

Background on Afterschool Programming

Student learning doesn't follow a clock—it is a continual process. Research shows that some students need more time, more attention, and more access to a variety of learning situations in order to succeed. With the rising number of families with both parents working outside the home, afterschool programs have flourished as Americans look for ways to keep kids safe while they learn and grow.

Afterschool offerings are taking root in community centers, parks, and libraries as well as schools. Here's why: The alternative to quality afterschool programs is both dangerous and more costly to society. Research by a national anticrime group shows that youngsters without adult supervision after school are most likely to participate in risky behavior or become a victim of a violent crime. In contrast, the same research finds organized afterschool programs improve academic achievement and expand social development.

No longer just supervised leisure, afterschool programs are now about enriching the learning experience and building real-life skills. What's old is new: Apprenticeships are making a comeback in areas such as television production, technology, and computer graphics. Students are filling in their own gaps of time with social networking, multiplayer games, and creation of original content—all supported by the Internet. The merits of these activities vary. More research is being done to measure the benefits of afterschool programs to student performance, which suggests that more innovation is ahead. But the mind-set that learning is continual—not limited to a specific place or part of the day—is here to stay.