

For Immediate Release
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Afterschool and Summer Programming are Keys to School Success
New Issue Brief Examines Importance of Out-of-School Time

A new report from the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) highlights the important role high-quality afterschool and summer programming can play in improving children's academic achievement. The report, "More Than Fun & Games: Quality Out of School Time for All Kids Makes a Difference in School," identifies the elements of successful programs, and describes programs in Wisconsin that have proven to be effective. "More Than Fun & Games" is part of WCCF's WisKids Count Issue Brief series.

With children across the state returning to school this week, most parents and educators are focusing their attention on what takes place between the morning bell and the flinging open of the schoolhouse doors in the afternoon. Research demonstrates, however, that the way children spend their out-of-school time can have a profound effect on their performance in school. Participation in afterschool programs has been shown to improve academic outcomes significantly.

But not all out-of-school programming is equal. According to the brief, there are a number of key characteristics that researchers have identified as contributing to positive outcomes. The best results are achieved by programs that provide access to sustained participation; have well-prepared staff and appropriate supervision; and forge strong partnerships with families, other community organizations and schools.

Author Martha Cranley, coordinator of WCCF's Kids Count project, notes that afterschool programming can be an effective strategy for closing the racial achievement gap in school.

"Access to high quality, structured out-of-school environments is one of the best tools we have for helping children of color improve their school performance," Cranley said. "The data tells a fairly clear story: All other things equal, kids who participate in good afterschool programs tend to do better in school than kids who don't. And the impact seems to be strongest for children of other and disadvantaged kids."

In addition to the benefits of programs that take place after school, research has shown that participation in summer enrichment programs helps as well, in part by mitigating the "summer slide" effect—the educational regression that most kids experience between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next in the fall.

One of the programs highlighted in the brief is the Lighted Schoolhouse program in Racine, which combines academic assistance with an emphasis on self-discipline, responsibility and service to others.

"Afterschool programming with an intentional purpose not only benefits the child, it helps build a positive and productive community," said Kathy Dunkerson, Director of Extended Day Programs at the Racine Unified School District.

Stan Kocos, who administers Fond du Lac's program, which is a partnership between the Fond du Lac School District and the Boys and Girls Club of Fond du Lac, believes the key is to aim high. "We find that it's important to hold ourselves and students to high standards," Kocos said. "Too often we perpetuate stereotypes by having low expectations for kids who haven't done particularly well in the past. So we expect excellence from them, and try to provide excellent programs that help them attain those high standards."

"We have a pretty good understanding of what works, and there are some successful programs in Wisconsin that can serve as models for the rest of the state," said WCCF Executive Director Charity Eleson. "Our job now is to make sure that as many children as possible, especially at-risk kids and children of color, have access to the kind of excellent programming that can make a difference."

"More Than Fun & Games" is available online at http://wccf.org/pdf/more_than_fun_games_after_school.pdf.