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## feature articles

### After the Bell Rings

Finding the perfect afterschool program is a challenge for parents. Expert advice helps them make the right choices. By Megan Fazekas

**August 01, 2006** - For many local families, the need for child care doesn't end when their child goes off to school. School hours rarely, if ever, coincide with business hours. Every day working parents all over the Triangle struggle to accommodate school schedules. The lucky ones enjoy flexibility at work that allows them to pick up their children or meet them at home when the school day ends. For the not-so-lucky ones — and their employers — quality afterschool programs are a must.

Afterschool programs are good for parents and children.

"The primary benefit of parents having their child in an afterschool program is not having to worry about "What could happen while I'm at work and she's home alone?" says Polly Allegra, a school-age specialist at Child Care Services Association (CCSA), a nonprofit ensuring affordable, accessible, high quality child care for all families in the Triangle. "They don't have to worry about strangers coming into the house," Allegra says, "or if she is doing her homework and eating right. With a quality afterschool program, all of their worries should be gone."

There are countless other benefits to putting children in afterschool care. And not just for the parents. Children benefit from quality programs that offer homework assistance, nutritious snacks, organized activities, time for socialization and plenty of physical activity.

Keeping children active after school is just as important as academic time. Ephesus Elementary School's afterschool program, a five-star state licensed program in Chapel Hill, offers a variety of different activities from which the children can choose.

"Kids like gym games the most, such as kick ball and dodge ball," reports Jamie Harrison, the afterschool site director at Ephesus. "They also really like cooking activities and art projects, and the older kids like to socialize, especially the girls."

A balanced curriculum is best.

There are many options for and benefits of school age-care. In addition to being located at schools and child care centers, programs can be at recreation centers, churches, family child care homes and youth organizations. School-age programs may or may not be licensed by the state and may be accredited by the National Afterschool Association ([www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)).

It is important to find an afterschool program that offers equal amounts of fun, planned activities and academic time. Ephesus seems to have struck just such a balance. "We're not academically based, but it is a benefit that we are located in a school," says Harrison. "We have tutors and teachers

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
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