

# After-school Myths & Realities

## 1. After-school programs have limited sources of support.

---

### REALITY

- After-school programs' funding often comes from a variety of sources, including school districts; state governments; federal programs such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers; local community-based organizations and student participation fees. Since student fees are often waived or charged on a sliding scale for low-income students, many programs cannot depend upon these fees as a major source of funding.
- Schools can often assist with funding through programs like Title I.
- Partnerships between school and after-school can be mutually beneficial in pooling resources to achieve common objectives.

## 2. After-school programs are not accountable to standards or regulations the way schools are.

---

### REALITY

- Most after-school programs have a comprehensive set of requirements and expectations by which they abide.
- Several states and districts require that programs qualify for accreditation through a process developed and administered by the National Afterschool Association.

## 3. After-school programs are only meant to serve under-achieving students.

---

### REALITY

- Although low-income and under-achieving students often have a complex set of academic and social needs that after-school programs are well positioned to address, after-school programming offers opportunities for all children.
- In addition to academic support and tutoring, many programs focus on a variety of themes and interests, such as sports and the arts, that provide learning enrichment for all children.

#### 4. After-school programs are only for young children.

##### REALITY:

- Although a large number of programs serve elementary school children, a wide variety of programming can be tailored to the specific needs of middle and high school students.
- Since older students “vote with their feet,” it is essential that programming reflects their interests. Such programs might include sports teams, science and art clubs, debate, homework help or mentoring.

#### 5. After-school programs only serve working families.

##### REALITY:

- After-school includes programs that operate during the summer and holiday seasons, as well as before school and on weekends. Some programs serve dinner and extend their hours well into the evening.
- The hours between 3–6 p.m. on school days (referred to by law enforcement officials as a “danger zone”) are, however, the prime time for violent juvenile crime; this is also the time period during which kids are most likely to become victims of violent crime, be involved in all kinds of accidents, experiment with drugs or alcohol and become pregnant. (After-School All-Stars) Programs that operate between 3–6 p.m. therefore play a key role in ensuring the safety of children.
- Only 6.5 million K-12 children (11%) participate in after-school programs. An additional 15 million would participate if a quality program were available in their community. (America After 3PM, May 2004)

#### 6. After-school staff lacks academic and child development qualifications.

##### REALITY:

- Educational qualifications for staff may vary according to program focus. Ten or more years ago, most after-school programs were designed to provide safe spaces for children to wind down from the school day, socialize with other children and enjoy a variety of recreational activities. As the after-school movement has grown, attention on the part of educators, parents and even the federal government has turned to ways in which these valuable hours after school can be utilized to provide additional opportunities for learning and enrichment. Most programs now include homework help and remedial assistance, as well as a variety of enrichment experiences in the arts, technology, science and community service. As a result, many programs now employ staff whose qualifications include post-graduate degrees, often in education.
- After-school can be an entry point for teacher development.
- Many programs have on-going training requirements, often in partnership with colleges and universities.
- Although some programs do not require academic qualifications and may depend on the participation of volunteers, they look for individuals who are child-focused and able to connect well with children at the age levels of the program.

## 7. After-school programs do not engage the community in ways that benefit schools.

### REALITY

- The ideal after-school program is uniquely balanced between school and community and presents opportunities for parents and community members to access schools in ways they otherwise wouldn't.
- Parents are often encouraged to take a role in after-school programs as volunteers or champions.
- After-school programs often work in partnership with libraries, universities, museums and community centers.
- A disconnected community is in jeopardy of becoming an unsafe community. Criminologist Robert J. Sampson asserts, "communities characterized by (a) anonymity and sparse acquaintanceship networks among residents, (b) unsupervised teenage peer groups and attenuated control of public space, and (c) a weak organizational base and low social participation in local activities face an increased risk of crime and violence." (After-School All-Stars)
- After-school programs are proven to lower juvenile crime rates and generally improve neighborhoods and not just by keeping youth occupied for a few hours everyday. After-school programs help young people succeed by providing academic support and the chance to form meaningful relationships with adults from their community, and by encouraging them to get involved in their neighborhood through service projects. This support, these relationships and the benefits to the community create a mutually beneficial relationship of immeasurable value. (After-School All-Stars)
- Experts agree that investing money in after-school programs saves lives and tax dollars over time—one study concluded every dollar spent on an after-school program produced three dollars in benefits to the public. (After-School All-Stars)

## 8. After-school programs are separate from the school day and therefore do not have relevance to issues such as school attendance or graduation rates.

### REALITY

- Students who spend even one to four hours in after-school activities are 60% less likely to drop out of school by 12th grade than their peers who did not attend. (LASLC)
- Teens who do not participate in after-school programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes than teens who do participate. (YMCA of the USA, March 2001)
- Students in a statewide program in California improved their standardized test scores (SAT-9) in both reading and math by percentages almost twice that of other students and also had better school attendance. The program cut the high school drop-out rate by 20%. (University of California Irvine, May 2001 and March 2006)
- Boys and girls in the Quantum Opportunities after-school program were half as likely to drop out of high school and two and one half times more likely to go on to further education after high school than their peers. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2000)

## 9. After-school programs have no impact on academic success.

---

### REALITY

- Many after-school programs strive to create an environment that is an extension of the school learning day in a way that, while it may be more flexible and informal, addresses specific needs and enhances individual talents.
- After-school programs often encourage the development of social-emotional, teambuilding and problem-solving skills that support learning and are critical aptitudes in preparing students for a global economy.
- Students (Pre-K through 8th grade) supported by The After-School Corporation (TASC) improved their math scores and regular school day attendance compared to non-participants. High school level after-school participants passed more Regent exams and earned more high school credits than non-participants. (Policy Studies Associates, July 2004)
- Students participating in Citizen Schools' programs have higher math and English grades; score better on the Massachusetts state standardized exam (MCAS) in English language arts; have higher attendance rates and lower suspension rates; are more often enrolling in top-tier, college-track high schools and perform better in ninth grade English and math coursework compared to a matched group of Boston Public School students. (Citizen Schools, November 2005)

## 10. After-school programs are just babysitting.

---

### REALITY

- Most after-school programs have daily activities that complement academic learning, support and homework time.
- Tutoring is a common element of many after-school programs, providing struggling students access to the one-on-one support they need.
- After-school programming incorporates informal activities that enhance academic and life skills.
- After-school activities, such as music, arts and sports, provide children with experiences that are essential to healthy child development but that have often been extracted from the school day.