

Afterschool in Iowa:

A Summary of Survey Findings about the Benefits, Issues, and Demand in Iowa

Executive Summary
January 2009



The expectations for young people are changing – we now live in a more global community, and the definition of educational success goes beyond grades and academics to include life and work skills for the 21st century. Iowa is also changing, and we face many challenges and opportunities:

- **Demands during the limited school day hours continue to put pressure on schools and students to do more with less money and in less time**
- **Iowa's changing demographics present an ongoing challenge to educating students with specific learning needs, high mobility, and multiple barriers to success**
- **Iowa has one of the highest percentages of families with both or the only parent working outside of the home**

Afterschool programs are quality programs that offer safe, engaging, and enriching environments for children and youth when they are not in school. Afterschool programs not only assist youth with academic issues, but help them develop career paths and volunteer opportunities, build social skills, and become civically engaged, and provide preventive, gender-specific, and other specialized programming. These ongoing, continuous programs occur before school, after school, in the evenings, weekends, school and other breaks, school in-service days, or for late starts or early dismissals. They can be offered by a school, by a contractor with a school, by a community-based organization, or other partnerships at a school or other location.

The Iowa Department of Education recognizes the important role out-of-school time plays for children and youth in the state. Before and after school programs can help meet these challenges and leverage out-of-school time to support school-day learning and build essential life skills. However, relatively little is known about afterschool in Iowa – the demand for programming, the types of opportunities available, and the funding and resources available and utilized to support programming.

This report presents the findings of two surveys about before and after school in Iowa, provided to parents with children in high quality programs and school district leaders (school superintendents and school board presidents) across the state. The surveys found that, although afterschool is highly valuable to Iowans, multiple barriers exist for accessing high quality programming, and partnerships at the local and state levels are critical to sustaining successful, school-linked programming that benefits youth, families, communities, and the state.

Specifically, the surveys found:

- **Afterschool should be available to all youth, and the value of afterschool for older youth is not fully recognized**

An overwhelming majority of school district leaders and parents said that a focus on before and after school programming for all youth is important for Iowa. However, high school programming is not widely available or accessed, and there is less support for the need to have afterschool programming available for high school youth. There are multiple reasons for this, including the fact that high schoolers are often involved in other activities, but demonstrates the need to educate Iowans about the benefits afterschool can have for older youth – such as work skills, career planning, civic engagement, academic support, and social networking.

- **Quality afterschool programs do more than just keep kids safe**

School district leaders and parents alike reported that safety is the number one benefit of afterschool programming. However, they also indicated important factors that are essential to high quality programming and that have a positive impact on outcomes for youth. These include academic support, professionally trained staff, improvements in grades, and parent communication and involvement.

- **Multiple challenges exist for parents and district leaders to enrolling children and youth in afterschool**

Parents and school district leaders face tremendous challenges to developing and enrolling children in afterschool programs. Key challenges cited by parents include cost, availability of afterschool programs, and transportation. A significantly high percentage of school district leaders reported that financial and other resources present barriers to developing and offering afterschool programs.

- **School districts lack sufficient funding and other resources to meet known community demand and existing programs are relying on diversification of funding to continue at current capacity**

Limited funding and resources, and lack of available transportation and professionally trained staff present major barriers to school districts trying to meet the demand for afterschool. Funding for afterschool programs is typically a diverse pooling of resources from the school district, parents, and other community support. School district leaders cited the practice related to cutting capacity or program component as the least common practice implemented by programs to ensure sustainability. This reflects the significant community demand and district support for afterschool programs.

- **Strong school, community, and parent collaborations are necessary in offering, funding, and locating high-quality programs**

The majority of parents and school district leaders indicated that the public school district has a responsibility for developing and offering afterschool programs. Respondents also indicated the need to have strong partnerships at the local level with local government and community organizations. The need for school linkage was clearly indicated – school district leaders reported that school-based and school-linked programs are superior and 94 percent of parents said they prefer to have programming located at the child's school. Respondents also reported that funding of afterschool programs should be a shared responsibility among state government, federal government, local government, and parents.