

Making the Case: A Fact Sheet on Children and Youth In Out-of-School Time

Benefits from Afterschool Program Participation

A properly designed afterschool program can have strong positive effects on children's academic, social, and emotional lives. This is especially true for students whose personal circumstances put them at higher risk of school failure. Some research even suggests that what students do during their out-of-school time hours has as much bearing on their success as what they do during the school day. [1]

Halpern reported that afterschool programs fill gaps in communities; they complement the institutions of family and school by providing opportunities and resources that these other institutions are unable to provide. This is especially true for low- and moderate-income children. Afterschool programs provide an environment that supports the social and interpersonal dimensions of a child's development by responding to the interests and concerns of participants [2].

According to Walker and Arbreton, it is important to provide children and youth with environments like this which cultivate social relationships and provide opportunities for participants to "hang out" during the non-school hours. [3]

Community schools (integrated focus on academics, health, social service, youth and community development) offer positive out-of-school time opportunities for youth and can make a difference for students in four ways: (1) Improve student learning by addressing the needs of the whole child; (2) Promote family engagement with students and schools by providing families with access to services and opportunities to participate as leaders and learners; (3) Help schools function more efficiently by working together to support learning; and (4) Add vitality to communities through engagement with the schools and resources that works both ways. [4]

Research suggests youth who participate in afterschool programs improve significantly in three major areas:

(1) Feelings and attitudes; (2) Increased indicators of behavior adjustment which includes positive social behaviors and reduction in aggression, conduct problems, and drug use; and (3) Increased school and achievement test scores. One study concludes that programs that used evidence-based skill training approaches were consistently successful in producing multiple benefits for youth, while those that did not use such procedures were not successful in any outcome area. [5]

There is growing evidence that quality out-of-school opportunities matter – that they complement environments created by schools and families and provide important "nutrients" that deter failure and promote success – and that they matter in ways that are observable and measurable. [6]

Comprehensive, asset - based approaches to education and youth

development have tremendous potential to contribute to the academic success of students from all backgrounds. One study suggests that developmental assets play an important role in increasing student achievement across all groups of students. [7]

Afterschool programs offer children and youth opportunities to learn new skills such as conflict resolution, prepare for a successful career, improve grades and develop relationships with caring adults. These skills can be critical in helping youth develop in positive ways and to avoid behavior problems and conflict. Studies show that afterschool programs benefit youth at all levels, from elementary to high school. In fact, middle and high school students may often benefit most from these programs. [8]

Evidence suggests a correlation between frequent attendance in out-of-school time activities and positive outcomes, including an increase in academic achievement, school attendance, time spent on

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homework, extracurricular activities, improved effort in school, and better student behavior. Out-of-school time programs offer supportive contexts for youth development and offer excellent opportunities for youth to develop skills in supervised, safe, and engaging environments. [9]

ARTS FOCUSED AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS CAN INCREASE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, DECREASE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR AND IMPROVE YOUTH ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEMSELVES AND OTHERS.

[11]

Afterschool programs can increase engagement in learning by providing middle school students with opportunities to meet needs that schools often can't, e.g., personal attention from adults, a positive peer group, and activities that hold their interest and build their self-esteem (Vandell, et al. 1996; Garnezy, 1991; Rutter, 1987; Clark, 1987; Masten, et al. 1990; Comer, et al., 1984; Werner, 1993; Halpern, 1992; As reported in Miller, 2003). [10]

Engagement in the arts whether the visual arts, dance, music, theatre or other disciplines, nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies. Arts focused afterschool programs can increase academic achievement, decrease youth involvement in delinquent behavior and improve youth attitudes towards themselves and others and their futures. [11]

In a meta-analysis of 56 studies of out-of-school time programs researchers at McREL found that out-of-school time programs can have positive effects on the achievement of low-achieving or at-risk students in reading and mathematics and that OST strategies need not focus solely on academic activities to have positive effects on student achievement. [12]

Adolescent mental and emotional well-being is associated with teens' environments. Links have been found consistently between teens' well-being and environments that are emotionally positive and warm and that provide support for developing adolescent autonomy. Some research suggests that positive experiences in one area (for example, in the family, among peers, at school, through youth community service...) may lessen the effect of negative experiences in other areas. Adolescents who spend time in communities that are rich in developmental opportunities for them experience less risk and show

evidence of higher rates of positive development. [13-14]

Continued Need for Out-of-School Time Opportunities

Lack of adult supervision and participation in self-care for both children and adolescents have been linked to: increased likelihood of accidents, injuries, lower social competence, lower GPAs, lower achievement test scores, and greater likelihood of participation in delinquent or other high risk activities such as experimentation with alcohol, tobacco, drugs and sex [15-18]. Teens who are unsupervised during afterschool hours are 37% more likely to become teen parents. [19]

The Harvard Family Research Project has reported on several evaluations of afterschool programs focused on increasing the physical activity levels of children and youth. These evaluation results showed that the afterschool programs did increase levels of physical activity in participants. [20, 21]

There are approximately 73 million children and youth under the age of 18 living in the United States. [22]

The racial and ethnic diversity of America's children and youth (18 or younger) continues to grow. According to the 2005 American Community Survey published by the Census Bureau 68.5% are white, 14.8% are Black or African American, 19.6% Hispanic are origin, 7.9% report "other" 3.8% report two or more races, 4% Asian and less than one percent report American Indian. [23]

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The parents of more than 28 million school-age children work outside the home. As many as 14 million "latchkey children" go to an empty house on any given afternoon. [24]

A recent survey by the Afterschool Alliance found that in 2005/2006, three in four afterschool programs were full or overcrowded and 86% of the providers surveyed said that children in their communities who need afterschool programs do not have access to them. [25]

Research demonstrates demographic differences in participation in out-of-school time programs. Children from lower income families were more likely to participate in tutoring programs and children from higher income families participated in virtually all out-of-school time programs. [26]

In the hours after the school bell rings, violent juvenile crime soars and the prime time for juvenile crime begins. The peak hours for such crime are from 3:00 to 6:00 PM. These are also the hours when children are most likely to become victims of crime, be in an automobile accident, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs. A recent poll shows that the number one concern of working parents is the safety of their children during the afterschool hours. Afterschool programs that connect children to caring adults and provide constructive activities during these hours are among the most powerful tools for preventing crime. [27]

Researchers from Brandies University have identified a level of stress that parents experience regarding their children's afterschool arrangements. This parent stress is costing companies between \$50-\$300 billion in healthcare and lost job productivity each year. [28]

Findings from selected cost studies of out-of-school time programs suggest a wide variation in costs - from \$449 to \$7,160 per child per year- more than a fifteen-fold range. Much of this variation can be attributed to program characteristics and methodological differences in sample sizes, how costs are calculated, whether in-kind resources are taken into account, and whether start-up, operating, and system-building costs are included. [29]

Children and Youth Spend Time After School in a Variety of Ways

America After 3 PM reports that 11% (6.5 million) of the nation's youth are in afterschool programs and 25% (14.3 million) care for themselves in the afternoons. [30]

Nearly a million school-age children participate in afterschool academic enrichment programs and other youth development and support activities under the auspices of the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center Program. [31]

A study by Public Agenda showed that nearly 36% of kids report that they spend time home alone after school at least once a week. Sixteen percent (16%) spend at

least three to four days a week alone and 13% spend five days a week alone at home after school. This same study reported that 57% of middle and high school students participate in some organized activity every day, or almost every day, after school. When surveyed, 85% of students say that kids who participate in organized activities during the after school hours are better off than those who do not. [32]

More than half of teens say they would not watch so much TV or play video games if they had other things to do after school. [33]

When asked what they desire from afterschool programming parent reactions are mixed: 54% of parents feel that children need a break from academics during the afterschool hours while 38% of parents feel that children need afterschool programs that are focused on academic skills. [34]

Health and Well-being

Over the past few decades, a steady and dramatic increase in obesity has occurred throughout the entire U.S. population, particularly among children and youth. Currently, one third of American children and youth are either obese or at-risk of becoming obese. Over the past 30 years, the obesity rate has nearly tripled for children ages 2-5 years (from 5 to 14%) and youth ages 12-19 (from 5 to 17%) and quadrupled for children ages 6-11 years (from 4 to 19%). [35]

In 2005 only 20% of youth ate the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. [36]

The National School Lunch Program (NLSP) offers cash reimbursement to help schools serve snacks to children after their regular school day ends. Afterschool snacks can help to ensure that children receive the nutrition they need to learn, play, and grow. [37]

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Children who are overweight are at greater risk for heart disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure, Type II diabetes, bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, asthma, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem. [38]

Rates of participation in physical activity have declined in the past 30 years for both children and youth. According to the Centers for Disease Control 61.5% of children ages 9-13 do not participate in any organized physical activity outside of school hours, and 22.6 % do not engage in any type of physical activity during their free time. Participation rates are even lower for urban children. [39]

A study suggests that participation in afterschool programs with physical activities may be a promising approach for controlling obesity. Participants showed less increase in BMI (body mass index) than non-participants. [40]

Students with Special Needs

Afterschool programs can play a vital role by providing children with disabilities central opportunities that will help to increase their skills while building on their potential and can facilitate relationships among youth of all abilities. [41]

Historically, persons with disabilities have been isolated from mainstream youth development programs, including afterschool programs. Afterschool programs have not been well-equipped or willing to incorporate children with special needs in their programs for fear that students with disabilities would require exhaustive attention and may require costly renovations. Both the civil rights movement and the efforts of parents of children with disabilities contributed to the passage of legislation that ensure that students with disabilities have rights to participate and be accommodated in public and private programs. [41]

The goal of the American Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations is not to put strain on afterschool programs, but rather to encourage programs to “make reasonable accommodations” for individuals with disabilities in order to integrate them into the program to the degree possible. [42]

Out-of-School Time for Middle and High School-Age Youth

The non-school hours are an unused tool in supporting older youth in their transition to adulthood. Late adolescents and the period following, often referred to as emerging adulthood, have been noted as particularly important for setting the stage for continued development through the life span as individuals begin to make choices and engage in a variety of activities that are influential for the rest of their lives. [43, 44]

The challenges facing youth who are disconnected from our nation’s employment and education systems are expansive. Research has suggested that youth services and supports offered during out-of-school time, that are grounded in a developmental approach, not only help young people avoid self-destructive behavior, but also enable them to acquire the academic and workforce-readiness skills and personal attributes that employers seek. [45]

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Out-of-school time programs for older youth need to look very different than the middle or high schools young people attend. To retain older youth, out-of-school time programs must offer high interest programs and employ staff who can develop strong partnerships with and want to work with adolescents. [46]

Research has identified key components for quality middle school afterschool programming include: (1) allowing middle school youth to be creators of their own afterschool experiences; (2) quality standards that are asset-based; (3) staff who are credible and trained to work with middle school youth; and (4) programs that balance a connection to and are independent from school and maintain family connections. [47]

The physical space for teen programming needs to reflect their activity interests. Research on designing program spaces suggests that the “design and layout of the physical environment which includes interior finishes, outdoor spaces, room arrangement and selection of equipment can have a profound impact on how young people interact in the space. Teens will interact with space by arranging it, personalizing it, and readjusting it to meet their needs. Well-designed space will allow for flexibility and creativity. [48]

Recent research conducted in Boston provides insight into the interests of teens related to afterschool program space. Youth expressed interest in afterschool program spaces that offered them the opportunity to “relax, de-stress, commune with friends, and/or explore extra-curricular pursuits with minimal demands or structure, in a physically and emotionally safe environment.” [49]

The delivery of program activities and opportunities to high school-age youth during out-of-school time would be enhanced by a systemic approach with infrastructure elements, such as (1) Funding collaborations; (2)

Planning and cooperation among stakeholders; (3) Formal linkages between high schools, community, and local government organizations; (4) High school age program standards; (5) An agreed upon set of objectives; and (6) Designated citywide leadership. [50]

The Growing Need for 21st Century Skills

There remains a profound gap between the knowledge and skills most students learn in school and the knowledge and skills demanded for the 21st Century. Students need to learn academic content through real-world examples, applications and experiences both inside and outside of school. [51]

Afterschool programs can serve as an entry-point for many children and youth to both develop 21st Century skills and expand their exposure to and increase their ability to navigate new forms of technology. [52]

NEARLY 80% OF YOUTH WORKERS ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS, BUT LOW WAGES SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT THE HIGH TURN OVER RATE IN THIS FIELD. INCREASES IN WAGES AND ACCESS TO BENEFITS COULD STABILIZE THE WORKFORCE AND ADVANCE THE PROFESSION. [57]

Kugler [53] notes that afterschool computer clubs are often the most popular after-school activities and can serve as an entry point to other academic learning experiences. Other research suggests that applications focused on multimedia projects, which are often highly attractive to teens, can lead to success in high-order thinking, problem solving, and synthesizing different points of view. [54]

Youth tend to be more engaged in technology-oriented programs when they are given choices in activities, when program staff provide technological support, and when they are given opportunities for reflection, discussion, and interaction. [55]

The use of technology in afterschool programs can facilitate skill building that may lead to higher academic achievement, while being engaged in projects that seem very different from their school day activities. Technology can benefit afterschool programs whether through utilizing technology for homework help, skills training, web development, or job searching for older youths. [56]

The Out-of-School Time Workforce

Youth workers who staff afterschool and community-based programs play a critical role in providing a bridge of vital supports and opportunities for children and youth during the after-school hours, however many leave the profession after a few years. The results from a recent survey found that nearly 80% of youth workers are satisfied with their jobs, but low wages significantly impact the high turn over rate in this field. Increases in wages and access to benefits could stabilize the workforce and advance the profession. Salary is the number one factor that influences people's decision to leave a job over demographics, status, job satisfaction, or place of employment. [57]

The out-of-school time field lacks a national professional development system. However, several statewide initiatives are in pursuit of building components for a statewide system. Alaska, California, Connecticut, Indiana, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, and New York are at various states of developing core competencies, career lattices, and school-age credentials. Indiana and Missouri have launched a combined school-age and youth development credential. Local efforts are also underway in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. [58]

The characteristics and capabilities of the youth worker are paramount to program success, and programs for youth are most successful when youth workers are creative, well trained, skilled at building relationships, and can make long-term commitments to programs. Finding and retaining the right staff is critical to helping youth participants develop and sustain an interest in program participation. [59]

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The Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (MARS) found that programs with more highly educated staff, both at the program director level and direct service levels, were rated significantly higher on elements of program quality, such as staff engagement, youth engagement, activities, and homework assistance. Additionally, the study found that higher wages were linked with higher quality programming while high staff turnover was linked with lower quality ratings in both youth engagement and homework assistance. [60]

In a national survey of afterschool programs (n= 273), California Tomorrow found that 56% of responding programs enroll youth from more than one language group, and one in four serve English Language Learners (ELL). Very few program directors reported having enough bilingual staff to work with these youth in their home languages, and even fewer have staff that are trained to effectively serve youth who speak little English. Half the programs that enroll a significant number of English learners do not have any staff who speaks the home languages of the participants and their families. [61]

Credentialing, a certification process that recognizes an individual's performance based on a set of defined skills and knowledge, has been shown to increase the likelihood that recipients will seek further education, show modest increases in compensation and demonstrate a remarkably high retention rate. In those states with supportive policies and funding, as well as involvement with higher education institutions, the impact of credentialing is greater. [62]

The results of the National Afterschool Association's (NAA) survey of the afterschool workforce (4,346 afterschool workers) included the following results: About two-thirds (67 percent) have a two-year degree or higher, and over half (55.2 percent) have a bachelor's degree or higher. Forty percent (40%) of respondents in urban settings and 38% in suburban settings had access to paid time for training, while only 23% of their rural colleagues reported similar access. About 60% of respondents described themselves as full-time. The average hourly wage is \$10.75. The average salary is \$25,000. Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents do not receive any benefits. A large portion of the workforce has relatively few years in the afterschool field. This indication of significant turnover suggests the constant need for programs to recruit, orient, and train staff. [63]

Trends in Public Support and Public Funding

In a recent national phone survey, the Afterschool Alliance reported that seven in ten voters want the new congress to increase afterschool funding. Voters across party lines see that afterschool programs are necessary for their communities and would support increase funding to afterschool programs even if it leads to a tax increase. [64]

SEVEN IN TEN VOTERS WANT THE NEW CONGRESS TO INCREASE AFTERSCHOOL FUNDING. [64]

A recent review of thirty governors' State of the State speeches in 2006 indicates several policy trends that support afterschool including stronger state revenues, an interest in investing in education, and concern about children's health and safety. [65]

California is set to increase contributions to afterschool programs to \$550 million putting the state closer to making afterschool available for all children. In 2002 voters supported proposition 49 that allows every elementary and middle school child access to state funded afterschool programs. [66]

Although the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is authorized to receive funding in the amount of \$2.5 billion, \$981 million was appropriated for fiscal year 2006 and is expected to remain the same for 2007. At an average cost of \$1,000 per student, fewer than one million children and youth can benefit from 21st CCLC-funded programs at the current funding level of \$981 million. [67]

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) represents a significant public investment -- \$5 billion in federal dollars and an estimated \$2.2 billion in state funds in fiscal year 2006. In addition to these figures, many states are transferring significant amounts of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to CCDF, and are directly spending TANF on afterschool programs and child care. [68]

Despite increased funding, disparities in access and quality still persist. Programs in affluent or middle class neighborhoods were more likely to include direct instruction in the arts, enrichment activities, and sports, and are more likely to provide snacks or meals than programs in poorer neighborhoods. Wealthier communities are also more likely to have computer labs, playing fields, and gyms, open enrollment slots, and resources for art and enrichment materials. Programs in low-income areas have much tighter budgets, more facilities in need of repair, longer wait lists to get into the program, and higher staff-to-youth ratios. [69]

Strengthening Out-of-School Time Program Quality

The MARS study enabled us to see the relationship between program characteristics and program quality and these findings can guide programs in creating and sustaining high quality programs. Some practical findings include: 1) programs need enough staff to

provide youth with small groups and individual attention; 2) strong preparation by staff and good working conditions provide higher quality programming; 3) programs with good relationships with school personnel tend to be higher quality; 4) programs that were well-paced throughout the afternoon are more likely to have higher staff engagement and higher youth engagement. [60]

Available evidence suggests that the best program and policy ideas are unlikely to be effective if they do not include proper staff training, a well-developed infrastructure, and buy-in from parents and teens, including involving teens in program development. [70]

The explosion of before- and afterschool programs across the country are a verification of the growing demand for these types of supervised environments for children and youth among working parents, educators, child-welfare advocates and public officials. However, according to Proscio and Whiting, there are few well-established, coherent city-wide systems to support these programs on a funding, promotion, or regulatory basis. [71]

The National Afterschool Association Standards “are designed to describe the best practices in out-of-school time programs for children and youth between the ages of five and 14.” The Standards are used by the National Afterschool Association and out-of-school time programs throughout the country as a basis for a self-study process and program accreditation. For many out-of-school time programs having a national set of standards is viewed as a way of nurturing program improvement and maintaining quality care. Program standards can be a very powerful accountability tool for all out-of-school time and youth development stakeholders. [72]

The National School Board Association published a report on the value of afterschool programs developing connections with local school boards. A profile of eight school districts indicated that these connections can be very effective. In order for these connections to be as successful as possible, the NSBA recommends that school districts do the following: 1) conduct a needs assessment to find out the needs of the local community; 2) make a commitment to provide long-term programming to children and youth; 3) decide what you can realistically provide; 4) open yourself to community partnerships; 5) concentrate on quality programming; 6) connect with participants’ parents; 7) evaluate and fine-tune your plans; and 9) keep moving forward. [73]

A recent research finding on quality afterschool programs is that connections matter. Relationships among staff, schools, families, youth, and communities are crucial and many after school programs link with schools by aligning curricula and sharing resources. Complementary learning initiatives are growing—and so is the evidence that they have tangible benefits for youth, families, and communities. [74]

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