

2010 Pennsylvania Gubernatorial Candidates Address Afterschool Issues

In 2010, the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development (PSAYDN) invited the gubernatorial candidates to share their thoughts on afterschool programming in Pennsylvania and its potential direction under their leadership. Please click [here](#) to read Governor Tom Corbett's responses recorded during his candidacy.

PSAYDN: A 2009 poll conducted by the Afterschool Alliance found that just 9 percent of Pennsylvania's K-12 children participate in afterschool programs and that 87 percent of Pennsylvania adults surveyed believe there should be some type of organized activity for young people after school. How can the demand for afterschool programs be met?

Tom Corbett: Education funding overall must be tailored according to an individual district's need. The tailoring process should include a comprehensive assessment of the profile of the served community, considering economic indicators and where state dollars can have the greatest impact in terms of creating opportunities for at-risk students. Some existing programs, such as the Communities That Care initiative, already employ an analysis of community risk factors in order to prioritize available resources. Considering that Pennsylvania will likely continue to face significant budgetary pressures, all sources of public funding should employ similar research-based targeting of investments. Leveraging greater participation from private donors, businesses and grants from nonprofit organizations will be crucial to make significant enhancements in program availability. The next administration can be an advocate in communicating to nonpublic entities that every participant in the community has a direct interest in improving educational opportunities. Encouraging direct investments and supporting incentives such as the EITC program will be necessary to provide long term sustainability.

PSAYDN: The Afterschool Alliance poll found that 83 percent of Pennsylvania adults surveyed support public funding for afterschool programs. In addition, national research shows that children and youth who participate in afterschool programs demonstrate better student achievement levels, classroom behavior and engage in less risky behaviors that could have life-altering consequences. Do you support public funding for afterschool programs?

Tom Corbett: Throughout my career in public service, I have maintained that public investments in early intervention and prevention will result in long-term savings on rehabilitation and corrections. Afterschool programs can empower students and families with more personalized educational options to help students excel and meet high expectations. However, budgetary constraints projected for the next few fiscal years will result in very limited availability of resources. The EITC should be protected as a tool to secure funding for afterschool programs. Increased investments from other entities such as nonprofits and private businesses will also be crucial to protect program sustainability.

PSAYDN: As with all programs that engage children and youth, quality matters in afterschool programs. Should the Commonwealth incentivize programs to improve the quality of afterschool programs in the Commonwealth?

Tom Corbett: The Commonwealth should be a partner in the improvement of all educational services across the state. The state can help improve the quality of afterschool programs through the identification of best practices and focusing state resources on programs based on research with demonstrated success.

PSAYDN: A 2009 report from the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee on the availability of afterschool programs in the Commonwealth recommended the creation of a Statewide Afterschool Coordinating Council consisting of representatives from state agencies, legislator's afterschool network providers, key advocacy groups, foundations and others engaged in afterschool. The Council would perform various functions to improve quality, provide incentives for collaboration, develop models for staff recruitment and assess local needs and barriers, among other tasks. Would you support the creation of such a council?

Tom Corbett: I would support the creation of a council with a major focus on identifying best practices for afterschool programs and maximizing the return on available resources.

PSAYDN: How can the Commonwealth help rural children and youth access quality afterschool programs?

Tom Corbett: Funding available to our rural school districts must be flexible enough to allow administrators and educators to design an array of educational options that can evolve with the unique needs of the community. Significant demand in a given district – or a series of contiguous districts – should drive greater local control of how to set aside resources to prioritize needed educational programs. The Department of Education should be a partner with rural districts in designing customized funding plans. The next administration should also encourage multi-district coordination and pooling of resources to collaborate on regional programs, including afterschool services, where this is an identified demand.

PSAYDN: In some areas of the Commonwealth, parents have access to comprehensive information systems to help them find afterschool programs that meet their needs, but in many communities around the state they do not. How can we assure that all parents across the Commonwealth have access to this type of information to help them make informed choices about afterschool for their children?

Tom Corbett: Engagement of parents in the educational process is necessary to ensure the best possible outcome for Pennsylvania's students, regardless of the type of school in which he or she is enrolled. As Attorney General, I have created a series of programs designed to involve parents in helping their children make safe and informed life choices. These programs and afterschool services share a mutual goal: to provide Pennsylvania's children with the tools necessary to meet challenges with a high degree of achievement and success. As governor, I will bring the priority of parental involvement to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The next administration should ensure that the Department is as much of a resource for empowering parents as it is for our school administrators. The Department should serve as a central clearinghouse for a comprehensive array of information about all educational resources in Pennsylvania. Combined with a robust parental outreach effort, the state can help all ensure that available programs are fully utilized.