources, not “nice extras.”

learn new skills, develop character, make new friends, and build relationships with caring adults.

To make sure that these critical building materials remain available in our communities, there are several practical things Congress can do to strengthen ESEA's approach to learning that happens outside of the classroom:

1. Maintain the 21st Century Community Learning Center initiative as a separate and specific grant for school and community partnerships. This program is the only federal funding stream dedicated to ensuring that high-quality programming is available in the afternoons, on weekends, and in the summer. It is essential to keep it in place.
2. Ensure that non-profit and community-based organizations are eligible to partner with schools to apply for 21st Century Community Learning Center funds at the state level. These organizations engage kids at different times, and in different ways, from schools. It's important to ensure that state grant eligibility guidelines consider a variety of partners to support children's social, emotional, physical, and academic development.
3. Encourage schools at the state and local levels to coordinate more closely with community-based organizations. The ESEA should provide incentives for educators to tap the expertise of nonprofit partners, which can bring specific skills in assessing community needs and addressing the social, emotional, and physical strands of children's development.
4. Maintain dedicated funding for the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP). Physical fitness is essential for child well-being and providing opportunities for physical activity is a key way that communities can foster the potential of children and youth. Physical activity is associated with better classroom behavior, lower absenteeism, and better grades in school – not to mention a healthier, longer life and lower risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses impacting our nation's youth. PEP is the only federal funding directed toward physical education and physical activity for our children and it should be maintained. Without PEP, there is a risk that more physical education programs will be cut, and community well-being will suffer.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act has long played a role in building our children's well-being. With these important updates, Congress can extend and expand its impact on the well-being of communities across the country.

A plain-language explanation of 21CCLC helps to invite the public into the conversation.

Note the careful positioning of the unique value that youth development organizations provide. This language makes a case for human services agencies as essential partners without evoking a 'politics as usual' concern that nonprofits are just trying to get a piece of the funding pie.