



Sample Letters to the Editor
Caucus Advocacy Grant 2019/2020

Afterschool Works

Afterschool programs help families make ends meet -- they allow parents to work jobs that go into the afternoon and evening hours while their children are continuing their educational development even after the school bell rings. In fact, 65% of children that are enrolled in afterschool programs improve their homework completion and class participation; 60% improve their behavior in class; and 50% improve their math and reading grades. Furthermore, it is estimated that for every \$1 that is invested into afterschool programs, \$3 is saved due to 1) increased kids' learning potential, 2) improved performance at school, and 3) reduced crime and juvenile delinquency.

It would seem that government investment in afterschool programs is a wise choice for policymakers. However, current funding levels do not satisfy program demand: for every student that participates in afterschool, two more are waiting to attend. This issue should be raised with presidential candidates that come to Iowa, since the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is the only dedicated funding stream for Iowa's afterschool and summer programs. Afterschool programs support children, parents, and the community, making them a win-win-win -- Presidential candidates would be wise to consider this as they design their vision for the country.

Afterschool Helps Reduce Crime

After the final bell rings, more than 68,000 Iowa children go to afterschool programs. Without afterschool programs, these children may engage in risky behaviors when left to themselves. However, these afterschool programs not only occupy children that otherwise would be unsupervised -- they give these students the opportunity to continue learning and growing outside of school hours.

This has had clear benefits on Iowa children. According to Iowa teachers, 83% of students participating in 21st Century Community Learning Centers improved their behavior. Furthermore, the Council Bluffs police department reported a 51% decrease in juvenile arrests between the hours of 2:00-5:00pm -- afterschool hours -- since their middle school instituted an afterschool program. Parents agree, as roughly 75% think that afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that kids will engage in risky behaviors.

It would appear that when it comes to reducing juvenile crime, afterschool programs are a smart investment. 84% of parents approve of public spending on afterschool programs. As presidential

candidates visit Iowa and build their plan for the country's future, they would be wise to note the positive effects of afterschool programs for students, parents, and the community at large.

Afterschool Supports STEM Growth

With the upcoming school year soon arriving, children will go back to learning about important topics such as math and science. However, for some students this education will not stop when the bell rings. Children that participate in afterschool programs are gaining knowledge in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). In fact, 75% of participants in Iowa's 21st Century Community Learning Centers made improvements in math. Furthermore, afterschool participants enjoy STEM – more than 70% indicated a higher level of interest in science-related careers.

There is plenty of support for STEM-education beyond the students themselves. The U.S. Department of Education states that "If we want a nation where our future leaders, neighbors, and workers have the ability to understand and solve some of the complex challenges of today and tomorrow... fluency in STEM fields is essential." Additionally, 67% of parents agree that afterschool programs should include STEM-related activities. The government, parents, and students seem to acknowledge the importance of STEM education; however, 145,383 Iowa children do not have access to an afterschool program in their community. This need is not just limited to Iowa—states across the country lack resources for programming to meet demand. Presidential candidates would be wise to note the successes of afterschool programs in promoting STEM and advocate for increased access for young students.