

Schwarzenegger pushes Congress to save after-school funding

March 24 2015, by Christine Armario

Former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is calling on Congress to preserve federal funding for after-school programs in a proposed reauthorization of the 2002 No Child Left Behind law.

At a national summit in Los Angeles on Tuesday, Schwarzenegger will join education, business and law enforcement leaders in demanding that any bill maintain after-school funding. A House proposal would eliminate after-school centers designed to help children in low-income neighborhoods and 68 other programs in favor of a flexibility grant that would allow states to decide how to use funds.

"I'm always worried when someone says, 'It will give them more flexibility,'" Schwarzenegger said Monday in an interview with The Associated Press. "I think after-school money is for after-school programs."

The bill is stalled while Senate leaders work on a bipartisan draft.

An increasing number of children come from homes where both parents work, making after-school care a necessity for many families. In 1965, four in 10 children had more than one parent who worked; by 2014, that number had risen to more than six in 10.

But skeptics of federally funded after-school initiatives point to U.S. Department of Education data showing that participants do not demonstrate improved academic outcomes.

The most recent agency report found that almost none of the performance targets was met, with only 38.4 percent of elementary-school participants showing improvement in math grades and 40.2 percent in English. For middle and high school students, the numbers were also bleak: 33.8 percent had improved grades in math between fall and spring and 34.6 percent in English.

"The evidence shows they did not have an impact," said Mark Dynarski, a fellow at the Brookings Institution.

The nonprofit Afterschool Alliance estimates that more than 10 million children are enrolled in after-school programs, the vast majority in private care. Just 1.6 million are in a federal 21st Century Community Learning Center, targeted to children in low-income neighborhoods—the same communities where single parents or both parents are likely to work.

About 20 million more students would participate if an after-school program were available to them, the Afterschool Alliance estimates.

"Over 50 years ago, we wouldn't have to have it because there was one parent home," Schwarzenegger said. "Someone has to fill the vacuum, and after-school programming is the best way to do that."

Schwarzenegger has long been an advocate for after-school education. He held a similar national after-school education summit when federal funding was in jeopardy in 2003 and has described his efforts as a "crusade." He pointed to data showing that the highest rate of juvenile crime and gang-related violence takes place between 3 and 6 p.m.—the hours kids are most likely to be unsupervised.

"What we want to do is have a place that they can stay and do the things that normally happen when parents are around," he said.

Bonnie Reiss, global director for the University of Southern California's Schwarzenegger Institute, said that with any program involving millions of children, "they're not all operating at the same level of excellence." But there are many tangible benefits, including improved attendance, graduation rates, and health and wellness, that merit expansion, she said.

"The program itself doesn't need to be changed, but we need to be vigilant and supportive," Reiss said.

Federal support for after-school education was included as a key component of the bipartisan No Child Left Behind law and is funded at more than \$1 billion a year. The law sought to close achievement gaps between poor and minority students and their more affluent peers and requires annual testing in reading and math for students in grades 3 to 8 and again in high school.

The law required that all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014, a goal that remains a distant prospect. Lawmakers have been attempting to reform the law for several years.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Schwarzenegger pushes Congress to save after-school funding (2015, March 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-03-schwarzenegger-after-school-crusade.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.