

How Out-of-School Time Programs Before School, After School and over the Summer Extend Time for Learning

Education reform has focused on the achievement gap between our high and low performing students. Consider, also, the opportunity gap, or, as Milton Chen of the George Lucas Educational Foundation calls it, the “experience gap.”

Broadening students’ experiences outside the classroom—and now, with virtual experiences, using technology as a “window on the world” to connect them to experts, museums, parks, other workplaces, locally and globally—is a key to motivating and deepening student learning. (TASC, 2013)

Afterschool programs are critical to connecting students to their peers and the broader world. In out-of-school time, community partners come together to make students’ learning more relevant to work and life. It is a fact of life in Iowa that parents work, sometimes multiple jobs, to provide for their family. Our families are limited by time and money, and afterschool programs that partner with community resources are a critical link to the future success for many of our students.

Iowa Afterschool Alliance Policy Statement

The future of high-quality education cannot depend on our schools, alone. Education reform must understand that to successfully develop students into good workers, citizens, and life-long learners, time outside the traditional classroom in extended learning should broaden their experiences as well as align with rigorous curricula and standards.

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance represents providers of and advocates for high-quality out-of-school time that keeps kids safe, supports working parents, and promotes student learning. Out-of-school time is not necessarily solely community-based, but high-quality programming represents a partnership between schools and the community, including business and the public sector. Extended learning has been implemented successfully across the state through alternative school calendars and out-of-school programming.

We consider programs offered before school, after school, and during the summer as critical pieces to solving the challenge of the gap between our highest and lowest achieving students. In some cases extended learning has been offered during the school day through alternative scheduling. This is done through programming that looks different from the school day, yet supports it. It is an opportunity to provide students with a more individualized experience and within the community. The IAA supports efforts to expand resources available to schools and community-based organizations that focus specifically on children in need.



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CRITICAL ISSUES

» **State-Level Leadership and Coordination**

Out-of-school time in Iowa suffers from a lack of formal leadership at the state level. Such leadership not only lends legitimacy to programming as a critical partner in the education and development of our young people, but it also promotes better coordination of services to ensure equity of access and opportunity across the state. Currently, no one state agency provides leadership in out-of-school time. Rather, children up to age 12 served through Child Care Assistance are funneled through the Iowa Department of Human Services while children and youth served through Iowa 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding are supported by the Iowa Department of Education. Programs operating outside of these funding streams have no “home” through which to be provided support around quality improvement or tracked for purposes of measuring impact or tracking attendance. As such, there is currently little state-level data on the impact of high quality out-of-school time programming. Basic data on access and impact is needed to support replication of good practices across the state.

» **Maximizing Financial Resources**

A common characteristic of out-of-school time programs is the nature of how financial resources are pieced together to ensure provision of minimal services to keep kids safe after school. So much opportunity exists in this time; however, many providers struggle to raise funds and identify community resources necessary to offer high-quality, engaging and rigorous programming. This is due to the lack of sustainable, multi-year funding for such programming, as well as the inflexibility of existing funding streams such as state Dropout Prevention funding, federal Title funds, and Child Care Assistance reimbursement. Eligibility restrictions make it very difficult for schools and community-based providers to blend funds to implement school-wide programming for children and youth after school. A great benefit of expanded learning programs is the chance for students to interact with their peers in an environment that is different from the school day. The limitations of many funding streams utilized to provide out-of-school time programming mean that many students must be served in a piecemeal fashion based on funding stream rather than need or interest.

» **Recognition of the ROI (Return on Investment) of High Quality OST**

Much study has been done on out-of-school time nationally. However, very little data exists on out-of-school time programming in the state of Iowa. Nationally, out-of-school time has been shown to decrease the likelihood of dropping out of high school; decrease problem behaviors and school office referrals; increase in academic outcomes including proficiency and GPA; and better attitudes towards school, peers, and community. Many programs also leverage community and school resources to enhance programming and promote relevance. However, there is no data to analyze for impact at the state level outside of the data collected by the Iowa Department of Education on Iowa’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs.