Afterschool in Iowa:

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

January 2009

Prepared for the Iowa Department of Education by State Public Policy Group, Inc.

State Board of Education

State of Iowa

Department of Education

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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.

Introduction

The Iowa Department of Education is the leader and coordinator for the state's public school districts. The Department is responsible for creating a vision for educating Iowa's youth, and continually strives to maintain Iowa's national reputation for educational excellence. 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. With increasing pressure on the K-12 education system to prepare youth academically, socially, and civically, the Department of Education recognizes the important role out-of-school time plays for all children and youth in Iowa.

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.

Numerous studies have shown that the time before and after school when students are outside the traditional classroom are prime opportunities to positively impact and support students' school-day learning. Research demonstrates that involvement in afterschool programs creates improvements in school attendance, engagement in learning, and improved test scores and grades for all students involved in afterschool programs. Students learn best in environments where curriculum is reinforced and relevant learning experiences are provided – when programs are school-linked.

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Afterschool programs cannot exist in a vacuum – they must align with students' educational activities and goals, and collaborate at the state and community levels with other systems such as early childhood, post-secondary education, and workforce. The Department of Education's Core Curriculum embraces all major components of youth success – family, community, and academic supports – while building skills to meet the demands of a global economy. The development of the Core Curriculum reflects the recognition by Iowa's leaders of the need to confront Iowa's challenges with innovation and long-term thinking.

Currently, relatively little is known about afterschool programs in Iowa due to the lack of formal policy, governance, and funding systems for afterschool that provide for best practices and quality measurement. Programs in Iowa rely primarily on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grants to provide funding and a coordinated system for information-sharing and data collection. These federal grants, intended to fund the start-up of afterschool programs to serve children and youth attending schools in high-poverty and low-performing districts, have typically been awarded to Iowa communities for five years, with an understanding that community support will be built and continue to fund the programs after federal funds are expended. All of the parents surveyed by the Iowa Department of Education are parents whose children currently attend 21st CCLC programs statewide.

This report is a result of research conducted by the Department of Education to gain a better picture of afterschool in Iowa, its strengths and gaps in access, and the overall demand and value placed on afterschool by school district leaders and parents of students in quality afterschool programs in Iowa.

Unfortunately, 21st CCLC programs serve only .05 percent of all children in Iowa's school system. This does not begin to match the need demonstrated by Iowa's students, families, and schools. In the past two years, the state of Iowa has funded an afterschool grant program for the first time in the state's history. In 2007, nine programs were awarded a total of $900,000 through the Department of Education for a period of one year. Demand for the grant program, based on the total funds requested on grant applications, totaled over $4 million for that same application cycle. Additionally, sustainability of funding is a significant issue for all afterschool programs. Replacing federal funds with local funds has typically been difficult for 21st CCLC programs, and many are unable to continue without the federal financial support. The state grants only provide funding for one year, relying on programs to identify sources for ongoing sustainability.

This report is a result of research conducted by the Department of Education to gain a better picture of afterschool in Iowa, its strengths and gaps in access, and the overall demand and value placed on afterschool by school district leaders and parents of students in quality afterschool programs in Iowa. Each survey in and of itself provides a wealth of data about the benefits of afterschool; defining quality afterschool; affordability and funding; the role of the school, parents, public, and private entities in developing and paying for afterschool programs; and the overall value of afterschool for parents and school district leaders.

In addition, the Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) recently concluded a survey of Iowans regarding the value of afterschool in Iowa, and findings should be released in early 2009. The Department collaborated closely with the IAA in development of all three surveys – the school leader and parent surveys by the Department, and the IAA survey of a sample of Iowa voters – incorporating several key questions asked in all three surveys. This collaboration will further strengthen the existing data and findings collected from parents and school district leaders.

The findings in this report reflect the Iowa values of education, safety, and community. Education leaders and parents alike report that afterschool is important, that it must have a link to the school day and the greater community, that it requires a collaborative approach of all stakeholders, and that the benefits are realized in the form of academic success and community betterment.

The survey administration, data collection, analysis, and findings report were conducted and compiled by State Public Policy Group, Inc.

Background

According to Plus Time New Hampshire, "afterschool" is a word that has been adopted nationally to refer to the time of day when children are most vulnerable. Afterschool is also known as "out-of-school time", "school-age child care", "expanded learning opportunities" and "enrichment opportunities." The Iowa Afterschool Alliance defines afterschool programs as 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 provision of afterschool opportunities helps to ensure access to necessary opportunities in education, arts, culture, and civic ventures as Iowa faces unique challenges based upon trends in education that are bound to make it more difficult to meet the demands of student needs in the school day. The K-12 education system faces pressure to increase academic rigor within the school day, and No Child Left Behind has shifted focus to testing and evaluation activities. Recreation opportunities and physical education have also significantly suffered as the country grapples with the increasing prevalence of overweight and obese children and youth. Finally, Iowa faces a skilled worker shortage and many workforce and economic development officials have expressed concern that the new wave of working Iowans may not be armed with the needed 21st century skills to lead the way for retaining and attracting jobs for Iowa. At Iowa's 2007 Governor's Workforce Summit, Governor Culver raised concerns about a looming workforce shortage and difficulty finding highly skilled workers.[1] While the state has implemented initiatives to improve math and science skills of students, afterschool programs are often cited as a way to close the gap left by competing priorities for an ever-shrinking school day by offering a wide range of programming to assist in developing workplace skills, offering assistance with academics, and providing physical education.

Afterschool 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.

Model afterschool programs have been implemented through the 21st CCLC grants funded by the Federal Department of Education and administered by state Departments of Education. The design and implementation of these comprehensive afterschool programs require significant local commitment and collaboration as well as public-private partnerships and additional financial support. The 21st CCLC program supports the creation of community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children. The program, targeted to historically high-poverty and low-performing schools, is designed to assist students in meeting state and local student standards in core academic subjects such as reading and math; offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that complement their traditional academic programs; and offers literacy and other education services to the families of participating children. In a state that does not maintain formal policy, governance, and funding systems for afterschool quality standards and funding, the 21st CCLCs of the state generally serve as models of high-quality, community-supported programming that promotes a high degree of rigor and relevance.

Iowa ranked fifth in the nation in terms of the percentage of working parents (72 percent) with children under 18.

Although there are currently a variety of programs that support academic, social, workplace, and civic opportunities for youth in Iowa, children and youth are in need of supports now more than ever. Changing demographics around the state; mobility of families, especially for those in poverty; and continuing economic concerns are all cause for an update in available data about out-of-school time opportunities for Iowa's children and youth. One of the most critical issues regarding afterschool in the state of Iowa is a heavy reliance on parent fees. For all types of program providers, parent fees comprise 66 percent of funding, and Child Care Assistance pays for nearly a quarter.[2] Iowa ranks high in the number of families that have both or the only parent working, creating a tremendous demand for afterschool programs. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, Iowa ranked fifth in the nation in terms of the percentage of working parents (72 percent) with children under 18.[3] In the 2006 Iowa Youth Survey, 73 percent of sixth graders and 85 percent of eighth graders reported spending one to five hours or more per day unsupervised.[4]

Additionally, the composition of Iowa's school-age population is changing, and with those changes in student makeup, needs are also changing. Hispanic students in Iowa's public school system have increased 600 percent in the last twenty years, followed by increases in the percentage of American Indian students by 162 percent, African American students by 109 percent, and Asian populations by 80 percent. The number of Limited English Proficient students in Iowa has more than doubled in the last ten years. In addition, the statewide percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch is 32 percent.[5] Many urban districts report that the student body enrolled in individual schools may change by as much as 50 percent from year to year due to high mobility of families. As new Iowans are often faced with financial hardships and adjustments, the current economic situation, downsizing and layoffs in several Iowa companies further exacerbate concerns about families facing barriers and financial troubles. Poverty and lack of access to opportunities that can create often are correlated with the achievement gap for students, dropout rates, and lower achievement in meeting individual educational goals.

It is also important to recognize the correlation between income level and the summer learning gap. Research commissioned by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation found that although children in all socioeconomic groups progress at the same rate during the school year, lower-income youth lose skills and knowledge during summer months while middle-income youth continue to learn or maintain.[6] Summer learning losses are often the result of a lack of access to resources, and research shows that "summer learning losses in reading are a main cause of the widening achievement gap in reading between lower- and higher-income youth".[7]

In the 2006 Iowa Youth Survey, 73 percent of sixth graders and 85 percent of eighth graders reported spending one to five hours or more per day unsupervised.

Iowa has little in the way of formal policy, governance and funding systems to support high-quality afterschool throughout the state and has typically seen afterschool programs develop community-by-community to meet acute needs, often with little coordination with other community supports and programs. In late 2001, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation explored the need for a statewide afterschool network in Iowa. The resulting report found that "although direct opposition to programs is weak, so is support." Many have asserted that support for programming has been historically frail due to a lack of information about what afterschool opportunities are available, who is offering these programs, how much they cost, and the entities that fund them.

Clearly, many events and issues have converged to make this year ideal to conduct comprehensive data collection regarding afterschool in Iowa. 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; and Iowa has one of the highest percentages of families with both or the only parent working outside of the home.

Interest in afterschool in Iowa has increased in recent years due in large part to the important leadership and partnerships forged by community education leaders, the Department of Education, Iowa School Age Care Alliance, Iowa Afterschool Alliance, and other partners. Through relationship-building, message development, and data collection, partnerships have reached a level of critical mass that has begun to produce results. In 2006 and 2007, the Iowa Legislature appropriated about $1 million to fund before and after school grants. Administered through a competitive grant process, these grants served more than 1,100 students at 13 sites statewide in 2006. Beyond grants, understanding and communication about collaboration, and the importance and benefits of afterschool programs has continued to grow.

As this investment continues to grow, there is a renewed interest in enriching and sustaining programs that are considered high quality and that produce notable outcomes. Quality programs are comprehensive and institute good policy in meeting needs and demand. Data regarding access, affordability, and need for afterschool programs allows the Department to determine the types of opportunities available for children during very important times of the day – before and after school. With a growing interest in afterschool by the state and strong 21st Century Community Learning Center programs reaching the end of grant periods and looking for options for ensuring program sustainability, quality of programming will continue to be a focus of new and sustaining afterschool programs, the family members who search for afterschool opportunities for the children and youth in their care, and the policymakers that continue to fund afterschool programs in communities across the state.

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Survey Methodology

Process

The Iowa Department of Education contracted with SPPG to administer two surveys to establish baseline data about afterschool around the state. One survey sought input from school district leaders from each school district in Iowa. The survey was provided to all school superintendents and school board presidents in the state. Special efforts were made to reach out to the school district leaders, including a simple online survey, email reminders, and collaboration with the professional associations representing the two school leader groups.

The second survey sought input from parents whose child or children attend a 21st CCLC program. SPPG, with the counsel of the Iowa Department of Education, designed a deliberate survey process, keeping in mind the unique circumstances of many families of 21st CCLC programs. Efforts to increase survey access to diverse families included providing the survey and survey invitation letter in alternate languages. Efforts to maximize response rate included providing with the survey a postage-paid envelope for return of the survey, and mailing a reminder postcard to those families that had not returned the survey after two weeks of the survey's initial mailing.

Survey Development

Survey questionnaires were developed by SPPG in collaboration with the Department. Recognizing the importance of cross-data collection capabilities, SPPG worked in partnership with the Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) and coordinated questions from the IAA afterschool survey with the Department of Education afterschool surveys. An informal advisory group consisting of representatives from Waterloo Community Schools, Chrysalis Foundation, Holmes Junior High School, Elementary Tornado Academy, and the Iowa Department of Human Services assisted SPPG in brainstorming survey questions. The survey provided a combination of questions, including multiple choice, ranking, and open-ended questions intentionally designed to elicit descriptive and viable data. Throughout the survey development process, SPPG engaged parents, school administrators, and school board representatives to test the survey instruments to ensure correct word usage, question and term clarity, logical flow, and monitor time required to complete the survey. Refer to the separate Appendix of this report for complete copies of the survey instruments and data summaries.

Survey Implementation

The school district leader survey was released October 8, 2008 and closed November 7, 2008. An online survey tool was developed for completion of the survey. School superintendents from each Iowa school district were initially emailed a survey link from the

Department of Education on the date of release. A reminder was emailed to the same group two weeks following the original notice. The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) and School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) utilized their membership lists to email the survey link to their members. SAI also referenced the survey and the survey link in their October and November newsletters directed to superintendents.

The parent survey was released October 16, 2008 and closed November 14, 2008. The parent survey was administered through the mail, due to inconsistent access to internet and computers among parents across the state. SPPG contacted the program administrators of all 21st CCLCs in the state to provide a database of all names and contact information of the parents or guardians of program participants. A pre-survey letter from the Iowa Department of Education was mailed to the parent sample provided by the 21st CCLCs. The purpose of the pre-survey letter was to notify parents of the survey prior to its receipt. Similarly, a reminder post-card was mailed to parents reminding them to complete the survey. To ensure a higher rate of return, surveys were mailed with an enclosed pre-paid return envelope. SPPG took parental language barriers into consideration and provided translations of all survey-related documents as well as the survey itself. The pre-survey letter, survey instrument, and post-card reminder were translated based on the language needs identified by the 21st CCLC program administrators. Spanish and Vietnamese were the only languages identified by the administrators as necessary for survey completion by non-English speaking parents and guardians.

Sample Size and Statistical Reliability

The population and sample size for the school leader survey was 724 individuals, of which 362 were school superintendents and 362 were school board presidents. Of the 724 school district leaders contacted, 261 responses were collected. Based on a response rate of 36 percent, the school district leader survey had a margin of error at plus or minus 4.83 percentage points calculated at the 95 percent confidence level. The population and sample size for the parent survey was 2,137 households, and 363 total responses were collected. The resulting response rate of 17 percent allowed the parent survey to maintain a margin of error of plus or minus 4.69 percentage points calculated at the 95 percent confidence level.

Data Collection and Analysis

These surveys provide useful findings that will help the Iowa Department of Education shape future policy regarding before and afterschool programs. Because Iowa has no prior data regarding before and after school programs, these survey results create a baseline picture of the current state of afterschool in Iowa. The two surveys also provide an opportunity to draw comparisons between the opinions of Iowa school district leaders and parents regarding afterschool in the state.

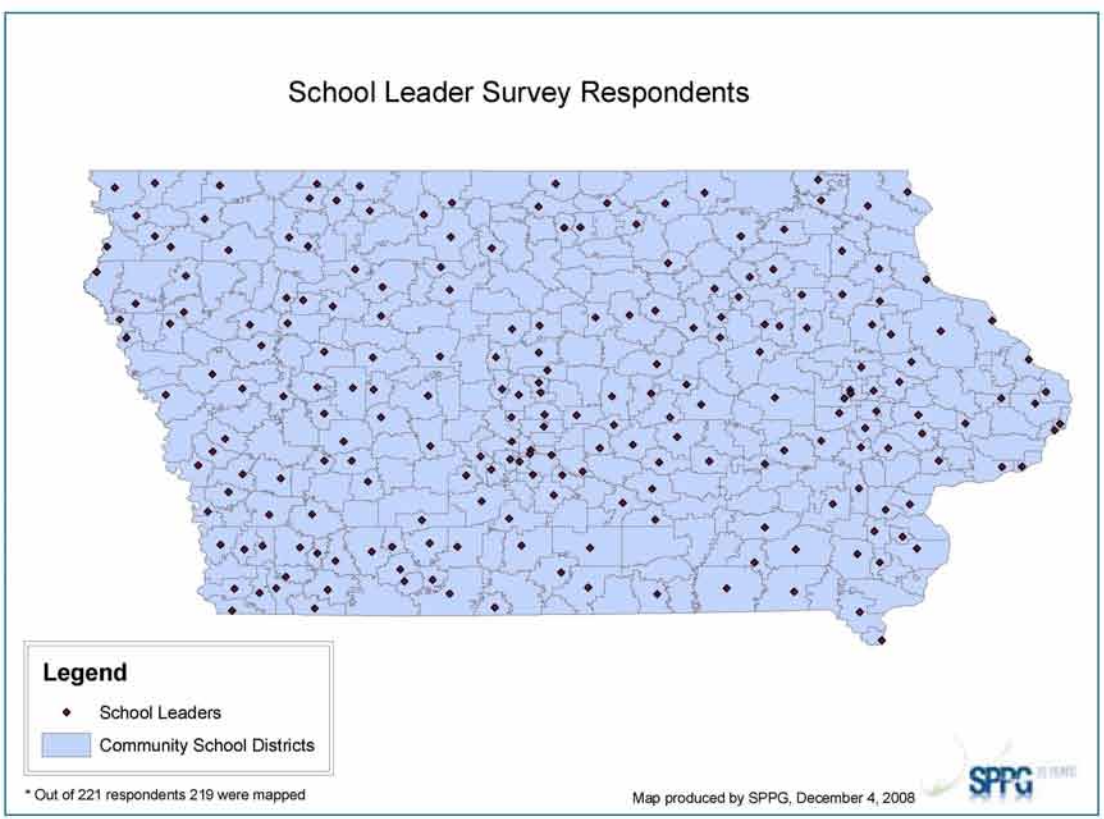
Specifically, the school district leader survey results provide a thorough understanding of the types of afterschool programming provided in local communities, afterschool funding considerations and barriers, and issues of access faced by districts and parents. Likewise, the parent survey results provide a unique perspective on issues regarding quality, access, and affordability of afterschool programs. Both surveys also provide school leader and parental opinions regarding the various benefits of afterschool programs for youth of different ages.

Summary of the Respondents

School District Leaders

A total of 724 school district leaders were invited to complete the school leader survey – 362 school superintendents and 362 school board presidents. Out of this, 185 school superintendents and 60 school board presidents completed the surveys. An additional eight respondents identified themselves as a school principal or board secretary. This represents a return rate of approximately 36 percent. The map below indicates which districts are represented in the survey responses.

School district leaders responded from 206 school districts across the state. Respondents were asked whether students in their districts, by age group, attend an afterschool program. Of those who responded "yes," 154 indicated that elementary age children in their districts attend an afterschool program, 92 respondents said that middle school age youth attend an afterschool program, and only 29 school district leaders reported that high school age youth attend an afterschool program in their districts.



According to the school district leaders who responded to the survey, the primary entity offering afterschool programs is the public school district, but over one-third of respondents said non-profit community organizations are offering afterschool programs, and about a quarter of the district leader respondents said faith-based and private organizations are offering programs in their districts. Funding of afterschool programs comes from a variety of sources, but parent fees and the school district were most often cited as the funding source for programming.

Parents

The parent survey was mailed to a total of 2,137 households, of which 363 households completed and returned the surveys, representing a response rate of 17 percent. The survey shows that 88 percent of the respondents were mothers, of which, 81 percent were between the ages of 25 and 44 years old. One-fifth of respondents were between the ages of 45 and 60 years of age. Over half of the respondents identified themselves as couples with one to three children under the age of 18 living in the household. One-third of all respondents identified themselves as the single head of household with children.

The education level of approximately 60 percent of the parent survey respondents ranged from a high school diploma or GED to an associate's

degree or technical school. Sixteen percent of the respondents indicated that they had earned a bachelor's degree and six percent had an advanced degree. Nearly 70 percent of all respondents held full-time jobs. Three-fifths of the respondents earned between $10,000 to $49,999 annually. Only three percent of the respondents to the parent survey identified their annual household income as $100,000 or more. The majority – 63 percent – reported that they do not pay for afterschool, and about 18 percent pay less than $10 per week.

A majority of respondents identified themselves as white. Ten percent of the respondents identified themselves as black or African-American, and eight percent of the respondents identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

Of the sixteen 21st CCLC grantee school districts, parents from all but five districts responded to the survey. Parents responded from the following districts: (refer to map for all current 21st CCLC grantee school districts)

- **Allamakee Community School District**
- **Blackhawk Boys and Girls Club**
- **Clinton Community School District**
- **Council Bluffs Community School District**
- **Davenport Community School District**
- **Des Moines Independent Community Schools**
- **Fort Dodge Community School District**
- **Iowa City Community School District**
- **Linn County extension**
- **Siouxland Human Investment Partnership**
- **Van Buren Community School District**

No surveys were received from the Cedar Rapids, Eagle Grove, Keokuk, Perry, and Storm Lake school districts. It is possible that, according to a 21st CCLC program administrator, language barriers, high mobility, and disaster recovery impacted the populations in these districts and their capacity to respond to the survey at this time. It is interesting to note that no surveys were returned in Vietnamese.

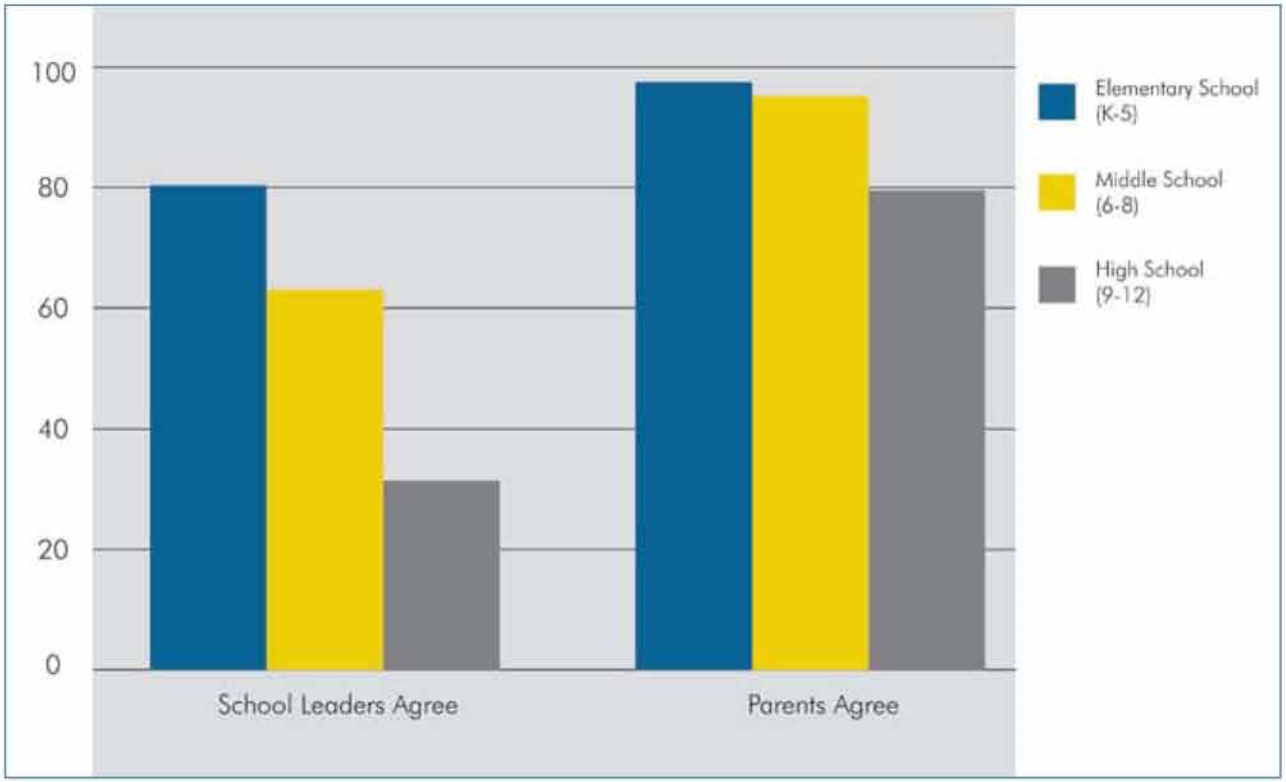
Survey Results

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

School district leaders and parents both overwhelmingly indicated that afterschool programming should be available for all students – 72 percent of school district leaders and 84 percent of parents surveyed said "yes" when asked whether a focus on before and after school programs for all children is an appropriate focus for the state of Iowa.

72 percent of school district leaders and 84 percent of parents surveyed said "yes" when asked whether a focus on before and after school programs for all children is an appropriate focus for the state of Iowa.

However, when asked whether they agreed that afterschool should be available for youth at different ages, the results varied. The majority of parents reported that afterschool should be available for elementary and middle school age youth, with over 95 percent of respondents saying that they "agree" that every child in those age groups should have access to an afterschool program. Parents were less sure about their support for access to afterschool for all high school age youth – 80 percent said they should have access, while 14 percent answered "don't know." The distinction among responses from school district leaders was more significant. While 80 percent agreed that elementary age youth should have access to afterschool programs, 63 percent agreed for middle school age youth, and only 31 percent agreed that all high school age youth should have access to an afterschool program. Half of the overall responses from the school district leaders were in the "don't know" category for this question.



Percentage of respondents answering "agree" to the question: Do you agree or disagree that every child, in the following age groups, in Iowa should have access to an afterschool program?

The reasons for the varying responses depending on age groups may be related to general attitudes about safety and the age at which children can be left unsupervised. Also, older youth are more often involved in extracurricular activities and work during out-of-school time and may not be seen as a high-risk population in need of afterschool programming. According to the school district leaders who responded to the survey, the top reasons parents do not enroll their high school age children in afterschool programs are, in order, student is participating in other activities, student has a job, and student is old enough to be independent. However, it is well known that the time period after the school day ends is when youth are most likely to commit crimes, engage in sexual activity, and experiment with drugs. Although data is mostly available about the time of day after school lets out, afterschool provides positive impacts during all out-of-school time, whether it is during the summer, before school, on early dismissal days, or during school breaks. Based on this series of responses, there is not a comprehensive understanding of the value of afterschool that goes beyond being a safe place and positively impacting youth and community well-being.

Quality afterschool programs do more than just keep kids safe

The survey asked both parents and school district leaders about the benefits of afterschool. All respondents indicated that safety was the number one benefit of a child attending an afterschool program. When asked to rank, in the order of importance, the benefits of a child attending an afterschool program, "provides a safe place" was chosen the most for the number one and two rankings by both parents and school district leaders. "Parents do not have to worry about where kids are" and "improvements in grades" were the next most-often chosen benefits by both parents and school leaders.

By comparison, when ranking top criteria that make an afterschool program "high quality," school district leaders most highly ranked academic support, professionally trained staff, and enrichment activities. An overwhelming percentage of parents – 47 percent – cited academic support as the most important criteria for quality programming, followed by professionally trained staff, and parent communication and involvement.

Interestingly, the criteria cited by both respondent groups are key elements of high quality programming, and it is obvious that the parents and school district leaders who responded are well educated in this area. When asked if parents would be willing to pay higher fees for afterschool programs that are called "high quality," 37 percent answered "maybe," and 23 percent said "I don't know." Only one-quarter of the respondents definitively said no, they would not be willing to pay higher fees for quality programming. This is especially compelling given the income levels of parents who responded – about an equal amount of parents (15 percent) responded that their family's annual household income is $10,000 to $19,999, $30,000 to $39,999, or $40,000 to $49,999, and the vast majority indicated that they are employed full-time.

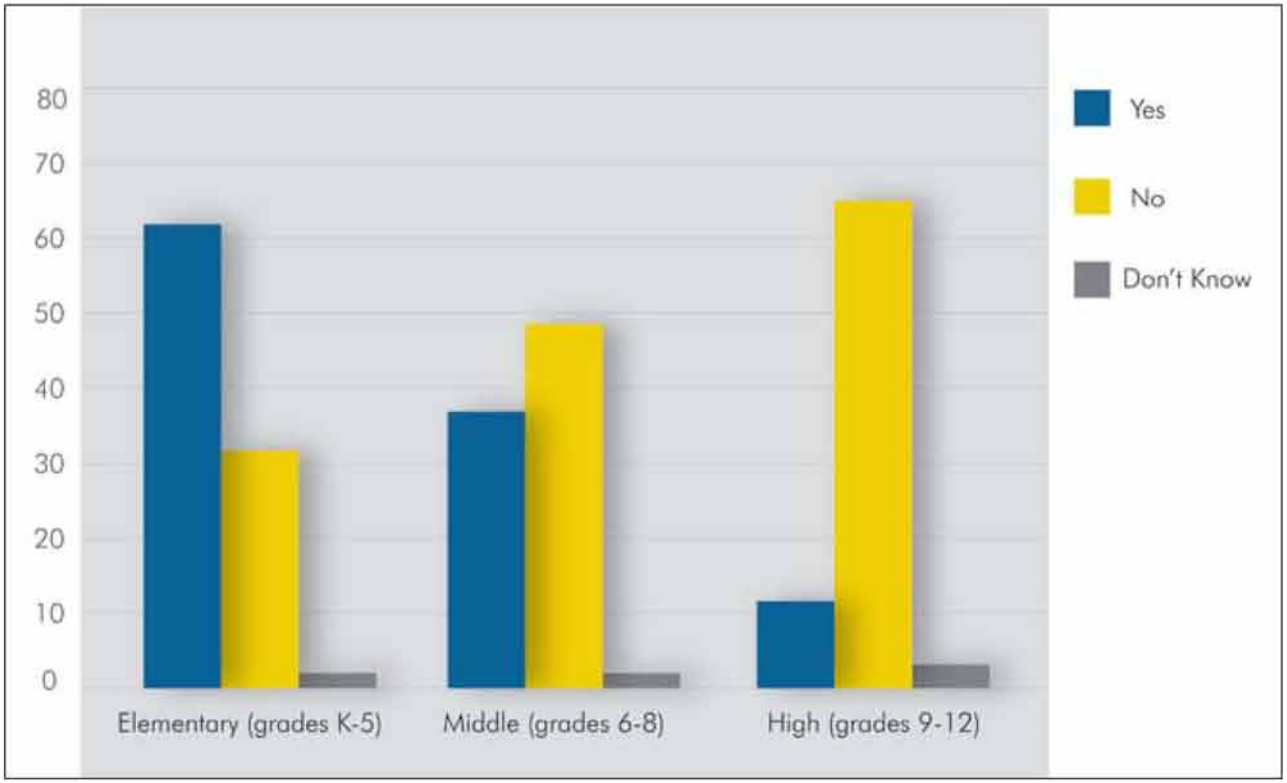
When asked to rank, in the order of importance, the benefits of a child attending an afterschool program, "provides a safe place" was chosen the most by both parents and school district leaders.

As noted previously, 21st CCLC programs serve as models of quality programming for the state. The elements of quality are clearly identified by both parents and school district leaders. Parents surveyed, who are mostly low-income, likely have a better understanding and more direct experience with high quality programs and their positive impacts than other parents. This finding may generally indicate the importance of outcome measurement and information-sharing about quality among programs and when communicating with parents. It also indicates a need to better educate Iowans about the benefits of afterschool and the significant return on investment that can occur as a result of a child being involved in programming that is school-linked, has well-trained staff, and offers supports and activities that prepare the youth for adult life.

An overwhelming percentage of parents – 47 percent – cited academic support as the most important criteria for quality programming.

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

Parents and school district leaders face tremendous challenges to enrolling children in afterschool programs. Cost, availability of afterschool programs, and transportation are the most cited barriers [to afterschool] facing parents. In the school leader survey, transportation and cost were ranked as the top two barriers for elementary age children attending an afterschool program. Low-income families that do not have personal transportation are especially limited in enrolling their elementary school age children in afterschool programs. Similarly, school district leaders indicated that another significant barrier to enrollment for elementary age children is a lack of programs nearby. As the figure below clearly indicates, there is a wide gap in the attendance of middle and high school age children as reported by the school district leaders.



Percentage of total school district leaders who responded to the question: Do students in your district, according to the age groups listed below, attend an afterschool program?

Middle and high school age youth face unique challenges to attending afterschool programs. School district leaders indicated that middle school age children are more likely to participate in other activities, and that is the primary reason why middle school age children might not attend an afterschool program, in addition to cost and transportation barriers.

High school age children are less likely to participate in afterschool programs. When asked what keeps parents from enrolling a high school age youth in an afterschool program, school district leaders most often indicated that the student is "participating in other activities" and the student "holds a job." Other top barriers that discourage parents from enrolling their high school age children in afterschool programs are that the child is old enough to be independent and a lack of afterschool programs nearby.

Likewise, school districts are faced with numerous challenges that prevent them from offering adequate afterschool programs. A large portion of responding school district leaders (89 percent) cite lack of available financial resources as a major barrier to developing and offering afterschool programs, and 90 percent of school district leaders indicated that their

districts do not have sufficient funding to meet the demands for an afterschool program. Similarly, 81 percent of school district leaders indicated that their districts lack sufficient resources to meet the needs of afterschool programs. Other barriers that school districts face in afterschool programs include transportation, adequate and professionally trained staff to lead and organize afterschool programming, and space for afterschool program.

Cost, availability of afterschool programs, and transportation are the most-often cited barriers to afterschool facing parents.

This data indicates that increased awareness on behalf of parents about the benefits of afterschool programs, especially for older youth, may increase participation among youth. Research done by Harvard Family Research Project shows older youth are more likely to participate in afterschool programs if they can have fun with friends, and learn new skills in sports, arts, community service, and recreational activities. Similarly, children are more likely to participate if afterschool programs provide flexibility in attendance. Since older youth often choose to work over attending an afterschool program, they are more likely to participate in an afterschool program if the program provides some sort of compensation through on-site job opportunities and skill-building classes. Likewise, key stakeholders can collaborate and pool resources, such as space and volunteer transportation, as well as other benefits.

Middle and high school age youth face unique challenges to attending 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

As noted previously, of school district leaders surveyed, 90 percent indicated that their districts do not have sufficient funding and 81 percent indicated that they also lacked the sufficient resources necessary to meet their known demand for afterschool programs. Of those surveyed, 89 percent of school district leaders cited lack of available financial resources as a known barrier to offering program. Many afterschool programs tend to rely upon a single source of funding, putting financial sustainability into question.

90 percent of school district leaders indicated that their districts do not have sufficient funding and 81 percent indicated that they also lacked the sufficient resources necessary to meet known demand for afterschool programs.

This lack of funding and other resources, in addition to other significant barriers cited including lack of available transportation and lack of trained staff reflect the indication of school district leaders that additional unmet needs for afterschool programming in their communities exist. Three-fourths of school district leaders surveyed responded that they are aware of additional unmet needs in their communities for afterschool programs or are not sure of additional needs. Only 25 percent of school district leaders surveyed were not aware of unmet needs in their communities. While local school districts are most often cited as the most appropriate originator of afterschool programs, school district leaders (87 percent) and parents (69 percent) agree that the majority of the funding should come from state government.

Nearly 44 percent of school district leaders indicated that the programs in their districts are currently planning for financial sustainability. Some afterschool programs have implemented practices related to district support (60 percent) and parent fees (59 percent) to ensure sustainability of their programs from year to year. Other practices that afterschool programs

are implementing relate to state and/or federal funding (53 percent), and community partnerships (51 percent). School district leaders cited the practice related to cutting capacity or program components as the least common practice implemented by programs to ensure sustainability. This reflects the significant community demand and district support for afterschool programs.

School district leaders cited the practice related to cutting capacity or program components as the least common practice implemented by programs to ensure sustainability.

Interestingly, parents of students participating in a 21st CCLC program indicated that they may be willing to pay more for a program deemed "high quality." Of those parents surveyed, nearly 60 percent indicated that they would definitely pay more for a high quality program, maybe would pay more, or did not know. Only 25 percent of parents surveyed definitively answered that they would not pay more. Of the parents surveyed, 81 percent currently pay $10 or less per week in program fees or do not pay fees at all.

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

When school district leaders were asked about the responsibility for developing and offering afterschool programs, 77 percent indicated that the public school district has a responsibility. When asked the same question, 84 percent of parents also responded that the public school district has a responsibility for developing and offering afterschool programs. Local government and non-profit community organizations were the next most-often chosen entities to have responsibility for developing and offering programs. The commonality of responses among both parents and school district leaders demonstrates that developing and operating afterschool programs are considered a shared responsibility among various entities, with the public school district playing a key role.

77 percent of school district leaders and 84 percent of parents indicated that the public school district has a responsibility for developing and offering afterschool programs.

Recognizing that schools are the ideal entity to develop and offer afterschool programs further supports the notion of the public trust that is held within the school district. Many recognize that these educational institutions promote a strong linkage with the school day and are the most trusted in program design and delivery. School district leaders around the state, 59 percent, agreed that school-based and/or school-linked afterschool programs are superior to other types of programs. The importance of a linkage with education is further reflected with 94 percent of parents indicating that afterschool

School district leaders around the state agreed that school-based and/or school-linked afterschool programs are superior to other types of programs.

programs should be located at the child's school. Both parents and school district leaders recognized academic support and professionally trained staff as the two most important indicators of a high quality afterschool program.

Parents noted that state government, the federal government, local government, and parents should all participate in paying for programs.

Many stakeholders recognized that developing, offering, and paying for afterschool programs is best designed as a hybrid. Regardless of employment status and household income, a majority of parents are willing to pay for their children to attend an afterschool program. It is important to keep in mind that this survey was administered to parents of children in traditionally high poverty and low income school districts, which may affect the amount chosen to spend. The key message in this finding, however, is that even families living in high poverty areas would be willing to pay for afterschool programming.

Parents noted that state government (70 percent), the federal government (69 percent), local government (60 percent), and parents (66 percent) should all participate in paying for programs when asked if each should be partially financially responsible. This information supports the notion that developing, offering, and funding afterschool programs should be handled in a collaborative manner to best engage all necessary parties to appropriately design, offer, and sustain afterschool programs to meet known demand and garner recognized benefits.

Summary

Education leaders and parents alike report that afterschool is important, that it must have a link to the school day and the greater community, that it requires a collaborative approach of all stakeholders, and that the benefits are realized in the form of academic success and community betterment. However, the demand far outweighs current funding and resources available for school districts, communities, and parents to provide needed programming. Because of current demographic and economic factors facing the state of Iowa, now is the time for Iowa to consider ways to enhance and support out-of-school time for our youth. Quality before and after school programs provide not only a safe place for youth, but help improve their skills to prepare for them for the 21st century global economy.

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