

## Fast 5 Friday

*December 2021*

### Square Dancing and Afterschool Advocacy...What Could Go Wrong?

I've got my work cut out for me with that title right. If you are one of the few people reading this, it is likely we saw each other at the recent MOSAC2 conference. What a great event of learning and fun. I made the comment to Cindy that I must be getting old because each year it seems I know fewer and fewer people there. For the young folks reading this you are probably wondering why I am talking about square dancing and how it relates to afterschool advocacy. Well it doesn't but that does not mean we can't take a lesson from it.

For those that don't know, square dancing is like line dancing except you have a partner, dance in a square formation, a DJ calls out the various dance moves, and most importantly the wearing of over-the-top country western attire. Now then I know all of this because I had relatives that were certified professionals in this field and as a child I attended several of their events (I told nobody at school about this). Anyway here's the deal with square dancing: if you are in, you are all in. Nobody in the history of square dancing is on the fence about participating. You are in or you are not in. Now for the record there is nothing bad about the practice. Practitioners are getting exercise, having fun, and doing so in a safe manner. At one point square dancing was required curriculum in PE in my school district...seriously. Now then, if square dancing had enough political influence to infiltrate school district curriculum how in the world does it seem like our afterschool programs are on the outside looking in (despite all the good they do)?

While MOSAC2 was a great conference, I heard from some programs some alarming things particularly around competition for staff. In some instances it's as if our programs (and their leaders) are literally having to dance with their hands behind their back and blindfolded. My suggestion: think of the sustainability plan of square dancing...and do the opposite. What I mean is square dancing is great it never evolved in a way to interest future generations. While I'm sure it still has appeal the appeal is limited in scope.

While MOSAC2 had great attendance and sessions the thing that caught my eye was the diverse population of afterschool professionals. You had college aged professionals sitting at the same table as me the grumpy old man. There was a genuine excitement in the air that has to be harnessed and used as motivation for our field. We all need to be sharing our experiences whether we are front line staff or directors, most importantly we need to share our victories because we can all learn from one another.

In closing, I encourage everyone to attend the quarterly MASN meetings, director's meetings, and all other meetings. They will find a spot for you to land with the quarterly meetings. I'm so old I started the sustainability committee that doesn't even exist anymore.

Finally, square dancing is comparable to afterschool programs. Both are safe, fun (in doses) and enriching learning opportunities. We as a movement must continue to evolve and try new things so we do not suffer the same fate of my relative's favorite pastime.

*James Reed*