

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS: Helping Youth Reach Their Full Potential

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS CAN INCREASE PROTECTIVE FACTORS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

- **Social-Emotional Learning.** Afterschool is an ideal setting to teach SEL skills; youth can focus on building friendships; and programming is flexible. Research demonstrates that children and youth who regularly attend afterschool programs that utilize consistent SEL practices benefit from improved self-awareness, positive social behaviors, increased academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviors.¹
- **Self-Esteem and Workforce Development.** Positive afterschool experiences help children and youth gain essential skills in healthy self-esteem, personal agency, and problem solving. These skills translate to increased employability skills and career readiness, in addition to boosting resiliency in the face of adversity.²
- **Community Wide Support.** Afterschool programs bolster community-wide post-traumatic growth by providing children and youth with a safe place to learn and grow amidst trauma, family addiction, and disruptions. Additionally, programs that provide afterschool and summer meals and snacks make it easier for families to make ends meet, and may be a child's only chance to access nutritious food until the next school day.
- **Healthy Relationships.** Afterschool is a place where youth can build social skills with peers in a low-pressure environment and also develop trusting, stable relationships with adult staff. High quality professional development for afterschool staff around SEL and trauma-informed practices is in demand and on the rise across Vermont.

What Makes Sense?

With a proven track record for increasing resilience, supporting positive youth development, and preventing substance abuse, investing in afterschool and summer learning programs is a cost-effective way to help build and support an integrated, trauma-informed system that supports children, youth, and families.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE PROVEN TO REDUCE RISKY BEHAVIORS

- **Positive Youth Development.** In addition to keeping kids away from drugs after school, afterschool programs build protective factors that prevent substance use disorders from occurring and can reduce risk factors that lead to misuse of substances. Afterschool programs reduce substance abuse through the development of protective or resiliency factors such as school connectedness, self-control, self-confidence, and quality peer relationships.³
- **Afterschool Participation.** Vermont's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in 2015 found that students who participate in extracurricular activities each week (up to 19 hours/week) are significantly less likely to use any alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana than those who did not participate in any activities.⁴
- **Response to the Opioid Epidemic.** Quality afterschool programs also provide trauma-informed practices that offset the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Addressing the impact of ACEs in turn reduces development of substance use disorders and other future health concerns.⁵ As the opioid epidemic continues to disrupt Vermont families this becomes increasingly important.

VERMONT NEEDS MORE INVESTMENT IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

- **Return on Investment.** For every dollar spent on quality afterschool and summer learning programs, Vermont gets back \$2.18 in long-term savings from reduced criminal activity and substance abuse treatment, as well as accruing additional benefits from increased high school completion and work productivity.⁶
- **Need for Programs.** In Vermont, 79% of children and youth ages 6-17 have all available parents in the workforce.⁷ For most families, there is a gap of 15-25 hours per week when parents are still at work and children and youth are out of school and need supervision. This need for programs is even greater during school vacation weeks and over the summer.
- **Unmet Demand.** Approximately 24% percent of Vermont's children and youth, grades K-12, are currently enrolled in afterschool programs. Of those children and youth not currently in programs, 33% would participate if a program were available.⁸



LOCAL AFTERSCHOOL MODELS THAT WORK

- Changing staff models to strengthen social emotional learning (e.g., Burlington)
- Increasing training and support for afterschool staff around trauma and resiliency (multiple sites)
- Stepping in when crisis hits a community and parents are incarcerated (e.g., Newport)
- Partnering with social services to support children and youth in foster care (e.g., Rutland)
- Supporting youth and families experiencing homelessness (multiple sites)
- Making connections to career pathways for older youth (e.g., Winooski, Bellows Falls, Swanton)

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Vermont Afterschool is expanding the scope of professional development for youth development workers in social emotional learning and trauma-informed care through:

- Bringing an evidence-based social-emotional curriculum to afterschool sites across the state;
- Providing one-to-one coaching to increase frontline staff competence in therapeutic behavior management;
- Facilitating communities of practice for leadership-level staff to increase staff knowledge and skill in addressing toxic among the youth and families they serve; and
- Coordinating regional training and collaboration opportunities to connect out-of-school programs with community partners including medical and mental health providers, community justice centers, and social services agencies.

REFERENCES

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