

After School Programs in Arkansas:

A Solution Whose Time Has Come



A report by:
Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families
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Whenever parents are gathered together at work, at church, in the grocery store, or at a family event you will likely hear the questions: What are you doing with your child after school? What is your child doing this summer?

The growing number of families with primary caregivers employed full time has created widespread concern for how children spend their out of school time. This issue brief explores several aspects of after school programs including: their positive impacts, the potential demand for programs, the importance of quality, and current efforts to expand these programs in Arkansas.

Keeping Children Safe

Keeping children safe is, by far, the most important benefit of after school programs.¹

Parents want their child in a safe environment and well they should be.

- On school days, the hours from 3-6 p.m. are the peak hours for teens to commit crimes, for innocent kids to become crime victims, for 16- and 17-year olds to be in or cause a car crash, for teen sex, and for kids to smoke, drink or use drugs.²
- The violent victimization of children more than triples when school lets out.³
- Nearly 4.5 million children 14 and younger are injured in their homes each year, and most unintentional injury-related deaths occur when children are out of school and unsupervised.⁴
- The after school hours are also the most common time for teens to become pregnant⁵ and being unsupervised after school doubles the risk that an eight grader will smoke, drink, or abuse drugs.⁶

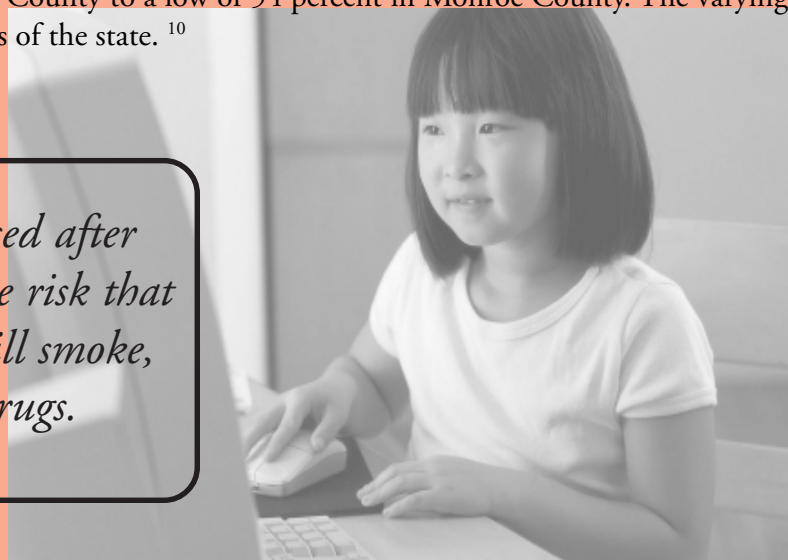
Studies have also shown that boys left out of an after school program were six times more likely to be convicted of a crime, and boys and girls left out of these programs were 50 percent more likely to have children before graduating from high school.⁷ In another study of five housing projects, the projects without after school programs had 50 percent more vandalism and 33 percent more drug use.⁸

Supporting Working Families

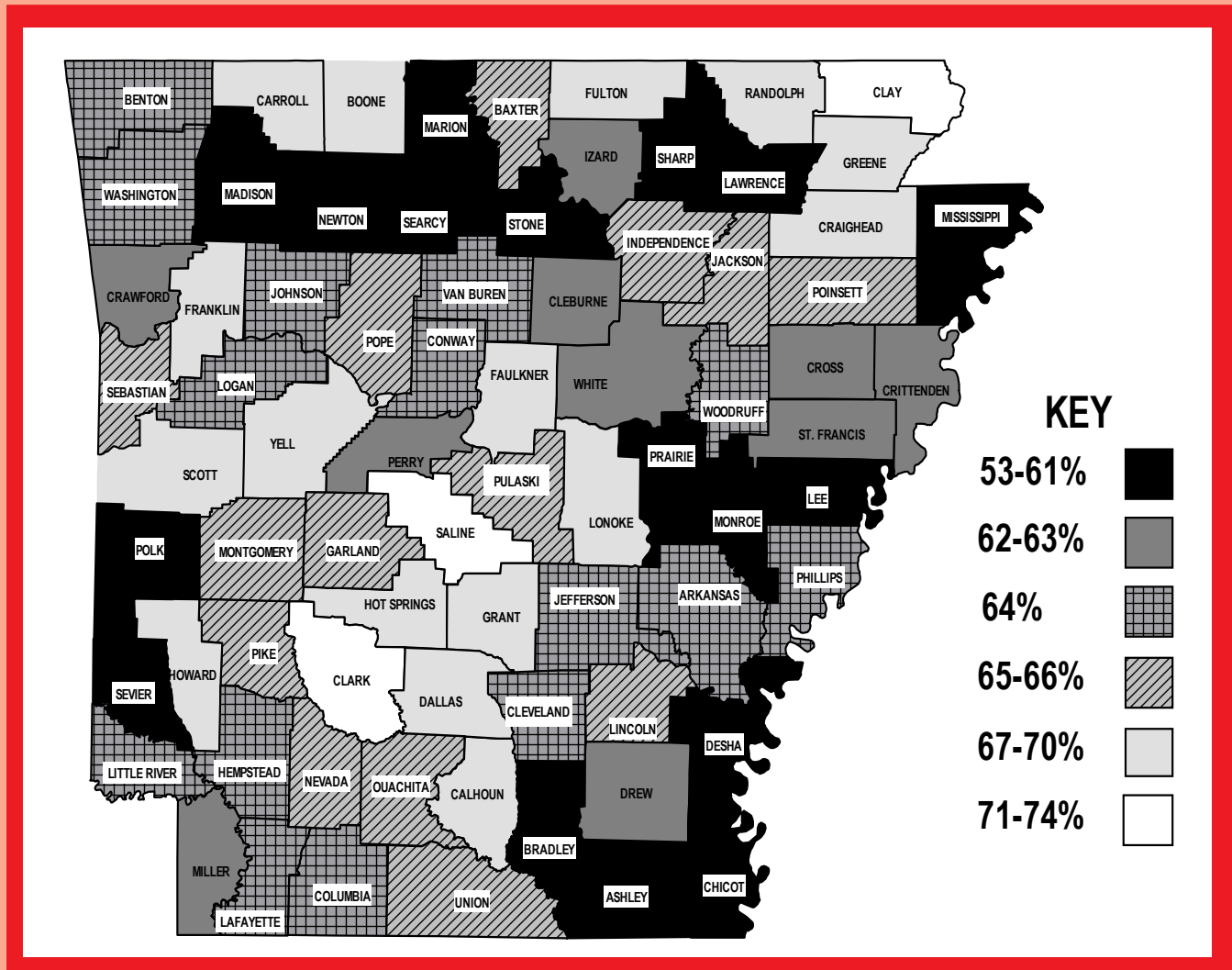
Working parents in Arkansas have always struggled to find a safe place with adult supervision and positive enriching activities for their children when school is out. In 1950, only 56 percent of families fit the “traditional” family structure of one parent at home, caring for children full-time, while the other parent provides financial support.⁹ Today, less than one-fourth of American families fit this profile. While women are still the primary caregivers, either as single mothers or part of a two-parent family, they are entering the workforce in greater numbers than ever.

In Arkansas, the overall rate is 65 percent, but the percent of children with all parents in the workforce varies from a high of 74 percent in Clark County to a low of 54 percent in Monroe County. The varying rates are dispersed throughout the regions of the state.¹⁰

Being unsupervised after school doubles the risk that an 8th grader will smoke, drink or abuse drugs.



Percentage of Children Under 18 With All Parent(s) in the Workforce



Eighteen percent of Arkansas children enrolled in K-12 are taking care of themselves from the time school is out until their parents return from work. Sixty-five percent of Arkansas children under 18 (414,523 children) have their caregiver(s) in the workforce. Men and women are also working more hours. The average work hours per adult increased 7.9 percent between 1960 and 1998, and nearly three-fourths of working adults say they have little or no control over their work schedule.¹¹

The gap between a child's school week and the parent's work week may be as many as 25 hours, which presents working parents with the challenge of finding someone to care for their children while they are at work. Forty-four percent of families do not have any regular after school care for their children.

A recent study also documents the connection between high employee stress due to concerns about their children after school and decreased productivity and increased rates of absenteeism. It estimates the cost to businesses to be anywhere from \$496 to \$1,984 per employee, per year, depending on the employee's salary.¹²

Inspiring Children to Learn

Perhaps the most compelling data on the positive impacts of after school programs is the educational benefits of these programs. An academic component is a critical part of the after school curriculum. At the

same time the informal nature of most after school programs give young people a chance to develop positive relationships with peers and adults, as well as stronger connections between their school, family and community. All of these opportunities combine to help a young person achieve the wide range of skills and well-roundedness they will need to succeed in the workplace and in society.¹³

The following is a summary of studies illustrating the educational impacts of quality after school programs.

- o A report on 21st Century Community Learning Centers showed that in 2003-2004, 45 percent of all participants had improved their reading grades, and 41 percent improved their math grades. (*U.S. Department of Education, 2005*)
- o Students who participate in extracurricular activities have better grades, feel greater attachment to school, have lower truancy rates and reach higher levels of achievement in college, as documented by a 17-year study that followed 1,800 sixth-graders in 10 Michigan schools through high school and college. (*“Extra Benefits Tied to Extracurriculars,” Education Week, October 2000*)
- o Students in a statewide after school program in California improved their standardized test scores (SAT-9) in both reading and math by percentages almost twice that of other students and also had better school attendance. (*University of California Irvine, May 2001*)
- o The boys and girls randomly selected from welfare households to participate in the Quantum Opportunities after school program were half as likely to drop out of high school and two and one half times more likely to go on to further their education after high school than students not selected to participate. (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2000*)

In an analysis of four recent after school evaluations, there were fairly consistent indications that these programs also promote greater parental involvement in school, greater student engagement, and greater student commitment to homework.¹⁴ Quality after school programs markedly increased engagement in learning by providing students with opportunities for personal attention from adults, a peer group with positive aspirations, and hands-on activities that hold students’ interest and develop their skills and sense of competence. Schools often have difficulty providing these types of opportunities to most of their students, yet research indicates they are critical to long-term academic success. Students who are engaged in after school learning behave better in school, have better work habits, higher educational aspirations, and improved attitudes toward school, a greater sense of belonging in the community, and better relationships with parents. Young people are not the only ones to benefit. After school programs have been referred to as “the new neighborhood” because positive effects extend to families, employers and communities.¹⁵

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The Demand for After School Programs

According to the 2000 Census there are 414,523 Arkansas children under 18 with their caregivers in the workforce. This constitutes the potential number of children whose parental work requirements necessitate some form of after school care.

In a national study it was found that only 11 percent of children in K-12 were enrolled in after school programs.¹⁶ Mayors surveyed in 86 cities reported that only one-third of the children needing after school care were receiving it.¹⁷

There are no comprehensive surveys or studies to document the number of children enrolled in after school programs in Arkansas, the number of non-school and summer hours operated by existing after school programs, or the quality of these programs. While the more established programs have various program standards, there is no uniform agreement on what constitutes a high quality after school program in Arkansas.

A preliminary after school supply and demand assessment conducted by the Arkansas Out of School Network (AOSN) established the following facts.

- Nearly 9,226 of Arkansas children participate in the programs supported by the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the only federal program dedicated to after school.¹⁸
- Over 145,500 children participate in 4-H youth development programs in Arkansas each year.
- Approximately 63,600 youth participate in programs operated by the state's Boys and Girls Clubs.
- Arkansas YMCA programs serve 18,921 children each year. Of those 15,950 (84 percent) are school age (6 to 17 years).
- There are 423 school age centers licensed by the DHHS Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education with a capacity to serve 25,849 K-12 children. Only 4,268 or 18 percent of these potential slots are in programs meeting quality standards. An estimated 73 children age 5-13 are eligible for every quality slot in Arkansas.¹⁹
- The 39 Schools for the 21st Century program currently serve 3,200 students from K through 12th grade.
- County and municipal after school programs include 2,130 youth in the City of Little Rock's Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment Programs and over 400 youth in Pulaski County's Our Clubs.

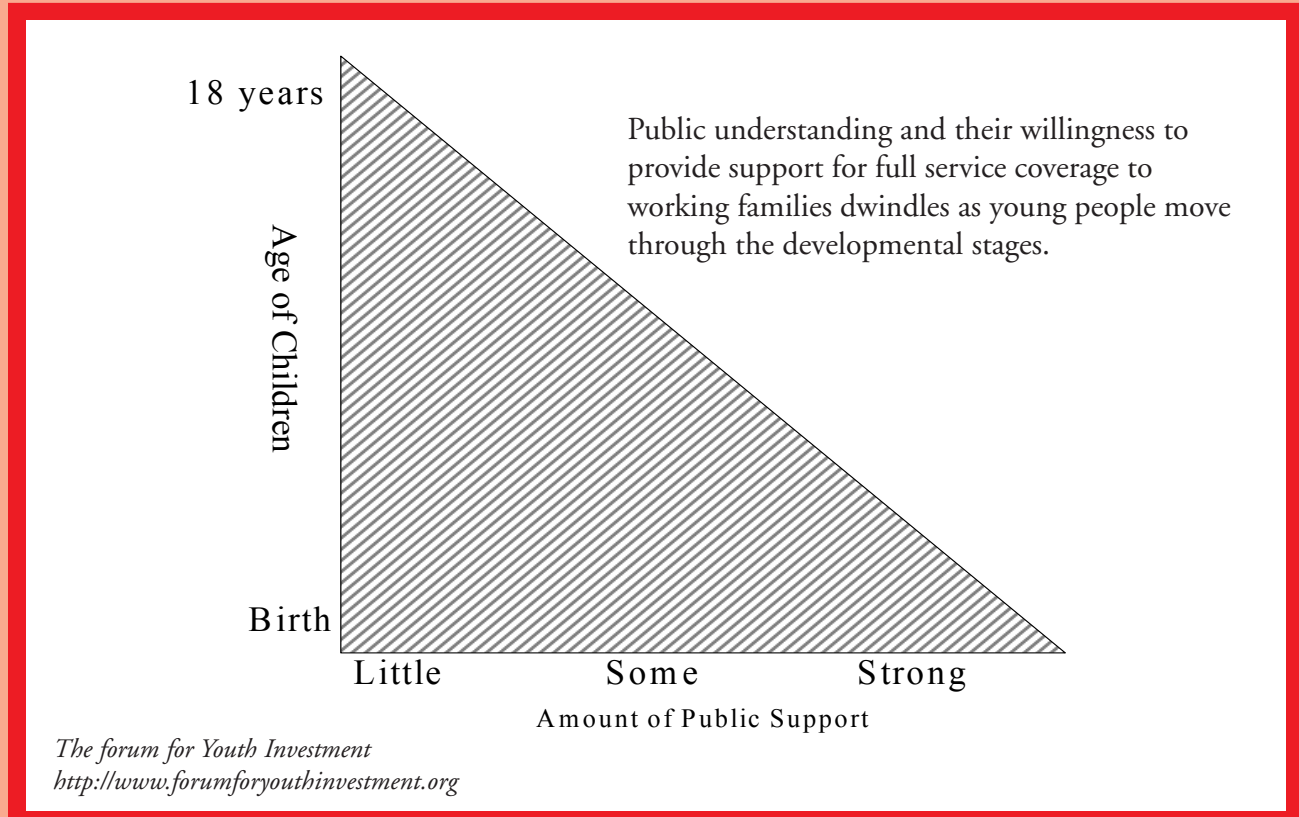
These programs vary considerably from community to community and various types of programs operate within one program site. Program user's participation varies from a few hours a month to over 20 hours a week. And while some programs are specifically focused on serving children at risk or in low-

Nationally, only 11 percent of children in K-12 were enrolled in after school programs.



income areas, most are opened to youth from every socio-economic level. This preliminary AOSN assessment does not include after school programs conducted by many church-based or private nonprofit organizations. In the absence of such comprehensive data, one needs only to ask parents to get a sense of the growing demand for such programs in communities across the state.

Parents of teenage adolescent children face additional problems finding suitable after school and summer programs. This age group is often perceived as more difficult to engage, more capable of taking care of themselves, and there is less appreciation for the role of private and public programs in helping this population during out of school time. Yet this age group has greater access to funds, transportation, and other options that provide even more opportunities to risk taking behaviors. The consequences of these behaviors are life changing and shape much of their adult lives.



A Campaign to Expand After School Programs in Arkansas

On March 9, 2006 Governor Huckabee held a Governor's Summit on Extra Learning Opportunities at the Clinton Library in Little Rock to help launch a three year campaign to expand, support and improve after school and summer programs in Arkansas. Leaders in government, business, education, and the judiciary spoke to the 135 invited guests from across the state. They all voiced strong support for expanding after school programs and the Arkansas Out of School Network (AOSN) that will lead this campaign.

Following this summit the AOSN began holding regional meetings across the state to introduce local communities to this after school campaign. The success of this effort will depend greatly upon local community leaders working together to strengthen the collaboration between existing programs and public education efforts to increase local investment.

Public and private partnerships are essential to the success of this effort in Arkansas. There has been significant interest and investment in after school activities by U.S. corporations for over a decade, including \$136.6 million invested in 2005.²⁰ This is clear evidence that the business community understands the role after school programs play in education, youth development, child care and creating the future workforce in Arkansas.

While meeting the demand for these programs is certainly a concern, establishing a high quality standard of care is essential to ensuring that youth get the full benefits and positive outcomes that such programs can provide. Parents, policy makers, and supporters must first be convinced that their children are cared for, that their money is well spent, and that research-based services will result in desired outcomes before supporting any further expansion in the state.

The AOSN will explore and uncover the policy strategies and solutions that will bring children, parents, government and business together out of common concern for the safety and learning opportunities for Arkansas children. These programs are uniquely situated to serve as the hub between families, schools, and communities that come together to embrace the challenges that face them. After school campaign volunteers are already working with a variety of providers to develop quality standards for programs, to establish and offer staff development opportunities, to determine the cost for creating such programs in local communities, and to build public support for school-based or school-linked programs.

Funds have been provided by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to support this effort in Arkansas which is one of 31 states from across the country working with this foundation to develop school-based and school-linked programs. The Arkansas Department of Education and the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services have provided matching funds. The Afterschool Alliance, National Governors Association and numerous other national groups have come together to support these 31 statewide campaigns because they believe that the research is clear, that the demand is real, and that communities realize significant benefits when they keep children safe, support working families and inspire children to learn.

If you are interested in becoming involved in this effort to make quality after school and summer programs available to more Arkansas children and their families please contact Paul Kelly, Senior Policy Analyst at Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, Union Station, Suite 306, 1400 W. Markham, Little Rock, AR. 72201. Email pkelly@aradvocates.org Call 501.371.9678, Ext. 102. To find out more or to register online visit the Arkansas Out of School Network website www.aosn.org.

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(Footnotes)

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- 14 Kane, Thomas J. *The Impact of After school Programs: Interpreting the Results of Four Recent Evaluations*. This is a working paper of the William T. Grant Foundation. University of California, Los Angeles, January 16, 2004
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It is far easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

Frederick Douglass
abolitionist, journalist and lecturer



“We can’t always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt
former President of the United States



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