



After-The-Bell

2025-2030 Strategic Plan

Serving middle school students in the
Kennett Consolidated School District
for more than 25 years



Kennett
After-School Association
www.afterthebell.org
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*The **Kennett After-School Association Strategic Plan for After-The-Bell, 2025-2030** was prepared and written by Kathleen Meehan Do on special assignment to the Kennett After-School Association. It was prepared under the supervision of Executive Director Paola Rosas.*



**Kennett
After School
Association**

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July 1, 2025

Dear Friends:

It is my great honor to lead this extraordinary organization during such a momentous time in our history. Last year, as we celebrated our 25th Anniversary, we were overwhelmed by the outpouring of community support and admiration for the work we do to keep middle school students safe and engaged after school. Now, it is our priority to look to the next quarter century and envision all that we can do to grow our program and provide even greater opportunities for the children we serve.

To begin this process, we have spent much of the last year working closely with the entire After-The-Bell Family to review the accomplishments we have realized and the challenges we have faced in an effort to provide a roadmap for the future. We are pleased to provide this *Strategic Plan for the Kennett After-School Association, 2025-2030* as the culmination of this effort.

To prepare this document, over the last several months, we convened a series of focus groups with the constituencies that are at the core of After-The-Bell. Focus Group sessions were held with After-The-Bell students, Kennett Middle School administrators and teachers, our adult volunteers, our high school volunteers, and our community partners. In addition, special meetings were held with our Board of Directors, our Finance Committee, and our After-The-Bell staff. All of these meetings were held to consider the ongoing benefits of the program, the challenges we have faced, and ways the program could be strengthened to meet these challenges while we consider all that is possible to achieve in the coming years.

It is noteworthy that while we have set out a series of goals for the next five years, it is our intention to meet each goal at the earliest possible date. Individual goals will be evaluated to determine the most feasible and beneficial timeline for implementation. At the end of each fiscal year, the board and organizational leadership will meet to review the status of the objectives and ensure that goals are being met in a timely manner.

We also want to emphasize that while the Strategic Plan is complete, the work will never end. We will always strive to identify opportunities to enhance our program and add activities that excite and motivate our students. We recognize our responsibility to the children in our care. In the words of one of our community partners, we will always make it a priority to “Ignite a spark!”

Thank you for your support.

Most sincerely,

Paola Rosas, Executive Director, Kennett After-School Association /After-The-Bell



Meeting the Needs of Adolescent Students, Today and Tomorrow

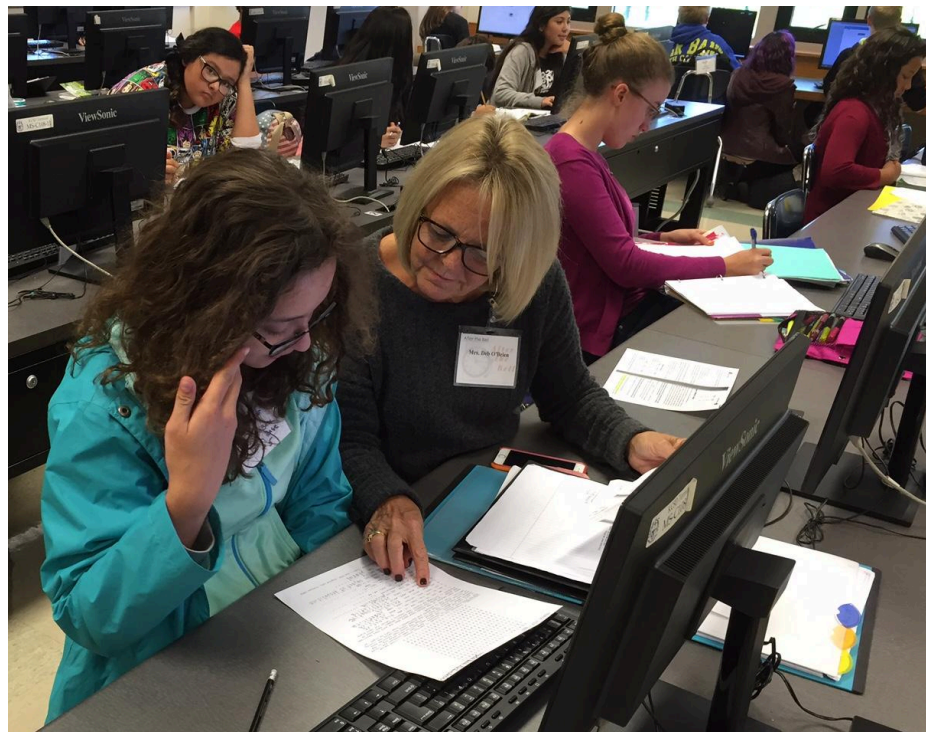
Objective:

Identify ways in which middle-school-aged students are impacted by changes in academic requirements, as well as by technical and sociological developments that may have a direct bearing on their lives and their future careers. Ensure that After-The-Bell evolves to provide relevant opportunities and address student needs in our changing world.

History:

Since its inception, After-The-Bell has always been more than just after-school care for middle school students. While keeping students safe is our top priority, we have focused considerable attention on helping students develop new interests and passions, introducing them to potential career trajectories, and providing safe havens for free expression and kinship with their peers.

After-The-Bell has historically had a strong working relationship with the Kennett Consolidated School District and particularly with Kennett Middle School, where the program is seen as a great benefit to the school and its students. While the program is privately funded and operates independently from the district, each Kennett Middle School principal who we have worked with over the years, including current Principal Jake Moore, has embraced After-The-Bell as vital to the success of





the school. After-The-Bell has been cited as a contributing factor in Kennett Middle School's designation as a *Pennsylvania School To Watch*.

Working with Kennett Middle School staff and partners in the area business community, we regularly evaluate the activities we offer and seek to add activities that are relevant and interesting to students at any given point in time. The types of activities we offer have also evolved over the years to meet the changing interests of our students and to incorporate breakthroughs in technology, science, and other areas that could prove beneficial to the future of our students. We have made it a priority to offer students activities that could help to inform their career trajectories, including computer coding, aviation, drone piloting, movie-making, and robotics. To address student interests, we have added activities in areas including animal care, floral arranging, seafood cooking, and pickleball. We even added an activity based on the popular video game, *Dungeons and Dragons*.

We are also mindful of student wellness and create activities that allow us to support the physical and emotional well-being of our students. We follow student interests as well as emerging career opportunities in order to create new activities that can be of most benefit to our students.

The following are examples of activities created in the last few years designed specifically to meet the changing needs of our students:

Drama Improv Club – This activity was created with the support of the Psychology Department at West Chester University to help us address issues related to stress and anxiety many of our students have been feeling since the pandemic. Created by a graduate student at the University, the activity teaches students problem-solving techniques and team-building as they act out a variety of scenarios.

LGBTQ+ Alliance Club – The activity welcomes all students to a supportive, safe and welcoming environment that encourages them to advocate for themselves and/or their friends in the LGBTQ+ community. Students learn about the importance of awareness, acceptance, and pride within their school and local community.

TCHS Career Tour – Students travel to the Technical College High School to learn about and/or be introduced to a plethora of interesting career choices. Students immerse themselves in different hands-on, career-related activities to essentially try them on for size. They also learn about what level of education or training is required, as well as the likely salary expectations for the various careers.

4-H Engineering Design Challenge – This fun and engaging project provides youth the opportunity to explore the field of engineering, inventions, simple machines, and the engineering design process. Youth have the opportunity to create a Rube Goldberg-style machine that can



be entered into the 4-H Engineering Design Challenge Showcase, as well as the Chester County 4-H Fair or the PA Farm Show.

School of Rock – Our students love making music! School of Rock representatives introduce our students to a variety of instruments each week and teach them the basics of these instruments so that they can play together in a band.

It is also noteworthy that After-The-Bell has always made it a priority to welcome students of all abilities into the program. Each year, between 15 and 20 percent of our students are identified with special needs. For those who face the most significant cognitive challenges, an aide is provided by the Chester County Intermediate Unit, similar to aides assigned to such students during the school day. For students with milder cognitive issues, we often assign high school volunteers to become one-on-one partners with these students.

It is our goal to ensure that all students have the opportunity to fully participate in After-The-Bell activities at a level that best suits their abilities. Parents of students with disabilities have expressed gratitude to the program for our efforts in support of special needs students. As one parent put it, “She felt included right away and feels welcome to participate at whatever level is appropriate for her.”

Issues and Challenges:

Our world is changing at a pace that can seem both frenetic and disorienting to young people. The following are examples of issues that are presenting challenges to current After-The-Bell students:

- Changing academic requirements, including an increased emphasis on testing, has proven to be a challenge for many students. During the middle school years, academic rigor increases significantly, particularly during the transition from 6th to 7th grade. Many students who had previously felt confident and well-prepared for the academic requirements of their respective grade levels suddenly find themselves feeling frustrated as they struggle to keep up.
- *Brain Base* is an activity that was designed 25 years ago as an outlet for students to complete their homework and receive one-on-one academic assistance from caring volunteers, most with academic backgrounds. Unfortunately, in recent years, there has been a consensus that *Brain Base* is no longer effective and beneficial to students. Many students have come to see assignment to the *Brain Base* activity as a form of punishment for sub-standard academic performance.



- Social media is now playing an oversized role in the way young people communicate with each other, which has led to issues of bullying, diminished self-image, the dissemination of false information, and isolation. It is increasingly vital that students have outlets where they can gather together in settings that are not rigorous, where they can bond over shared interests and where they can form friendships.
- Following the pandemic, we have become aware that many of our students are dealing with higher levels of stress and anxiety. There has been increasing interest in activities to help students deal with these issues. These include discussion groups, activities that allow students to act out their concerns, and activities where students can gather in a calm and quiet environment to complete projects and spend time with friends.
- The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) can be confusing and frightening to young people who fear they will fall prey to scams and sometimes have difficulty recognizing what is real and what is artificial.
- Student and volunteer satisfaction at After-The-Bell is an important component of our success. Gathering feedback about the experience of students and volunteers is important and surveys are taken at the conclusion of each cycle to solicit this information. The survey questions have not changed in more than 10 years and no other form of constituent input is regularly employed.

Goals for Meeting the Objective:

1. A subcommittee of the Board of Directors has been formed to determine how After-The-Bell can better support the academic performance of students in activities that combine educational goals with spirited, team-focused opportunities for learning in a fun environment. The subcommittee's first priority will be to rebrand and re-imagine *Brain Base* to create an activity (or activities) that combines the original academic goals of the program, including a focus on homework completion, with a greater emphasis on academic confidence-building and incentives for educational growth.
2. Either through the rebranded *Brain Base* or via the creation of additional activities, we will endeavor to provide students with outlets that focus on test-taking, the enhancement of executive functioning skills such as time management and organization and higher levels of support for struggling 7th-grade students.
3. We will explore additional opportunities for students to deal with stress and anxiety. We have already begun this by expanding our popular *Drama Improv Club* so that it is now offered three days per week instead of one. *Perler Beading* has become a beloved activity where students quietly work on beading projects and take pride in completed works of art. We will seek to identify activities that provide similar benefits to students.



4. As has been a priority for many years, we will work with the business community and other partners to determine changing career trends and develop activities that will introduce students to potential career trajectories in these fields. This may include activities that focus on artificial intelligence, gaming, environmental protection, and STEM.
5. During the focus group sessions, we asked participants about the types of activities they would like to see added or brought back into the program. We will consider adding many of these activities in the near future. They include the following:

Acting

Book Club

Capture The Flag

Cosmetology

Creative Writing

Intro to Sports

Kindness Club

Filmmaking

Off-Season Sports Training

Podcasting

Spikeball

Talent Show

Other suggested activities are as follows:

- ***Team-Building Activities*** – High school volunteers talked about the importance of team-building activities to teach students basic skills such as camaraderie and problem-solving. They provided great examples of activities where students must solve physical problems as a group. Such activities are great fun but are also wonderful learning experiences.
- ***Mini-Thon*** – Based on the Penn State model, students would choose a meaningful cause. Via the activity, they would engage fellow Kennett Middle School students and families to promote and raise money for this cause. We will seek to partner with Kennett High School Mini-Thon Club to create this activity.
- ***Life Skills*** – We will create an activity that helps students to understand vital skills that they will need later in life, including managing their money, using debit and credit cards, how to shop for a family, etc.
- ***Friends Home Biographies*** – An interest was expressed in enhancing our current program in which students visit the Friends Home in Kennett Square to play games and bond with the residents. Partnering with tech-savvy high school students and the Audio-Visual Department of the Kennett Library, students could interview residents and create video biographies to celebrate the lives of the residents.

6. We will explore the creation of grade-specific activities for 7th-grade students. They would be designed to assist students struggling with the more rigorous 7th-grade academic curriculum.
7. As we seek to enhance the activities we offer to address the stated objectives, we will remain committed to providing the activities students have enjoyed for years, including activities in sports, cooking, the arts, and community service. We will also continue our commitment to embrace students of all abilities and ensure they have a worthwhile experience in the program.
8. We will conduct a review of our student and volunteer end-of-cycle surveys and update both the question and comment sections so that we may elicit additional information that is relevant to the experiences of both students and volunteers in light of program changes and enhancements.
9. Additional avenues to obtain program feedback, beyond surveys of students and volunteers, will be considered. These may include annual focus groups that promote group discussion and the exchange of ideas regarding the future of the program. Such focus groups could take place in person or via Zoom.



Program Enhancements

Objective:

Conduct a comprehensive review of After-The-Bell's operational structure, administrative practices, and safety protocols to determine ways to best serve the students in our care.

History:



Technology and best practices for not-for-profit organizations have changed dramatically since After-The-Bell first opened its doors in 1999. When the program first began, it was run by two teachers at Kennett Middle School who used color-coded filing and crate systems to keep track of vital information, including enrolled students, assigned activities, volunteer activity facilitation, and activity supplies.

Within a couple of years, as outside professionals

were brought in and attempts were made to modernize the program administration, computerized files were created that allowed for improved tracking, but still left much to be desired. Through the years, each successive program director has reviewed our practices and found ways to insert personal preferences designed to enhance our efficiency.

These included the creation of a unique software program that allows us to track every level of student participation, from registration, through activity assignments, to daily attendance, and finally to the bus ride home each day. This software has proven to be a game changer, saving countless staff hours and ensuring that each student is accounted for every moment they are with us.

More recently, we upgraded to a new donor database software, which allows us to more easily solicit, track, and acknowledge donations.



The availability of texting communication systems has made it possible to keep in touch with the parents and guardians of our students in a way that is both faster and more efficient. We now employ mass texting to all parents in the event that there is a change in the program, such as a closure or early dismissal due to poor weather conditions. It is also available to us in the event of an emergency. In addition, the system allows us to reach out to individual parents to check on absent students or inform them of an issue involving a specific child.

Issues and Challenges:

The following are After-The-Bell operational issues that have been identified:

- Adequate staffing is an ongoing challenge in the program. The program is run by the director with the assistance of four to five part-time staffers. Due to difficulties in recruiting the ideal number of volunteers (to be described in the Volunteer Recruitment section of this plan), staff members who work while the program is in session are often called upon to facilitate or help out in activities normally run by volunteers. This has led to concerns about the number of responsibilities that fall to the director while the program is in session. In addition to overseeing the smooth operation of the program, she must also track attendance, reach out to parents of absent students, and assist students who wish to switch activities.
- The use of Kennett Middle School to house After-The-Bell and run the majority of our activities is an incredible gift from the school district and we would not exist without it. However, we are mindful of the fact that school needs will always be a priority. This is occasionally a problem when a room or facility that we have booked (such as the gymnasium) is not available with little or no warning due to a school event.
- Attendance is currently taken using low-tech methods. Sign-in sheets are placed on tables for students to write their names on when they first arrive in the program each day. In addition, before heading to their assigned activities, volunteers or staff members take handwritten attendance of each student present for the activity. There has been some discussion of digitizing this process, but we would need to determine the cost-benefit ratio. To digitize attendance, we would either need to place check-in computers in the cafeteria for students to sign in when they arrive, or we would need to create an app to be uploaded to students' phones for sign-in purposes.
- Each day, approximately 20% of our students take buses to off-site activities at the locations of some of our community partners. They are to return on buses prior to the program's 5 pm dismissal time. Unfortunately, due to transportation issues and other complications, these students often return late. We then need to hold the buses assigned to provide transportation home for all students until the activity buses have returned to the school.



- One of the problems identified most often by students and parents is how long it takes for students to return home on the bus at the end of each program day. The problem is due in part to the issue of students returning late from off-site activities described above. However, the most significant contributing factor is the size of the district. Depending on the total number of enrolled students in any given cycle, we have four or five buses available to take students home. The fewer the number of buses, the longer the length of the trips to cover all stops in the district.
- While bullying is not a significant problem in the program, any student who feels bullied and disrespected by their peers is a concern that must be addressed. In recent years, we have noticed that passive-aggressive forms of racism may have become more prevalent in the program. For example, if a new student is asked if he or she speaks English in a way that makes other students laugh, this can make the new student feel unwelcome and isolated. After-The-Bell has always had a Zero-Tolerance policy regarding bullying and students who commit overt acts of bullying are removed from the program. In the past year, we added a form that students can fill out anonymously to report instances of bullying. Unfortunately, students are not using the form. We believe they fear it may not be entirely confidential and that they could be singled out as snitches.

Goals for Meeting the Objective:

1. To address staffing issues and ensure that the director can oversee the day-to-day operation of the program without having to spend a significant amount of time on administrative tasks that could be handled by someone else, it is proposed that a part-time employee be hired as an Attendance Manager. (This position did exist some years ago.) The Attendance Manager will ensure that attendance is taken each day and prior to each activity, track student absences, and confirm absences with parents as necessary. In addition, this person will be available in a specific location in the cafeteria at the start of each program day to address student requests to change activities.
2. At the current time, we will not move to digitize our student check-in procedures. Staff members believe that taking attendance by hand ensures the most accurate count of students present at any given time. As this is a safety and security issue, we feel it is in the best interest of the program to maintain our current practice of taking attendance. It also provides staff members with a chance to get to know individual students better. Over the five-year span of this plan, we may review this decision. If the technology becomes available to ensure an accurate attendance record through the use of digital check-in, we could consider it.
3. To address the hectic environment that often exists at dismissal time, particularly when off-site activity buses return late, it is recommended that a staff group texting chat be formed, or that staffers be assigned walkie-talkies. Staffers would make sure that program leadership is immediately made aware of all issues that may hinder dismissal and the timely departure of buses to take students home. We also need to ensure that staffers are

staying in touch with volunteers traveling with students to off-site activities. If off-site buses are running late, off-site students will be asked to wait outside the activity so they may board the bus as soon as it arrives. Volunteers can also give staff members an estimate of the anticipated arrival time back at Kennett Middle School.

4. In regard to bullying or any form of unkind behavior between students, we will ensure that all volunteers are asked to keep an eye out for such behavior, including subtle forms of passive-aggressive racism. Such behavior would be reported to the Director by the volunteers. The Director will continue to talk to students on a regular basis to make sure they understand how their actions and comments can negatively impact their fellow students and that such behavior will not be tolerated. To make it more likely that students who have experienced or witnessed bullying use the new reporting form, we will make the form available through a link on our website, thus ensuring anonymity. We will rename the document the *Encouraging Respect Form*. Students and parents will be made aware of this link so that bullying behaviors can be reported and acted upon.



Volunteer Commitment

Objective:

Ensure that After-The-Bell has an appropriate number of dedicated volunteers to facilitate activities and assist with administrative functions. Enhance volunteer training sessions and materials to provide volunteers with the information and tools necessary for a successful and beneficial volunteer experience.

History:

Volunteers are the very heart of the After-The-Bell program. When our founders first envisioned an after-school program for middle school students, they believed that men and women from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences would be willing to donate their time to make a difference in the lives of these adolescent students. They were correct.



Since we first opened our doors in 1999, more than 1,000 people have volunteered to facilitate activities, chaperone students to off-site activities, assist with administrative tasks, plan special events, and participate as members of our Board of Directors. Most of our program volunteers join us for multiple sessions over multiple years. Each year, between 140 and 160 program volunteers join After-The-Bell and donate more than 3,500 volunteer hours to keep our students safe and engaged in meaningful activities. Approximately 40% of our volunteers are high school students from Kennett and Unionville high schools.

Volunteers represent a broad array of caring local residents. Many are retired, while others take time off from their jobs to donate time to the program. Over the years, our volunteers have included current and retired educators,

scientists, business professionals, culinary experts, information technology specialists, and representatives of community-based organizations. We are particularly gratified that many parents of students enrolled in the program choose to volunteer with us and then continue their commitment to ATB long after their students have graduated.



Volunteers also play a huge role in designing our activities. When a volunteer comes to us with a specific skill set or interest, we often create new activities based on that volunteer's expertise. This level of caring and commitment resonates with our students, and often the passion of the volunteer is passed on to the students who participate in the activity.

Issues and Challenges:

The recruitment and dedication of volunteers are essential to our success. Here are the major issues we face in regard to our volunteers:

- Probably the most significant challenge After-The-Bell faces each year is the recruitment of enough volunteers to meet our growing number of students. In recent years, we experienced a surge in our student participation rates. We are committed to ensuring that all students are welcome at After-The-Bell. Therefore, when we have more students, we must offer more activities, and we must make sure that we have enough volunteers to facilitate these activities.
- The pandemic dramatically altered our ability to recruit volunteers, particularly older men and women who may be at higher risk for illness. When we first reopened to in-person activities in the Fall of 2021, we had a particularly challenging time. Illness due to COVID-19 was still a major concern and, while we diligently adhered to all safety protocols including social distancing and masking, many of our older volunteers were unable to return. Notably, in 2021 we had lower-than-normal student participation rates, so we were able to make do with fewer volunteers. By 2022, however, our student participation rates soared, and while more volunteers returned to After-The-Bell, many others felt that they could no longer risk volunteering in the program. We currently have approximately 15% fewer volunteers than we did in 2019-20, prior to the pandemic.
- Another frequent issue we deal with is in regard to volunteers who let us know at the last minute that they cannot attend on any given day. This sends us scrambling to ensure coverage of the individual volunteer's assigned activity. When a staff member is not available, we sometimes have to cancel the activity. This requires us to reach out to students before the program begins to let them know the activity has been canceled so the decision can be made about whether they should attend After-The-Bell that day or take the regular bus home at 2:35 pm.
- The training of our volunteers is a priority that should receive greater focus. Currently, the director provides adult volunteers with information about the basics of the program in an informal session. This includes the program schedule, layout of the building, how to check in and take attendance, and where supplies are kept. For high school volunteers, the director provides training in a Zoom session to help the HS volunteers understand the basics of the program and what expectations we have for their service. Many volunteers have indicated that more formal training would be beneficial.



- In a related issue, some volunteers are concerned about students who do not seem to fully participate in activities, possibly due to social or emotional issues. They would like more information on the appropriate way to handle such situations.
- Student behavior is an occasional issue for volunteers. They say they rarely see overt acts of bullying or behavior that is harmful, but they worry about students who may not want to be in an activity and choose to disrupt the participation of others by “acting up.” Volunteers, particularly high school students, wonder at what level they should be disciplining students or ignoring such behavior.

Goals for Meeting the Objective:

1. An ongoing priority for the director and the board is the recruitment of additional volunteers. In our Community Partner Focus Group, we learned about Volgistics, which is software designed to match interested community volunteers with organizations that would align with their interests, abilities and availabilities. The software is currently being utilized by Longwood Gardens and the Kennett Library. We will look into the costs and benefits of purchasing the software and consider partnering with another organization to share costs.
2. We will also enhance our volunteer recruitment efforts by meeting with organizations and businesses that promote volunteerism among their members and employees. We are beginning the process of having board members attend PTO meetings for all of the schools in the Kennett Consolidated School District to let parents at every level know about our need for volunteers. We will also seek to strengthen our ties with area colleges, including West Chester and Lincoln universities, and we will have a greater presence at meetings for organizations such as the Kennett Newcomers Club. (Our director already regularly attends meetings of the Longwood Rotary.)
3. To ensure proper training of our volunteers, a Volunteer Handbook will be created. It will contain all information regarding program requirements and logistics. It will provide suggestions about how to engage with middle school students, identify and address inappropriate behavior, and provide information about how to support students who may be dealing with social or emotional issues. The Handbook will also include information about Kennett Middle School’s safety protocols to deal with any type of emergency situation.
4. We will reintroduce volunteer orientation sessions for both adult and high school volunteers. By doing one session for each group, this will cut down on the amount of time the director needs to provide orientation to volunteers on an individual basis. In addition to discussing the basic operation and requirements of After-The-Bell, these sessions can focus on how volunteers can handle issues such as inappropriate student behavior and emotional issues. The director may choose to lead High School Volunteer

Orientation sessions at both Kennett and Unionville high schools as a way to promote After-The-Bell and recruit additional volunteers.

5. In regard to the issue of volunteers who are unable to attend on a given day and let us know at the last minute, we will seek to recruit a Floater volunteer for every day that we are in session with the understanding that this volunteer would be available to facilitate activities when another volunteer is not available. The Volunteer Handbook will include information about absence notification in an effort to ensure that more advanced notice is given whenever possible.



Program Leadership

Objective:

Review the leadership structure of the Kennett After-School Association Board of Directors to ensure the appropriate division of organizational responsibilities and a smooth transition when board officers step down from leadership roles or conclude their service to the Association. Review the responsibilities of the Executive Director as they relate to board and program staff members to ensure that the director is best able to manage her time and provide the highest level of service to the organization and the students we serve.

History:

The KASA Board prides itself on being a hands-on, working board, as opposed to a corporate board. It has always included a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. It also includes an Assistant Treasurer who manages the organization's financial assets.

The board membership and structure have evolved over the years. In particular, the number and type of standing subcommittees of the board, and thus board member responsibilities, tend to change based on individual board members' backgrounds and availability to serve in board leadership positions.

Through the years, we have had a number of standing subcommittees, including Executive, Fundraising, Program, Finance, Information Technology, and Nominating committees. Of these subcommittees, only the Finance Committee is currently operational. In addition to the standing committees, we occasionally ask board members to serve on special committees to plan events or deal with a specific issue facing the program. As described in our *Meeting The Needs of Students* section of this report, we currently have a special Student Support Committee looking into how we can improve activities to provide greater academic support to students.





The position of Executive Director has also evolved as the program has grown, and professionals with different backgrounds and expertise have joined the organization. After initially being run by two Kennett Middle School teachers who juggled this responsibility with their teaching schedules, we turned to a committed local professional who had been involved with the program's founding. As the scope of the program expanded, additional staff were brought in to assist in various aspects of the program.

Over time, we changed the structure to employ an Executive Director who reported directly to the Board of Directors and was responsible for the overall operation of the organization, including managing staff, raising funds, and representing After-The-Bell in the community. In addition, we employed a Program Director who handled the day-to-day operations of After-The-Bell, including the planning and implementation of activities, the registration of students, the recruitment of volunteers, and ensuring the safety of all students and volunteers.

Seven years ago, this structure changed again to accommodate a leadership transition. We currently employ an Executive Director who also runs the program, manages staff, and represents the program in the community. We utilize an outside contractor to prepare all grant-related materials and assist the director with a wide variety of tasks, such as general fundraising, the preparation of written materials, marketing, maintaining the budget, acknowledging contributions, and planning events. Board members have indicated that they find the current structure to be highly efficient and beneficial to the program.

Issues and Challenges:

The following are key issues related to the leadership of the Kennett After-School Association Board of Directors and the Executive Director overseeing the After-The-Bell program:

- When new board members are recruited, many are new to the organization and, as such, do not always have a strong understanding of the operational structure of the program and the expectations of board members.
- Our board is largely made up of caring and hardworking individuals who are committed to the success of the program. However, the board makeup is not reflective of the population of students we serve. While almost 50% of our student population is Hispanic, only one of our current board members shares this ethnicity. It is noteworthy, however, that our current executive director is Hispanic. Her ability to speak Spanish and relate to issues that many of our immigrant students experience has proven to be a great benefit to the program.
- The lack of Fundraising and Program committees has put a greater burden on the executive director. In regard to fundraising, the director ends up becoming the de facto head of the planning committee for our annual fundraiser, juggling a large number of event-related responsibilities while winding down the winter cycle of the program and preparing for the spring cycle. Without a Program Committee, the director has little



assistance in the design and planning of the wide variety of activities we offer each cycle. And it falls to her to recruit enough volunteers for all of the planned activities.

- The President of the Board of Directors has served in this position since 2010. He is an extremely dedicated president who works countless hours with both the board and the staff to ensure the smooth operation of the program and to deal with problems as they arise. There is currently no succession plan to select a new president when he chooses to step down.
- The Bylaws of the Kennett After-School Association provide mandates and guidelines for board and program leadership. These bylaws were last updated in 2010 and contain information that is no longer current or relevant to the program.

Goals for Meeting the Objective:

1. To meet many of the objectives included in this plan—and to determine additional steps that can be taken over the next five years to ensure the long-term viability and relevance of After-The-Bell—the Board of Directors will conduct an Organizational Governance Review.

The Review will provide the opportunity for a methodical appraisal of the key facets of the Kennett After-School Association governance and operational procedures. The review will be undertaken with an eye toward further enhancements and services that will incorporate best practices for not-for-profit organizations and a renewed commitment to meet the needs of adolescent students in the coming years.

Specific areas targeted for further review include Organizational Leadership, Financial Management, and Operational Procedures. Board members will be assigned to lead the reviews in the specific areas and to bring back recommendations in such areas as board recruitment and responsibilities, board leadership succession, long-term financial planning, and operational policies and procedures of the program. The Review will also provide for a comprehensive analysis and revision of the organization's By-Laws and the Board of Directors' Manual.

2. A more formalized process will be created for the orientation of new and potential members of the KASA Board of Directors. All new and existing board members will be provided with a copy of the updated Board Manual, which will outline all board responsibilities and provide detailed information about organizational and program operations. Board members who are new to the organization will be encouraged to volunteer or spend time in the program while we are in session to better understand the structure and mission of After-The-Bell. We will continue to require that all new board members prepare profiles outlining their backgrounds and relevant experience.
3. We will make it a priority to re-establish a Fundraising Committee. The primary responsibility of the Fundraising Committee will be to plan and execute the annual spring



fundraiser. Efforts should be taken to recruit a community member with fundraising experience to join the board and to chair this committee. The fundraising committee can also help plan smaller fundraisers such as Dine & Donate and Giving Tuesday events.

4. A Program Committee will also be re-established. The focus of this committee is to regularly review After-The-Bell activities to determine their popularity and relevance to our students. As part of this focus, Program Committee members will assist with volunteer recruitment aligned to specific activities. So, for example, if a committee member is aware of a person in the community who has a strong background in graphic arts, the member might try to recruit this person to facilitate a graphic arts activity at After-The-Bell.
5. The executive director will work closely with both of these committees and will work with the board to make final fundraising and program decisions. While the chairs of both the Fundraising and Program committees should be board members, other committee members do not need to serve on the board. ATB parents, volunteers, and other community members who have an interest or expertise in these areas will be recruited to serve on these committees.
6. As noted in the Organizational Governance Review plan, we will continue our efforts to recruit new members to our Board of Directors, specifically seeking to bring in more ethnically diverse candidates and those with expertise in key areas that will be beneficial to After-The-Bell.
7. The board will make it a priority to consider leadership succession as part of the Review. Discussions will take place to determine if an existing board member has the interest and necessary abilities to lead the organization in the future. If that is not the case, efforts will be made to identify and recruit new board members who may be suited for the leadership role. The board will also consider elevating the position of Vice President to become the expected successor to the president at the appropriate time.

Community Connections

Objective:

Strengthen and expand our relationships with businesses, organizations, and foundations in Southern Chester County.

History:

After-The-Bell is honored to have the support and friendship of a wide variety of community partners in the Greater Kennett Square area. These include businesses and organizations that host our students at off-site activities, encourage their employees to volunteer in the program, and provide other forms of in-kind support. Our community partners also include many organizations, foundations, and businesses that provide financial support for the program through the award of grants and other donations.



Without question, the community partner that represents the soul of After-The-Bell is the Episcopal Church of the Advent in Kennett Square. It was three members of the church—Denise & John Wood and Marshall Newton—who founded After-The-Bell in 1998. They conducted a listening study to identify challenges local residents faced in the Kennett area, and one of the most significant challenges they learned about was the problem of adolescent students who were home alone after school, before their parents came back from

work. Working with many caring members of the church, they created After-The-Bell as a safe haven for middle school students to feel secure, have fun, and maybe learn something at the same time.

This spirit of compassion and kinship instilled in the organization by the Church of the Advent has permeated the dozens of partnerships we have formed with other institutions over the years.



In our most recent program year, we maintained partnerships with 32 business and community-based organizations that provided in-kind assistance to After-The-Bell and 35 organizations that donated funds in support of the program.

Issues and Challenges:

The following are issues related to community partners that provide activities for After-The-Bell students:

- As will be described in the Financial Preparedness section of this plan, transportation to off-site activities has become a challenge in the last few years due to bus driver shortages. This has required us to limit the number of off-site activities to only those locations within the boundaries of the Kennett Consolidated School District. This means that some meaningful opportunities we have provided students in the past that are located outside the district in Pennsylvania and Delaware are not currently available.
- In addition, the lack of drivers has forced us to consolidate some of our activity runs with the regular after-school buses. This means that students often arrive late and have less time to participate in their activities.
- While most off-site activities are offered to our students at no cost, some do require a fee to be paid to cover the cost of the staff and services provided during the activity. Depending on the activity, these fees can sometimes run several hundred dollars per cycle. We, therefore, must weigh the value of the activity against the cost, and we have occasionally had to forgo opportunities due to budget constraints.

The following issue is related to community partners that provide grants and other financial assistance in support of After-The-Bell:

- After-The-Bell's number one funding need is for general operating expenses. These expenses include staff salaries, transportation, activity fees, supplies, administrative costs, and food for students and volunteers. Over the years, a number of granters who had previously provided unrestricted grants that could be used in support of general operating costs have switched their priorities. Such granters now require that grant applications be submitted for targeted expenses that often do not include general operating costs. While the program does occasionally have the need for funds to cover specific expenses, such as the creation of a new website, the great majority of our expenses are recurring and may not meet the granters' definition of a targeted expense. This also creates challenges because it limits funding for the general expenses needed to run the program.

Goals for Meeting the Objective:

1. The Financial Preparedness section of this report will describe efforts we will undertake to address issues related to the transportation of students to off-site activities. We recognize that our community partners devote a significant amount of time and expertise to welcoming our students to their facilities, providing them with beneficial and unforgettable learning experiences. We will honor their efforts by ensuring that transportation issues are resolved so that students will arrive on time in order to fully enjoy the benefits of these activities.
2. Efforts will be made to encourage granting and funding organizations to conduct site visits at After-The-Bell. (Prior to the pandemic, site visits were a regular occurrence at the program.) During such visits, we will seek to help funders better understand the vital importance of general operating funds to the success of our program. They will be able to see how such funds provide the supplies, food, transportation, and supervision that are necessary to ensure a safe and rewarding experience for our students.
3. We will enhance our relationship with existing community partners through a commitment to a higher level of communication, ensuring that we recognize and celebrate their efforts to provide a rewarding experience for our students. As part of this commitment, representatives from the program will endeavor to visit each community partner while the students are present to better understand the opportunities these partners provide. They will take photographs and include a description of the off-site activities in our social media and marketing materials.
4. The leadership of After-The-Bell will seek to identify new opportunities for community partnerships by expanding our presence at local events and organizational gatherings that provide opportunities for collaboration and mutually beneficial relationships.



Financial Preparedness

Objective:

To ensure the long-term financial solvency of the After-The-Bell program while maintaining our commitment to high-quality activities and services for future generations of ATB students.

History:

When the Kennett After-School Association was founded in 1998, a dedicated effort was made to raise funds beyond the initial operational cost of the After-The-Bell program. This was done to create a reserve fund that would be available to the program during economic downturns or in other times of need. Our original Finance Chair, Aaron Martin, set a goal of establishing a reserve fund large enough to cover two years of total program operating expenses. Through robust fundraising and careful financial management, we have exceeded this goal.

Each year, if we fall short of our cash on hand to pay expenses, we withdraw funds from the reserve account to cover these costs. Over the last three years, we have withdrawn approximately \$40,000 per year to cover these shortfalls. At the end of those fiscal years in which we experience a surplus, money is then returned to the reserve account.

Other than covering shortfalls, funds from the reserves have almost never been used for program expenditures. The only exception occurred when After-The-Bell first moved to Landenberg in 2002 as part of the relocation of Kennett Middle School. The new location, approximately five miles from downtown Kennett Square, made it necessary to provide transportation home for students each day. Initially, the cost of this transportation was paid through the reserve account. In later years, we were able to increase our fundraising efforts to cover these costs.





Issues and Challenges:

The Kennett After-School Association is currently in a strong financial position that bodes well for the long-term solvency of the program. However, on a year-to-year basis, we do address financial challenges, including the following:

- Year-end deficits have occurred in approximately half the years that we have been in operation. Fortunately, most are small and equal to less than 10% of our total budget. Deficits occur due to a number of factors, including increases in our student population and higher costs for required expenses such as personnel, transportation, food, and activity fees.
- We are grateful to the many foundations and businesses that support us with grants and other large donations. However, with the large number of worthwhile not-for-profit organizations in southern Chester County, we have experienced a decrease in funding from some of these supporters over the last few years as they strive to meet the needs of multiple organizations.
- At the current time, many organizations that receive funding via federal grants are facing the possible loss of all or a portion of their federal funding due to newly announced national mandates. Fortunately, After-The-Bell does not receive federal funding. It was the policy of our founders that there would be no costs to students or taxpayers for the services we provide. Over the years, our Boards of Directors have chosen to continue this policy. As such, all of our funding comes from private sources. While After-The-Bell will not be directly impacted by the potential loss of federal funding, we recognize that many other not-for-profit organizations in the area are likely to be impacted. As a result, private funders may be asked to provide larger awards to affected organizations, potentially reducing the amount that may have previously been awarded to non-affected organizations like After-The-Bell.
- Recently, we identified a specific challenge that will likely impact our budget. The availability of transportation is vital to our success. We contract with a local bus company to bring students home at the end of each program day, as well as to take students to off-site activities at the locations of some of our community partners. Since the end of the pandemic, the bus company we contract with has been dealing with significant bus driver shortages, a situation that appears to be happening nationwide. As a result, we have had to greatly curtail the number and type of off-site activities we are able to provide. Our ability to offer students a wide range of meaningful activities at locations that provide opportunities in genres including STEM and the arts has long been a centerpiece of After-The-Bell. We are committed to addressing this issue so that we can once again provide our students with all of the robust activities our community partners have to offer. While we are researching options at this time, we are considering utilizing the

services of a different transportation company. This would increase our transportation costs.

Goals for Meeting the Objective:

1. The Finance Committee has considered the size of our reserve fund in relation to the current financial needs of the program. While we will continue to prioritize judicious spending practices and the maintenance of a balance in the reserve fund equivalent to at least two years of program operating expenses, the decision has been made to carefully consider needs that can benefit the program that might not be covered via annual revenues. When it is determined that such a need will benefit our students and enhance After-The-Bell, the necessary funds will be transferred from the reserve fund to cover the expenditure. Off-site transportation is an example of a need that may fit this description.
2. After-The-Bell is a proud member of the community of caring in the Kennett Square area. While we will not be impacted by a potential loss of federal funding, we recognize that some of our partner agencies may be facing this challenge in the near future. Our executive director and other members of the KASA-ATB leadership will participate in community-wide efforts to support any impacted agencies through the sharing of information, resources, and friendship.



Looking toward The Future

A message from Kennett After-School Association President Dr. Rudolph Karkosak:

On behalf of the Kennett After-School Association Board of Directors, I am pleased to provide this Strategic Plan that will help our organization to make important decisions about the future of After-The-Bell.

This has been a beneficial, collaborative process that enabled us to take an in-depth look at all of the facets of After-The-Bell so that we may determine the best path forward for this program that has served more than 7,500 adolescent students in the last quarter century.



I would like to take this time to thank all of the community members who provided honest feedback and invaluable guidance on a great number of issues related to the program during the last year. We were pleased and honored to have the input of our volunteers, parents, Kennett Middle School administrators and teachers, and many of our community partners who attended focus groups and shared their candid and constructive thoughts about After-The-Bell. Community

partners who graciously assisted in this effort included representatives from the Applestone Foundation, the Episcopal Church of the Advent, Friends Home of Kennett, Kennett Area Community Services (KACS), Kennett Library, Kennett Rotary, Kennett Run Charities, Kennett Trails Alliance, and the Longwood Rotary Foundation.

I am also grateful to my fellow board members, the ATB staff, and members of our Finance Committee, who all took the time to engage with us in a comprehensive review of every element

of the program, from the overarching mission of After-The-Bell to the minutia of running the program and keeping hundreds of students safe and engaged every day.

In particular, I thank our students for their forthright and plainspoken insights. Clearly, they were pleased to have a voice in the future of After-The-Bell, and they used the opportunity to let us know what they liked about the program ... and what we could do better. This is why I love middle school kids so much!

Finally, thank you to our Executive Director, Paola Rosas, and our Grant Coordinator & Document Writer, Kathleen Meehan Do, for their efforts to reach out to our constituents, listen to what they had to say, and compile this constructive blueprint that will lead us into the next quarter century of After-The-Bell.

