



WHAT IT COULD COST US: New York City's Afterschool Programs and the Economic Crisis

Over the past decade, the afterschool field has made tremendous strides in consistency and quality of services, professionalization, and measurement of its impact on youth. During these difficult economic times, it is crucial that these hard-won advances be maintained.

The impact of the economic crisis on the afterschool field will be felt in every neighborhood of New York City. A reduction in afterschool programs means:

- parents unable to work without leaving their children home alone;
- increased unemployment as youth workers and managers are laid off;
- a lower standard of quality in services to already at-risk youth; and
- fewer opportunities for young people in low-income communities to spend time in safe, supervised settings outside the home or school.

As government budgets and private giving priorities are debated, the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) urges that the following steps be taken:

- Maintain funding streams for afterschool at the highest level possible.
- Support efforts to increase efficiency and collaboration among youth-serving organizations.
- Engage leaders in afterschool and related sectors in discussions about the future of youth services.
- Maintain professional development and capacity-building as a high priority.

school + afterschool = education

In a recent PASE survey¹ of youth-serving organizations' executive directors, 76.5% of respondents indicated that their organization lost funding in the third quarter of 2008. As a result of this lost revenue, 52% of these organizations have cut services, and 56% have cut staff. 68% of executive directors indicated that as a result of lost revenue, their organizations experienced difficulty meeting demand for their services, while 40% had difficulty maintaining program quality. **What might New York City look like with reduced afterschool services?**

Afterschool programs enable the parents of more than 500,000 youth around the city to work full-time, knowing their children are safe and engaged in enriching activities in out of school time. If afterschool programs are cancelled or limited, many parents will be forced to choose between leaving their children unsupervised, paying for childcare on already limited budgets, or becoming unemployed themselves.

New York City organizations serving youth under age 12 alone employ more than 40,000 individuals throughout the city. Several thousand additional adults are employed by afterschool programs serving older youth. If loss of revenue by those organizations results in staff reductions, thousands of people could be added to the city's unemployment rolls. Nearly a decade of professionalization and several dedicated funding streams have enabled afterschool programs to recruit and retain individuals with ever greater experience and education. However, if agencies are unable to afford the salaries required to retain experienced, educated staff, **the field will face the real possibility of losing the momentum gained over the past decade, resulting in a reduction in program quality and ability to serve youth across the board.**

¹ September 2008, distributed to approximately 750 executive directors, with return rate of about 10%.

The impact of reduced or cancelled afterschool programs on New York City's youth themselves must also be considered. On a fundamental level, afterschool programs provide young people safe, enriching spaces in which to spend their out of school time. **Without these programs, children citywide would be at home or on the streets, with no caring adult supervision. The closure of even one quarter of the city's programs would impact more than 125,000 youth.** Studies show that the hours of 3-6 p.m. when children and youth are not in school are peak times for young people to engage in risky behaviors or become the victims or perpetrators of crime.² Quality afterschool programs not only keep youth off the street, but increase their connection to school, reducing the likelihood of their dropping out before graduating high school.

It is not simply a matter of keeping the doors open – program quality must remain high. In addition to increasing high school graduation rates, regular participation in quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in test scores and work habits, as well as reductions in behavior problems.³ Afterschool programs are also the primary places that New York City's low-income youth have the opportunity to develop critical 21st century workforce skills including critical thinking, technology literacy, ability to collaborate and work in teams, written and verbal communication, and creativity.

Without afterschool programs, New York City's low-income children and youth are likely to suffer academically, lack the opportunity to develop crucial social-emotional skills, and enter the workforce without the essential skills they need to compete and succeed.

Afterschool programs, like most nonprofit organizations, are accustomed to working with limited budgets. Funding from government agencies and private foundations is most often tied to specific programs and activities, rather than providing the kind of general support that could enable an organization to establish a capital reserve or an endowment. The field is working to help itself. Organizations are exploring collaborations, resource-sharing, mergers, and more. But the sector cannot survive based solely on its own efforts if funding continues to be cut and efforts at efficiency are not supported in meaningful ways.

Recommendations

- Maintain funding streams at the highest level possible. Investment is needed from organizations and individuals to ensure that youth and families receive the support they need to keep the city vibrant and viable.
- Support efforts to increase efficiency and collaboration among youth-serving organizations. Resources including funding and expert guidance are needed if organizations are to forge effective alliances ranging from shared programs, space, or supplies to full organizational mergers.
- Include afterschool leaders in discussions about the future of youth services in New York City. Afterschool plays a critical role in the development of New York City's youth, and the current and future economic health of the city. Leaders in afterschool must be included in conversations among government leaders, funders, and other stakeholders about the future of the city's youth and education.
- Maintain professional development and capacity-building as a high priority. For the past three years, New York City has dedicated significant resources not only to funding afterschool programs in underserved communities, but to providing their staff with access to the training and support they need to provide quality services. A formal statement of this commitment, along with the financial resources to fulfill that commitment, would ensure that the city's youth and families are able to continue contributing to New York City's economic upturn.

For more information about PASE and the *Supporting Afterschool Agencies in Turbulent Times* initiative, visit www.pasetter.org or call 212-571-2664.

² Fight Crime: Invest in Kids New York; YMCA of the USA, March 2001

³ Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, University of California, Irvine, University of Wisconsin – Madison, and Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2007