

The Third Space of Learning
by Lemar Marshall

This piece is written from the great Palmetto state known as South Carolina where I am attending a week long Afterschool Policy Fellowship Program, named after three long term education leaders: Bill White the long term leader of the CS Mott Foundation (and the Fellows are funded by them); former US Secretary of Education and Governor Dick Riley; and Dr. Terry Peterson.

I am not only pleased to be back in the state where I grew up, but I am extraordinarily privileged to be here studying afterschool policies and initiatives. To be sure, this week has been incredibly informative, affirming even more regarding the afterschool program we recently launched in Hammond.

Our host leader is Dr. Terry Peterson, former chief education advisor for Mr. Richard Riley when he was Governor of South Carolina and Secretary of Education under the Clinton Administration. Affectionately known as “Mr. Afterschool,” Dr. Peterson has held many titles, including teacher, school administrator, Peace Corp worker, author, community organizer, and policymaker. In South Carolina he has worked on numerous education initiatives, including holding a position as director of the Afterschool and Community Learning Network. Moreover, on a national scale he has been instrumental in developing the 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

In brief, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers has spread both nationally and internationally in its effort to promote the important possibilities of after school programs.

With grassroots involvement, the 21st Century afterschool networks have stretched to nearly all 50 states. With its main goal to provide school aged youngsters a place to go after school in which a nurturing environment is provided to particularly assist in their academic and intellectual growth, Dr. Peterson astutely characterizes this as the “third space of learning.” With collective community support, this third space is that critical link between the home and the school.

Listening to Dr. Peterson passionately communicate the concrete impact afterschool programs have had on communities all over the country clearly radiated an inspirational message to all the attending participants. Indeed, since 1978 he has been a tireless advocate for afterschool initiatives, knowing they are changing the lives of individual children, families, and communities all over the country. Without doubt, what I have heard thus far has particularly confirmed what we have started in Hammond.

As the rest of the week unfolds here, I most certainly will learn more regarding funding possibilities, how to strategize with state legislators in order to more fully capture their interest in tapping into and expanding the 21st Century program, and how to more fully promote the idea that this “third space” can have a significant impact on moving education forward in the Pelican State.

Extremely grateful to all who have committed their hard-working efforts to get our afterschool program off the ground in Hammond, I aim to share more what I have learned here when I return back home.

Sincerely,
Lemar Marshall