



NEWS

Many after-school programs are offered, but more are needed, according to study

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Despite California being the leading state in the nation in its commitment to after-school programs, the Inland Empire is one of the highest-need regions in the state in regard to the service, according to a study conducted by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, an anti-crime organization comprised by hundreds of safety leaders throughout the state.

The study, "California's After-School Commitment: Keeping Kids On Track and Out of Trouble," revealed that in San Bernardino County, 190 low-income schools lack after-school programs, while in the Riverside County the number reached 107.

"After-school programs are essential for children everywhere. Not only do they keep kids away from gangs, drugs, and violence, they boost confidence and self-esteem," said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in a press release.

In fact, the programs, which include tutoring and sports activities, enjoy a high popularity to the point of having a waiting list. According to the study, more than half of the existing state programs surveyed have waiting lists, resulting in thousands of kids being left out of programs.

In Fontana alone, of the 30 sites surveyed, 20 have waiting lists, averaging about 500 kids waiting to use the service at any given point. The Fontana Unified School District (FUSD) offers after-school programs through the After School Education and Safety Program at all elementary and middle schools (high schools are exempted).

Local services began in 2007 with the creation of a partnership between the City of Fontana, the FUSD, the Colton Joint Unified School District (CJUSD) and the Boys and Girls Club of Fontana, and since then, thousands of students have been positively impacted. However, every day hundreds of kids are turned down for lack of space for everybody.

"It's a no-brainer — if kids are turned down, they will find things to do on the streets and too often they get in trouble because they get with the wrong crowd," said Terrie Schneider, chief professional officer at the Boys and Girls of Fontana. "Here at the club, we have been blessed but I know for a fact that some programs do have a waiting list. We do what we can."

According to Fight Crime, after-school programs can help shut down the "prime time" for juvenile crime, which is between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. in California. This is the time when students are off school and often unsupervised due to parents been at work. This is also the period of time when kids are more likely to become victims of crime, according to Fight Crime, a bipartisan, non-profit organization which studies strategies that help kids from becoming criminals and victims.

In California, after-school programs are funded by the 2002-approved After School Education and Safety (ASES) Act, which provides \$550 million each year to programs aimed at students from low-income families. Despite that, California still falls short of meeting the after-school needs of students and families, stated Fight Crime.

According to the study, nearly 2,000 schools in low-income neighborhoods in California are still without state or federal after-school programs, and many interested schools have been turned away due to lack of funding.

For more information on after-school programs in Fontana, visit <http://www.fusd.net/schools/afterschool.stm>, http://www.fontana.org/main/parks_rec/youth.htm, or call (909) 350-6585.

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