

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF



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Afterschool and the Building of Character

Building of character and promoting positive behavior is an important part of every afterschool program. Besides the basics of homework help and physical fitness activities, afterschool programs are using teamwork exercises, service learning, volunteerism and other activities to teach kids about making the right decisions that will help them become responsible, caring and productive adults. The tasks of keeping kids safe and improving academic achievement come with lessons of self-confidence, compassion, perseverance, tolerance and ethics—lessons that will keep them in the classroom, earning good grades and planning for their futures and away from risky behaviors such as truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activity and sexual activity.

Afterschool programs keep kids safe and deter them from risky behavior.

- The behavior of students who regularly participate in Montgomery, Alabama's 21st CCLC Star Search afterschool programs is improving, even though discipline problems have increased among other students. Overall, there has been a 25 percent reduction in violence across the three sites. (U.S. Department of Education, September 2000)
- Incidents of vandalism, stealing, violent acts and arrests were 50 percent lower among students in afterschool programs in 12 high-risk California communities. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *California*, August 2001)
- In a report on The After-School Corporation's (TASC) afterschool programs, evaluators conclude that, "Although risky behavior remained prevalent in the lives of students outside of their school and after-school experiences, students reported that certain risk behaviors became less common in their lives, including (among high school participants) alcohol use and sexual activity." (Policy Studies Associates, Inc., December 2002)
- In Plainview, Arkansas, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program implemented an abstinence program that resulted in no pregnancies in their high school graduating class for the first time in years. In 1998, there were six teen pregnancies, in 1999 there were only three, and in 2000, there were *no pregnancies* at the high school. (U.S. Department of Education, September 2000)

Afterschool programs improve students' performance and interest in school.

- Children and youth who regularly attend high-quality afterschool programs have better grades and conduct in school; more academic and enrichment opportunities; better peer relations and emotional adjustment and lower incidences of drug-use, violence and pregnancy. (U.S. Department of Education, September 2000)
- 21st CCLC participants in Chattanooga, Tennessee, have shown improved school attendance. At one school, absentee days dropped from 568 days to 135; at another the drop was from 148 to 23. (U.S. Department of Education, September 2000)

- Participants in the Boys and Girls' Clubs of America's national educational enhancement program, Project Learn, increased their grade average and showed improved school attendance and study skills. (S. Schinke, 1999)
- High school youth in afterschool programs are at least 5 to 10 percent more likely to earn "A"s and "B"s; have attended a cultural event or visited a museum in the past month; say they love school or like school a lot; believe being a good student is important; say their schools are preparing them very well for college and plan to continue their education after graduation. (Peter D. Hart, Research Associates, 1999)
- Higher levels of participation in LA's BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) afterschool program led to better school attendance resulting in higher academic achievement on standardized tests of mathematics, reading and language arts. (D. Huang et. al, May 2000)
- Students who participate in extracurricular activities achieve better grades, have lower rates of truancy, attain higher levels of achievement in college and feel more attached to their schools, as documented by a 17-year study that followed 1,800 sixth-graders in 10 Michigan school districts through high school and college. (*Education Week*, October 2000)

Afterschool programs encourage students to be respectful of others and committed to the community.

- The 3:00 Project, a statewide afterschool program developed by the Georgia School-Age Care Association, offers the more than 750 participating middle school students community service opportunities from stocking food banks to performing puppet shows on substance abuse for younger youth. The program reports that approximately 80 percent of parents and 60 percent of youth and teachers agree the program enhances youths' interpersonal skills and helps them learn how to make a positive contribution to their community. A majority of the youth said they enjoyed volunteering and that they planned to volunteer in the future. (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, June 1998)
- 95 percent of teens said it is important to be involved in the community through volunteering time to community efforts. (The Wirthlin Group, 1995)

Afterschool programs provide students with values and habits that will help them succeed in life.

- The 4-H Share/Care After School and Summer Program for 2,000 youth in New Mexico focuses on substance abuse prevention, developing leadership capacity, increasing self-esteem and fostering active citizenship through hands-on learning activities. Staff at one fifth grade program reported that 96 percent of the youth indicated on year-end surveys that they "have a goal to not use drugs." (National 4-H Council, 2001)
- Students involved in Exploring, an out-of-school time career education program, learn life skills, empathy, ethics, respect and other values through career exploration, mentoring and service learning. 75 percent of Explorers say their group has had to face decisions about right and wrong. Also, 92 percent agree that the program has made them more self-confident, 94 percent learned to get along with people who are different and 93 percent learned about how to work in a group and be a team player.

Afterschool programs are a sound public investment.

All of these positive outcomes of afterschool programs create an investment that pays off for taxpayers. Every dollar invested in afterschool programs will save taxpayers approximately \$3, according to an independent study of the costs and benefits of afterschool programs. These savings stem in part from a reduced need for remedial education and grade repetition. Because afterschool can be a crime deterrent, savings from reduced juvenile crime and risky behaviors increase total savings by 400 percent to \$12. (Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, September 2002)