

Andrew Gussert: Investing in Wisconsin's future

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Right now, 11.3 million kids are home alone afterschool, without adult supervision, including 205,000 youth unsupervised across Wisconsin. One out of six students fails to graduate from high school on time. Nearly half of youth don't believe the American Dream is possible.

It doesn't have to be this way.

At the Boys & Girls Clubs of Wisconsin, we see, every day, the inequities and roadblocks our country's young people face. With that in mind, we are committed to providing every child the opportunity for a better future, no matter their background. Success is within reach for every young person who comes through our doors, and we work with every child to achieve that full potential.

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But we can't do it alone.

Our kids' success isn't just in clubs, or controlled by funding from Congress or state legislatures. It's on all of us to create change, and provide real opportunity based on kids' potential — not on the circumstances that surround them. With the launch of our Agenda for America's Youth, Clubs across Wisconsin — and the country — are joining together to speak with a unified voice to move the needle for our young people.

In Wisconsin, 159 clubs serve over 143,000 youth across 57 cities, more than any organization outside the public school system. When we think about the national

reach and scale — more than 4,600 Clubs in communities across the nation and our presence in nearly every Congressional district — we have an incredible opportunity to create more awareness, understanding and support around the issues youth face today.

Out-of-school time is at the forefront of our agenda because we believe it is the critical vehicle for accomplishing these solutions. We use this time to equip youth with the skills they need in the workforce, while fostering partnerships that create access to real-life experiences to explore career options. Our clubs help them make positive decisions and embrace Healthy Lifestyles & Wellness, such as preventing cigarette and opioid use.

Prioritizing and investing in afterschool time not only leads to better outcomes for our kids, it leads to a healthier, safer and more prosperous nation. Join me in asking our elected leaders to prioritize our kids by funding after school initiatives, implementing trauma informed care, and promoting workforce development programs.

Our kids are the future. The return on investment is worth it.

- Gussert is State Director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Wisconsin