

RECOMMENDATIONS ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT FEBRUARY 25, 2010

Introduction

After-school programs are a beacon for the millions of working families in California who need a safe, enriching environment for their children in the risk-filled hours after the last school bell rings. Research has shown that after-school programs produce tangible developmental, social, and academic benefits for children, while also leading to long-term cost savings for communities. Due to concerted education and advocacy, there is now shared understanding among policymakers, educators and parents not only about the potential dangers children and youth can face from 3 pm to 6 pm during the school year, but also how after-school programs can use these hours to create positive opportunities for children.

Unfortunately, there is not yet a similar awareness of the risks children and youth face during the summer months. Many Americans have an image of summer as a carefree, happy time when “kids can be kids,” and they take for granted the prospect of enriching experiences such as summer camps, time with family, and trips to museums, parks, and libraries.

Unfortunately, many children face anything but idyllic summer months. When the doors close at the end of the school year, many children struggle to access educational opportunities, as well as basic needs such as healthy meals and adequate adult supervision. Here are some sobering facts about summer for children in this country:

- All young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer. Research spanning 100 years shows that students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer (White, 1906; Heyns, 1978; Entwisle & Alexander 1992; Cooper, 1996; Downey et al, 2004).
- Most students lose about two months of grade-level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months. Low-income students also lose more than two months in reading achievement, despite the fact that their middle-class peers make slight gains (Cooper, 1996).
- More than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (Alexander et al, 2007).
- Children – particularly children at high risk of obesity – gain weight more rapidly when they are out of school during summer break (Von Hippel et al, 2007).
- Parents consistently cite summer as the most difficult time to ensure that their children have productive things to do (Duffett et al, 2004).

While California has shown clear support for children in the after-school hours during the school year, summer has been somewhat forgotten in the discussion about what children need when they're not in school. There's practically no public funding specifically for summer programs, and the funding streams that can be used are difficult to redirect for this purpose (such as Title 1, Supplemental Educational Services, etc.).

Recognizing the need to bring more attention to the issue of children and youth during summer, after-school advocates promoted and the Legislature authorized in 2008 a new Task Force on Summer and Intersession Enrichment (ACR 134, DeSaulnier). This Task Force is charged with examining what is currently happening to disadvantaged children in the summertime and making recommendations to the Legislature and Governor on what the state might do to address identified challenges. The Task Force began its work in November of 2009, and is scheduled to complete its work by late 2010 or early 2011.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #1

Enable more California children to attend summer and/or year-round academic enrichment programs.

Recommended Actions

- A. The State Legislature should pass and the Governor should sign Senate Bill SB 798 (DeSaulnier) to direct more of our federal after-school dollars (21st Century Community Learning Centers program) to summer and year-round programs, so that after-school programs can choose to continue their services through the summertime.
- B. The Governor, State Legislature and Superintendent of Public Instruction should advocate for an increase in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers budget at the federal level, so that California can receive more funds for after-school and summer programs. Currently, there is about a billion dollars dedicated to this program nationally, though is it authorized for up to \$2.5 billion.
- C. The federal Child Nutrition Act is expected to be reauthorized early in 2010. The Governor, State Legislature and Superintendent of Public Instruction should advocate for a change to the area eligibility test for both the afterschool snack and summer food programs. The federal afterschool and summer nutrition programs allow sites to participate (receive funds for meals and snacks) based on area income criteria, without having to individually document each child's household income. If a high enough percentage of children in an area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, then the sites in that area receive a standard reimbursement for all of the children.

This "area eligibility" test has proven extremely effective because it substantially decreases the paperwork for both public agencies and nonprofits (many of them small) and streamlines administrative requirements. Currently, 50% of the children in an area must be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals for the afterschool or summer site to meet the area eligibility test. The 50% threshold is too high and should be lowered to 40%.