

Afterschool Programs to Increase Retention and Outcomes in Detroit Public Schools

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Detroit has a high-school graduation rate of 58%, the worst rate in the nation for a large city (Kellogg, 2009). State funding for public education is based on enrollment. The high dropout rate in Detroit Public Schools means that the system loses funding that it desperately needs to provide a quality education for remaining students.

Compared to their peers with a high school diploma, youth who don't graduate from school earn less money, have fewer job opportunities and have poorer health. They are less likely to pay taxes, more likely to collect welfare, and eight times more likely to attend jail or prison, imposing huge negative externalities and financial burdens on the rest of society (Afterschool Alliance, 2009).

Studies show that quality afterschool programs can help resolve many of the issues that lead students to dropout by providing mentoring, personalized instruction, parental and community engagement and opportunities for experiential learning.

However, existing federal aid does not meet the need for afterschool programs in Michigan (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). Additional funding is needed to provide the maximum number of students with the opportunity to benefit from afterschool programs, especially in high risk districts like Detroit Public Schools. In order to increase retention rates, DPS should seek funding from local foundations to provide afterschool enrichment programs on school grounds.

Afterschool Makes a Real Difference

Afterschool programs improve attendance rates, decrease deviant behavior, and prepare youth for employment

Students enrolled in afterschool programs display better attendance rates and are significantly more likely to graduate from school than their peers who are not. Students in LA's BEST afterschool program and the Youth in Quantum Opportunities afterschool program were 20% and 50% less likely to dropout than the average student in their district, respectively (Hahn, 1994).

In addition to reducing dropout rates, afterschool programs keep students engaged and occupied in constructive activities during the crucial after-school hours, which are the peak times in which teens commit crimes or become victims of crimes, smoke, drink and use drugs

(Afterschool Alliance, 2007). Afterschool programs can also provide a viable alternative to gang activity, which is a significant problem in many DPS schools. Unsupervised youth have a significantly greater risk of engaging in deviant or high risk behaviors (Afterschool Alliance, 2003). 27% of children in Michigan are unsupervised after school, and this figure is likely significantly higher in Detroit (Afterschool Alliance, 2008). According to one study, teens who do not participate in afterschool programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes and use marijuana or other drugs, and are also more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and engage in sexual activity than teens who are enrolled in afterschool programs (YMCA, 2001).

Afterschool programs are a critical tool to prepare Detroit youth to compete in tomorrow's workforce. Job growth is greatest in fields that increasingly require postsecondary education, but the US Chamber of Commerce reports that only 32% of high school graduates are prepared for college (Afterschool Alliance, 2004). The five most important skills valued by the nation's largest employers are professionalism, teamwork, oral communication, ethics and social responsibility, and reading comprehension (The Conference Board Inc, 2006). Afterschool programs are an excellent place for young people to develop and practice these skills so they can be prepared for further education or employment.

The Time is Now

Even in Today's Economy, Funding for Afterschool Exists

Several large foundations exist in the Detroit metropolitan area with the desire and the resources to fund improvements at Detroit Public Schools, including the Skillman Foundation, the Knight Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation. The Skillman Foundation alone has an annual budget of \$30 million, and has already invested \$50 million into Detroit Public Schools.

Everyone Benefits

Although critics may argue that afterschool programs are too costly to implement in a struggling economic climate like Michigan's, exactly the opposite is true. If we don't take decisive action to prepare young people for further education and employment, Michigan's economy will only get worse.

If retention rates were increased through quality afterschool programs, Detroit businesses would benefit from having access to a local pool of graduates with the skills for employment. With more youth engaged in constructive activity during the crucial afterschool hours, Detroit police would benefit from a reduced juvenile crime rate and gang activity.

Michigan taxpayers will also reap the long-term benefits of quality afterschool programming. When outcomes are considered, the returns clearly exceed the cost of implementation of afterschool programs. According to one study, every dollar invested in afterschool programs will save taxpayers about \$3 in reduced need for grade repetition and remedial education. If savings from reduced juvenile crime rates are factored into this equation, savings could amount to \$12 (Brown et al, 2002). In addition, each grade of high school dropouts cost the U.S. more than \$17 billion in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured health care (National Dropout Prevention Center). Preventative measures must be taken to ensure that Detroit youth are able to graduate with the skills to become successful, contributing members of society.

Afterschool is a Politically Sound Policy

The political will is present in Michigan to provide these programs. According to a 2004 survey, 88% of adults in Michigan agree that there should be “some type of organized activity or place for children and teens to go after school every day that provides opportunities to learn” and 81% support public funding for afterschool programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). According to a survey of police chiefs nationwide, 69% felt that afterschool and child care programs are “the most effective strategies for reducing juvenile crimes” and 86% agreed that expanding after-school and child care programs will greatly reduce youth crime and violence (Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, 2007).

Barriers to Afterschool

Current restrictions require that any after-school programs funded by federal Title I money be academic in nature. However, this requirement prevents schools from using the funds to provide youth with opportunities to participate in programs that build important life skills. According to Detroit Principal Norma Hernandez, because of this requirement, the chess club at her school can’t afford to attend an annual regional competition because they aren’t allowed to use Title I funding for transportation purposes. These students miss out on an opportunity for friendly competition and exposure to other children

that are enjoyed by Michigan students who attend more affluent schools. Many high quality programs would not meet Title I’s funding requirements, but they are important to the success and development of Detroit youth.

While many community groups provide quality after-school programs for Detroit youth, transportation is a barrier for students who wish to access these services. School closures mean that many DPS students do not attend school within walking distance from their homes, and rely on bussing to get to and from school each day. Principal Hernandez said that she would like to be able

to provide a bus to shuttle children to afterschool programs in the area, but that in order to do so, she would have to rent a bus for a minimum of four hours due to company contracts.

The expense of doing so prevents her from being able to consider this option.

If funds are made available that allow schools the freedom to design programs that meet student needs, the school itself can extend its role as a center for student growth and community engagement. Schools should work with students, parents and teachers to determine what programs are needed the most in their community. The efficacy of the programs should be routinely evaluated, and student outcomes should be monitored to ensure the highest quality results.

Next Steps

Several schools in Detroit have already implemented comprehensive after-school programs that can serve as models for further expansion. The Skillman Foundation provided a \$100,000 grant to help launch the Building Educated Leaders for Life (BELL) afterschool program at Harding Elementary School in 2008. BELL students participate in after-school activities three days a week for 2.25 hours a day focused on literacy skills, math tutoring and enrichment activities in technology, the arts and physical education. On “Mentor Days,” BELL scholars listen to community members share stories about careers, heritage and service in the community. Parents are involved in the program as much as possible.

Several nonprofit organizations and neighborhood organizations run successful afterschool programs in Detroit that can serve as models for future afterschool programming on school grounds. Partnerships between schools and nonprofit organizations could serve as one way to bring these services to a larger number of students. At the All Saints Neighborhood Center in Southwest Detroit, students aged 7-17 are able to receive afterschool tutoring, practice computer skills, and participate in cultural activities. They are also able

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to participate in community service projects, recreational sports activities, and learn about nutrition. Nonprofit groups like Urban Neighborhood Initiatives help run these afterschool programs, which help “enrich, challenge and support learning” that students receive in the classroom (Urban Neighborhood Initiatives, 2010).

Alternatives for Girls Prevention Program provides services to about 150 participants between ages 5 and 18 who are at risk of teen pregnancy, gang involvement and school truancy (Alternatives for Girls, 2010). These prevention programs take place in after-school workshops, study groups and girls’ clubs, and help at-risk girls build character on “a foundation of positive choices.” AFG’s programs provide mentorship, emphasize education and introduce positive alternatives and new experiences into the lives of their participants. Youth develop leadership skills and decision-making skills, with the goal of building and encouraging social responsibility.

Quality afterschool programs like these require quality staff, effective curricula and community collaboration in order to succeed. Federal, state and local governments must develop policies to support and evaluate these programs to ensure their success. In order to prepare Detroit youth for graduation, employment and the skills to succeed, quality afterschool programs are almost certainly a necessity.

While foundation money can be used to implement these programs, federal action will ultimately be required to improve education outcomes in urban areas. The federal government must recognize that programs like No Child Left Behind are not adequately serving inner-city youth. According to census data, the Detroit metropolitan area is the most segregated area in the nation (Kurth et al, 2001). Decisive federal action and urban investment will be necessary to begin the process of desegregating metropolitan school districts to improve education, limit urban sprawl, and encourage the development of the metropolitan region (Baum, 2004).

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