

Celebrating 25 years of Impact and Long-Term Returns on Investment

Technical Report

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Keywords

afterschool, out-of-school time, workforce development, program quality, return on investment, youth development

Abstract

This report examines the return on investment of Prime Time Palm Beach County's 25-year effort to improve the quality of afterschool and summer programs through workforce development and quality assurance systems. In a fragmented field of school-age childcare, Prime Time functions as an intermediary organization, building workforce capacity and supporting program quality at scale to improve outcomes for children, families and the broader community.

Over this period, Prime Time has trained more than 37,000 professionals, supported 190 organizations through sustained participation in a countywide quality assurance system and provided access to high-quality programming for more than 275,000 child enrollments. These investments are associated with improved program quality, stronger developmental relationships and expanded learning opportunities in areas such as science, technology, arts and wellness.

Drawing on longitudinal data, external research and conservative economic assumptions, the report estimates both short-term and long-term returns. Short-term effects include approximately \$145 million in additional household earnings and employer savings associated with reliable access to afterschool care. Long-term social returns are estimated at approximately \$2.23 billion, reflecting increased lifetime earnings, reduced public expenditures and improved health outcomes for participating children.

Findings suggest that the benefits of out-of-school time (OST) programs depend on sustained program quality. Intermediary organizations that invest in workforce development, continuous improvement and system-level supports play a critical role in ensuring that afterschool programs generate both immediate economic stability for families and long-term developmental and economic returns for communities.

Executive Summary

Over the past 25 years, Prime Time Palm Beach County has developed and sustained a countywide system of supports designed to improve the quality of afterschool and summer programs. Operating within a fragmented school-age childcare sector, Prime Time functions as an intermediary organization, strengthening workforce capacity, supporting continuous quality improvement and expanding access to high-quality learning opportunities for children and youth.

A substantial body of research demonstrates that high-quality OST programs contribute to children's academic, social and emotional development, while also supporting family stability and workforce participation. Prime Time's model is designed to ensure that programs consistently reach the level of quality required to produce these outcomes. By focusing on workforce development, coaching, credentialing and system-wide alignment, the organization helps translate investments in afterschool programming into measurable benefits for children, families and the regional economy.

Over this period, Prime Time has trained more than 37,000 professionals, supported 190 organizations through sustained participation in a Quality Improvement System and provided access to high-quality programming for more than 275,000 child enrollments. These efforts have contributed to improvements in program quality, strengthened adult-child interactions and expanded opportunities for children to engage in structured, skill-building activities across a range of content areas, including science, technology, arts, literacy and wellness.

Drawing on longitudinal data, external research and conservative economic assumptions, this report estimates both short-term and long-term returns associated with high-quality OST programming. In the short term, reliable access to afterschool care supports family economic stability by enabling parents and guardians to maintain consistent employment. Across the 2003–2025 period, these effects are estimated to have generated approximately \$145 million in additional household earnings and employer cost savings in Palm Beach County.

Over the long term, participation in high-quality programs is associated with improved educational attainment, workforce participation and health outcomes. Based on a conservative benefit-cost ratio of 3:1 and estimated program costs of \$2,695 per child per year, total long-term social returns are estimated at approximately \$2.23 billion. These returns reflect increased lifetime earnings, reduced public expenditures and broader societal benefits.

Importantly, these outcomes are not produced by program access alone, but by sustained program quality. Evidence from developmental science and longitudinal studies indicates that the benefits of OST programs depend on the presence of stable, skilled staff, high-

quality adult–child interactions and structured learning opportunities. Prime Time’s role is to support programs in consistently achieving these conditions.

Taken together, the findings suggest that investments in afterschool and summer programs yield both immediate and long-term benefits when paired with effective quality assurance systems. Intermediary organizations play a critical role in strengthening workforce capacity, supporting continuous improvement and ensuring that program quality reaches the threshold necessary to produce meaningful outcomes. As a result, afterschool programs function not only as a service for children and families, but as a sustained investment in human capital and community well-being.

Acknowledgement

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Finally, we acknowledge Suzette L. Harvey and the management team at Prime Time for extraordinary leadership and dedication to this work for more than two decades. Their sustained commitment has been instrumental in advancing Prime Time’s mission and impact.

These programs don't just occupy time but transform the afternoon hours into incubators for academic support, social-emotional growth and creative exploration. For working parents, afterschool isn't just a convenience; it's the foundation that makes employment possible, knowing their children are safe and actively engaged in building skills, confidence, and connections. The ripple effect touches entire communities and families who can pursue economic stability without sacrificing their children's development.

—Aruna Gilbert, MSW, Member, Prime Time Palm Beach County Board of Directors, and Chief Program and Policy Officer, Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County

1. Introduction

On the occasion of Prime Time's 25th year, we have taken the opportunity to use the best available data from across this period, together with current scientific evidence and validated assumptions, to venture some reflections on impact. Prime Time serves as a quality support organization, strengthening the capacity of organizations and the associated workforce, in the school-aged childcare sector of afterschool and summer programs. In doing so, Prime Time contributes to outcomes that matter in both the short run, by enabling parents/guardians to work reliably, and in the long run by supporting children's development and their contributions across the life course.

Yet this impact is achieved in the context of a sector that is not historically regulated by a single comprehensive policy that applies to all. The childcare industries, specifically afterschool, are widely distributed across public, private, nonprofit, large, and small providers, making it challenging to assure consistent quality. This fragmentation also makes it difficult to align the field around common goals suggested by the science of child development. These challenges have grown as scientific research has increasingly demonstrated that raising skill expectations for staff produces far better outcomes for children and families. This shift advances the field beyond "warehousing" or "babysitting" toward developmental learning, intentional enrichment, and exposure to content areas such as the arts, literacy and leadership. As a result, programs achieve significantly stronger outcomes for children and families.

In the early childhood years, the United States has responded to this challenge by developing statewide systems for quality assessment, training and technical assistance over the past two decades. This large-scale investment in quality improvement is now expanding to school-age childcare, and Prime Time's work in Palm Beach County stands as a leading example for the nation.

It is important to note that Prime Time is not the sole cause of the outcomes described in this report. Funders of afterschool programs remain the major investors seeking "returns." However, Prime Time plays a critical role in offering fundamental supports, so quality reaches the threshold needed to generate these short- and long-term outcomes. In this

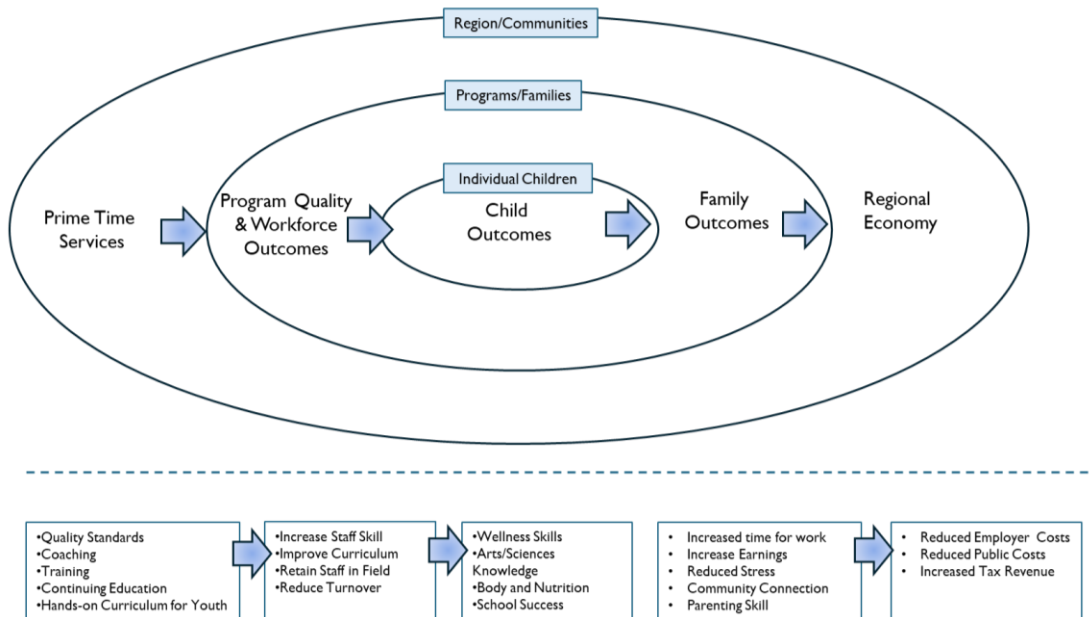
way, Prime Time is a necessary ingredient for realizing the returns on investment outlined in the pages that follow.

Prime Time’s Outcomes Framework

Figure 1 illustrates Prime Time’s outcomes framework, linking investments in workforce development and program quality to cascading benefits for children, families and the regional economy. The framework emphasizes a sequence that begins with building the skills and stability of the OST workforce, leading to higher-quality program environments and enriched learning opportunities for children. This is the left-hand side of Figure 1.

Moving rightward in Figure 1, impacts on program quality and youth development translate into short-term support for working families and, ultimately, long term social and economic returns for the county. The model highlights both the nested layers of influence from individual children to the wider community and the dynamic progression from inputs to outcomes, underscoring Prime Time’s role as a catalyst for systemic impact.

Figure 1. Prime Time Outcomes Framework for Workforce, Children, Families, and Regional Economy



Note. The framework illustrates how investments in workforce development and program quality produce cascading benefits for children, families, and the regional economy.

As the framework shows, the foundation for all other outcomes is the strength of the workforce that delivers afterschool and summer programming. Without skilled and stable staff, it is not possible to achieve lasting improvements in program quality, child experiences or long-term returns. For this reason, the first section of this report focuses on

Prime Time’s 25-year record of building a professional, supported and committed workforce in Palm Beach County.

2. Building a Skilled and Stable Workforce

Prime Time has contributed to the advancement of a skilled and stable workforce through training, technical assistance and direct services that help entry-level staff quickly learn about child development and quality practices. Supports for continuing education and staff retention complement this core training. Skills and stability are critical benchmarks for quality and outcomes in the afterschool and childcare fields because for the most part, our workforce is both young, with many “first job” workers, and has one of the highest turnover rates for any profession tracked by the U.S. Department of Labor (Fee, 2024).

Training and technical assistance organizations like Prime Time — called intermediary organizations in the OST field — play a pivotal role in strengthening a local childcare workforce. By improving educator skills, increasing credential attainment and fostering more stable, higher-quality work environments, they enable staff to remain in the field longer and advance along career pathways to more senior roles.

Evidence from the more mature but very similar field of early childhood care (e.g., birth to age 5) demonstrates that professional development, coaching, wage supplements and structured career pathways — the same set of supports provided by Prime Time — reduce turnover and sustain program quality. In turn, these investments directly benefit children’s learning and development.¹

Staff retention is particularly important for ensuring positive outcomes for children in early care and education settings. Bernardi et al. (2024) summarizes the evidence from the field of early childhood care in stating that, “Low turnover among early childhood educators promotes stable, continuous relationships between teachers and children, which are essential for fostering children’s social-emotional development, language growth and readiness for school” (p. 2).²

Prime Time Performance Metrics: Building a Skilled and Stable Workforce

¹ These statements draw heavily upon the review of research in Bernardi, N., et al. (2024) and other sources at the *Building and Sustaining the Child Care and Early Education Workforce*, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation (OPRE), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families: <https://acf.gov/opre/project/building-and-sustaining-early-care-and-education-workforce-base>

² See note 1.

For 25 years, Prime Time has served more than 76% of eligible school-age childcare organizations in the county.³ Through these efforts Prime Time has:

- Provided 37,696 training enrollments for OST professionals (see Appendix A, Table 2, column 7).
- Awarded 10,412 scholarships for training, continuing education for credit and non-credit courses leading to certificates and degrees (see Appendix A, Table 2, column 8).
- Hosted 147 non-training events for professional networking and career advancement (see Appendix A, Table 2, column 9).
- Guided 190 unique organizations through more than 2,436 annual cycles of participation (see Appendix A, Table 1, column 4) in its intensive Quality Improvement System, including 7,308 on-site assessments of program quality⁴ conducted by a trained observer and 9,744 site visits conducted by expert quality advisors.⁵
- Provided 23,478 hours of coaching in support of both quality improvement and career advancement (see Appendix A, Table 2, column 10). These coaching hours were delivered in a total of 46,235 instances of approximately 30 minutes, indicating ready availability of coaching services on demand and in real time.
- Awarded 4,438 wage supplement incentives (ACHIEVE OST) for longevity in position/role (see Appendix A, Table 2, column 11).

Prime Time’s efforts to build the skills and stability of staff lay the foundation. However, the real measure of success lies in children’s access to high-quality learning experiences after school and in summer. In the next section, we discuss how Prime Time services increase opportunities to experience high-quality adult-child interactions that build well-being and life skills as well as high quality curriculum content for a variety of subject areas.

For more than two decades, Dr. Deborah Vandell, one of America’s foremost child development scientists working at University of California Irvine, and colleagues, have built

³ Over the 22-year period from 2003–2004 to 2024–2025, the total number of unique afterschool programs served was estimated at approximately 330. This estimate assumes that in each program year, 2.5% of participating programs were new while the remaining 97.5% were continuing from the previous year (2.5% is the actual annual replacement rate for QIS participants, applied here to recipients of any Prime Time service). The calculation adds 2.5% of all programs served in each year to the largest single-year total (236 programs in 2021–22), resulting in an estimated cumulative reach of about 330 distinct programs. In 2024-25 there was a total eligible pool of 436 programs in Palm Beach County, so Prime Time has served (330/436) 76% of all eligible programs in the county. More narrowly, 190 unique programs have participated in Prime Time’s QIS over the same period so 44% of eligible programs have participated in the QIS for 1 year or more.

⁴ 2,436 QIS participants x 3 assessments.

⁵ 2,436 QIS participants x 4 site visits.

the most rigorous scientific description available about how afterschool experiences shape children's lives.

Through large-scale, long-term studies that followed children from early childhood into adolescence, Vandell's research demonstrates that participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to measurable and lasting gains in academic performance, work habits and social confidence. Her findings show that quality matters, not just in the moment, but across years, as children accumulate the benefits of consistent, enriching environments.

These longitudinal studies remain the field's gold standard for documenting how afterschool participation supports positive developmental trajectories.

In the next section, we draw on this body of work to illustrate why sustained quality improvement is the key to achieving lasting outcomes for young people.

3. Closing Opportunity Gaps

Prime Time has helped close opportunity gaps, situations where families lack the information, time, transportation, finances or other resources to enroll children in OST activities such as sports, arts, or private lessons that are more common among resource-rich families. Access to skill-building opportunities during this time causes improved outcomes in education, family stability and earnings across the life course.

According to Dearing et al. (2024), opportunity gaps accumulate from early childhood through adolescence, shaping educational attainment and lifetime earnings, with particularly strong effects for children from low-income households. By improving adult support and curriculum offered to youth before and after school and during the summer, Prime Time increases the likelihood that children from all backgrounds can experience high impact skill growth and positive youth development. Prime Time's direct impact on children occurs in two main ways, quality of adult-child interaction and quality of curriculum content.

Quality of Adult-Child Interaction

First, and most broadly, attendance in high-quality afterschool programs – like those that engage with Prime Time - leads to enhanced life skill growth and improved school success (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024; Vandell and Simpkins, 2024). (see Section 3 for Prime Time evidence.) These outcomes are central to Prime Time's mission to improve the quality of adult-child interaction in school-aged afterschool and child-care settings.

Further, quality improvement causes a virtuous cycle for the relationships that are the foundation of high quality adult-child interaction: Programs and staff who participate with Prime Time services gain child development skills, remain in their roles longer and use

those extended relationships to support greater growth in child outcomes. Research shows that high-quality, supervised OST programs in middle childhood produce unique, lasting contributions to adolescent outcomes, independent of family background or early care quality (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2025; Vandell and Simpkins, 2024; see Section 3 for Prime Time evidence).

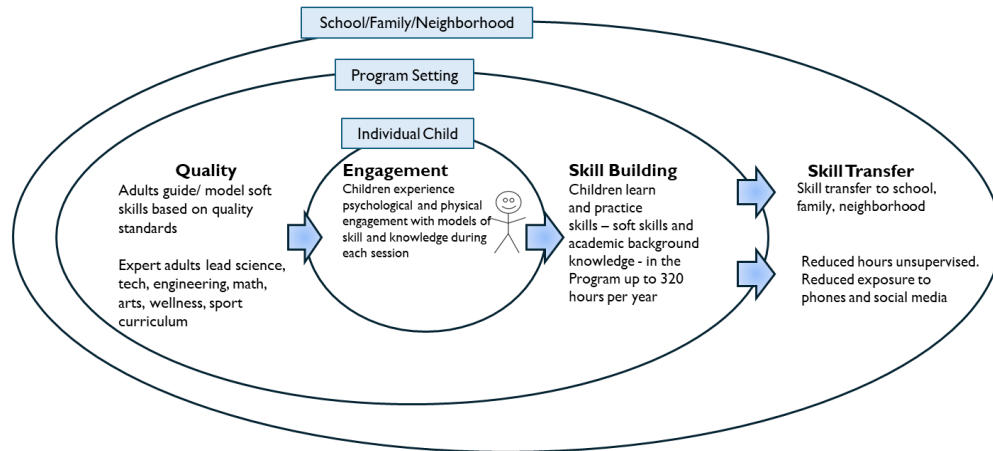
Vandell’s longitudinal findings anchor the national evidence base, showing that when afterschool programs reach and sustain high quality, they produce effects on children’s development comparable in magnitude to those of high-quality early childhood education.

For example, in the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, Vandell et al. (2020, p. 140) found that maternal sensitivity, high-quality early childcare and high-quality, supervised OST settings each made lasting contributions to adolescent academic, behavioral and social outcomes. While maternal sensitivity remained the strongest predictor, the effects of supervised OST were comparable in size to early childcare quality, and for social confidence, the OST effect was slightly larger (p.138).

Given that maternal responsiveness is one of the most powerful influences on child development, the fact that high-quality OST settings demonstrate comparable effect sizes (although smaller) to maternal sensitivity and maternal education underscores the substantial potential for impact that school-age care provides — proof that quality truly matters.

Figure 2 depicts the micro-level model whereby program quality heightens children’s psychological and physical engagement with the program setting, leading to skill growth, and ultimately, transfer of these skills to new settings such as school, family and community. The QuEST (Quality > Engagement > Skills > Transfer) model, featured in the recent National Academies (2025) synthesis of afterschool research.

Figure 2. QuEST Model of Child Development in OST Programs



Note. The QuEST model shows how program quality drives engagement, skill growth, and transfer across settings.

Quality of Curriculum Content

In addition to raising the quality of adult-child interactions, a second way that Prime Time’s work closes opportunity gaps is through expanded learning opportunities, curricula offered by local content expert providers in a multi-session format at no cost to the program or participant. Children attending the program participate in hands-on, interactive activities in subject areas such as science, technology, engineering, arts, math, entrepreneurship, youth leadership, literacy and health and wellness. These activities offer meaningful opportunities for skill-building outside school hours, especially for families who may otherwise lack access to specialized skill-building expertise such as private lessons, tutoring or other family learning experiences. According to a leading curriculum designer Robert Marzano (2004), these enrichment experiences also provide critical background knowledge for school success.

The best peer reviewed evidence available for the afterschool field comes from the work of Vandell and colleagues who have published extensively from multiple longitudinal data sets in the science on afterschool and child care.⁶ Their evidence shows that participation

⁶ Deborah Vandell has contributed to several major longitudinal studies of children’s development in relation to afterschool participation: (1) the *Study of Promising Afterschool Programs* (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007), a Mott Foundation-funded, two-year study (2003–2005) of nearly 3,000 low-income, ethnically diverse youth showing sustained afterschool participation improved academic and social outcomes; (2) the *NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development* (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2010), which followed about 1,300 children from birth through age 15 (1991–2006), linking early care and supervised OST to adolescent outcomes; (3) a longitudinal study of afterschool activities among low-income urban children (Posner & Vandell, 1999), tracking 3rd–5th graders to show links between activity patterns and academic/social adjustment; and (4) more recent work on *accumulated opportunities* (Dearing, Vandell, et al., 2024), a 26-year study

in structured, adult-supervised OST programs (such as sports, arts, clubs and service) is associated with stronger academic skills, better work habits and fewer behavior problems across childhood and adolescence, while unsupervised time is linked to problem behaviors and lower academic performance.

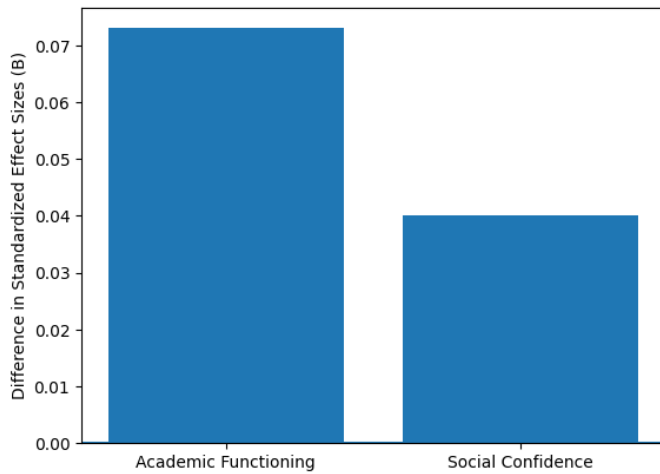
Figure 3 compares organized OST participation with unsupervised time during middle childhood and shows how these experiences relate to academic and social outcomes in adolescence. Youth who spent more time in organized, adult-supervised settings showed stronger academic performance and higher social confidence as adolescents than those who spent more time unsupervised. The differences shown in Figure 3 are modest in size, but they persist in years after participation and remain after accounting for family background and early childhood experiences.

Importantly, this figure represents one snapshot of a much larger body of evidence developed by Vandell and colleagues: across multiple studies, organized OST has been shown to support positive developmental pathways, to matter at levels comparable to other well-established influences such as early childcare quality, and to accumulate over time as children experience structured opportunities across multiple years (Vandell et al., 2020; Vandell & Simpkins, 2024).⁷

demonstrating how sustained access to high-quality experiences predicts higher educational attainment and adult earnings.

⁷ Estimates are derived from standardized regression coefficients reported in Vandell et al. (2020), Tables 6 and 7 (Model 3). Academic functioning pools coefficients for Woodcock–Johnson Applied Problems, Passage Comprehension, and Picture Vocabulary by taking the simple mean across outcomes. Social confidence is reported as a single behavioral indicator. All coefficients are included at their reported values, regardless of statistical significance. Other behavioral indicators (impulsivity, risk taking, externalizing behavior) are not pooled because their associations with organized OST and unsupervised time are outcome-specific and reflect different behavioral pathways rather than a single underlying construct; importantly, these associations are not uniformly negative for organized activities. Social confidence is highlighted because it represents a consistently positive social outcome emphasized in Vandell’s developmental framework.

Figure 3. Associations Between Organized OST Participation and Adolescent Academic Functioning and Social Confidence



Differences are calculated using regression estimates from Vandell et al. (2020), comparing organized OST participation with nonadult (unsupervised) care during middle childhood. Academic functioning reflects the average association across three achievement measures, while social confidence is shown as a single social–emotional indicator. All reported estimates are included as calculated.

Prime Time Performance Metrics: Closing Opportunity Gaps

Over 25 years, Prime Time has provided:

- Access to developmentally powerful experiences at programs participating in the Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System for 275,882 children across all years (see Appendix A, Table 1, column 5) or an estimated 110,353 unique children⁸. In 2024-2025, this represented more than 17,000 children, or approximately 17 percent of all school-age children in Palm Beach County.⁹

- A total of 562,627 enrollments (see Appendix A, Table 2, column 12) in expanded learning opportunity curriculum modules. Since each module involves six to ten sessions, this equates to nearly 3.54 million individual skill-building experiences¹⁰ in afterschool sessions during the period 2003-2025.

⁸ For an estimate of unique, non-duplicated children, using assumptions of retention at 2.5 years, we estimate that approximately 110,353 unique (total estimated enrollment divided by 2.5 years per child) children have participated in QIS-enrolled programs during the 2003-2025 period.

⁹ The total number of children aged 6-13 in Palm Beach County was approximately 110,000 according to the American Community Survey 2019-2023.

¹⁰ Sum of the number of unique enrollments 2003-2025 multiplied by an average of 6.4 sessions per enrollment.

In the discussion above, we have drawn heavily on the work of Vandell and colleagues, whose 20-plus years of research provide the leading scientific evidence on the developmental effects of afterschool. Complementing this body of peer-reviewed work, Prime Time has conducted its own rigorous research in partnership with several nationally recognized organizations over the past 25 years, making it one of the most thoroughly evaluated providers of intermediary services in the afterschool and school-age childcare field.

4. Rigorous Evidence of Impact

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2025) have highlighted the critical role of organized afterschool programs as developmental contexts for children and adolescents. In its comprehensive synthesis, the Academies concluded that high-quality OST programs support social and emotional development and can foster engagement and skills that contribute to longer-term educational outcomes when intentionally designed to do so (Summary p. 5). Palm Beach County's Quality Improvement System and expanded learning opportunities are explicitly recognized in this state-of-the-science report as examples that promote regional workforce and program curriculum quality to achieve outcomes for children and youth (Chapter 8 p. 22).

Building on this recognition from the National Academies, Prime Time's own evaluation record spans two distinct but complementary eras: early implementation studies led by Chapin Hall that documented how the Quality Improvement System took root in Palm Beach County, and later impact evaluations conducted by national research organizations and Prime Time itself that established the system's effectiveness in raising program quality and improving youth outcomes.

Prime Time Performance Metrics: Rigorous Evidence of Impact

Researchers from Chapin Hall, which evaluated Prime Time's first decade of work in five reports over seven years, found that the Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System (QIS) was achieving its intended effect: afterschool providers were buying into the process and steadily improving quality. By emphasizing support rather than punishment, the QIS created a culture of continuous improvement in which programs welcomed external assessments, engaged in self-assessment and planning, and worked with quality advisors who provided trusted, individualized coaching.

As described by Smith (2013), the result of this "lower stakes accountability" approach was that programs made measurable and sustainable gains in key areas such as safe environments, supportive relationships, youth engagement and organizational practices.

According to evaluators at Chapin Hall, Prime Time fostered a collaborative community-wide commitment to high standards of afterschool quality.¹¹

Quasi-experimental validation studies conducted by Prime Time, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality at the Forum for Youth Investment, QTurn LLC, and the American Institutes for Research further demonstrated the validity and effectiveness of the Palm Beach County QIS and related services. These studies confirmed the reliability and validity of QIS metrics as measures of program quality and showed that, through participation in the QIS, programs reach and sustain higher levels of quality. Moreover, when youth attended high-quality programs, they experienced measurable gains in life skills, school engagement and other positive developmental outcomes. Together, this body of evidence established that the QIS not only helped programs improve practice but also delivered on the goal of causing better outcomes for children and youth.¹²

5. Supporting Families and the Regional Economy

Prime Time's return on investment can be understood in two ways: (1) short-term benefits for families and employers that occur each year when afterschool programs provide reliable, high-quality care, and (2) long-term social returns that accrue across children's lifetimes when they grow up participating in high-quality OST settings.

It is important to acknowledge that the largest input to the economic effects described here is the sustained funding that has supported the operation of more than 200 afterschool and summer programs across Palm Beach County. These investments by public and private funders make the very existence of the system possible and serve as the essential foundation for generating the desired ROI.

At the same time, research shows that such investments only translate into meaningful child, family and community outcomes when the care provided is of high quality. Prime Time's role has been to support programs in consistently meeting that quality threshold, thereby unlocking the full value of the ecosystem. Without a sustained focus on quality, the

¹¹ Chapin Hall (Speilberger and Lockaby, 2006; Speilberger and Lockaby, 2008; Speilberger and Lockaby et al., 2009; Baker and Speilberger et al., 2010; Sinesterra and Baker, 2010,) – evaluations documenting provider buy-in and improvements in program quality during the first decade of the Prime Time QIS.

¹² Prime Time (Lindeman and Smith et al., 2019), David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Smith and Akiva et al., 2008; Akiva and Pearson et al., 2010; Smith and Akiva et al., 2012; Smith, 2013), QTurn LLC (Smith and Peck, 2019), American Institutes for Research (Naftzger, Hallberg and Yang, 2014) – quasi-experimental and validation studies showing the validity of QIS metrics, improvements in quality, and positive youth outcomes associated with participation in high-quality programs.

promise of afterschool care would be diminished; with it, the substantial short- and long-term returns we document here become possible.¹³

Additional detail on methods, assumptions and caveats for both short and long-term analyses presented in this section can be found in Appendix C.

Short-Term Economic Effects

As context for this discussion, we first note that since 2009, four nationally representative surveys conducted by the Afterschool Alliance consistently show that consumers of child care say that afterschool programs provide peace of mind (85%) and enable them to remain on the job (83%).¹⁴ These findings point to an immediate and measurable economic function of afterschool care. Our question then becomes: What are the assumptions necessary to estimate the value of these effects?

Economists have approached the question of short-term effects of childcare on family income in several complementary ways. In the early childhood field, studies by Herbst (2010) and Morrissey (2017) have reviewed how reductions in the cost of care influence maternal labor supply, producing well-documented estimates of employment “elasticities” linking more affordable care to increased hours of work and higher earnings.

In the United States, the Council of Economic Advisers (2023) has extended this line of reasoning by analyzing the impact of childcare investments on maternal employment, finding that recent federal supports such as the American Rescue Plan helped speed mothers’ return to work and reduced family out-of-pocket costs.

Internationally, researchers have examined the expansion of afterschool and extended-day programs in places such as Chile, Germany and Switzerland, documenting measurable increases in mothers’ employment rates, work hours and labor force participation.¹⁵

¹³ We make this argument—that return on investment does not occur below a certain threshold of quality—based on evidence from early childhood education. Landmark longitudinal studies such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart et al., 2005), the Abecedarian Project (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002), and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers Study (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001) demonstrate that only high-quality early learning programs produce the sustained developmental and economic returns documented over the life course.

¹⁴ In successive waves of the *America After 3PM* survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance (2009, 2014, 2020, 2022), overwhelming majorities of parents reported that afterschool programs not only benefit children but also support families’ economic stability. Across these surveys, approximately 85 percent of parents with a child enrolled in an afterschool program said that participation provides them with peace of mind knowing their child is safe and engaged during the afterschool hours, while roughly 83 percent agreed that afterschool programs help them remain employed or keep their jobs (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Afterschool Alliance, 2020; Afterschool Alliance, 2022).

¹⁵ See Berthelon & Kruger, 2011; Givord & Marbot, 2015; Schmitz, 2020.

Together, this body of evidence underscores a consistent theme: when families gain access to affordable and reliable care for school-age children, the immediate effect is greater parental ability to remain steadily employed. It is within this context that we frame our own estimate of the short-term returns associated with high-quality afterschool care in Palm Beach County.

An Estimate of Short-Term Returns

When access to high-quality OST is abundant - as in Palm Beach County – parents/guardians are able to work with greater consistency and fewer interruptions, producing measurable short-term gains in household earnings and employer cost savings. While elasticity estimates are derived primarily from studies of early childhood care, we interpret them here as a proxy for the effects of reliable school-age care, given the similar mechanism of freeing parents/guardians to work the hours they need.¹⁶

A review of research by Morrissey (2017; See also Herbst, 2010) on the responsiveness of maternal employment to affordable childcare finds an employment “elasticity” between 0.5% and 2.5% when childcare costs decline. Applied to Palm Beach County’s median annual wage (\$46,509)¹⁷, this translates into a potential annual household earnings gain ranging from \$233 to \$1,163 per family, with a conservative midpoint of \$699.

Because OST settings account for roughly half of a child’s daytime hours spent out of the home (with the other half spent in school), we conservatively assign 50% of this gain to afterschool and summer programs. This yields a midpoint OST-related family earnings gain of \$349 per household per year.

A gain of \$349 per year is not hard to imagine in practical terms. It is the equivalent of roughly 17.5 hours of work for a parent earning \$20 per hour, or about two and a half extra workdays of income secured simply because reliable afterschool care makes steady employment possible.

In addition, employers benefit from reduced absenteeism and turnover costs when parents/guardians have stable OST arrangements. Based on national estimates from Ready Nation (2019), we assign an average of \$350 per household per year to capture these employer savings.

¹⁶ Although no estimator perfectly captures the short-term income effects of afterschool programs, we use the elasticity of maternal employment with respect to childcare availability and cost as a proxy. Reliable afterschool care—accessible, dependable and stress-reducing—functions much like having the level of care parents need to work the hours they want. Elasticity estimates therefore reflect a reasonable range of possible effects for families in Palm Beach County.

¹⁷ Median annual wage (\$46,509) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2023, West Palm Beach–Boca Raton–Delray Beach Metropolitan Division.

Together, these two components — an estimated \$349 in additional household earnings and \$350 in avoided employer costs — yield a combined short-term effect of \$699 per household annually. Multiplying this by the sum of families served each year (see Appendix A, Table 1, column 6) yields a total of \$144,632,886 (or approximately \$145 million) in additional value in nominal (unadjusted) dollars added to the regional economy during the 2003-2025 period. These gains are above and beyond parents’ annual wages and employers’ annual employment costs, representing the incremental annual return to earners and employers made possible because families can depend on reliable, high-quality afterschool arrangements.

We note that these estimates are conservative and illustrative: they do not capture the full range of intangible benefits that families report (e.g., reduced stress, greater peace of mind) nor do they account for subgroup variations where effects may be larger (e.g., for single parents).

Long-Term Economic Effects

Beyond immediate household and employer returns, OST investments yield long-run benefits to children and society. Peer-reviewed cost–benefit studies estimate that every \$1 invested in quality afterschool produces roughly \$3 in long-run social value, including higher lifetime earnings, reduced public expenditures and improved health and well-being.¹⁸

Using cost estimates from a county-wide multi-site organization of \$2,695 per child per year¹⁹, and the summed annual number of children enrolled in Prime Time-supported OST

¹⁸ Recent analyses of the economic benefits of afterschool programs demonstrate that investments in high-quality OST yield measurable social and fiscal returns. State- and program-level cost–benefit studies estimate returns ranging from roughly \$3 to \$5 per dollar invested, with some models projecting even higher ratios when reductions in crime, juvenile justice costs and welfare dependence are included (Rose Institute of State and Local Government, 2006; OregonASK, 2021). The Afterschool Alliance commonly summarizes this evidence as a “\$1 yields \$3” return, a figure intended for policy communication that falls at the *bottom* of the empirically plausible range and therefore serves as a conservative assumption for modeling purposes (Afterschool Alliance, 2025). Comparable benefit–cost analyses in early childhood education consistently report even larger long-term social returns—often between \$4 and \$12 per dollar invested—for programs that improve children’s developmental and academic trajectories (Heckman et al., 2010; Karoly et al., 2005; Economic Policy Institute, 2004). Because high-quality afterschool programs target similar developmental pathways for school-age youth, adopting a 1:3 ratio in this report represents a deliberately conservative estimate within the broader evidence base for human-capital investments across childhood.

¹⁹ The \$2,695 per child annual program cost used in this analysis is derived from the School District of Palm Beach County’s 10-month afterschool tuition rate of \$3.70/hour. This figure represents a price rather than a full-cost estimate and reflects maximum staffing ratios of approximately 1:20. National OST cost studies (e.g., Wallace Foundation 2021 update to Grossman et al., 2009) suggest that fully costed, high-quality programs with 1:12–1:15 ratios operate at \$4,000–\$4,500 per child per year, indicating that the local price benchmark likely underestimates true system cost and renders our return estimates conservative.

programs (275,882, see Appendix A, Table 1, column 5), we estimate total program expenditures across the period 2003-2025 at \$743,501,990 (or approximately \$744 million). Applying the 3:1 ratio yields a long-term social return of \$2,230,505,970 (approximately \$2.23 billion).

Interpreted at the level of individual children, the long-term benefit is equally striking. Across 2003–2025, Palm Beach County’s Quality Improvement System supported approximately 275,882 annual child enrollments, which translates to 110,353 unique children served when accounting for the average child’s 2.5 years of participation (See note 8). On a per-child basis, program investments of roughly \$6,738 (2.5 years × \$2,695) yield an estimated \$20,212 in long-term social benefits for each unique child enrolled. These social benefits include higher lifetime earnings, reduced public expenditures and improved health and well-being.

To avoid double-counting, we report short-term and long-term returns separately. If short-term family/employer effects are embedded in the long-term benefit–cost estimates, then the long-term value should be viewed as net of the \$145 million in short-term returns already documented.

Summary of Economic Returns

Over the 25-year period from 2003 to 2025, high-quality out-of-school time programs supported by Prime Time generated both short-term and long-term economic value for families, employers and the wider community.

In the short term, participation in OST enabled parents to work more consistently and reduced employer costs tied to absenteeism and turnover. Using conservative assumptions, these effects yielded and estimated \$145 million in additional value to Palm Beach County families and employers over 25 years.

In the long term, investments in OST generated sustained benefits for children and society through higher lifetime earnings, reduced public expenditures and improved health outcomes. Based on program costs of \$2,695 per child-year and a 3:1 benefit–cost ratio, total long-term social returns are estimated at \$2.23 billion.

Together, these findings highlight the dual nature of OST investments: they provide immediate economic stability for families and employers, while also generating lasting returns to individuals and communities across the lifetimes of participating children.

Caveats

There are several caveats that apply to our short and longer term estimates of return on investment: First, to avoid double-counting, short-term and long-term returns are reported separately; if the 3:1 ratio already embeds family/employer effects, the net long-term return

is about \$2.09 billion after subtracting \$145 million in short-term value. Second, all figures are in nominal dollars and are not adjusted for inflation, present value, or the time value of money. Third, estimates are based on benchmark assumptions (e.g., \$2,695 per child annual cost; 3:1 return ratio; 2.5 years average participation). Different assumptions would yield different totals. Finally, results reflect total program enrollments as well as approximate counts of unique children, and attribution is shared across Prime Time, participating Programs, funders and families.

Conclusion

Over the past 25 years, Prime Time Palm Beach County has demonstrated that community-wide investment in quality assurance can fundamentally redefine what afterschool means for children, families and the county as a whole. In a field that is diverse, under-regulated and often uneven in practice, Prime Time has served as a critical infrastructure supporting the translation of afterschool investments into measurable outcomes.

The evidence is clear: when afterschool programs meet established thresholds of quality - through trained and supported staff, strong curricula and ongoing improvement processes - children gain academically, socially and emotionally. Families benefit from stability that allows them to work reliably, and the community realizes both short-term economic gains and long-term social returns. Without intermediary support, these benefits would be more fragmented and less certain; with it, the returns are systematic, validated and enduring.

Prime Time's experience in Palm Beach County now stands as a national model for how local quality assurance systems can transform the hours after school and during the summer from mere supervision into genuine opportunities for child development. The lesson of 25 years is not simply that afterschool matters, but that quality matters most and that intermediaries like Prime Time are essential to achieving high quality at scale. As the next chapter begins, the path forward is clear: continued investment in quality improvement is not only a commitment to children's afternoons and summers, but a strategic investment in their futures and in the prosperity of the entire community.

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Appendix A. Data Tables for Annual Performance Results

This appendix presents annual performance results on Prime Time’s reach and services across its first 25 years. All results were harvested from Prime Time’s published annual reports for the years 2009-2025, unpublished fourth quarter performance reports to funders for the years 2003-2008, and Prime Time’s internal database.

Table 1 summarizes participation by programs, children and families in participating in Prime Time’s intensive Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System (QIS), while Table 2 reports on the delivery of Prime Time services, including coaching, training, scholarships, and expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) for all programs in the county (QIS and non-QIS). Together, the tables provide a comprehensive picture of Prime Time’s annual performance and cumulative impact. Appendix B includes sources and construction rules for Columns 1-12 in Tables 1 and 2.

Several columns reflect constructed estimates based on fixed conversion factors (e.g., average children per program, average children in afterschool per family, average sessions per ELO enrollment). These methods are explained in Appendix B, with brief notes included beneath each table for reference.

Table 1. Annual Performance Results for Programs and Participants

Program Year	1. Total County OST Programs	2. County OST Programs Eligible for PT Services	3. County OST Programs Received any PT Service	4. County Programs in QIS	5. Children Enrolled in QIS Programs ²⁰	6. Families of children enrolled in QIS ²¹
2003-04	493	320	30	21	2373	1780
2004-05	493	320	30	21	2373	1780
2005-06	493	320	54	38	4294	3221
2006-07	493	320	67	47	5311	3983
2007-08	493	320	67	47	5311	3983
2008-09	493	320	104	73	8249	6187
2009-10	493	320	145	102	11526	8645
2010-11	493	320	149	105	11865	8899
2011-12	493	320	163	115	12995	9746
2012-13	459	287	167	120	13560	10170
2013-14	578	388	188	122	13786	10340
2014-15	524	332	207	142	16559	12419
2015-16	472	297	206	155	17741	13306
2016-17	475	306	204	154	18893	14170
2017-18	458	312	220	150	19050	14288
2018-19	482	316	219	152	18476	13857
2019-20	498	348	216	148	19004	14253
2020-21	506	337	227	151	10551	7913
2021-22	515	385	236	146	14973	11230
2022-23	514	415	205	141	15471	11603
2023-24	540	441	218	144	17475	13106
2024-25	521	436	228	142	17232	12035
2003-25 Ave/Tot	Average = 499	Average = 340	Total = 3550	Total = 2436	Total = 275882	Total = 206914

²⁰ Children enrolled (Col. 5) estimated as QIS programs × 113 children per program. An enrollment of 113 children was the average for QIS programs in the 2015-2025 program years.

²¹ Families (Col. 6) estimated as children (Col. 5) × 0.75, i.e., the average number of children for each family participating in afterschool is 1.33 children; every third family has two children in afterschool.

Table 2. Annual Performance Results for Prime Time Services

Program Year	7. Total Training Enrollments ²²	8. Total Scholarships Awarded ²³	9. Total Non-Training Events	10. Total Coaching Hours	11. ACHIEVE OST Wage Incentive	12. Total Child ELO Enrollment ²⁴
2003-04	267	0	1	176	0	4802
2004-05	267	0	1	176	0	4802
2005-06	484	32	3	318	0	8690
2006-07	713	186	4	468	0	12806
2007-08	942	241	5	619	0	16922
2008-09	1146	218	11	752	0	26460
2009-10	750	422	10	778	94	31660
2010-11	1464	419	9	961	94	29250
2011-12	1820	522	9	920	94	30776
2012-13	1489	494	6	380	94	27468
2013-14	1581	490	7	1201	94	25000
2014-15	932	593	4	1256	94	25000
2015-16	906	557	6	1203	262	27165
2016-17	1854	646	6	1271	371	29381
2017-18	3265	775	11	1416	448	30000
2018-19	3027	733	10	1749	400	30000
2019-20	2501	648	7	1506	362	22531
2020-21	3606	712	7	1827	389	49991
2021-22	2310	580	6	1234	342	29590
2022-23	2644	689	8	1774	425	35342
2023-24	2662	779	6	1883	437	32829
2024-25	3066	676	10	1610	438	32162
Total	37696	10412	147	23478	4438	562627

The cumulative results reported in Tables 1 and 2 are based on consistent methods applied across all years. Detailed definitions for each column, including data sources and methods of imputation and estimation, are provided in Appendix B.

²² Counts with duplication of persons, i.e., one participant may attend multiple trainings.

²³ Counts with duplication of persons, i.e., one participant may receive multiple scholarships.

²⁴ Counts with duplication of persons, i.e., one child may attend multiple EOs.

Appendix B. Performance Metric Definitions for Tables 1 and 2

Performance Metric Definitions for Table 1

Column 1: Total OST Programs in County

Total number of programs serving school aged children in Palm Beach County each year. Cell counts for years 2003-2011 were imputed using the Table 1 column 1 average for the years 2011-2025. Source: Early Literacy Coalition, Palm Beach County.

Column 2: Total OST Programs in County Eligible to Receive Prime Time (PT) Services

Subset of Column 1 representing programs eligible to receive Prime Time's services because they serve 20 or more school aged children and have at least one staff dedicated to school age children. Cell counts for years 2003-2011 were imputed using the Table 1 column 2 average for the years 2011-2025. Source: Early Literacy Coalition, Palm Beach County.

Column 3: Total Programs in County Received Any PT Service

Number of programs in Column 2 that actually received at least one Prime Time service (i.e., training, coaching, career advising, ELOs, attend events). Cell counts for years 2003-2011 were imputed using the ratio of Table 1 column 4 to Table 1 column 3 for the years 2012-2019. Source: Prime Time unpublished reports to funders.

Column 4: Total Programs in Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System (QIS)

Programs formally enrolled in the QIS during the program year. Source: Prime Time published annual reports and unpublished reports to funders.

Column 5: Children Enrolled in QIS

Estimated enrollment in programs in Column 4. Calculated as: Column 4 x 113 children. 113 is the average enrollment for programs participating in the Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System during the period 2015-2025.

Column 6: Families

Estimated number of families reached through enrollments in the Palm Beach County Quality Improvement System. Calculated as: Column 5 x 0.75. This means that every third family has two children in OST. This metric is a systematic undercount of households since many children have more than one household, e.g., in the case of divorced parents.

Performance Metric Definitions for Table 2

Column 7: Total Annual Training Enrollments

Number of afterschool practitioner enrollments in Prime Time training courses during the program year with duplicated participants. Each enrollment is counted as a distinct enrollment even if it is the same person. Cell counts for years 2003-2013 were imputed using the ratio of Table 1 column 4 to Table 2 column 7 for the years 2013-2025. Source: Prime Time published Annual Reports.

Column 8: Total Annual Scholarships Awarded

Number of scholarships granted for professional development, coursework or credentialing. Source: Prime Time internal database and published Annual Reports.

Column 9: Total Annual Non-Training Events

Count of professional networking, recognition or other career-advancement events hosted (excludes trainings). Cell counts for years 2003-2008 were imputed using the ratio of Table 1 column 4 to Table 2 column 9 for the years 2008-2025. Source: Prime Time published Annual Reports.

Column 10: Total Annual Coaching Hours

Hours of coaching provided across Prime Time’s suite of services. Cell counts for years 2003-2011 were imputed using the ratio of Table 1 column 4 to Table 2 column 10 for the years 2011-2025. Source: Prime Time internal database.

Column 11: Achieve Wage Incentive

Number of wage incentive awards for longevity in professional position/role. Years 2010-2014 were simple average for total awards over those years since by-year information was not available. Source: Prime Time internal database and published Annual Reports.

Column 12: Total Annual Child Enrollments in Expanded Learning Opportunities

Number of individual children (with duplication) who participated in expanded learning opportunities during the year. Cell counts for years 2003-2008 were imputed using the ratio of Table 1 column 4 to Table 2 column 12 for the years 2008-2025. Source: Prime Time published Annual Reports.

Appendix C. Economic Methods

This appendix details the methodology and results used to estimate Prime Time’s economic impact on Palm Beach County families, employers and children over the past 25 years. Two categories of effects are presented: short-term annual returns and long-term social returns.

1. Short-Term Effects

Formula: $\text{ShortTerm}_y = F_y \times ((e \times W \times s_{\text{OST}}) + E_{\text{emp}})$

Variables:

- F_y = families served in year y (Appendix A).
- e = maternal employment elasticity to child care affordability (0.5%–2.5%; midpoint 1.5%).
- W = median annual wage in Palm Beach County MSA (\$46,509; See note 17).
- s_{OST} = share of daily care attributable to OST (0.50).
- E_{emp} = annual employer savings per household (\$350).

Interpretation: The formula estimates the incremental economic return generated by OST participation each year, over and above parents’ baseline wages and the program costs they already pay. These additional gains flow from (1) increased household earnings enabled by reliable afterschool care, and (2) avoided employer costs tied to absenteeism and turnover. At midpoint assumptions, the combined annual gain is \$699 per family. Multiplying by families served (206,914) produces a 25-year total of \$145 million in additional short-term value for the regional economy.

2. Long-Term Effects

Formula: $\text{LongTermRaw}_y = R \times (N_y \times C)$

Variables:

- N_y = number of children served in year y (Appendix A).
- C = annual OST program cost per child (\$2,695; See note 19).
- R = long-term benefit–cost ratio (3:1, conservative; See note 18).

Interpretation: The formula estimates long-term social returns (higher lifetime earnings, reduced public expenditures, improved health outcomes, etc.) as three times the total program cost per child served. Multiplying the total number of child enrollments over 25 years (275,882) by the per-child program cost estimate (\$2,695) yields a total of \$743,501,990 which is an estimate of the total investment to produce afterschool services in Palm Beach County during the 25-year period. Using a conservative 3:1 benefit-cost ratio for social return on investment yields a total social return of \$2,230,505,970 over the 25-year period. It is important to note that we assume that the 3:1 benefit–cost ratio likely already incorporates near-term parental employment and employer effects, i.e., long-term returns include the short-term estimates.

3. Caveats

Several caveats should be considered when interpreting these estimates:

Nominal Dollars: All figures are reported in nominal terms. They are not adjusted for inflation, discounted to present value or corrected for the time value of money. Results represent cumulative totals across 25 years.

Double-Counting: Short-term and long-term returns are reported separately. If the 3:1 long-term ratio already embeds family and employer effects, the net estimate (long-term minus short-term) is the more conservative interpretation.

Assumptions and Benchmarks: Estimates rely on external benchmarks:

- \$2,695 annual cost per child (plausibly within the Wallace Foundation cost calculator range).
- 3:1 long-term benefit–cost ratio from peer-reviewed studies.
- 1.5% maternal employment elasticity, 50% attribution of childcare gains to OST, and \$350 annual employer savings per household. Alternative benchmarks would change the totals.

Attribution: Outcomes result from a system of funders, programs, staff and families. Prime Time’s role is to provide quality assurance systems so that quality thresholds are met and returns can be realized, but attribution cannot be assigned to Prime Time alone.

Scope of Effects: The estimates capture only selected economic returns (household earnings, employer savings, lifetime social benefits). Intangible outcomes, such as reduced parental stress, improved staff well-being or community cohesion, are not monetized here.

Uncertainty of Long-Term Projections: Long-term effects are based on prior cost–benefit research and assume consistent causal impacts. As with any projection, actual outcomes may vary with future changes in policy, economics or demographics.