

Iowa Afterschool Alliance Issue Brief

Afterschool Programs Help Working Families

This issue brief is the first in a series developed by the Iowa Afterschool Alliance. Each issue brief is designed to educate policymakers about important issues relating to Iowa's afterschool programs in an effort to encourage well-informed policies for those programs. Please note, however, that the views and opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the organizations employing the Alliance members.



Family Structures Are Changing

Today's families in Iowa and across the nation are very different from the family image of 50 years ago. While women are still the primary caregivers, either as single mothers or part of a two-parent family, they are entering the workforce in greater numbers than ever. According to a 2003 study by the Children's Defense Fund, Iowa has the greatest percentage of families in the nation with both parents (or the only parent) in the workforce.

Making Up the Difference

While the work day grows longer for working parents, the school day has not. The gap between work and school schedules amounts to as much as 25 hours per week, which presents working parents with the challenge of finding someone to care for their children while they are at work. Working parents often find themselves with limited options: child care, which can be costly; care from friends and relatives, when it's available; or allowing their child to stay home alone. The number of available afterschool programs to serve as a viable option is decreasing. It is estimated there are over 300,000 children ages 5 through 12 in Iowa who could benefit from afterschool programs.

Child care can be prohibitively expensive for some working families. Families in Iowa often report that they pay more each month for child care than they pay for shelter for the family. Nearly half of America's working families with a child younger than 13 have child care expenses that consume, on average, 9 percent of their monthly earnings, and families with earnings below the federal poverty level spend an average of 23 percent of their monthly earnings on childcare, says research by The Urban Institute.

The Three O'Clock Dilemma

Studies show that children are most at risk during the hours after school—the time of day when juvenile crime triples and children are most likely to be involved in risky behavior, such as drug use or sexual activity. Even if unsupervised kids are not getting into trouble, they are oftentimes at home eating, playing video games or watching TV, which is a major contributing factor to childhood obesity.

While concerns about unsupervised children pressure families, they also profoundly affect employers. Polling by *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids* shows that 87 percent of working mothers say the hours after school are when they are most concerned about their children's safety, and other studies demonstrate this "afterschool stress" can lead to distraction that causes lower productivity, high turnover, and absenteeism. In fact, 80 percent of employees with children miss work because of child care problems, according to Policy Research Associates.

Quality afterschool programs are proven to alleviate these burdens. For many parents and children, afterschool activities are much more than a luxury.

What is the Iowa Afterschool Alliance?

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) is a statewide coalition of networks and interest groups who support, advocate, train, and work to advance afterschool and out-of-school time experiences which are meaningful and beneficial for children, youth, families, and communities. The IAA is a project of the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development and receives financial support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Statewide Afterschool Network grant and the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust.

- Parents in a study from The After School Corporation said afterschool programs helped them balance work and family life, with 60 percent saying they missed less work than before their child was in the program, and 59 percent saying it supported them.
- One parent from Marshalltown explains how afterschool programs help her family: "It is imperative for my children to be in a safe environment. The added benefit is that afterschool activities have taught them other languages, given them a place to do their homework with a teacher available for questions, and provided recreational activities to give them additional exercise."

Afterschool as a Workforce and Economic Issue

Corporate Voices for Working Families, a philanthropic organization made up of major corporations, highlights a study that estimates the cost to business due to parental stress about their children after school to be anywhere from \$496.00 to \$1,984.00 per employee, per year, depending on the employee's annual salary. The study confirms what the business community has known for some time: when employees have access to high quality afterschool programs for their children, employees are better able to concentrate on their work, increase productivity and decrease absenteeism, and ultimately, create higher profitability for the employer.

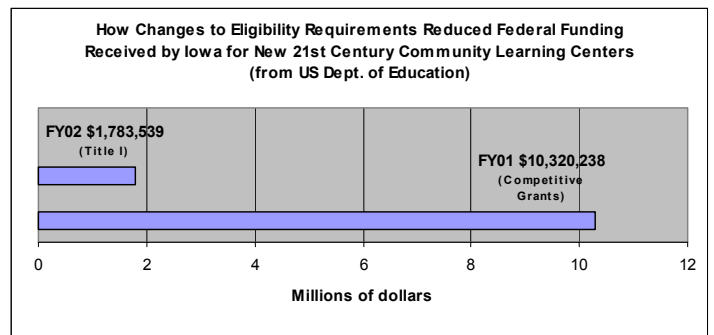
Many companies across the country see afterschool as an investment in their workforce, both current and future. As the American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC) notes in its 10th Anniversary Report, "The companies view their investments in dependent care in the community not as charity, but as sound business practice." Although some large corporations may be able to contribute to the cost of providing quality afterschool care for their employees' families, many Iowa-based businesses would find it difficult to do so.

Iowa's Unmet Needs for Afterschool

Despite the many school districts, cities, businesses, and faith- and community-based organizations taking steps to help provide quality afterschool programming, there are still plenty of gaps in care. In 2003, Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral estimated that for the 226,056 children age 6-12 who potentially needed child care, only 49,690 slots for that age group could be identified.

Federal funding to Iowa for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), afterschool programs across the state that are a crucial component of the No Child Left Behind Act, has taken significant cuts.

Previously, when states applied for competitive grants, Iowa fared well in receiving federal funds. However, changes to the eligibility requirements now say the funds must go to programs with 40% or more of the students who receive free and reduced lunch. The current Title I formula requirements mean that fewer school districts across the state qualify for 21st CCLC funds, and that a number of communities with programs previously funded are now left to scale back, close, or obtain funding from other private and public sources to preserve their afterschool programs. Both rural and urban areas have been significantly affected.



Summary

Supporting families is a part of healthy businesses and a healthy Iowa economy. Investments at all levels, federal to local, and from all sectors, public to private, are crucial to ensuring that Iowa's children do not fall through the cracks while their parents are at work and they are out of school.

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