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New York Newsday - July 5, 1995

## Time to Pay for Kids' Summer Play

Summer is the toughest season for parents in New York. Most of them don't own a house with a big backyard, can't afford to send their kids to camp in Maine, and get only a week or so of paid vacation. For the vast majority, the biggest worry is finding a safe place for their kids during the day. The schools are closed, the beaches and pools are open, but parents are anxious since young children rich or poor, male or female, regardless of race need supervision, safety and space.

Suburban park and recreation departments operate summer sports and arts and crafts activities, but in New York City, youth programs are run by community organizations under contract to the city's Department of Youth Services. Under former Mayor David Dinkins, the Department of Youth Services' budget grew from approximately \$35 million to \$70 million a year. But under Mayor Giuliani, the department's leadership and funding have both declined. And though the City Council restored some funds for youth programs for the fiscal year that began Saturday, no one knows whether contracts will be prepared in time to pay for summer activities.

Cuts in the school budget have already forced the Board of Education to cancel summer educational programs for children enrolled in kindergarten through third grade. Many kids receive free breakfast and lunch while participating in school-based summer programs. Without these programs, they may miss out on the free meals as well.

The city has 1.7 million children, more than twice as many as Los Angeles and more than four times as many as Philadelphia. In fact, according to a new report, "Keeping Track of New York's Children," one out of four New Yorkers is a child.

It's a shame they can't vote. If kids could, the new city budget might look a little different. For example, it would include funds to air-condition the public schools, so they could stay open all year round. Of the 1,100 public schools in New York City, only eight high schools and 35 other public schools are air-conditioned. The kids' vote for year-round availability of school gyms, libraries and arts classrooms would aid another cause: learning. As Schools Chancellor Ray Cortines has observed, year-round schools are the most effective way to accommodate the growing public school population.

About 10,000 kids attend camp through the Fresh Air Fund, an admirable philanthropic achievement, but sending a few thousand kids to the sticks is a diversion from a critical problem facing this city. That puzzler, recently discussed at a conference sponsored by a good-government group, the Citizens Committee for New York, is how to marshal the will to invest

in parks, public spaces, schools and activities for the thousands of kids who can't leave town in July and August. Last evening's fireworks were impressive but, after 30 minutes, all that was left was a sky full of smoke, while parents still wonder what to do with their kids until the schools reopen.

One untapped revenue source that could help fund the city's summer youth programs are the tax-exempt organizations and foundations that squat on prime midtown space but pay no real estate taxes. Why should the Ford Foundation, Yale Club, Harvard Club or Racquet & Tennis Club be treated like educational, health-care or religious institutions that serve the citizens of this city directly? Surely, the occupants of these prestigious Manhattan edifices should pay their fair share for public services, like everyone else.

The mayor and City Council are wisely cutting business taxes to make the city more competitive. At the same time, many nonprofits would acknowledge that not all nonprofits deserve to be tax-exempt. Why shouldn't the elite outfits located in midtown Manhattan help pay for summer youth programs here? Surely their leaders recognize that this is not a trivial issue: Their own kids are already safe and busy basking on the beaches of Easthampton, horseback-riding in the Tetons or biking across the south of France.

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