

Before- and After-School Care

Background

More than 5 million, and perhaps as many as 15 million, American children have nowhere to go after school. These children are at significant risk of getting poor grades, abusing drugs or alcohol, engaging in sexual activity, and becoming the victims of crime. They are also missing out on opportunities to learn and grow. Before- and after-school programs can provide extended learning opportunities and positive interactions with caring adults in safe environments.

The after-school hours are the time when juvenile crime hits its peak, but quality after-school programs can protect our children. In communities with comprehensive programs children are less likely to commit crimes or be victimized, and are less likely to engage in sexual activity or use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. In a Northeastern University poll, nine out of 10 police chiefs nationwide agreed that, "if America doesn't pay for greater investments in programs to help children and youth now [such as after-school programs], we will all pay far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs."

After-school programs also improve the attendance rates and academic performance of participating children, as well as raise their self-esteem. Teachers and parents report that children who participate in after-school programs develop better social skills and learn how to handle conflicts in more socially acceptable ways. After-school programs also help school districts save money over the long term because fewer students are retained or require special education placements.

Despite the benefits, few students have access to quality, affordable after-school programs. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, by 2002 the current number of out-of-school programs for school-age child care will meet as little as 25 percent of the demand in some urban areas. Parents also have trouble locating quality programs if they live in rural areas, have a child in middle school, or have a child with special needs. Only one-third of schools in low-income areas offer extended-day and enrichment programs, as opposed to more than half of schools in more affluent areas. Furthermore, the cost of care is out of reach for many families. Eighty-four percent of programs surveyed depend entirely on parent fees, which average \$45 per week. Participation in some of the communities most in need, therefore, is low.

Americans support federal funding for before- and after-school programs. National PTA's December 1998 poll found that almost 70 percent of parents support increasing federal funding for after-school programs. According to a 2001 Mott Foundation and JCPenney survey of registered voters, 94 percent agreed

that there should be some type of organized activity or place for children to go after school, and three-quarters were willing to use additional taxpayer money to make these programs accessible to all children. Almost nine out of 10 agree that there should be a national commitment to making sure every child has a space in an after-school program.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is the only source of federal funds available for school districts to develop and provide quality after-school learning opportunities. More than 1,500 grants have been awarded to open programs in about 6,800 rural and inner-city public schools in 1,420 communities, serving more than 1 million children. In FY 2001, \$846 million was appropriated for this program, and \$1 billion is expected in FY 2002. Demand, however, continues to exceed the supply of high-quality, affordable school-based programs, particularly because eligibility for this funding has now been expanded to include other public and private entities such as community-based organizations. Competition from these entities may reduce the funding for school-based programs.

It is important to keep after-school programs in schools for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Using public school facilities is a cost-effective way to provide accessible and affordable programs. When asked where before- and after-school programs should be located, more than half of the 2001 Mott survey respondents chose public schools compared to community organizations, the next most popular choice, which was picked by only 16 percent.
- Transportation can be a tremendous barrier to participation in after-school programs located off-site.
- Exemplary after-school programs coordinate learning with the regular school day and forge linkages between school-day teachers and after-school personnel. This can be done most effectively when the after-school program is located in the school.
- School-based after-school care improves parent involvement. Parents, especially economically disadvantaged parents, may be apprehensive about making contact with school staff. School-based after-school programs allow parents to access the schools under less intimidating circumstances.
- Schools currently serve students from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs. Off-site providers of after-school care may not be prepared or equipped to serve such diversity among the students.

National PTA Positions

National PTA supports federal and state incentives for high-quality child-care and preschool programs that are affordable and accessible; coordinated between federal, state, and local governments permitting flexible services that reflect local needs; planned, implemented, and evaluated with parent involvement; and offered with quality standards for caregiver and teacher training and for health and safety.

National PTA believes that child-care programs and facilities are important in addressing the education, nutritional, recreational, developmental, and safety needs of school-age and preschool children. PTA encourages the effective use of existing facilities, such as public schools, for child-care programs during non-school hours and days.

Other Voices on Before- and After-School Care

"Quality after-school programs give our young people more time to learn, more challenging enrichment and academic activities, and the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with caring adults. These after-school programs can build on instruction taking place during regular school hours and provide students in danger of being left behind extra time to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to meet or exceed state and local academic standards."

—*U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, June 15, 2001*

"Before- and after-school programs that are housed in school buildings have many advantages over those located elsewhere in the community. These include institutional credibility, continuity of care for the youngsters, and easy access to child-friendly facilities. The children do not require transportation to another program location, and the program can extend students' learning time, particularly if its activities are integrated with the school curriculum. Moreover, because schools are publicly owned buildings that are used at less than one-third of their potential, some experts argue they should be opened for community use."

—*Joy G. Dryfoos, The Role of the School in Children's Out-of-School Time, 1999*

"We'll win the war against crime when we're as ready to guarantee a kid a place in an after-school program as we are to guarantee a felon room and board in a prison cell."

—*Sheriff Patrick J. Sullivan, Jr. (R-Arapahoe County, CO), October 2000*

Contact—Susan Nogan
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