



## Review of

# *America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime, or Youth Enrichment and Achievement<sup>a</sup>*

by

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# **REVIEW of**

## ***America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime, or Youth Enrichment and Achievement***

### **Chapter 1: Prime Time for Juvenile Crime, Kids Becoming Victims, and Other Dangers**

After-school hours have been identified as particularly dangerous for children. Without supervision, children become involved in crime or other dangerous behaviors. Children are also likely to become victims of crime or experience some form of bodily injury.

#### **The hours between 3-6pm are prime time for:**

- Gang related violence<sup>1</sup>
- Juvenile violent crime<sup>2</sup> (defined by the FBI to include murder, rape, robbery, and assault<sup>3</sup>)
- Children becoming victims of violent crime<sup>4</sup> (violent victimization triples during after-school hours<sup>5</sup>)
- 16- and 17-year olds causing or getting into car accidents<sup>6</sup>

#### **Other occurrences common during after school hours:**

- Teen sexual activity leading to pregnancy<sup>7</sup>
- Household injury or injury-related death (nearly 4.5 million children under 14 are injured in their homes every year)<sup>8</sup>
- Substance abuse<sup>9</sup>
- Increased risk of truancy, poor grades, and depression<sup>10</sup>

### **Chapter 2: After-School Programs Prevent Crime, Teach Skills and Values**

#### **Quality after-school programs can:**

- Reduce juvenile crime and violence
- Reduce drug use, alcohol use, and smoking
- Reduce teen sex and pregnancy
- Improve school outcomes and graduation rates

#### **Research on specific after-school programs reported:**

- Boys participating in Quantum Opportunities program were six times less likely to commit a crime than other boys. Boys and girls in this program were less likely to drop out of school<sup>11</sup>
- Communities with Boys and Girls Clubs noted a decrease in vandalism and drug activity, as well as juvenile delinquency<sup>12</sup>
- Canadian Public Housing After-School Program reported a significant decrease in juvenile arrests<sup>13</sup>
- Children in Big Brother/ Big Sister programs were less likely to initiate drug use or commit assault<sup>14</sup>
- Children participating in Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension After-School Program were better at resolving conflict and cooperating<sup>15</sup>

- After-school programs also cut the likeliness of middle school children using drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes in half<sup>16</sup>

**After-school programming offers the following protective factors:**

- Opportunity to develop social skills and peer relationships<sup>17</sup>
- Increase the likelihood that children will stay in school and even pursue further education beyond high school<sup>18</sup>
- Opportunity for children to develop a positive relationship with an unrelated adult

Children who do not find constructive activities to fill after school hours often turn to gangs. Gangs recruit members by offering the excitement and adult relationships that children are looking for. It is common for children to begin associating with gangs at 12 or 13 years of age, join by age 13, and experience their first arrest by 14.<sup>19</sup>

### **Chapter 3: Unmet Needs and Wasted Opportunities**

**Federal support of after-school programming:**

- Federal money appropriated for after-school programming increased from \$40 million in 1998 to \$450 million in 2000
- Despite federal support, after-school programming will be available to only 650,000 children across the country
- In 1999, the federal government was able fund 310 of 2,252 after-school programs eligible for support<sup>20</sup>
- 40% of programs that received federal support had waiting lists<sup>21</sup>

**Working families and unsupervised children:**

- It is estimated that more than 11 million children are unsupervised on a regular basis
- 4 million of these children are between the ages of 6-12<sup>22</sup>, another 4 million are 13-14<sup>23</sup>
- 7 of every 10 children live in households where both parents or the only parent in the household work
- 69% of married couples with children between the ages of 6-17 work outside the home; 71% of single mothers and 85% of single fathers with children between the ages of 6-17 work outside of the home<sup>24</sup>

**Costs of after school programs:**

- Annual cost of running an after school program 3-4 hours/day year round is estimated at \$2500-4000<sup>25</sup>
- Majority of after-school programs are funded by caregiver fees; as a result, these programs most often serve families in middle income communities<sup>26</sup>
- Families least likely to have the financial resources to access after-school programs are low- to middle-income families who live in areas with highest crime rates<sup>27</sup>

## **Chapter 4: Quality Matters**

Program success is relies heavily on program design, implementation and staffing.

### **Factors effecting outcome of after-school programs:**

- Boys in after school programs where staff members had positive attitudes showed better behavior than those in programs where staff had negative attitudes<sup>28</sup>
- Programs with lower staff to child ratios improved likeliness that personal relationships can be formed
- After-school programming should be specialized to meet the needs of a particular community. Children's ages and developmental needs should also be considered

Children should be offered a variety of opportunities during after school hours, including academic help, sports, arts, music, or drama. Teenagers can benefit from programs designed to provide job skills or career development opportunities.

## **Chapter 5: Investing in After-School Saves Money and Lives**

Investing in after-school programming pays for itself in tax dollars saved as well as lives saved. Research shows:

- Extra income and taxes paid by youth who become responsible citizens rather than criminals will make up for money invested in after-school programs<sup>29</sup>
- Each high risk youth prevented from a life of crime will save the United States between 1.7 and 2.3 million dollars<sup>30</sup>
- 68% of Americans polled believe investing government money in child care and after school programs is more important than a tax cut<sup>cut31</sup>

## **Chapter 6: From the Front Lines of the Battle Against Crime: A Call for Action**

Many law enforcement officials believe that the solution to the crime problem in the United States cannot be based solely on punishing criminals after a crime occurs. Instead, efforts should be made to prevent crimes from ever occurring in the first place.

- 86% of police chiefs polled agreed that strengthening after-school and child care programs will greatly reduce youth crime and violence
- 9 of 10 police chiefs polled agreed that if the U.S. did not invest in after-school and child care programs now, they would pay more in crime, welfare, and other costs later
- 86% of public agreed that the U.S. could reduce violent crime by expanding preventative measures such as after-school programs

## Endnotes

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For more information on after-school programs, see *Practice and Programming Issues: After-School Programs for Children* and *Policy Brief in Family and Youth Resiliency: After-School Programs for Children* at <http://resiliency.cas.psu.edu>.

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