



Afterschool Alliance

AFTERSCHOOL FOR ALL

Keeping Young People Safe: Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs and Youth Violence Prevention

More than 15 million school-age children (26 percent) are on their own after school. Among them, more than 1 million are in grades K-5. Children who are unsupervised after school are in danger of becoming victims of crimes or accidents. These 15.1 million children are also at risk of falling behind academically, socially and emotionally. They are at higher risk than other children and youth of substance abuse, gang involvement, teen pregnancy and dropping out. A small but growing number of our children are avoiding these pitfalls and reaping the benefits of quality, affordable afterschool programs – evidence-based programs that keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. Through federal programs like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative, and the support of parents, businesses, schools and local and state government, over 8 million children participate in afterschool programs daily.

Youth violence prevention – a role for afterschool and summer learning programs

Afterschool and summer learning programs provide a safe, nurturing environment for young people and can be part of a comprehensive public health approach to youth violence prevention. In addition to academic support, quality afterschool programs provide youth development opportunities for young people that contribute to mentally and physically healthy children and teens, including:

- *Social and emotional learning:* The Promising Afterschool Programs Study found that students reported improved social and behavioral outcomes: elementary students reported reductions in aggressive behavior towards other students and skipping school, and middle school students reported reduced use of drugs and alcohol, compared to their routinely unsupervised peers. (Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2007)
- *Caring adults and mentor relationships:* Mentoring is a critical element in every child's social, emotional and cognitive development. It builds a sense of industry and competency, boosts academic performance and broadens horizons. Along with parents, mentors help young people realize their potential by providing them with support, advice, encouragement and friendship. Afterschool programs, with their history of supporting families and communities, are an ideal platform for successful mentoring programs.
- *An inclusive, supportive learning environment for all children:* While all children benefit from high quality afterschool programs, afterschool gives children with special needs the chance to experience meaningful and authentic belonging. Beyond the benefits of providing learning and enrichment activities, afterschool offers children with special needs the chance to engage with their non-disabled peers in a way often not possible during the regular school day.

Recommendations

Consistent with the National Collaborative for Youth and others in the youth development field, we recommend the following as part of a comprehensive effort to reduce violence, particularly violence directed at young people:

- Targeted funding through the Department of Justice for evidence-based afterschool and summer learning programs that prevent youth violence, including programs offering physical activity that helps contribute to positive mental health.
- Increasing funding for afterschool and summer learning program infrastructure through the Department of Education's 21st CCLC initiative.
- Holistic measures for students and schools that include their health, safety, and education.
- Universal training for personnel who work with youth in schools and community settings.
- Proactive efforts by community organizations, schools and parents, working together to ensure that all children are connected to community in meaningful ways at each stage of development.

1616 H Street NW, Suite 820, Washington, D.C. 20006 • 1440 Broadway, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10018

TEL: 202.347.2030 FAX: 202.347.2092 • TEL: 646.943.8660 FAX: 646.943.8664