

Unsupervised and Unsafe: After-school and Youth Development Programs

In Pennsylvania, more than a million children are in families with all parents working, with the potential for a lack of supervision that has serious and long-term implications. Juvenile crime and juvenile victimization peak in the hours after the school day ends. Children without adult supervision during after-school hours are also more likely to have poor grades and higher rates of truancy, risk-taking behavior, and substance abuse.

The goal: All Pennsylvania children and youths should have access to high-quality adult-supervised after-school and youth development programs in their own communities.

The Problem is Real

With most children now living in families where a single parent or both parents work outside the home, lack of supervision during the after-school hours is a serious and growing problem.

- In 69 percent of all married-couple families with children ages 6 to 17, both parents work outside the home.¹
- In Pennsylvania, at least 1.2 million children are in families with all parents working.²
- Across the country, about 8 million children ages 5 to 14 regularly spend time without adult supervision. Of these, 4 million are between the ages of 5 and 12.³
- The time accumulated after children leave school and parents get home from work can amount to 20 to 25 hours a week.⁴

The implications are grave:

- Studies by the FBI and others have found that the peak hours for juvenile

crime and victimization are from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m.⁵ That's also when teens are likeliest to get in an automobile accident, engage in sex, smoke, drink, or use drugs.⁶

- Violent crimes by juveniles – murder, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault – peak between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m.⁷
- Nearly 4.5 million children age 14 and younger are injured in their homes every year, and most unintentional injury-related deaths occur when children are out of school and unsupervised.⁸
- Children without adult supervision are at significantly greater risk of truancy, poor grades, risk-taking behavior, and substance abuse.⁹ Without educational success and competencies, children are less likely to graduate and be prepared to enter employment and higher education opportunities.
- Children's most common after-school activity is watching television, which can encour-

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age aggression and discourage literacy.¹⁰

The Solution is Clear

The challenge, while daunting, is not overwhelming. After-school and youth development programs help children, their parents, and the community:

Improved school performance. Studies have shown that students participating in effective after-school programs show better grades,¹¹ better school attendance,¹² and drop out less often than children who were not in these programs.¹³ Children in after-school programs also behave better in class. Here in Pennsylvania, a RAND Corporation evaluation found that fourth-graders in Philadelphia-area after-school programs outperformed comparison students in reading, language arts, and math.¹⁵

Preparing teens for college. Children and teens participating in effective after-school programs are more likely to go on to college after high school.¹⁶

Safer kids – and neighborhoods. Quality after-school programs reduce the chance that a participating child or teen is a victim of a crime.¹⁷ They can also reduce the likelihood that participating teenagers will commit crimes and can reduce crime in the neighborhood.¹⁸

Avoiding risky and harmful behavior. In one study, students who spent time in extracurricular activities like after-school programs were 49 percent less likely to use drugs and 37 percent less likely to become teen parents.¹⁹ Anti-smoking activities in after-school programs are an important component of Michigan's tobacco prevention efforts, which have contributed to a 28 percent drop in teen smoking in just four years.²⁰

Saving tax dollars. The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence showed that an effective after-school program saves \$3 for every \$1 spent.²¹

Improving parents' workplace productivity. Quality child care, including after-school care, can increase productivity in the workplace because parents miss less time from work and are more confident of their child's well-being.²²

The Need is Great

Despite strong research-based evidence demon-

strating the effectiveness of after-school programs, services have not kept pace. Demand for school-based after-school programs outstrips supply by about two to one.²³

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) projects that the need for school-age care could exceed the available resources by as much as four to one in some cities this year.²⁴ In rural areas, experts believe that the availability of school-age care covers only about one-third of children with employed parents.²⁵ Here in Pennsylvania, more than half of those responding to a recent statewide survey said it was difficult for parents to find affordable, quality after-school programs in their area.

The current federal and state commitment to providing more after-school opportunities falls far short of meeting the need.

- Total funding from the two largest federal funding programs, the Child Care Development Block Grant and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), serves fewer than 2 million of the 35.8 million children ages 5 to 13 in this country.²⁶ In Pennsylvania, only 5,000 children have been served with the 21st CCLC, although anticipated funding increases will extend the program to more children.²⁷
- Pennsylvania's new youth development program, funded with \$15 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars, serves only 9,409 children – a small fraction of kids needing after-school activities.²⁸
- The state's subsidized child care funding is an important revenue source used to support after school and youth development programs, particularly for younger school-age youth. These dollars, however, are limited in their availability, purpose and eligibility requirements, and are not sufficient to support the many school-age children and youth who could use the services.²⁹

The Support is Strong

Law enforcement professionals, educators, par-

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ents and the general public overwhelmingly support after-school programs.

- According to public polling data from the 1999 and 2000 Mott Foundation/JC Penney survey, 92 percent of voters agree that access to after-school programs or some type of organized, supervised activity is important, and that access must be available to all school-age children and youth. This consensus holds across partisan lines as well as geographic regions.³⁰
- Another survey found that 88 percent of voters believe after-school programs are a necessity. Nearly 40 percent believe that the biggest problem facing children today is that they are alone and unsupervised.³¹
- 78 percent of Pennsylvanians think that providing after-school opportunities for children and teens should be a top priority for state government, and 71 percent support expansion even if state government must spend more.
- Only one Pennsylvanian in four thinks the state is doing enough to fund after-school programs for children and teens.³²
- Nine U.S. police chiefs in 10 believe that expanding after-school programs will “greatly reduce youth crime and violence.”
- The same percentage believes “if America does not make greater investments in after-school and educational child care programs to help children and youth now, we will pay far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs.”³³

Educators have long recognized the need for after-school programs as a way to improve students’ success in school.

- In a 1989 Harris poll, 84 percent of school principals agreed there was a need for after-school programs.
- In a 2001 survey, nearly nine principals in 10 said that after-school programs are important to a school.³⁴

The Objective is Achievable

Effective youth development programs during

the after-school hours exist in some communities across Pennsylvania. But these programs are not available on the scale needed to help many of the children who would benefit. Sufficient programs will not develop on their own without state government’s support for local community partnerships that can deliver quality services.

Pennsylvania should strive to give children and teens access to quality after-school and youth development programs that provide:

- A safe environment with structured adult supervision.
- Learning opportunities designed to improve educational achievement
- Training to teach kids to stand up against drugs, alcohol, tobacco and violence, including a comprehensive plan to reduce use of tobacco, a key “gateway” drug.
- Support the successful transition from youth to adulthood through youth employment and training opportunities.

This can be achieved through state government action to:

- Increase support for proven after-school and youth development approaches in rural and urban areas across the state. Pool and expand upon the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program – which will receive an additional \$11.5 million annually, beginning in the federal 2003 fiscal year, to supplement its existing \$10.97 million allocation – and the state’s current \$15 million allocation of TANF dollars for youth development.
- Create a statewide technical resource center network to help local programs deliver effective, research-based activities and monitor programs’ effectiveness in improving school performance and other key measures of success. This assistance should include help with developing agreements to use school facilities, strategies to secure funding from federal and other sources, methods for connecting homework-assistance activities to students’ academic performance needs, and establishing and monitoring performance measures to gauge

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success. This assistance could be provided by Pennsylvania's four regional Child Care Resource Development Offices.

- Provide incentives for counties to redirect existing child welfare funding to effective after-school and youth development programs from high-end crisis intervention and place-

ment. This budget-neutral approach will promote preventive activities and services.

- Ensure that sufficient resources are available through the state's current subsidized child care program to ensure access to school-age services for more eligible working families, and to avoid development of waiting lists.

The Time is Now

The entire state benefits when we give children and youth the tools and opportunities they need to grow into responsible adults. After-school and youth development programs have proven to be a critical component in improving the safety of our children and providing extra learning opportunities that can improve school performance while reducing crime.

Notes

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