

Advocates lobby for more after-school programs

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PROVIDENCE — School is not enough.

The majority of parents are pleased with their children's schools, but they say that children need to participate in additional activities after the traditional school day ends.

That was one of the findings from a survey of 500 parents statewide conducted for the Rhode Island AfterSchool Plus Alliance, a program within the United Way that advocates for high-quality after-school programs for children. The research was conducted in June by Acadia Consulting Group.

"We found a couple of things that surprised us," said Adam Greenman, executive director of the AfterSchool Alliance. "One was that 66 percent of parents said they were satisfied with their school day. The other was that 91 percent said that the school day alone wasn't enough, and that after-school programs are critical for them as working parents."

The United Way of Rhode Island and the alliance presented the findings Wednesday at the John Hope Settlement House in Providence.

No one knows precisely how many children participate in after-school programs, but Greenman estimates the numbers run from 12,000 to 20,000 children. Some communities, such as Providence and Woonsocket, have thriving programs that connect schools to libraries, Boys & Girls clubs and nonprofit groups like Save The Bay.

The survey, Greenman said, underscores the need to provide quality programs in communities such as Cranston and Warwick.

"Kids need after-school programs, no matter where they live," he said. "The parent survey validates what we have been saying, that parents see this as something they want."

In the survey, parents also said that the lack of after-school programs affects their ability to concentrate at work during the hours when their children are home alone. One-fourth of parents reported reduced productivity at work, while a third said that these worries had a negative effect on their attendance and their ability to focus.

Eighty percent of parents surveyed supported the need for state funding for after-school programs. Thirteen states, including Massachusetts and Connecticut, have dedicated money to support such programs.

“As the results of this parent survey clearly indicate, there is much more work to do to ensure our children and their families have access to high-quality after-school and summer-learning opportunities,” said Anthony Maione, president and CEO of the United Way of Rhode Island. “United Way of Rhode Island is much more committed than ever to making this dream a reality.”

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