

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF



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Laws for the liberal education of the youth ...are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

—John Adams, “Thoughts on Government,” 1776

Afterschool Programs: A Wise Public Investment

Afterschool advocates and practitioners face a daily struggle for adequate funding. While there have been successes -- the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program grew from a small pilot to a billion-dollar funding stream in the No Child Left Behind Act – budgets have since grown tighter at all levels of government, afterschool funding has leveled off and advocates must be prepared to respond to the question: Are afterschool programs a worthy investment? Fortunately, both research and personal stories reveal the answer to be a resounding YES!

The Price We Pay

A struggling student is not the sole bearer of the cost of academic difficulty—society at large pays a great price, too. Remedial education, absenteeism, grade repetition, drop-outs, crime, drug use, teen pregnancy and income lost are just a few of the costs taxpayers bear when a young person does not succeed in school, and these costs start tallying when school begins and last for a lifetime.

- Each year's class of dropouts will cost the country more than \$200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue.¹
- Remedial education costs Alabama colleges and businesses an estimated \$304 million annually.²
- Teen motherhood costs society an estimated \$8 billion annually. (Costs are largely related to greater welfare expenditures and lost tax revenue.)³
- High school drop-outs earn 24 percent less money during their lifetimes than high school graduates.⁴

Incredible Cost to Businesses

As manufacturing jobs dwindle in 21st century America, the next generation of workers will need far more education and advanced skills in order to succeed as productive members of the workforce. Unfortunately, too many graduates lack basic skills in reading, writing and math, much less creative thinking, problem solving, teamwork, communication, self-direction and technology. If future workers come out the end of the “education pipeline” unable to meet these standards, businesses bear the cost of retraining them.

- More than 70 percent of both college professors and employers said that recent high school graduates were unable to write clearly and had only poor or fair grammar and spelling skills.⁵
- American **business** currently **spends** more than **\$60 billion** each year on training, much of that on **remedial** reading, writing, and mathematics.⁶

Afterschool programs are an invaluable support for K-16 education because they provide extra time for academic help, career exploration, skills development, and internships that will prepare students for college and beyond. According to Corporate Voices for Working Families, “Quality after school programs provide a unique venue in which young people can develop the range of skills they need to enter the 21st Century workplace.” Therefore, they suggest, it is in the business community’s best interest to see that there is more public and private investment in afterschool programs.

Return on Investment

Myriad studies and evaluations have proved that, even with conservative estimates, afterschool programs are cost-effective and save money. Many of the areas in which afterschool programs save money through prevention are related to struggles with school. Juvenile crime, pregnancy, substance abuse, dropping out, these behaviors too often appear when a young person feels hopeless about the possibility of success in life.

Afterschool programs address these risky and expensive (for society) behaviors in two ways. First, afterschool programs simply keep youth busy during the hours they are most likely to get into trouble. Second, afterschool programs provide young people with access to caring adults who provide the support they need to succeed, whether it’s homework help or learning how to say no to drugs. As a result, children and youth who regularly attend quality afterschool programs have better grades and conduct in school, are more likely to graduate, and have lower incidences of drug-use, violence and pregnancy.

- Every dollar invested in afterschool programs will save taxpayers approximately \$3, according to a study by the Rose Institute at Claremont McKenna College.⁷
- A 2001 evaluation of California’s state afterschool program revealed that the state was likely to save \$11 million that year because fewer students would be held back in school.⁸
- Schools in Manchester, New Hampshire, estimate that they saved more than \$72,000 over three years because students participating in afterschool programs avoided being held back a grade or being placed in special education. (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 1998)
- Effective after-school programs save between \$1.87 to \$5.29 for every \$1 spent because participants commit fewer crimes.⁹
- Every \$1 invested in the Quantum Opportunities afterschool program produced \$3 worth of benefits to youth and the general public. This figure does not include the added savings from a six-fold drop in crime by boys in the program.¹⁰
- An evaluation of the CAS-Carrera pregnancy-prevention program showed reduced births among girls by 50 percent. The program also saw a 61 percent college-enrollment rate among its eligible students.¹¹

Unexpected Contributions

As flexible as they are, afterschool programs are uniquely able to tailor themselves to what their community needs, even problems beyond education. For example, afterschool programs are increasingly seen as an essential weapon to fight the growing obesity epidemic. Because people form their fitness and nutrition habits during their youth, it is a positive trend that afterschool programs commonly provide young people with the time and space to participate safely in physical activity and nutrition education. In a 2001 survey of 800 elementary school principals conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP,) 78 percent reported that their afterschool programs offer recreation and sports activities.¹²

Helping to create healthy habits for a lifetime is no small contribution. Annual obesity-attributable medical expenditures in the U.S. were estimated to be \$75 billion in 2003, half of which were financed by Medicare and Medicaid.¹³ According to the CDC, 61.5 percent of children ages 9-13 do not participate in any organized physical activity outside of school hours, and 22.6 percent do not engage in any type of physical activity during free time.¹⁴ Experts agree that strategies to promote healthy behaviors in our youth must focus on reducing sedentary activities; ensuring that all youth have access to daily, quality opportunities for physical activity; and providing nutrition education and access to healthy foods. Afterschool programs provide much-needed opportunities to promote and support healthy lifestyles in our youth.

Benefits Beyond Dollars

As much as quality afterschool programs are capable of saving money and providing a significant monetary return on the investment, many benefits to individual students, teachers, schools and communities cannot be assigned a dollar value. Time to find a passion or a skill, better self-esteem, teamwork skills, confidence, a greater sense of curiosity, a lifelong love of learning—these things are priceless. Society will absolutely reap the benefits of making an investment to create future generations of scientists, teachers, leaders, artists and thoughtful citizens.

- Participants in the Go Grrrls program in Tucson, Arizona, reported significantly greater increases in body image, assertiveness positive attitudes regarding attractiveness, self-efficacy, self-liking and competence.¹⁵
- Evaluations of the 4 Counties for Kids program revealed myriad positive outcomes for youth, including better problem-solving skills, higher academic aspirations, better communications skills and improved grades. Their parents not only reported that their children were getting better grades, were reading better and had more interest in school, but also that they were playing a more active role in their child's education and even were noticing better interactions with their child.¹⁶
- Of the middle-grade students participating in a TASC program, 56 percent feel the program is giving them the leadership opportunities and life skills they need to become productive members of society. Half of the participants say the program exposes them to important new places, ideas, and activities and gives them a chance to master skills, and 62 percent report a high level of academic self-esteem.¹⁷
- Most principals with TASC programs at their schools say the programs boost school attendance and increase students' interest in learning, and 90 percent say the benefits of hosting the program outweigh the costs.¹⁸

Quality Counts

Research has proved time and time again that afterschool programs are an effective way to boost student achievement and set young people on the path to productive adulthood. Quality programs, however, cannot be produced out of thin air. If we are to reap the rewards of educating our youth well, we must make a solid and deliberate investment. Quality afterschool programs, like schools themselves, need quality staff, effective curricula and community collaboration in order to succeed. Federal, state and local governments need to put their weight behind developing policies that support staff and curriculum development and regular evaluation so programs can best serve our youth. If the K-12 education system is going to provide the education youth need to move on to productive adulthood and lifelong learning, then the support of afterschool programs is not just a good idea—it's an absolute necessity. We demand our children do their best in school, so why would we do any less than our best for them?

¹ “Quick Facts: Economy,” National Dropout Prevention Center/Network
www.dropoutprevention.org/stats/quick_facts.htm.

² Hammons, Christopher, *The Cost of Remedial Education: How Much Alabama Pays When Students Fail to Learn Basic Skills*, Alabama Policy Institute, April 2004.

³ Levine, Phillip and Zimmerman, David, *Evaluating the Benefits and Costs of After-School Care: Final Report*, The After-School Corporation, June 2003.

⁴ Aos, Steve and Pennucci, Annie, “High School Graduation Rates in Washington and the United States: A Long-Run View,” Washington State Institute for Public Policy, March 2005.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “The Impact of Education on: *The Economy*,” Alliance for Excellent Education, November 2003,
www.all4ed.org/publications/FactSheets.html.

⁷ Brown et. al, *The Costs and Benefits of After School Programs: The Estimated Effects of the After School Education and Safety Program Act of 2002*, The Rose Institute of Claremont-McKenna College, September 2002.

⁸ *Evaluation of California’s After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program: 1999-2000 Final Report*, California Department of Education, University of California at Irvine, September 2001.

⁹ Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2001.

¹⁰ *America’s After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime Or Youth Enrichment and Achievement*, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2000.

¹¹ Children’s Aid Society Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program, 2004,
www.stopteenpregnancy.com/success/teens.html.

¹² Fact Sheet. Principals and after-school programs: a survey of PreK-8 principals. National Association of Elementary School Principals. From the website: www.naesp.org

¹³ Finkelstein, E, Fiebelkorn, I, Wang, G. “State-level estimates of annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity,” *Obesity Research*; 2004.

¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Physical activity levels among children aged 9-13 years” --United States, 2002. *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*, 2003.

¹⁵ “Making the Case: A Fact Sheet on Children and Youth in Out-of-School Time,” National Institute on Out-of-School Time, January 2005.

¹⁶ *4 Counties for Kids: The Implementation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Final Evaluation Report*, Center for Prevention Research and Development—University of Illinois, October 2004.

¹⁷ TASC: The After-School Corporation, *Quality, Scale and Effectiveness in After-School Programs*, summary of 2004 Policy Studies Associates’ evaluations, 2005.

¹⁸ Ibid.