

Getting \$50 Million More for California After-school Programs Took Group 3 Years of Lobbying

LOS ANGELES – California after-school programs statewide were able to breathe a small sigh of relief this year after Gov. Jerry Brown set aside an extra \$50 million for them from the general budget.

Getting [SB 78](#) passed took three years of lobbying by a statewide coalition called [California Afterschool Advocacy Alliance](#) that included a local coalition made up of the [Los Angeles Unified School District](#) board, the [Los Angeles City Council](#), the [Los Angeles Police Department](#) and more than 10 after-school programs like [Beyond the Bell](#), [After School All Stars](#) and [LA's BEST](#).

“Part of the success is just not giving up, and continuing to raise the issue with elected officials so they understand that this is a real issue, there’s really something at stake,” said CEO Eric Gurna of LA’s BEST, one of the local coalition leaders.

The
**Los Angeles
Metro
Bureau**



Since 2002, California’s after-school programs have operated on \$7.50 per child per day. With inflation and minimum wage

increases, it got harder to keep the programs running. But now those programs are getting an extra 70 cents per child per day.

Before the new funding passed, LA's BEST faced a \$1 million deficit for years to come, Gurna said. It was unsustainable, irresponsible, and they couldn't cut their way out of it, he said. So, they started contacting organizations that could help.

"The only reason they were coming together was because we asked them repeatedly," Gurna said. "It was the deputy mayor, the local superintendent, the lobbyists from the school district and LA's BEST all coming together. It shows it's an issue of importance to the whole community, not just after-school programs advocating for funding."

He said the key to success was building a coalition of groups in Los Angeles that might normally compete for grants and funding but were willing to make formal declarations of support for an important issue.

And also California state Sen. Connie Leyva, a Democrat, who wrote the bill and rallied support.

"I didn't realize they hadn't had an increase in 10 years and that was just unbelievable to me and made me want to author it," Leyva said in an interview. "Kids will find something to do if they don't have an after-school program and it will be something we don't want them to be doing."

The bill received bipartisan support. The turning point came when statewide coalition lobbyists flew two elementary school girls out to testify and explain why their after-school program was so important to them.

"Legislation seems nebulous but when organizations can bring hard evidence and stories, that makes all the difference in the world," Leyva said.

But the support wasn't unanimous. The [California Teachers Association](#) opposed the bill. It was not against more funding for after-school programs, said CTA media consultant Frank Wells, but it was concerned about the funding source.

The money came from [Proposition 98](#), which requires a minimum percentage of the state budget to be devoted to K-12 education. Allotting \$50 million for after-school programs means \$50 million less for school services, supplies and employee salaries and benefits.

"That reduces money available to other programs coming from K-12 curriculum. It's devoted specifically to that so it should be funded," Wells said.

The bill originally proposed allocating \$100 million to after-school programs, but, Gurna explained, \$50 million is still a victory.

"As a coalition we took it to the finish line, but we'd been running for a long time," he said.

For Leyva, a \$50 million victory doesn't mark the end of the fight.

"This was a first attempt, this will certainly not be the last attempt. We have a long way to go."

LA's BEST serves 25,000 children in the Unified School District. They play sports, conduct science experiments, eat supper daily and go on field trips. Studies from the University of California at Los Angeles say the program improves test scores in middle school, and decreases dropout and juvenile crime rates.

Other organizations in the Los Angeles coalition were [Woodcraft Rangers](#), [Think Together](#), [A World Fit for Kids](#), [arc](#), [EduCare Foundation](#), [TEAM PRIME TIME](#), [STAR](#) and the [LA Conservation Corps](#).

This story has been updated.

Hello. The national Knight Foundation and the Democracy Fund like our work so much that they have agreed to match donations of up to \$1,000 per person. They will spend up to \$28,000 through the end of December.

So this would be an especially good time to donate to the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange. Any money you give us up to \$1,000 will be doubled.

Our independent journalism on the juvenile justice system takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. But we believe it's crucial – and we think you agree.

Thanks for listening.

[Contribute Now](#)