

The Importance of After School Program Funding

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Abstract

Afterschool programs provide essential needs to students after the regular school day comes to an end. I have experienced this firsthand. In grade school, I attended both an afterschool and summer program and now, I work in those same programs. Through this I have experienced the benefits these programs provide. They establish a safe environment that is supervised by qualified staff. Programs assist in developing socialization and 21st century skills, along with time for recreation with their peers. Education is a main focus for students enrolled in afterschool programs. Many of these students have shown significant progress in their education. In this paper, information is obtained from reputable sources including the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of the US Department of Education, a research study from Chicago's The Youth Project, a report from the AfterSchool Alliance, and another from the only afterschool federal funding program, 21st CCLC. Through these sources and through my own experiences we will establish the importance of funding after school programs.

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“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.” In this insightful quote from Benjamin Franklin, he describes that people are more applicable to learn if they are invested and involved in the lesson. While traditional education during the school day is essential to student development, the time after school is often overlooked from its true potential. In elementary school, I attended an after school program. Now in my senior year of high school, I have been working at both a summer K-6 program and an afterschool program. Throughout my years both attending and working for an after school program, I have experienced the effects that these programs have had on students. However, I have also seen the more recent effects of budget cuts towards education and especially after school programs. The after school program I work at is called “Colts Round Up.” For only a small fee (around \$15 and if a student cannot pay it can be waived) each semester, students from KinderPrep through 6th grade can attend from the end of school to shortly after 5pm. After school program times, activities, fees, range from location to location but the main benefits of such programs include: a supervised environment, time for socialization and recreation, and constant learning opportunities. (“After School Programs,” n.d.). The lack of funding towards Afterschool Programs has and will continue to be detrimental to young developing students. These programs need the funding to continue and to expand in order to provide a safe supervised environment, develop recreational and social activities, and continue the education of the young impressionable students who attend them.

Many, if not all of the programs struggle with the same big issues; a lack of funding and a high demand. Since 2009 the attendance of programs rose from 15% to 18% (Wang, 2014). As of 2009, 55% of elementary schools report to have one or more programs and 44% reported no

such programs (Parsad & Lewis, 2009). While the number of available programs has increased, it is nowhere near meeting the demand. According to the parents of students, in 2014, approximately 19.4 million children who were not in an afterschool program, would be enrolled if one were available to them. (“America After 3pm,” 2014). One source even describes the concerning demand by stating that for every one child in a program, two are waiting to get in (Wang, 2014). Due to a lack of funding at local, federal, state levels, many children’s needs to attend are unmet. Parental support for funding after school programs spans across many differences in socioeconomic, ethnicity, political parties, and backgrounds, but lack of funding still continues. As of May 2016, there is only one federal funding program for afterschool, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (Afterschool Alliance, 2016). This program has been stalled for years, according to the Afterschool Alliance. Arnold Schwarzenegger, former California Governor and founder of After-School All Stars, predicted that the amount of funding to meet the demand of students for after school programs is around \$5 billion dollars and growing (Wang, 2014). The goal of 21st CCLC in 2007 was only 2.5 billion dollars, in 2014 they could meet even half of that goal (Wang, 2014). The fact that these programs have all the support they need, except monetary, is tragic. During my time working for an afterschool program, we have experienced the effects of the lack of financial support. We have been restricted to the supplies we can use, cut the time of programs, and searched for other means of funding. At times we have questioned, if we would have an afterschool or summer program, which is disappointing because of all of the benefits it provides.

The most basic of all of the afterschool program benefits is that it provides a safe, supervised environment for students after the bell rings at 3pm. Many student’s parents do not

get off work at the same time as their students are released from school. This leaves them with a few different options; expensive childcare, an afterschool program (if one is available), or risking leaving your child with lack of adequate supervision. In the United States 11.3 million children, or one in five, are without supervision from 3pm to 6pm (“America After 3pm”, 2014).

Unsupervised children not only are missing out on hours of potential growth and development, but they are also more likely to participate in harmful activities. Kids who aren’t enrolled in afterschool programs are more likely to be involved in crime, gangs, drugs, alcohol, and other risky behaviors (Wang, 2014). Afterschool programs are in significant demand in large, high crime areas. “83% of parents with children in afterschool programs agreed that the programs reduced the likelihood of youths participating in risky behavior” (Wang, 2014). Afterschool programs are a smart investment in youth. By spending money to demote risky behavior and promote learning in skill growth, decreases the likelihood of participation in these behaviors, which potentially could cost the country more both financially and socially. By providing funding for a safe supervised afterschool program provides parents with peace of mind, helping them to be able to keep working (“America After 3pm”, 2014).

While afterschool programs meet a child's basic need of a safe environment, it’s benefits stretch far beyond this. A great afterschool program can easily have a large impact on children, especially at such an impressionable age. These programs allow students to spend time socializing with peers and develop healthy relationships with adults/teens. They also have time to play, such an often overlooked activity that is essential to their development. Recreation can broaden a child’s imagination, thoughts, and interests. While children are busy playing and participating, they are actually developing skills that could result in a possible career interest, or

simply allow them to develop their personalities and creativity (“After School Programs,” n.d.). Afterschool programs are an ideal substitute for other nonstimulating activities such as watching tv or playing video games (“After School Programs,” n.d.). The 21st century skills that many afterschool programs provide will produce more actively involved members of society and will give students the tools to reach their full potentials (Afterschool Alliance, 2016).

After the school bell rings, a child’s education doesn’t stop there. The truth is that as humans we should never stop learning and should take advantage of opportunities to expand our knowledge. Education extends so much farther than what we learn in a classroom. One of the most obvious benefits that are associated with afterschool programs is education. Programs across the nation offer a broad range of educational activities, ranging from tutoring or homework help, literacy programs, and a recent a rise in hands-on STEM based activities. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics is a rapidly growing field and skills in these fields will be very valuable to future employers (“America After 3pm,” 2014). The educational opportunities that are given to students enrolled in afterschool programs have shown growth in the main classroom. These participants have shown improvement in overall grades, math and reading proficiency (1/3rd), homework completion (70%) , class participation (70%) , and student behavior (2/3rds) (Parsad & Lewis, 2009). (Afterschool Alliance, 2016).

While a typical 8am to 3pm education is vital to the development of students, what they participate in after school is also important. Students and parent deserve the opportunity to further their education and develop their skills while being in a safe supervised environment to promote their growth. For students already participating in such programs, they have shown the tremendous benefits they provide. However, they are facing difficulties due to funding cuts. For

every students in the program, 2 more students don't have this opportunity available ("America After 3pm," 2014). Syracuse Police Chief Frank Fowler claims "We can't afford to not invest in these afterschool programs" (Wang, 2014). Educational funding has been a big topic of discussion for many state governments and the federal government. In my opinion, I only see the benefits of funding education and dumbfounded as to many things more important to invest in. While budgeting, especially on a federal scale is difficult, funding education, including afterschool programs should be a priority. Some ways I propose funding for this are rebudgeting, cutting from other departments/programs, more grant opportunities, reallocating tax profits, cutting government salaries, and using lottery profits to fund education as exemplified by the Missouri state government. Funding afterschool programs is vital to allowing students to reach their full potential, which as a result will benefit the future of our society. By investing time, effort, and money on the next generation we can provide them with the tools to be successful. Afterschool programs are a key component in this, they provide a safe supervised environment, stimulate the development of skills that are vital in the 21st Century, and allow the expansion of education after regular school hours. Working at and attending an afterschool program has given me a first hand experience in the benefits it provides to the community, workers, and the students. Not funding after school programs would truly be a missed opportunity to allow these students to reach new heights in their educational potential. "Excellence in education is when we do everything that we can do to make sure they become everything that they can." Carol Tomlinson.

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