

After the School Bell Rings: Key Findings from a Statewide Parent Survey

Introduction

In June 2011, the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance, an education initiative of United Way of Rhode Island, commissioned Acadia Consulting Group to conduct a statewide assessment of parents' and guardians' attitudes and beliefs about afterschool.

The purpose of this survey was to capture a clearer picture of parents' usage, understanding, and awareness of afterschool programs in Rhode Island.

The following results clearly demonstrate both a need and a desire for afterschool programs among parents, and the results have implications for various groups including afterschool providers, policymakers, and the business community.

Methodology

A total of 500 Rhode Island parents and guardians were surveyed by telephone. This includes a statewide representative sample of 400 surveys and an oversampling 100 surveys in the core-urban areas of our state.

To participate, respondents needed to have at least one child between the ages of 5 and 18 who attended school. Additionally, respondents could not work in the afterschool field.

What Is Afterschool?

During the telephone survey, parents were given the following definition of afterschool, which encapsulates a broad range of out-of-school time activities:

[An afterschool program is] a program that a child regularly attends that provides a supervised environment in the hours after the school day ends. These programs are usually offered in schools or in the community.

Recent national surveys have opted for a narrower definition of afterschool; however, it is important to capture the full spectrum of interest and participation in the state.

Key Findings at a Glance

Afterschool is important to Rhode Island parents, regardless of which city or town they call home.

Schools alone are not enough. It takes *both* school and afterschool to develop the skills children need to succeed.

Parents see the value in afterschool and its positive effects on youth.

Afterschool programs, or the lack of programs, has an effect on the workforce.

Parents overwhelmingly support the use of state dollars to fund afterschool programs.

— *Envisioning a Rhode Island that maximizes how, when, and where children and youth learn to ensure their success.* —

AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE OF



RHODE ISLAND AFTERSCHOOL PLUS ALLIANCE



United Way of Rhode Island

Key Findings

Afterschool is important to Rhode Island parents and guardians, regardless of which city or town they call home.

Overwhelmingly, this research yielded very little statistical difference between the values and attitudes in core-urban areas versus the rest of the state. Across Rhode Island, parents and guardians cite their children have a high level of current or past participation in afterschool programs. They also report a high level of satisfaction with the activities their children participate in after school.

88%
of parents cited that their children participate or have participated in afterschool programs.

School alone is not enough.

While the majority of parents are satisfied with their child's educational experience during the school day, parents from all regions report that to develop the skills necessary to succeed children need to participate in additional activities beyond the school-day curriculum.

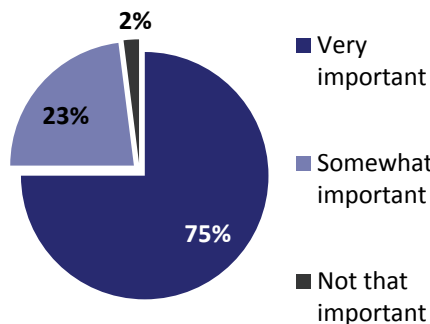
Parents indicate that they seek a "quality educational/learning experience" for their children in selecting afterschool programs.

This demonstrates a need for both school and afterschool to partner in delivering hands-on, innovative programming that reinforces what children learn in the school day.

91%
of parents agree . . .

"Schools alone are not enough. To develop the skills needed to succeed, children need to participate in additional learning, sports, the arts, and other activities after school and during the summer."

IMPORTANCE OF AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR A CHILD'S CONTINUING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Research demonstrates that afterschool programs can raise standardized math test scores, and improve student work habits necessary for school success. Student participants also showed reduced aggression, misconduct, and use of drugs and alcohol.¹ Therefore, the research supports parents' belief that afterschool is necessary to their children's continuing growth and education.

Parents see the value in afterschool.

Parents across the state indicate that afterschool programs benefit their children in multiple specific ways—a sure sign that parents understand why afterschool programming is valuable and vital.

A majority of Rhode Island Parents strongly agree . . .

Afterschool programs:

- Help reduce the chances of children engaging in risky behavior
- Help promote social development
- Give children greater opportunities to engage in physical activities
- Help keep children safe
- Help boost academic achievement
- Are essential to their community
- Help support working families

Various local and national studies reaffirm each of these items; thus, parents' perceptions of afterschool are right on track.

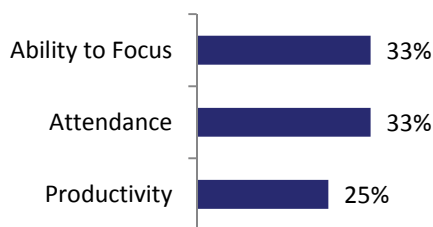
A recent study of the Providence After School Alliance's AfterZones revealed that youth who participated in the program boasted strikingly higher high-school attendance than their peers who did not attend. In addition, participants had more positive attitudes about community resources, better social skills, and stronger feelings of connection to school.²

Because the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are the peak hours for juvenile crime as well as experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex, enrolling children and youth in safe, structured programs can reduce their opportunities to engage in these risky activities after school.³ The evidence supporting this benefit is so great that Los Angeles researchers estimated that every dollar invested in high-quality afterschool programming saved their city \$2.50 in crime-related costs.⁴

Afterschool programs have an effect on the workforce in Rhode Island.

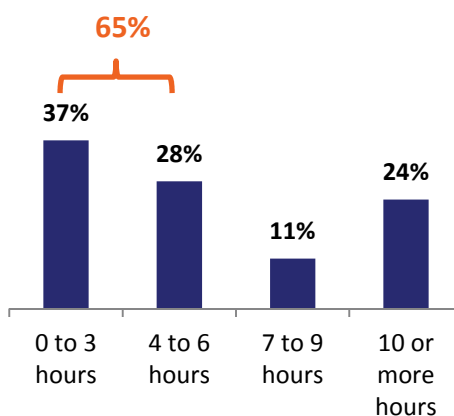
When asked about how their children's afterschool schedule affected their work performance, one-third of parents reported a negative effect on both their attendance and ability to focus, and one-quarter of parents reported reduced productivity at work. Parents identified transportation, cost, and availability of information as barriers to enrolling their children in afterschool programming.

PARENTS CITE THAT THEIR CHILD'S AFTERSCHOOL SCHEDULE HAS AFFECTED THEIR WORK IN TERMS OF THEIR ...



Further, the majority of parents whose children are currently enrolled in afterschool report their children participate part-time (e.g., fewer than six hours per week). This is striking when paired with data from a related study at Brandeis University which yielded that the gap between the time the school day ends and the time that most parents get home from work amounts to 20-25 hours per week.⁵ As a result, some children may be left unattended for hours after school, contributing to parents' stress during the work day.

HOURS PER WEEK CHILDREN AND YOUTH SPEND IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS



In the same study, parents with greater concerns about their children's afterschool arrangements reported significantly more job disruptions and significantly lower psychological well-being than their less-stressed colleagues. The cost to employee productivity reflects an average of five days of work per year.

Additionally, these parents are more frequently interrupted, distracted, and drained of energy at work by non-work issues, and consistently make more errors, turn down requests to work extra hours and miss meetings and deadlines. The cost to businesses is estimated to amount to \$300 billion dollars per year. If more parents had access to information about and transportation to full-time, affordable afterschool programs, it is likely that these adverse effects in the workplace would be greatly reduced.

Parents overwhelmingly support the use of state dollars to fund afterschool and summer learning programs.

4 out of 5 parents (80%) favor using state dollars to fund afterschool and summer learning programs.

Thirteen states, including both of Rhode Island's neighboring states, have dedicated funding allocations to support afterschool programming. In 2011, Massachusetts invested \$1.4 million in afterschool and out-of-school time grants that funded a broad range of projects. In Connecticut, the state allocated \$5 million specifically to afterschool programs.

Implications

The results of this survey demonstrate not only a great need for afterschool programming, but also that afterschool programs have benefits to parents and children alike. Indeed, while parents are satisfied with what their children do during the school day, there is overwhelming recognition that the school day is not enough time to prepare children for success in life, and that afterschool programs offer additional learning opportunities in a variety of ways. Parents also found afterschool programming to be critical to their ability to perform at work and to ensure that children and youth are safe once the school day ends. The results of the survey have implications beyond the afterschool field.

Parents identified “a quality educational/learning experience” as the top factor they consider when selecting afterschool programs. To address this desire of parents, school officials should find ways to partner with community organizations and other entities to ensure that

information about high-quality programs (both on and off school sites) are available to Rhode Island children and youth. Schools can also make an effort to connect afterschool programming to the school day to ensure the greatest academic success for participants. Afterschool programs and schools can work together to ease access to programming in the afterschool hours. For instance, schools can rethink bus routes to allow students to be dropped off at programming rather than a potentially empty home.

This report also has implications for the business community, especially when accompanied by the national research on lost on-the-job productivity after the school bell rings. Rhode Island businesses may find ways to support their employees in the effort to find affordable, high-quality afterschool programming for their children.

These efforts are sure to increase productivity, reduce the number of hours lost to parents needing to leave work early, and provide parents with a calm environment to focus on their work.

Finally, these data provide evidence to policymakers that parents across the state of Rhode Island require affordable, high-quality afterschool programs for their children. These programs not only provide academic, social, and emotional supports to children, but they provide parents with peace of mind.

Policymakers at all levels of government must recognize the need in the state to provide these opportunities for Rhode Island children and parents.

These data can provide the support necessary to begin the conversation on how we are able to provide students with greater educational opportunities and improve our current workforce simultaneously. Additionally, Rhode Island must remain competitive with its neighboring states that have invested millions in afterschool programs, even in a difficult economy.

References

- ¹ Lowe Vandell, D., Reisner, E.R., & Pierce, K.M. (2007). *Outcomes Linked to High-Quality Afterschool Programs*. Irvine, CA: University of California, Irvine.
- ² Kotloff, L. J., & Korom-Djakovic, D. (2010). *AfterZones: Creating a Citywide System to Support and Sustain High-Quality After-School Programs*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
- ³ (2003). *America's After-School Choice: Juvenile Crime or Safe Learning Time*. Washington D.C.: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.
- ⁴ UCLA National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, September 2007.

⁵ The Community, Families, and Work Program at Brandeis University. (2004). *Report of Findings: Community Families & Work Program Parental After-School Stress Project*. Boston, MA: Brandeis University.

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