

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF



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Afterschool programs help working families

“It’s midafternoon, and working parents across America are getting that sinking feeling—often with good reason. A glut of free time and a dearth of out-of-school care can spell trouble for children and stress for parents.”¹

Changing family structures place extra burdens on children, parents and employers.

The image of 21st century families is vastly different from that of previous centuries, or even the family image of 50 years ago. Today, less than one-fourth of American families portray the “traditional” image of one parent at home, caring for children full-time, while the other parent provides financial support. In 1950, 56 percent of families fit this profile.² 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. In fact, 77 percent of mothers with school-age children are employed.³ Plus, both men and women are working more hours. Average work hours per adult increased 7.9 percent between 1960 and 1998,⁴ and nearly three-fourths of working adults say they have little or no control over their work schedule.⁵

The burden on parents:

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,⁶ which presents working parents with the challenge of finding someone to care for their children while they are at work. Nationwide, between 2 million and 6 million youngsters under 13 regularly care for themselves, and 44% of families do not have any regular after-school care for their children.⁷ Further, commercial child care can be prohibitively expensive for some working families. 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.⁸

The dangers for children:

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. Even if unsupervised kids are not getting into trouble, they are oftentimes at home eating, playing video games or watching TV. These kids are not benefiting much from time spent alone.⁹

The drain on employers:

While concerns about unsupervised children pressure families, they also profoundly affect employers. Polling shows that 87 percent of working mothers say the hours afterschool are when they are most concerned about their children's safety,¹⁰ and 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.¹¹

Quality afterschool programs are proven to alleviate these burdens.

Afterschool programs provide a safe, enriching environment for kids while their parents are still at work, allowing them to focus on work and ultimately improve family life.

- 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 in keeping their job.¹²
- An evaluation of LA’s BEST found that three-quarters of the parents [surveyed] indicated that they worried significantly less about their children’s safety and that they had more energy in the evening since enrolling their children in the program. A clear majority also indicated that the program resulted in sizeable time savings.¹³

- "Because of that [afterschool] program, I can stay at work and I can earn extra hours. I work two jobs, and that program allows my kids to stay in school while I get the necessities taken care of."
--Irma Villarreal, parent of two sons in the afterschool program at Harms Elementary School in Detroit.¹⁴

Employers have noticed the effect on their bottom line.

For 18 years, *Working Mother* magazine has published a list of "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers." A slot on the list is a coveted designation—companies have to apply, and child care options, including afterschool care, are a significant factor. Companies see these programs as an investment. 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."¹⁵ The First Tennessee Bank echoed that sentiment in noting the benefits of its work/life programs. Namely, employee satisfaction impacts the service-profit chain: increase employee satisfaction, increase customer retention, increase profit.¹⁶

Afterschool for All is possible.

The movement to provide afterschool for all children, nationwide, is growing and local efforts are providing examples of success. For example, the city of San Diego now offers an afterschool program at every middle and high school through its San Diego 6 to 6 program. And a recent survey reveals that 51 percent of schoolchildren in Boston now participate in afterschool programming.¹⁷ Both cities are examples of successful public-private partnerships that use varied funding streams to provide quality afterschool programs. Boston's After-School for All Partnership includes 13 philanthropic, education, business and government institutions that have committed more than \$24 million in new funding over five years, and the program also receives federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds.

America's working families still need more afterschool programs.

Despite the many cities, states and businesses that take steps to provide care for the children of employees, there are still plenty of gaps in care. Mayors surveyed in 86 cities reported that only one-third of children needing afterschool care were receiving it,¹⁸ and only 4 percent of companies nationwide offer afterschool care.¹⁹ Further, 67 percent of the Boston parents whose children were not in an afterschool program wanted their child to participate.²⁰ Although some large corporations may be able to contribute to the cost of providing quality afterschool care for their employee's families, most businesses find it difficult, if not prohibitive. Healthy families are part of healthy businesses, and investments at all levels, federal to local, and from all sectors, public to private, are crucial to ensuring that America's children do not fall through the cracks while their parents are at work and they are out of school.

¹ Jackson, Maggie, "Now What?" *Working Mother* magazine, October 2003, 42.

² Bailyn, Lotte; Drago, Robert; Kochan, Thomas; *Integrating Work and Family Life: A Holistic Approach*, Sloan Work-Family Policy Network, MIT Sloan School of Management, September 14, 2001.

³ 10th Anniversary Report, American Business Collaboration for Quality Dependent Care (ABC), 2002.

⁴ Bailyn, et al.

⁵ AFL-CIO, Website: Work & Family, <http://www.aflcio.org/issuespolitics/workfamily>, accessed October 3, 2003.

⁶ Barnett, Rosalind Chait, Ph.D. "Working Parents Sweat It Out Over Unsupervised Children," Community, Families & Work Program, Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, PowerPoint presentation, 2003.

⁷ Barnett, Rosalind Chait; Rivers, Caryl; "Commentary: Out-of-Sync Work Shifts, Out-of-Sync Families; Child care is a pressing need for those with odd work hours," Los Angeles Times, September 2, 2002.

⁸ Barsimantov, J.; Giannarelli, L.; "Child Care Expenses of America's Families," *Assessing the New Federalism*, Occasional Paper Number 40, The Urban Institute, December 2000.

⁹ Jackson, Maggie, 43.

¹⁰ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, Poll of Working Mothers, www.fightcrime.org, August 2003.

¹¹ 10th Anniversary Report, ABC.

¹² Policy Studies Associates, Inc., February 2001.

¹³ Huang, Denise et al. *A Decade of Results: The Impact of the LA's BEST After School Enrichment Program*, UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, June 2000.

¹⁴ Kresnak, Jack, "After school-and all alone; State not doing enough to put kids on right track, study says," *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2002.

¹⁵ 10th Anniversary Report, ABC.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 2003 After-School Parent Survey, Boston After-School Partnership, October 1, 2003.

¹⁸ *After-School Programs in Cities Across the United States*, U.S. Conference of Mayors, January 2003.

¹⁹ Jackson, Maggie, 62.

²⁰ Boston After-School Partnership.