

# AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

## ISSUE BRIEF



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## **Afterschool programs level the playing field for all youth**

*We are living in a world where simply growing up, simply surviving is an extraordinary challenge. What we are trying to do here is offer children, youth and their families a permanent oasis of support.*  
--Michael Funk, San Francisco Beacons Program<sup>1</sup>

In America today, a number of youth face significant challenges that classify them as “disadvantaged youth.” Failing schools, dangerous neighborhoods, poverty, disproportionate incarceration, poor health and nutrition, lack of employment opportunity, language difficulty and marginalization of their heritage and culture are just a few of the factors facing many of our youth today. The heavily structured school day does not offer many opportunities to address these problems, and when left to their own devices, youth can find themselves facing boredom at best and danger and risky behavior at worst in the hours after school. Afterschool programs can offer youth facing considerable trials and tribulations as a result of their socioeconomic circumstances alternative opportunities for learning and success. Fortunately, communities and schools across the country are choosing to give these youth the time and tools to excel by creating quality afterschool programs.

### **A variety of youth nationwide face myriad obstacles.**

- In the 2000-2001 school year, 27.4 million kids were receiving free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>2</sup>
- Sixth-graders who regularly care for themselves after school have shown poor behavior adjustment and academic performance later in school.<sup>3</sup>
- By the end of the fourth grade, African American, Latino, and low-income students of all races are already about two years behind other students. By the time they reach eighth grade, they are about three years behind.<sup>4</sup>
- African American and Latino youth are more likely to drop out of school than their white and Asian peers. 10.9 percent of African American youth drop out, as do 27 percent of Latino youth. By comparison, 7.3 percent of white youth and 3.6 percent of Asian youth drop out.<sup>5</sup>
- In 1999, 55 percent of poor, single rural mothers were working, but many rural communities face shortages of formal child care providers and children often are left unsupervised. Rural schools are less likely than urban and suburban schools to offer extended-day and afterschool programs.<sup>6</sup>
- Families leaving welfare may need afterschool more than most. The US General Accounting Office estimates that welfare reform will be associated with a “substantial increase” in unmet child care needs.<sup>7</sup>
- Several studies have found effects of hunger and poor nutrition on cognitive ability. One such study found that among fourth-grade students, those who had the least protein intake in their diets had the lowest achievement scores. Also, children who are hungry or undernourished have more difficulty fighting infection. Therefore, they are more likely to become sick, miss school and fall behind in class.<sup>8</sup>
- According to a study examining access to afterschool in varying neighborhoods, inner-city young people appear to have fewer afterschool opportunities. Chapin Hall researchers Julia Littell and Joan Wynn documented that both the quantity and variety of programs were dramatically higher in a suburban Chicago neighborhood (71 activities and 42 facilities per 1,000 youth) than an urban one (23 activities and 9 facilities per 1,000 youth) even though the population of the inner-city neighborhood was six times as dense.<sup>9</sup>

## **Afterschool programs are key to keeping youth on the path to success.**

- Researchers compared five housing projects with new Boys & Girls Clubs to five housing projects without clubs. The projects with clubs had 50% less vandalized housing units and 30% less drug activity than those with new clubs.<sup>10</sup>
- The boys and girls randomly assigned to participate in the Quantum Opportunities program were half as likely to drop out of high school and two and one half times more likely to go on to further education after high school.<sup>11</sup>
- The Children's Hunger Alliance provides nutritious meals and enriching experiences to more than 1,300 youth, ages 5-18 at 45 afterschool programs in Franklin County, Ohio. Youth who participate in Children's Hunger Alliance-sponsored programs are more likely to:<sup>12</sup>
  - Meet minimum USDA requirements for all key nutrients.
  - Arrive at school on time, attend school more regularly and pass on to the next grade than their peers.
  - Pass 4<sup>th</sup>- and 6<sup>th</sup>-grade proficiency tests than their peers.
- Teens who do not engage in afterschool activities are five times more likely to be "D" students than teens who do.<sup>13</sup>
- Roosevelt Village Center is an afterschool program at an Oakland, CA, middle school that serves a student population that speaks 17 primary languages. Nearly two-thirds of the students are English language learners. The academic program provides homework help in students' native languages, which makes them feel more comfortable and encourages them to reach higher academic goals. Also, despite the lack of formal ESL instruction, many students are improving their English skills because of the program's small group environments in which students can practice the language without fear of ridicule or judgment.<sup>14</sup>
- An evaluation of LA's BEST found the program "has a profound positive impact on the attitude that participants have towards school and towards themselves. Students in LA's BEST have higher expectations of themselves and have greater motivation and enthusiasm for school. The positive student attitudes associated with LA's BEST, and the students' greater trust of adults in their school environment, may well help develop students who later in their adolescence find it easier to apply themselves academically, finish high school and pursue higher education."<sup>15</sup>

## **All of America's youth deserve a fair chance to succeed in life.**

A recent National Research Council report concluded that "at least 25 percent of adolescents in the United States are at serious risk of not achieving 'productive adulthood.'"<sup>16</sup> Afterschool programs are a proven way to reach at-risk youth and keep them on a positive path; they have the ability to reach youth in meaningful ways that take their backgrounds and cultures into account. A quality afterschool program is an open place where youth can feel safe, express themselves, and learn from and form bonds with both their teachers and their peers. Quality afterschool has the potential to help youth develop life skills and turn young people into problem solvers, creative thinkers, community participants, lifelong learners and productive, successful adults.

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<sup>1</sup> *Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention*, Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Food Research and Action Center, Summary of National School Lunch Program, [www.frac.org/html/federal\\_food\\_programs/programs/nslp.html](http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/nslp.html).

<sup>3</sup> National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> *Pursuing the Promise: Addressing Equity, Access, and Diversity in After School and Youth Programs*, California Tomorrow, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> "High School Dropout Rates," ChildTrends Databank, 2003, <http://revised.childtrendsdatabank.org/indicators/1HighSchoolDropout.cfm>.

<sup>6</sup> *America's Forgotten Children: Rural Poverty in America*, Save the Children, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> *After-School Programs: An Analysis of Need, Current Research, and Public Opinion*, The After-School Corporation, the National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> "Children's Nutrition and Learning," ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> *The Availability and Use of Community Resources for Young Adolescents in an Inner-City and a Suburban Community*, The Chapin Hall Center for Children, 1989.

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

<sup>11</sup> Fight Crime, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Children's Hunger Alliance, [www.childrenshungeralliance.org/youth%20development.htm](http://www.childrenshungeralliance.org/youth%20development.htm).

<sup>13</sup> *After School for America's Teens: A national survey of teen attitudes and behaviors in the hours after school*, YMCA of the USA 2001.

<sup>14</sup> California Tomorrow, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> *A Decade of Results: The Impact of the LA's BEST After School Enrichment Program on Subsequent Student Achievement and Performance*, University of California, Los Angeles Center for the Study of Evaluation, June 2000.

<sup>16</sup> *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002.