

# After school programs can offer a lot more than milk and cookies

BY HEATHER JOHNSON  
DUROCHER  
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Five-year-old James Brumfield recently surprised his dad with some slick new soccer moves.

"During spring soccer, my son didn't know to dodge to fake anyone out," said James Brumfield Sr. of Traverse City.

"But the other day we were messing around and he's finally learned to stop and turn and change directions."

Brumfield credits the local YMCA with teaching his son on the playing field — and off. Along with his 11-year-old sister, Aleya, James Brumfield Jr. takes part in the Y's after-school program, a safe and healthy alternative to being home alone while his dad finishes up his work day.

According to the Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., such quality care is needed: an estimated 15 million school-age children have no place to go

after school. Surveys also show that nine out of 10 Americans, whether they have children or not, believe that all children who need them should have access to quality after-school programs. Churches have helped fill the gap along with home-based caregivers. But there is a growing movement to create broad-based after-school programs in communities across the country, in part fueled by 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a government-sponsored grant program. The idea behind the centers is to create after-school programs that deliver more than a safe haven for two or three hours after school but also a chance for meaningful activities and educational enrichment.

Locally, Northwest Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care Council has a program — Child Care Connections — a regional organization providing childcare referrals

and resources. They receive dozens of calls from parents seeking quality after-school care, said Director Pamela Ward. Taking into account each family's needs, the organization directs parents to licensed caregivers, including the YMCA, school districts and individual providers.

Along with providing physical fitness — from canoeing and archery to kayaking and ball sports — the Grand Traverse YMCA offers homework support and "character development" activities, said Jude Cornett, director of camp and childcare at the YMCA. These programs, for kids in kindergarten through eighth grade and sometimes older, aim to teach honesty, caring, respect and responsibility, Cornett said.

"It's building up kids to have great self-esteem, to become great leaders in the community," she said of the program that serves about 300 area children during the school year.

Cost is \$5 per day for members and \$7 per day for non-members. Monthly YMCA memberships are \$15.

James Brumfield Sr. couldn't be happier with his children's involvement with the YMCA. This fall, for the second year, YMCA staff will pick up his children from Cherry Knoll Elementary School and take them to the organization's South Airport Road facility. (The YMCA provides transportation for all students in the program at a cost of \$2 per ride, per day).

"My kids are athletic and I like that (the YMCA) gives them that chance to grow and be more athletic. They run off a lot of energy — that's always good," Brumfield said. "Also, they meet other kids besides the ones they go to school with. And that's what life is all about, learning to adapt and communicate with other people."

Local school districts also are committed to the after-school effort. In Traverse

City, extended day programs are available at every elementary school and provide breakfast and snacks as well as activities ranging from physical fitness to art, music and academic assistance.

Traverse City Area Public Schools has even been recognized as one of the top districts in the country for meeting before- and after-school care needs, said Sara Weatherholt, TCAPS District Childcare Programs Coordinator. Close to 1,000 of the district's 11,000 students participate, she said.

"It's a fabulous program," Weatherholt said. "It's not daycare, and I don't mean to downplay daycare. We're doing a lot of things that impact classroom achievement. There's a whole lot going on that I don't think people are aware of."

For example, she said, local musicians and community actors have come to the schools to educate kids about music and acting. Drug and violence prevention programs are another

component.

These programs serve children starting in preschool through sixth grade. Before-care starts at 7 a.m., sometimes earlier if necessary, and after-school care goes as late as 6 p.m. Costs vary, but generally parents can expect to pay \$10 per day for both before- and after-school care, Weatherholt said. The district did recently receive multi-year funding which should help ease the financial burden felt by some families and help reach even more students in need of extended day care.

To learn more about the TCAPS extended day program, call Weatherholt at 933-7967.

For more information about YMCA offerings, call 933-YMCA (9622).

Learn more about Child Care Connections by going to [www.nwmi4c.org](http://www.nwmi4c.org) or calling 941-7767.

Heather Johnson Durocher is a local freelance writer.

## Tweens

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and concept for The Children's Place.

Girls especially like the T's when they are tie-dyed or sparkly, she says.

Also expected to be popular this back-to-school season are bohemian and outdoorsy looks in textured fabrics, such as corduroy and thermal-weave cotton, in a palette of green, orange and brown. Look for patchwork patterns, too.

It's Strubel's job to adapt what's going on in the fashion world to please both fashion-fickle children and their usually more modest parents.

While teenagers, who are already usually shopping in adult stores, often have their own money to spend on clothes, middle schoolers still rely on mom and dad to foot their back-to-school bill, and that gives parents more influence over their

purchases.

"We look at what's happening in fashion, movies, music, entertainment ... we know the kids are looking at the stars. We take all those influences into each season and then make them age appropriate," Strubel said.

"This way, the kid will feel really cool when she walks into school but mom will feel good about what she's wearing. Back-to-school shopping is when the mom and kid come together."

Boys care about their clothes, too, says Strubel, who has a 9-year-old. "My son has opinions. If I buy something he doesn't like, he'll never put it on, so what's the point?"

Boys put effort into looking like they don't care.

"They might look disheveled but it's an intended disheveled," said Mossimo Giannulli, creator of the Mossimo line at Target, and father of a 13-year-old son.

Denim is the key item in Mossimo's collection and

most other tween-targeted lines.

"Denim is huge for fall, but it's always huge and it always will be. It's universally accepted by kids, teenagers, adults," Mossimo said.

Other back-to-school basics are hooded sweatshirts, track jackets and cargo pants, which have plenty of pockets for cell phones and iPods.

Just like the adults who have embraced the casual California style, wearing jazzed-up Juicy Couture warm-up suits and pricey designer jeans with flip-flops, students prefer a relaxed look, Mossimo said. Their sweaters are no longer tight cable knits; instead, they wear looser weaves that have a silhouette more similar to a sweatshirt.

"Kids have the same taste all over. MTV changed the world. Now kids all over have the same tastemakers," Mossimo said.

Anything Beyonce wears will be an instant hit with

the tween crowd, according to Seventeen's Rubenstein, who expects to see gold chains laced around the waists of many girls this fall.

Many celebrities are trading their super-low rise jeans for trouser jeans, which parents will find more appropriate for middle schoolers.

"The trouser is looser but it's tailored and has a flat front so it doesn't look frumpy, so kids will like it," Rubenstein said. Tweens likely also will be wearing jeans with an exaggerated cuff.

"At this age, some are following trends — there will be those who want to wear the latest thing from Juicy. But they also create their own trends. Style is more important to them than the brand. That changes as you get older, unfortunately," Rubenstein said.

## SCHOOL FACTS

### School uniforms have merit

Many parents, teachers and school officials see school uniforms as a positive and creative way to reduce discipline problems, increase school safety and enhance the learning environment. The potential benefits of school uniforms include:

- Decreases violence and theft among students over designer clothing or expensive sneakers.
- Helps prevent gang members from wearing gang colors and insignias at school.
- Instills students with discipline.
- Helps parents and students resist peer pressure.
- Helps students concentrate on their school work.
- Helps school officials recognize intruders who come to the school.



SOURCE: U.S. Dept. of Education

Copley News Service / Paul Horn

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