

THE IMPERATIVE TO ACT:

INVESTING IN KIDS THROUGH OUT-OF-SCHOOL CARE IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

3/08/2019
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WASHINGTON COUNTY KIDS

250 NE Hillwood Dr., Hillsboro, OR 97124
washcokidsoregon@gmail.com
washingtoncountykids.com

A REPORT BY





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Too many children and families in Washington County, especially children from families categorized as economically disadvantaged, are not served well by our community. When it comes to academic performance, emotional development, and preparation for employment, the County's children are missing out. The demand for infant and toddler childcare far exceeds the supply. Programs outside of school time have waiting lists and struggle financially. The community pays a price for failing to invest in its kids.

All children should have positive and successful lives. Simply attending school from kindergarten through twelfth grade is insufficient. Out-of-school-time (OST) programs have proven to be invaluable: helping pre-schoolers prepare for kindergarten, sustaining student academic progress during summer breaks, and engaging students in a variety of structured activities that improve their interpersonal and academic skills. OST programs improve mental health and social-emotional competencies as well as reduce violent and anti-social behavior, and substance use and abuse.

Washington County Kids (WCK), a nonprofit with support from Meyer Memorial Trust, examined the situation in Washington County. During 2018 and early 2019 WCK conducted Community Conversations with parents and guardians of kids, inviting those unable to attend to complete an online survey. This report details three conclusions. First, OST programs work, benefiting children and their communities. Second, families in Washington County, especially those from culturally specific populations or who face economic disadvantages, confront daunting barriers to accessing OST programs. Third, Washington County Commissioners should act aggressively to improve opportunities for OST programs.

OST PROGRAMS WORK

Studies find positive outcomes for youngsters who participate in OST programs, as well as for their parents and communities. Tracked from pre-school into adulthood, participants in an OST program had lower rates of juvenile delinquency and adult arrests, higher levels of academic success, and greater economic success, resulting in a return on investment at least double every dollar invested in the program. OST programs encourage students, especially women and students of color, to complete high school, an important precursor to gaining employment. OST programs not only improve the lives of youths, they also help avoid tens, even hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxpayer burden over the lifetime of an unemployed individual.

PARENTS IN WASHINGTON COUNTY CONFRONT BARRIERS TO OST PROGRAMS

Insufficient information: Many children are not participating in OST programs because their parents do not know about them, according to WCK's survey.

High cost: The cost of preschool childcare ranges from \$7,740 to \$16,680, comparing unfavorably to \$11,800 for a year at one of Oregon's public universities. After school and summer program costs range from free to over \$800/month.

Inaccessibility and unavailability: Lack of transportation explains why many children are not participating in OST programs. Programs tend to be concentrated geographically, making them inaccessible to children outside those areas.

Mismatch between program and parent schedules: Accommodating parents' employment schedules matters when parents choose programs. Matching parents' obligations with child care options requires continuous juggling.

Insufficient diversity of program content: Some parents want programs to enhance their children's social skills. Some want more rigorous enrichment. Others want sports, arts, or practical skills training. They often cannot find these options.

Inadequate programming for specific populations. Elementary school students comprise the largest population served by OST programs in Washington County; high school students comprise the smallest, yet parents believe adolescents require structure. Waiting lists exist at programs regardless of age group.



THE WASHINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS NEEDS TO:

- Identify and implement sustained funding for OST programs,
- Collect data on program availability and cost county-wide
- Serve as a clearinghouse of program information for county residents

WCK proposes a property tax levy of at least \$.35/\$1,000 of assessed valuation to generate \$21 million dollars per year dedicated to supporting OST programs. Working with school districts to use existing resources can control costs. Subsidizing current programs and working with them to develop additional spaces and programs can capitalize on their experience.

The County should centralize collection of information about OST programs. This would provide the Board with the information to plan where programs need to be developed, what types of programs are needed, and the effectiveness of programs. This information can help parents know where and how to access programs across the County.

While more than three-quarters of respondents to WCK's survey believe local government should provide support for organized OST programs, most respondents felt that Washington County was not doing enough to help children and families. This is both a cost effective and wise investment in the future of Washington County kids, especially for those on the lower end of the economic spectrum. Where there's a will, there's a way. We know the way. We need the will!

A REPORT BY



WASHINGTON COUNTY KIDS

250 NE Hillwood Dr., Hillsboro, OR 97124
washcokidsoregon@gmail.com
washingtoncountykids.com