

# Fast 5 Friday

*January 2022*

A is for Educate, and Advocate

The year is new; school is back in session, and judging by payment requests to our office I am guessing programming is strolling right along. If you are one of the five people reading this you know how fantastic of a community afterschool is. We support each other, we educate the students and families that need it the most, we aspire to train our professionals at the highest level, and most importantly we do it year around.

Now we know this but it would appear that we are the only ones that do. I've had many instances lately one of which took place recently where our work was called "childcare" I quickly corrected the individual and proceeded to point out if we are "childcare" early childhood should be renamed "babysitting". As you can imagine that did not sit well with anyone but the point was made.

In recent years we have made great strides in the afterschool profession but we can't let up. I know programs at school districts who's own superintendent has no idea what's going on in the building when the school day ends. The same superintendent signs their name to a rather lengthy document stating they are ultimately responsible for cooperating with federal fiscal guidance. This has and must change!

Seeing new faces on the MASN directors call is a great start even if the person or stakeholder doesn't have a program of their own they at least learn the lingo (which can be a dangerous thing): I can't speak for Cindy but if I had a dollar for every time someone found out I work with grants that I could write and secure any type of grant for them I would be rich. Literally New Year's Eve I was approached by an engineer (I think) to write a grant for a particle accelerator. I said "look I can give you guidance but that's it I know nothing about the field". He just knew I had a background in grants and that's all it took. People see our programs in action and throw out "childcare" and "babysitting". Instead of getting mad (like I do) that's our opportunity to educate then hopefully the person will advocate for us.

Very recently my newlywed wife had an opportunity to apply for a local grant for funds towards middle school special needs kids. She asked for advice (because apparently I'm the end-all of grant writing). I said put together your proposal and I'll take a look at it. So she sends it to me one night and it's completely blank. I point this out, she counters with one of the questions had "afterschool" in it so I should just be able to write it. Then she says "isn't this what you do for your programs"? After picking my jaw up off my floor I realized I needed to do a much better job educating my wife on what it is I do vs. what it is you guys do. Speaking of which after attending a recent afterschool event, she wanted to know what her district could do to start an afterschool program (pretty neat).

We can't take for granted the people we know the most know what we do for kids, families and communities. I have literally no business writing anything associated with teaching middle school Special Ed. kids any more than particle acceleration, but that's people's perception because: they don't come to our meetings, get our trainings, and most importantly see physically what we do.

I challenge you in the new-year to educate one person on what afterschool....real afterschool is. If all six of us do this we can double our advocacy and education. Have a great year!