

WHY AFTERSCHOOL MATTERS:

a changing social landscape



A few generations ago, family life looked very different than it does today. Children were more likely to return from school to find a parent waiting at home. Snacks involved fewer processed foods or sugary beverages and homework could be completed with paper and pencil, after which kids were free to ride off on a bike – without helmet – and play outside until dark.

The 21st century moves at a different pace. In many cases a single income is no longer adequate to support a family, forcing both parents to seek employment outside the home. Since professional hours diverge significantly from the school calendar, working parents must find other care for their children in the hours before and after school. In the past grandparents or other relatives might have filled those gaps, but today's more mobile society means living near extended family is no longer a given. At the same time, we are more aware than ever of the risks associated with leaving children unsupervised.

For all these reasons, expanded care of school-age children is a fact of life for thousands of Kansas families. Less certain is whether the families most in need of such assistance have consistent access to programs that not only keep their children safe but help them grow in body and mind.

What if providing afterschool resources were treated less as a burden on individual families than as an opportunity to help young people reach their full potential, becoming successful and productive adults? This report by the Kansas Enrichment Network will examine the individual, familial and societal benefits of investing in high-quality Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) for students throughout the state.

WHAT IS A HIGH-QUALITY ELO?

Before taking a closer look at the human and economic benefits of this approach, let's briefly consider what components such a program would include.

First, programs must operate for a minimum of 125 minutes per day for 30 days or more. Within that time, a variety of activities will be offered. Mindful of mounting rates of childhood obesity and related illnesses, a successful ELO incorporates both physical activity and healthy options for meals and snacks. On the academic front, participants have access to homework assistance from qualified adults, making students less likely to fall behind in class.

Regular supervision, and the resulting positive relationships with peers and mentors, also serve as preventive measures, lowering the incidence of (and opportunity for) juvenile crime, substance abuse and pregnancy. In addition, many ELOs offer enrichment activities with an emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields, building skills for future careers in these high-demand areas. All of these factors, including data on impact, will be discussed in detail in the next section of this report.

At the administrative level, a quality ELO is defined in the context of this report as one receiving 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) funding, based on the following criteria:

- serving children at schools in which at least 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-cost meals;
- utilization of Kansas Quality Guidelines and Assessment;
- staff participation in state and national development opportunities;
- participation in site, compliance and technical assistance visits;
- evaluation by a third party.

How do quality ELOs change lives?

For students, ELOs contribute to the ABCs of Success: Academic, Behavioral & Career.

ACADEMIC:

A

In Kansas, schools are required to offer 186 days of instruction time per year. An afterschool program operating during the same time frame adds 39.5 days to that total; a before and after school program increases instruction time by 120.7 days. Adding summer hours provides an additional 163.3 days of instruction – nearly double the standard amount.

Given these numbers, it's not surprising that access to quality ELOs has a significant impact on school performance. A 2002 study on California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership Program concluded that ELOs can reduce a student's risk of retention by 53.4%.ⁱ Participation in ELOs has also been shown to reduce a student's risk of dropping out by 22%.ⁱⁱ Lowering retention and dropout rates yields a corresponding increase in high school graduations. In Kansas, the current graduation rate is 86%.ⁱⁱⁱ The expected graduation rate for students with access to quality ELOs rises to 99.94%.^{iv}

BEHAVIORAL:

B

Studies suggest that afterschool supervision can reduce the risk of addiction to drugs and/or alcohol by 50%.^v In addition to the immediately harmful effects of substance abuse on a young person's health, relationships and academic performance, an estimated 25% of Americans who begin using addictive substances before age 18 will be addicted as adults – a fact that makes early prevention even more crucial.^{vi}

The risk of teen pregnancy is also lower for students who regularly participate in quality ELOs, dropping by an estimated 33%.^{vii}

Finally, the incidence of youth criminal activity decreases with afterschool supervision, eliminating a quarter of allows juvenile offenses committed on school days.^{viii} Instances of vandalism drop by an estimated 33%.^{ix}

CAREER:

C

Kansas has more than 3,400 open computing jobs, three times higher than the average demand for all jobs statewide. In Kansas City alone, 42% of job ads in the first quarter of 2013 required STEM skills – a trend that shows no sign of waning. Through 2020, the areas of professional, scientific and technical services are projected to create 26.5% of all Kansas jobs, with healthcare and education accounting for another 45% of the state's job growth. Currently 90% of Kansas' high-quality afterschool programs provide participants with STEM enrichment activities. This kind of early exposure increases not only practical skills but awareness of such career paths among young people who might not otherwise consider these fields.

For the parents and teachers of those enrolled in ELOs, there are ancillary benefits. Students with improved academic and behavioral skills are likely to be more successful both in class and at home, leading to fewer resource-heavy interventions. Many parents reported increased peace of mind and improved job performance as a result of knowing their children were receiving quality care.

From a quality-of-life standpoint, anyone who has parented school-age children while working a full-time job understands the difficulty of trying to cram homework, dinner, and extracurricular activities into the few hours before bedtime – much less incorporating a few lessons in STEM technology along the way.

The benefits of providing quality ELOs are not limited to students and parents. Even for those whose daily lives are not directly impacted, the quality and availability of these services can pay dividends well into the future.

ELOs by the Numbers:

500,789

Number of elementary, middle and high school students in Kansas public schools

80%

of a young person's waking hours are out of school

70,407

Number of students currently enrolled in ELOs

68%

of existing ELOs meet criteria for high-quality programs

132,731

Number of Kansas students who would participate if programs were available ^x

75%

of Kansans support public funding for afterschool programs ^{xiv}

For every child in an out-of-school program, two are waiting to get in. Sadly, that leaves 19% of Kansas youth unsupervised after school.^{xi} To expand access and improve the quality of existing programs would require a substantial investment. Fortunately, this initial outlay of funds would yield more than commensurate savings in future social costs.

\$938 ▶ The annual cost per-student in Kansas for high-quality afterschool programming

\$91,433 ▶ The annual cost to confine a single Kansas youth

Every year the state of Kansas spends more than \$50 million on youth in prison or other out-of-home placement.^{xii} If the same amount were invested in high-quality ELOs, we stand to gain:

58,865 ▶ Additional youth with access to afterschool programs^{xiii}

\$42,271,119 ▶ Savings in lower costs related to juvenile and adult crime

\$18,304,650 ▶ Savings related to lower incidence of retention and failure to graduate

\$7,360,429 ▶ Savings from lower drug and alcohol addiction costs

A NOTE ON RURAL POPULATIONS:

In the interests of clarity, the figures cited above describe the school-age population of Kansas as a whole. There are significant regional variations, however, in both the need for and availability of high-quality ELOs. Rural communities in particular face a distinct set of challenges in providing afterschool care for their youth. These range from the practical — site selection and transportation needs, given the lack of population density — to broader demographic issues.

For areas struggling with poverty, lack of employment, and lower educational levels, recruiting and retaining qualified staff pose significant obstacles to out-of-school programs. Technological resources are often limited, making it more difficult to provide STEM-based enrichment. Added to this is a cultural divide: rural families tend to be less familiar with the institution of afterschool care, rendering them unlikely to seek out programs even where they exist.

Among those whose children do participate in ELOs, 59% reported that current economic conditions make the programs difficult to afford. Four in 10 parents whose children are not enrolled in afterschool care named cost as an important factor in that decision.^{xv}

As so often happens, scarcity of resources goes hand in hand with an urgent need for services. In addition to helping families now, expanding access to quality ELOs would combat the cycle of limited job prospects and lower earning potential, strengthening rural communities for generations to come. The majority of families whose children do participate in after school programs reported a high degree of satisfaction with the experience. Of those not enrolled, 39 percent indicated they would sign up if such a program were available. Unmet demand is even higher among minority and low-income families, with 51% of rural Hispanic children and 45% of rural African-American children who would participate unable to find a placement; 44% of low-income families faced the same constraint.^{xvi}

IMPROVING THE ODDS FOR KANSAS STUDENTS:

What do we want for the children of our state? Health, safety, education, nurturing relationships: all of these are essential to helping our young people build productive and satisfying lives.

A school-age child's social and academic experiences can set them on a path toward success — or struggle. By offering assistance with everything from homework to exercise, quality ELOs reduce the risks of juvenile crime, substance abuse and dropping out of school. Fewer social problems early on place less of a burden on society — and taxpayers — down the road, as healthy, well cared for children graduate from school and take their place in the workforce.

By improving both the quality and accessibility of afterschool programs, we can help Kansas families thrive. In rural areas especially, it should be remembered that accessibility also means affordability. Until the work day ends at 3, or the average 7-year-old (or 17-year-old) can be expected to go home alone and exercise for 30 minutes, eat a healthy snack, and then teach themselves robotics, afterschool programs will remain both a necessity and an opportunity.

No matter how rapidly the pace of life increases, a day holds only so many hours. The least we can do for our young people is to lead by example and use their time wisely.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Dropout & High School Completion. Vermont Agency of Education, 2014.
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<http://www.casacolumbia.org/newsroom/press-releases/national-study-reveals-teen-substance-use-americas-1-public-health-problem>
- ^{vii} Newman, S.A., et al. America's After-School-Choice.
- ^{viii} Ibid.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/detail.html#s/KS/demand/p_of_children_in_programs_2014
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/2016/02/new-report-highlights-need-to-reform-kansas-juvenile-justice-system/>
- ^{xiii} The Afterschool Alliance reported that 31% (132,731) of Kansas youth who do not currently participate in afterschool programming, would do so if such an opportunity were available to them.
- ^{xiv} http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/detail.html#s/KS/support/p_of_children_in_programs_2014
- ^{xv} http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/Afterschool_in_Rural_Communities.pdf
- ^{xvi} Ibid.

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