

Report Highlights

Afterschool Programs in Pennsylvania

House Resolution 2008-824 called on the LB&FC to assess the availability and affordability of afterschool programs in the Commonwealth. We found:

- **There is no commonly accepted definition for what constitutes an afterschool program.** Unlike for child care facilities, there are no required standards for what constitutes an afterschool program. To keep the study manageable, we therefore developed our own definition/criteria.
- **Public funding is available for afterschool programs, but it is primarily directed to low-income families with children ages 6-12.** Funding for afterschool programs for teens is available, but makes up only a small percentage of total available funding. Many programs include afterschool services in a menu of eligible uses, but these programs typically do not track exactly how their funds are used. Consequently, it was not possible to determine the total amount of public monies used for afterschool programs.
- **Afterschool program costs vary from \$450 to over \$7,000 per child per year.** Much of this variation is due to program characteristics and methodological differences in how costs are calculated. The annualized cost to provide afterschool programming for children who attend 21st Century Community Learning Centers is approximately \$760 per student.
- **Transportation can be a major issue for afterschool programs.** Frequently (for about 55% of the centers we surveyed) schools provide at least some after school bus service to the center. This practice, however, is much more common in rural school districts (almost 90%) than in urban districts, where only about 30% of centers reported such service. Centers often provide their own transportation for at least some students.
- **It can be difficult to engage teenagers in structured afterschool programs.** While teens have a greater ability to care for themselves than younger children, they also engage in risky behaviors that could potentially be avoided if they were in an afterschool program. However, teens are often reluctant to participate in such structured programs or have jobs or other interests that keep them from participating.
- **The level of demand for additional afterschool programming is difficult to quantify.** Studies find that some programs have many underutilized slots, while others have only one slot for every three children desiring afterschool programs. Our survey of child care providers found similar mixed opinions on the need for additional afterschool programs.
- **Some areas of PA have comprehensive information systems to help parents find afterschool programs, but most do not.** Even where afterschool programs exist, it can be difficult for parents to locate appropriate programs for their children. To address this problem, Philadelphia and southwestern Pennsylvania, in particular, have developed comprehensive, searchable databases of the afterschool programs in their area.
- **Afterschool programs have had difficulty establishing themselves as a recognizable “system”.** Afterschool programs are supported by a variety of funding streams with different, though often related, purposes. As a result, afterschool programs have been slow to build the type of physical, financial, and public support infrastructure that exists for other social service programs.
- **States vary in their approach to afterschool program funding and planning.** Some states (e.g., CA and NY) provide significant state funding for afterschool programs. Others (e.g., MA and MI) are working to develop a coordinated approach to afterschool programming.

Recommendations:

We recommend a Statewide Afterschool Coordinating Council be created to:

- Identify goals and action steps to address already-identified issues.
- Promote additional web-based regional databases of afterschool programs.
- Identify and promote potential new funding sources.
- Assess local needs and barriers to afterschool programs, especially for adolescents.