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After-school programs help kids succeed

When it comes to selecting an after-school program for your children, many parents and caregivers have a lot of questions. Partners for Public Education reached out to the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network to discuss the value of after-school programs and how parents can find the best ones.

How do after-school programs benefit school-aged children, parents, and the larger community?

The Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network's (PSAYDN) mission is to promote sustainable, high-quality out-of-school time youth development programs across Pennsylvania because we believe these programs promote youth development and support the successful transition to adulthood. After-school programs benefit children by inspiring learning. From a 2010 meta-analysis after-school report, it has been demonstrated that high-quality after-school programs are proven to accelerate student achievement and positive social conduct, reduce problem behaviors, and improve school grades and test scores.

Not only do children benefit with after-school programs, but parents benefit from having access to programs that support families by keeping children and youth engaged and safe while parents work. Approximately 18 percent of Pennsylvania children were unsupervised after school in 2014 for an average of 8.99 hours per week. The hours from 3 to 6 p.m. are a peak time for kids to commit crimes or become victims of crimes. Youth also tend to develop patterns of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use — or non-use — between the ages of 12 to 15. According to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, youth in after-school programs are 50 percent less likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs. Reducing juvenile crime greatly benefits the community.

What should working parents interested in enrolling their children in an after-school program look for?

Many working parents look to find an after-school program that fits their child's needs. High-quality after-school programs offer more than just a safe place for children; they offer a positive effect on a child's or youth's early development. These programs

DEMAND IS HIGH

More Pennsylvania youth than ever before—

321,296

—are in afterschool programs.

www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM



also set the foundation for positive relationships and a lifetime of learning. PSAYDN created a set of principles and ideals which we believe should guide the actions of after-school programming, regardless of the program purpose or ages served. Parents may want to consider the following elements and questions when searching for a quality program:

Structure and management:

- How are staff and volunteers trained?
- What type of professional development opportunities are there for staff?
- How are program outcomes measured and evaluated?

Safety and health

- Is it a safe and accessible environment?
- Does the program promote fitness, good nutrition, and healthy choices?

Activities

- Are there activities that promote understanding and respect for various cultures?
- Do the activities contain varied learning strategies and combine academic, recreational, and cultural elements?
- Are the activities age-appropriate, and do they strive to develop skills and promote learning?

Positive Connections

- Does the program provide strong partnerships with families, schools, and the local community?

What can parents expect their children to do in an after-school program?

After-school programs as we know them today still carry the traditions of safety, youth development, and academic enrichment, but they are now offered by a wide variety of means and venues. They can include tutoring, mentoring, homework help, arts (music, theater, and drama), civic engagement, and other activities to support and promote healthy social/emotional development. After-school programs also play a valuable role in improving science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. After-school programs can provide the infrastructure to foster STEM partnerships and communication. This is necessary to build the commonwealth, as there are annually 75,000 STEM job openings in Pennsylvania.

What do you tell parents who say they'd like to enroll their children in an after-school program but simply can't afford it?

Low-income working parents seeking to find care beyond school hours have a number of options to consider. First, PSAYDN would suggest parents contact their local school district to find out the specific programs available. Some of these after-school and out-of-school-time programs may offer or be aware of scholarship or private funding opportunities for children. Parents should also determine if they are eligible for financial assistance by contacting their local Child Care Information Services agency for resource and referral services. They can find a listing of regulated child care providers through the Online Child Care Provider Search. Also, parents can apply for benefits by using COMPASS, an online resource for financial assistance that includes child care in Pennsylvania. (See the links below for more information.)

LEARN MORE

Child Care Information Services:

www.dhs.state.pa.us/helpfultelephonenumber/childcareinformation/services/index.htm

Online Child Care Provider Search:

www.compass.state.pa.us/compass.web/ProviderSearch/pgm/PSWEL.aspx

COMPASS: www.compass.state.pa.us/

Rising STARS Initiative:

www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_STARS

PSAYDN: www.psaydn.org/

With growth in after-school programs, is the number of "latchkey kids" in Pennsylvania decreasing?

The number of "latchkey kids" in Pennsylvania is decreasing, especially with growth and demand for after-school programs increasing significantly over the last five years. Despite this positive shift, according to the 2015 "Afterschool by the Numbers" report from the Afterschool Alliance, nearly 350,000 children are still on their own during the after-school hours in Pennsylvania. Over 800,000 kids in Pennsylvania would participate in an after-school program if one was available to them. Approximately 321,000 kids in Pennsylvania participate in after-school programs. The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to before-school, after-school, and summer learning programs. Currently, over 600,000 kids in Pennsylvania are eligible to participate in a 21st CCLC program. However, just over 42,000 students attend a 21st CCLC program, largely due to limited federal funding for the programs.

What role does the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network play in promoting high-quality afterschool programs?

PSAYDN promotes sustainable, high-quality out-of-school-time youth development programs through advocacy and capacity building. PSAYDN understands that quality out-of-school-time programs inspire and promote learning and positive youth development by providing opportunities for autonomy and leadership, caring relationships, connections to family, community, and school, safe environments, and engaging activities. PSAYDN promotes a "Program Quality Value Statement" to ensure a straightforward framework to define quality for after-school programs. PSAYDN also encourages investment by the state in the Rising STARS initiative. (See the link below for more on the Rising STARS initiative.) PSAYDN is also excited to announce the formation of a bipartisan, bicameral "Afterschool Caucus," co-chaired by Sen. John Yudichak and Sen. Ryan Aument in the Pennsylvania Senate and state Rep. Jake Wheatley and Rep. Mindy Fee in the state House.



About Partners for Public Education

Partners for Public Education is working to provide you with resources about public education in Pennsylvania because we are committed to the success of every child. It is brought to you by the [Pennsylvania State Education Association](http://www.pseasg.org), an organization made up of the dedicated employees in your Pennsylvania public schools.

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