



4 ways to spark progress
in your
after school program
for the new year



Happy new year!

It's a new year. [Thank goodness.]

It's been a rough go for a while, but we must soldier on.

Between our hope for better days ahead and our resourceful determination, we will contribute to a better future. If not only for our students, but for ourselves.

In the tradition of new year's resolutions, I put together this quick guide with practical, implementable strategies for sparking positive and helpful changes in your afterschool program. Not just for your students, but you as well.

You have the power to change your students' lives. You just need some help.



Leslie McConnell



It's a new year. A time of new beginnings, resolutions to do better, and make more progress.

What are you hoping to accomplish this year?

If you're anything like me, you want to get more done and make good things happen. And set aside a little more time and energy for yourself.

If we have learned anything over the past 2 years, it is that things will change. Frequently. Unexpectedly. And not always in the direction we want.

But...what we've also learned is that we can – and will – weather the storm that comes our way. We are more resilient than we give ourselves credit for. We are more resourceful than we thought. **We will get it done.** We will be there for our kids.

But we also need to be realistic.

While there might be a light at the end of the tunnel, it is still a looooooonng tunnel.

So if we want to set ourselves up for success, we need to be deliberate about how we step into 2022.

Either we are in control or we will be controlled.

That's why I put together my top 4 ways to spark progress in your afterschool program in a new guide for the new year. To help you get the year started off right.

This free guide will help you, if:

- ✓ You operate, run, manage, coordinate, or own an afterschool program
- ✓ You aren't sure how to get started making progress
- ✓ You have felt overwhelmed by ALL THE THINGS you have to do and the lack of time to do them
- ✓ You want to start the year off in a positive, proactive, and productive way

If this sounds like you, read on!



#1. Get clear about what you want to accomplish this year.

This is the hardest and most critical part of the process.

If you don't make a decision about what you actually want to accomplish, it is impossible to achieve it. You can't map out a plan to get somewhere if you don't know where you're going. [Check out this blog post [3 reasons we don't achieve goals – and what to do about them.](#)]

What this is, though, is entirely up to you. And it is only as ambitious as you make it. This is up to you. Your goals can be as small or as large as you want them to be.

I'm a fan of small goals. Don't feel like you have to tackle the world. Sometimes having a few small goals that you knock out of the park is better than one big goal. Those 'small' goals help you gain traction and momentum to tackle the bigger stuff later. You can always add more and bigger goals after you have some wins in your pocket!

Ideally, you might have one or two large(ish) goals, with a few smaller objectives under each one that build toward the larger goal. Breaking down larger accomplishments into smaller chunks or milestones makes larger targets more manageable and attainable.

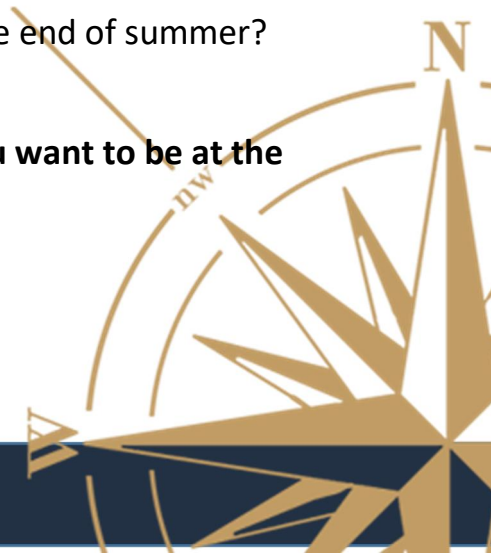
So how do you decide what you want to accomplish?

Here are some prompts to get you thinking.

Where do you want to be at the end of the school year? At the end of summer?
By the end of the year?

The biggest question you need to answer here is **where do you want to be at the end?** [Whenever "the end" might be for you.]

What do you want the program to look like?



What new needs have emerged? What problems or challenges are you seeing in your students, staff, or families?

Priorities. If you had to choose ONE THING and only one thing to focus on right now, what would that be? Then, what one or two actions would give you a solid return on your time and energy investment?

What would be the most life changing?

What have you been putting off most or longest? Sometimes the fear or avoidance of a thing is far worse than the thing itself. If there is something you have put off for far too long, perhaps now is the time to get it done so you can stop wasting your mental energy on it and free yourself up for something else.

Identify your biggest pain points. What causes you the most grief? What do you hate doing the most? Identify ways that you can improve or eliminate these things so they don't drag you down.

Identify some easy wins. Pick your low-hanging fruit. What can you get done quickly and easily or with little resistance?

Make yourself two lists: one for things to do (a task list) and the other for accomplishments (a goal list). And then set yourself up for making progress on both. Put even your smallest tasks on your to-do list, as these small 'I need to remember to _____' items **take up big mental real estate**. Plus, it feels good to do them and then cross them off your list!

Backmap your goals by identifying what you need to do in the next month, next three months, next six months, and so on, to reach the target.

#2: Take stock of your current program - what's working, what isn't.

Cut the crap.

If something isn't working, stop doing it. Especially if you're doing it 'just because that's how it's always been done.'



Sometimes you need to let go in order to move on.

This is an opportunity to look at your whole program – WHAT you do, HOW you do it, and WHO does it – and figure out where you can get a bigger return on investment.

What is the least successful aspect of your program?

What expenses can you cut without any repercussions?

What processes or procedures are the most cumbersome?

Eliminate these things, scale them back, or make them more manageable.

On the flipside, what is really working well? Where are you seeing the most success? The greatest participant gains? What do students and families like the best? Talk to your team about what they see and talk to parents and students about what program elements are the most impactful or meaningful to them.

What is most aligned to your needs, your students' or families' needs, or your agency's mission?

KEEP doing these things. You don't want to eliminate or abandon what's working for you.

Think about how you can preserve, strengthen, and expand on your success while minimizing or eliminating what's holding you back.

#3. Get help.

You are not the only one responsible for the success and operations of your afterschool program.

You likely have staff, partners, or others who you can lean on to get things done, even if you have not called on them much in the past.



I know that **it is hard to ask for help**. I'm a recovering DIY-er myself. But if you want to make as much progress as you can, you need to shed some of the work weight to others.



Also, involving your team and partners is important for them to feel invested in the progress.

If you're going to change the world, you'll need some help.

If you're going to have a successful program, all the parts need to be aligned and all the people need to be working together toward the same result.

Once a year, preferably in January when everyone is in a similar mindset, I suggest having a 'state of the union' meeting with your key leaders. Bring everyone together, supply some nice breakfast treats or lunch, and have a heart-to-heart discussion about where things have been and where you're headed as a program and as a team. Allow the team to contribute to the solution. You never know the great insights and solutions they might offer!

And don't forget to share where you need help. People LOVE to be helpful.

Then, let them own their ideas.

Did someone have a great idea for recruitment? Let them design the campaign.



Did someone think they could streamline a protocol that's been giving you grief? Let them map out a new process.

Did a lead teacher find a new training that would be helpful? Let them research it and explore who would be a best fit for it.

In short...don't see their ideas and contributions as more work for you. Let them do the leg work and then periodically check in with you about their progress. Draw on and take advantage of the resources available to you. Let your team be your team.

Include them in the goal setting and tracking progress, be clear about what you want and where you want to go, and make it everyone's business to get there. And then celebrate together when you arrive!

#4. Track your progress.

What gets measured gets managed.

Figure out your best way to track your progress and manage your task list. Maybe you use a journal. Or a simple notebook. Or sticky notes. Or a Google Doc.

Whatever you choose, you need to refresh and revisit your goals, targets, or desired accomplishments on a regular basis. It is SO EASY to get caught up in and sidetracked by the daily grind and putting out fires.

Make a point to revisit your desired accomplishments regularly and make notes about your progress if you aren't able to complete it at one time.

Keep your desired accomplishments somewhere that you can see them every day. Use them as a daily reminder of what you're working toward.



I'm here to help!

There is a lot here. I get it. You won't be able to do all the things right away. It will take some time.

But you do need to ***do something***. Take action. Start slow. Even if you do just a few of the things I've suggested, you'll be on your way to a more impactful program. But you won't get what you want waiting for it to happen. Make it happen. I know you can do it.

Need help? Want more? I'd love to connect with you. Reach out to me any time: Leslie@NorthofthePresent.com. www.NorthofthePresent.com

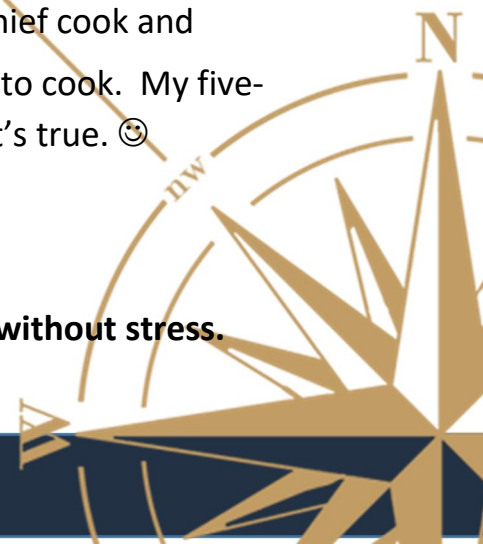
About Leslie

Most organizations start an afterschool program and think that they are going to do better than those that came before them. *Their* program is going to be the one that turns their school or community around...until it doesn't. And then program leaders wonder why.

I'm Leslie McConnell. Officially my profession is program evaluator specializing in education. But really, I like to think of myself as a data storyteller, results improvement harbor pilot, and problem-solver – and also a get-it-done writer, coach, planner, analyst, mom, wife, chief cook and bottle washer...you get the idea. Especially that last part – I ❤️ to cook. My five-year-old nephew told me I was “a good cooker,” so you know it's true. 😊

I wear a lot of hats. Probably many of the same hats you wear.

I help afterschool educators create more impactful programs without stress.



I believe that needs-informed program design, aligned action, the right staff mindset, adequate support, and a continuous cycle of improvement has the potential to transform lives.

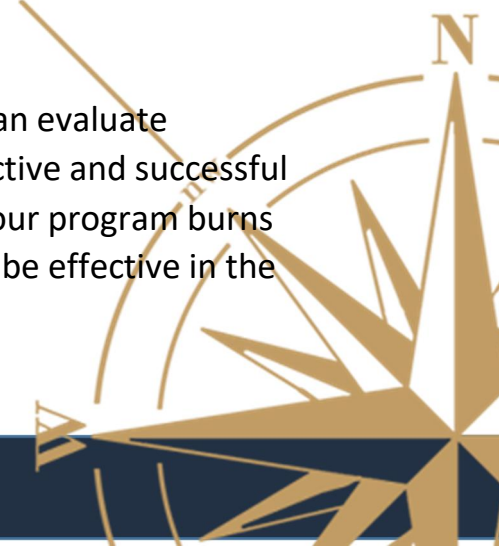
Want to know more about my philosophy? Check out [My 5 Guiding Principles](#).

I didn't start out as a data person. But I realized the power that data had to transform our stories and make them more real. So I fell in love with the data part because I knew what it could do for my clients and me. It was going to take a 'non-data person' approach to help my clients and their stakeholders – who were not data people. I think that's what gives me an edge. It takes a non-data person who loves data to make evaluation effective for most programs. Data can lead to knowledge and knowledge is power.

My work is designed to guide you from where you are to where you want to be and to tell your story of the journey. For the past 20 years I have helped schools, government agencies, and nonprofits improve their supplemental and out-of-school education programs for children and youth facing some of the most profound challenges: poverty, failing academics, homelessness, displacement from persecution in foreign countries, trying to adapt to and succeed in American school but speaking not a word of English. I've worked with small, community-based organizations, to school districts, to statewide agencies, and multi-million dollar programs. I've supported programs that involved six classroom teachers to programs that serve 40,000+ students. I've evaluated more than \$100 million in out-of-school and supplemental education programs. All of them had the same purpose: improved outcomes for children.

Your program can be and do all those things that you dreamed about, AND it can be a source of satisfaction and success, not stress.

That's part of what makes me different. I want to do more than evaluate programs and analyze data. I want you to have the most effective and successful afterschool program. But...I want it to also **work for you**. If your program burns you and your staff out...if your pace is unsustainable...it won't be effective in the



long term for anyone. In addition to improving outcomes for students, **I want it to help you too.**

I've focused on out-of-school time and afterschool program evaluation and improvement for more than 15 years and the most common challenge I encounter is that program directors and education leaders are overwhelmed, tired, and being pulled in too many directions. They are too busy working **IN** their program that they don't have the time and energy to step back and work **ON** their program. And working **ON** their programs is **the key to improving student outcomes** and program results.

Now is the best time to make your program better for children. And for you.



You can choose to do nothing and stay where you are.

You can get some momentum on your own by following some of the strategies I've shared in this guide.

Or, you can get help and start building a new future for you and your students.

I'd love to hear from you. Please [reach out now for your free consultation.](#)

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