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Economic Considerations of Child Care Amid COVID-19
Special Committee on Economic Recovery
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AFTERSCHOOL/OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME IN KANSAS AMID COVID-19

Over the last few months, it has become clear that many working parents and policymakers see school age child care and remote learning support as an urgent need amid the pandemic. Both early learning and school age care are integral components in the economic recovery of our state. Child care is the lynchpin for parents to return to work and our Kansas' economy back on track.

In response to changing plans by school districts and local and state governments for the beginning of the 2020-21 school year in the wake of COVID-19, Kansas YMCAs and other out-of-school time (OST) providers expanded their operations to meet the urgent needs of children and families in their communities, even while facing an uncertain future themselves. Our Ys responded eagerly and adapted our programming to provide child care, remote learning support, tutoring and academic enrichment for students K-5, while keeping students safe and ensuring their academic and social emotional needs are met.

But even as the Y and other providers have been innovating to stay connected with students and keep them safe, healthy and engaged in learning, many of us are severely affected by the hardships created by the pandemic and are struggling to keep our doors open. Many programs face budget shortfalls, need additional staff to meet higher student/staff ratios, require PPE and cleaning/sanitation enhancements, as well as more space and resources to provide consistent care for children and families as school schedules shift.

In addition, as the landscape of learning continues to change, immense concern grows around the potential downstream economic impact of a widening achievement gap among K-12 students, especially historically disadvantaged ones, caused by school closures. During a typical school year, learning setbacks that students commonly experience over the summer can wipe out one to two months of academic growth. But new studies report that due to COVID-19, learning loss could be much more extreme. These achievement gaps then contribute to ongoing gaps in college attendance and attainment between less and more advantaged students, which also result in gaps in lifetime earnings for the disadvantaged. Kansas Ys and other OST providers can be the key to help bridge this educational inequity.

As our state moves through the ups and downs of recovery, the afterschool/OST field remains an essential partner of the state to help ensure children and families have the necessary supports to weather the hardships of the pandemic and communities emerge from the crisis stronger and more united.

KANSAS STATE ALLIANCE OF YMCAS

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Y LEARNING ACADEMY

The YMCA of Greater Kansas City is a great example of a community organization that has adapted to fill workforce and community needs by offering the Y Learning Academy program. This innovative program has served as a model for other after school providers to follow, and in fact, several of our Kansas Ys are offering a similar type of remote learning and child care program in communities all across Kansas.

The Y Learning Academy is an in-person option for families when schools are not offering full-time, in-school learning. It provides a safe environment and caring staff for kids while parents work, along with academic support to complete school-assigned online instruction and meet continuous learning requirements from the school, district and state. Strict health and safety protocols in a smaller learning environment help mitigate risk. Sites offer WiFi access for students, bridging the internet divide to ensure kids who have no or unreliable internet can complete their schoolwork. Trained youth development staff provides more than day care and work as partners in education to complement the instruction schools are providing.

As the Y has stepped up to address the needs of working parents, community partners have been crucial because school buildings aren't available for Y programming use as they were pre-pandemic. For example, districts doing hybrid learning schedules need the school space to spread out students who are in-person. The Y's partners have provided space to address this important need and help working families. The program addresses the needs of essential workers, single parent households and low-income families through scholarships. The dollars we have for financial assistance have dwindled, and charitable funding has diminished because of the pandemic, so additional funding is needed. Funding is an investment in tomorrow's workforce. If we don't step up to provide programs and policies that allow ALL kids support during this pandemic, kids of today will lack the foundation they need to be prepared to join the workforce in the future.

Looking ahead, the Y is preparing for the possibility that the need for Y Learning Academy programs may fluctuate. Schools may return to hybrid or in-person classes, in which case the Y will transition to offer the support of Y Learning Academy before and after school. It also could be possible the schools may have to return to virtual classes depending on the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, in which case we will be prepared to provide full-day Y Learning Academy again. No matter what, the educational experience has significantly changed, and we will still have a need to support working families and provide the academic support of Y Learning Academy.

KANSAS ALLIANCE OF YMCAs BACKGROUND

The Y is Kansas' largest provider of school age programming and is our state's partner in education. In Kansas there are 11 independent YMCA associations, with facilities in 31 different communities and programming in 20+ counties. Last year Kansas Ys served 16,000 school age students in before/after school programs; 3,500 kids (birth to 5) in early learning centers; and 6,250 children in summer camps.

Since school closures began as a result of COVID-19 in March, YMCAs all across Kansas have continued to offer an Essential Child Care option, a traditional Summer Day Camp option for families, and now Remote Learning and Afterschool programming options. With the addition of numerous safety protocols, our Ys have been able to create safe spaces, learning support, and social opportunities for youth as parents have returned to work – and we did this with NO major COVID-19 outbreaks in any of our programs.