

October 5, 2023

Dear Members of the House Appropriations Committee and the House Education Committee:

I greatly appreciate this opportunity to share with you why out-of-school time programs are so important for supporting young people's learning and for strengthening our communities.

I am Dr. Karen Dreyer, Executive Director of Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time, often called by our acronym - APOST. Our organization serves the Commonwealth by providing professional development and quality improvement initiatives for over 55 out-of-school time organizations in Allegheny County. APOST recognizes and celebrates the amazing learning that occurs during the hours that young people are not in school. We work day in and day out to increase access to and improve the quality of these vital programs.

Research makes it clear what we can see with our eyes that young people benefit tremendously from participating in out-of-school time programs. In fact, a meta-analysis of almost 70 different studies of after-school programs that focused on improving young people's personal and social skills, revealed that participants:

- demonstrated significant increases in positive social behaviors
- achieved higher levels of academic success
- reduced drug use
- and exhibited fewer problem behaviors, including noncompliance, aggression and conduct.

Evaluations have also found that out-of-school time program participants improved in their school classroom participation, attentiveness in class, and motivation to learn.

Despite these benefits for young people, too many are not able to participate in out-of-school time programs. According to the America After 3 PM survey, conducted in 2020, for every child in an afterschool program in Pennsylvania, four more are waiting to get in. Sixty-one percent of families reported cost being a barrier to enrolling their child in a program, which was a significant increase from 34% of parents who reported this in 2014, and this survey was completed before the economic challenges of the pandemic.

Out-of-school time programs are a significant life-line resource for families. While parents or caregivers are working, these programs provide safe learning spaces for kids to be with friends and adults who mentor them. In the summer months, out-of-school time programs allow parents to continue working and provide much needed learning experiences for the months that young people are not in school.

Twenty states already have dedicated state government afterschool funding streams. Sadly, Pennsylvania is not one of them. Current programs receive financial support from foundations, corporations, individuals, and fees paid by participants' families.

In June 2021, the Pennsylvania Joint State Government Commission issued a report and found that for every dollar invested in afterschool programs, the return on investment in afterschool programs is approximately \$6.69. This is based on potential benefits of reducing:

- high school dropout rates
- teen pregnancy rates
- substance use disorder
- crime
- delinquency.

These programs have considerable public support with eighty-eight percent of Pennsylvania parents supportive of public funding for out-of-school time programs.

I encourage you to see for yourself the benefits of out-of-school programs. Please make time in your schedule to visit an out-of-school time program in your district on October 26, "Lights on Afterschool Day." This is a great opportunity for you to see firsthand the benefits that out-of-school time programs provide to young people. You will see the passion of the staff at these programs, who do tiring and challenging but rewarding work. They persist so that our young people have places to play, learn and thrive. They do it because they see the potential in our kids.

You can help the children of Pennsylvania achieve their potential by creating a dedicated funding stream for out-of-school time programs in our Commonwealth. I strongly encourage you to support legislation to create the "Building Opportunity through Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Program" to work towards a better today for our children and a better tomorrow for Pennsylvania.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Karen Dreyer
Executive Director
Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time

References

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