

Background and Position Paper

The Case for After-School Care

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The composition of the labor force has changed dramatically over the past decade, which has contributed to the shifting dynamic of the American family. The number of employed women has increased drastically over the last generation, especially in the past thirty years. Between 1950 and 1998, the percentage of women in the labor force increased by 25.9 percent. In 1996, more than one-fourth of the children in the US were living in single-parent homes (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). These figures indicate a greatly increased need for after-school care

Although research has shown that mature children in white rural and suburban environments do not suffer when left alone after school, (Vandell & Corasaniti, 1988; Sarampote, Bassett & Winsler, 2004) children from low income families experience more adjustment problems when they care for themselves after school than similar low-income children in after-school programs. Children from families with low incomes show the greatest benefits from formal after-school programs. They achieve higher grades in school, have better classroom behavior, and show better emotional adjustment (Posner

and Vandell, 1994). The gains for low income children are attributed to their participation in structured academic and social activities after school hours. After-school programs that have been associated with the most positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes in the child they serve are costly and therefore are not accessible to low-income families. A solution to this problem is the development of more federally and state funded after-school programs that are accessible to all. Two examples of such programs are California's After School Education and Safety (ASES) program and the School of the 21st Century.

The School of the 21st Century follows children from birth to the age twelve, providing before- and after-school care free of charge. After-school care normally takes place at the child's school, but if it is located off-site, transportation is provided without charge. The implementers of The School of the 21st Century believe that parent education is an important component of child development and incorporates education for parents into their program. Preliminary studies have indicated that children who participated in the School of the 21st century performed better academically than those in a

matched group, indicating the need to further expand the program and disseminate information about its objectives (Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Marsland, 1995).

California's After School Education and Safety (ASES) program is a 121.6 million dollar program funded by the state. Its goal is to promote educationally enriching options both before and after school for California youth in kindergarten through the ninth grade. In order to receive funding from ASES, programs must include two chief components: education and literacy and educational enrichment. The program strives to not just repeat what the children have learned in school, but also present novel learning opportunities and activities. Since its implementation in 1999, studies have shown that children participating in programs under aegis of ASES have demonstrated increased academic achievement, especially among at-risk students, improved social skills and behavior, and a reduction in grade retention. With the possibility that the funding for this program may increase to 150 million dollars in the coming years, it appears that it will have a continuing impact on California's after school care programs (California Department of Education, 2002).

Various states, led by California, have recognized the need for safe and affordable after-school care options and have implemented acts such as California's "After-School Learning and Safe Neighborhood

Partnerships Program," which promotes intellectual development and provides safe and structured after-school care for children in elementary, middle, and junior high schools (Sarampote, Bassett, & Winsler, 2004). It is important that after-school programs that are already in existence strive to meet federally

Fast Facts about After-School Care

- **6.5 million** children in grades K-12 are currently in after-school care (Afterschool Alliance, 2004).
- The number of women in the labor force has risen **250%** since the 1950s (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000)
- There are over **28 million** school-age children with both parents in the labor force today (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001).
- **39%** of children between kindergarten and third grade regularly receive non-parental care before or after school (Brimhall et al., 1999)

mandated standards in order to provide the best care for those of varying developmental stages.

It is imperative that an increasing number of states follow California's lead in the battle to increase government funding for after-school programs, especially for at-risk children. If this funding is not provided, the developmental progress of the 6.5 million children in grades K-12 currently in after-school care and the hundreds of others who are along after school may be in jeopardy (Afterschool Alliance, 2004).

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