

Out-of-school time is also crucial to kids' success

Chrystal Struben, President & CEO, AYS, Inc.

At AYS, we read with great interest your story about mayoral candidate Joe Hogsett's plan to improve education in Indianapolis "as a way to address rising concerns over public safety."

As Central Indiana's premier provider of before- and after-school programs for kids, we see value in Mr. Hogsett's proposals to expand pre-K opportunities – something that his opponent, Chuck Brewer, also supports. We also like the idea of creating a working group that brings together "representatives from schools, neighborhood organizations, faith-based institutions and other child service providers to find ways to provide resources and education to children living in poverty."

If Mr. Hogsett is elected, we would of course hope to be a part of that working group, and any additional discussions that center on out-of-school time programming. Our nonprofit, which serves over 2,000 children during the school year and 500 in the summer, has been working since 1980 to help kids learn, grow, have fun and stay safe.

AYS' programs complement school-day learning and primarily focus on math, literacy, character development and physical activity. Our secondary focus is on science and art. For example, over the last few years, children in AYS programs have built LEGO robots and NASA water rockets, programmed video games and created frame-worthy pieces of art. We've also provided lessons aimed at preventing bullying.

Typically, schools that do not have access to high-quality out-of-school time programming like ours are the same schools that serve a high rate of children from low-income families. And many of the schools who do partner with out-of-school time providers still have significant numbers of students who can't participate because of cost.

This is important to know, because studies have shown that out-of-school time programs are effective at improving at-risk kids' educational outcomes in math and reading. These kinds of programs also positively affect peer interactions *during* school hours, which can increase school attendance, leading to academic success. As Mr. Brewer has said, "a great education creates opportunities for young people who may otherwise turn to a life of crime."

No matter who is elected in the fall, we hope that out-of-school time learning and activities remain top of mind in the mayor's office. It would be tremendous if our newly-elected mayor would bring on a full-time advisor on after-school programs – something that Mayor Bart Peterson did during his tenure.

As a parent of a young child myself, I hope we all continue to work together on behalf of our kids, their future and the future of our city.