



Testimony of AfterSchool Works! NY: the New York State Afterschool Network
Before the
Assembly Standing Committee on Children and Families
And the
Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services
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My name is Alli Lidie, and I am the Deputy Director for AfterSchool Works! NY: the New York State Afterschool Network (ASW:NYSAN), a statewide nonprofit designed to strengthen the commitment and capacity of communities, programs, and professionals to increase access to high-quality programs and services beyond the traditional classroom. ASW:NYSAN wants to see all of New York's children and youth provided with access to high-quality expanded learning and development opportunities that will support their success in school, college, work, and life.

Our thanks to Assemblymembers Crespo, Hevesi, Lupardo, and Nolan and to the other members of the Committee on Children and Families, the Committee on Education, the Committee on Social Services, and the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force for the opportunity to present testimony to you today regarding the issues around child poverty in New York State.

All youth deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential, despite the economic circumstances into which they are born. It is well-known, however, that youth from low-income families and areas of poverty have more to overcome to reach that potential than their middle-income peers. Studies have consistently shown an achievement gap based on socioeconomic status that can be seen in measures such as grade point average, test scores, dropout rates, and college enrollment rates. This is in part due to summer learning loss which sets youth without access to enriching summer experiences apart through two to three months of loss in reading and two months of loss in math skills, and has been shown to contribute to 2/3 of the achievement gap in reading by 9th grade. It is also due to an opportunity gap – TASC has shown that, by the time a child born into poverty reaches 6th grade, they have experienced an estimated 6,000 hours less of learning and enriching opportunities than their middle-income peers. These enriching activities are what spark a love of learning and inspire a future career path, what put youth on a path to reaching their full potential. Fortunately, the state has an opportunity to make a difference.

Afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning opportunities play a crucial role for New York families and youth, and the state must expand investments in these opportunities to allow those in poverty a chance to reach their potential. 1.1 million New York students want an afterschool program and do not have access to one. That number remains unchanged from 2009. Similarly, a recent report based on the *America after 3pm Survey*, revealed that 500,000 New York children are still without access to high-quality summer programming.

To build an innovation-focused economy, ensure our children are graduating high school ready for college and career, and keep them on track for healthy adult lives, New York needs to invest in high-quality afterschool and summer learning experiences. These programs help all of our students, no matter where they live, engage in hands-on learning, avoid risky behaviors and involvement with the juvenile justice system, and stay on track to develop into active citizens. They can be crucial for working families, who need to know that their children are safe between the end of the school day and the end of the work day.

This year, we are asking for a \$49.9 million increase to the Advantage After School Program (AASP), a program targeted to those youth at highest risk. Such an investment would allow the state to serve 20,000 youth through full-year programming, including both high-quality afterschool and summer programs.

We hope that the Legislature and the Governor will begin to plan for continued investments, building on our budget recommendation and New York's long history of strong afterschool programs, to eventually serve all of the estimated 1.1 million children who need an afterschool program, and the 500,000 in need of summer programming that do not have access. Children across the entire state need the benefits of afterschool and summer programs.

Poverty

Poverty has a direct impact on children's academic achievement, including low literacy rates and decreased cognitive stimulation. Afterschool and summer programs help break the cycle of poverty by helping to close both the opportunity and achievement gaps. This is achieved not only through providing academically enriching activities, but also by building the social-emotional skills that youth need to have the confidence to ask for help when needed, and the perseverance to continue on the path to success despite setbacks. These programs increase student attendance, increase graduation rates, improve test scores, and increase overall engagement in school. Additionally, afterschool and summer programs help fight food insecurity and obesity amongst lower income students. A 2010 national study found that children from low-income families are more than twice as likely to be obese as compared to children of higher income households. By providing healthy snacks and meals and offering the physical activity that is so often left out of the traditional school day, afterschool and summer programs help combat these issues. Afterschool Alliance has noted that several studies link poverty to not only poor academic performance, but to dropout rates as well. One such report, conducted by the Urban Institute in 2012, observed that impoverished children are almost 90 percent more probable to not have graduated high school by the age of 20.

Poverty in Rural Areas

Urban communities are not the only areas in need of programming. Similarly, rural areas are also being crippled with the cyclical nature of poverty. In areas where resources are limited, the investment in afterschool and summer programs are often the only source of aid for at-risk youth. Programs are enhancing the school day by providing literacy enrichment, STEM activities, homework assistance, and sometimes most importantly, food. In isolated areas, there is often increased need for programs that offer these opportunities in a convenient location to students, as transportation can serve as a barrier to participation and as schools may not have all of the resources and staff expertise to offer a wide variety of enriching opportunities during the school day. Afterschool and summer programs offer an affordable way of combating poverty.

Afterschool and Summer Programs Can Help

Afterschool and summer programs provide opportunities to help overcome poverty and close the achievement and opportunity gaps. These programs provide academic support, hands-on experiential learning, healthy snacks, safety and supervision, and other engaging activities.

During the hours of three and six pm, children are at the most risk to be involved in, or be victimized by, crime. Participation in afterschool programs also reduces the risk of alcohol and substance abuse. In looking at afterschool as a preventative measure in combating substance abuse, another contributing factor of poverty, one day of in-patient treatment for a heroin addict is nearly equivalent to the cost New York State pays for an entire year for an at-risk student to attend afterschool.

These valuable afterschool programs are most out of reach for families living in poverty. New York has the highest cost of child care in the country, averaging \$11,352 per child in 2012. Alternatively, the state can increase investments and fund high-quality afterschool programs at \$1,500 per student. Furthermore, an increase in investment would not only benefit low-income families. A study by the Rose Institute at Claremont McKenna College found that, on average, taxpayers save \$3 for every dollar invested in afterschool programming. If the benefits from crime reduction were to be factored in, the savings would be closer to \$8-\$12.

Likewise, summer experiences help meet the needs of all children; this is especially true for children from traditionally underserved communities, including children of color, those from low-income families, and children living in rural areas. In addition to academic benefits, summer programs and learning opportunities provide a safe, supervised environment for children, which is of particular importance for working families. Summer programs can offer parents free or affordable childcare that enables them to continue working during the summer. Further, youth who participate in summer programs are less likely to engage in the kind of risky behaviors, such as substance abuse and sexual activity, which they may participate in if left unsupervised. These opportunities are more than just safe learning environments; they often offer opportunities for outdoor play and experiences that are important to a child's development.

In conclusion, afterschool and summer programs are the State's best investment in fighting poverty and improving the opportunities afforded to our at-risk youth. Afterschool and summer programs help to close both the opportunity and achievement gaps, combat food insecurity and obesity, and allow parents to continue working by providing a safe environment for their children. These programs are providing our children with confidence, support, and skills to succeed in school and life, and to reach their full potential.

At a time when our schools' resources are exceedingly limited, afterschool and summer programs are a cost-effective way to supplement the school day by supporting students and families. This is why it is essential that our state step up and provide greater investments in afterschool and summer programs. We are asking you to be proactive instead of reactive in the fight against poverty. Thank you for your dedication to examining this issue and addressing inequities. We are pleased to assist in any way we are able.