

Preparing for Back to School and Navigating Summer in the Time of COVID-19

The summer of 2020 was an extraordinary one. While families found their summer plans disrupted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, summer programs did their best to adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19 and remain open for their communities, but struggled to meet the demand for their services.

Back-to-school season is shaping up to be one for the history books as well. Though school reopening plans include a mix of distance learning, in-person, and hybrid schedules as the country heads into the fall, a new survey of parents finds that parents feel ready to support their children's new educational needs. At the same time, parents express concerns about the new circumstances created by COVID-19, and greater appreciation of school-day and afterschool educators— 3 in 4 agree that the experience of the pandemic has made them appreciate school teachers and afterschool program providers more than ever, with working parents more likely to agree.

After six months in a COVID-19 world, with the continued uncertainty of when things will return to normal, this brief, *Preparing for Back to School and Navigating Summer in the Time of COVID-19*, combines findings from a survey of parents along with the second in a series of surveys of afterschool and summer providers to monitor the state of the afterschool field. The Wave 2 provider survey of 1,047 afterschool and summer program providers, conducted between July 20 and August 31, finds that providers are growing increasingly worried about their program's long-term sustainability. Nearly 9 in 10 providers report that they are concerned about long-term funding and the future of their program, with roughly 2 in 3 concerned about permanently closing their program.¹ Despite these struggles, these two new surveys find that programs continue to provide supports to the children and families in their communities, with strong majorities of parents believing in the value of afterschool and summer programs, as well as supporting public funding for these opportunities.

Programs report struggles in the midst of the pandemic

The country continues to struggle with the economic impact of the coronavirus, and afterschool and summer program providers report that they also feel these effects of the pandemic. Overall, 81% of program providers reported that they are concerned about the loss of funding to their program this year, with 39% "extremely" concerned, and 89% are concerned about the long-term funding and future of their program, with 43% "extremely" concerned. A full 64% are concerned about permanently closing their program, with 1 in 4 "extremely" concerned about their program's permanent closing.



Photo credit: Webber J. Charles, Breakthrough Miami

¹Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19 survey data are based on an online survey of afterschool and summer providers, conducted by Edge Research. Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19 Wave 2 data were collected July 20-August 31, surveying 1,047 program providers representing more than 7,600 program sites in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19 Wave 1 data were collected May 28-June 30, surveying 914 program providers representing more than 6,000 program sites in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

Parent survey data included in this brief is a nationally representative survey of 1,071 parents of school-aged children conducted online by Edge Research August 4-18, 2020.

When asked about their program's staffing concerns, more than three-quarters of program providers (76%) reported that they were concerned about the ability to find staff to hire and staffing shortages as a result of COVID-19 and 71% worry about having to lay off or furlough staff in the months to come.

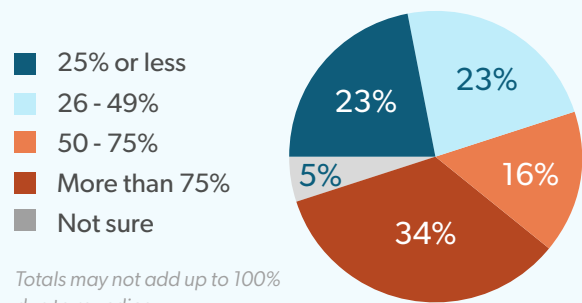
This summer, programs reported employing a smaller workforce, with 28% reporting laying off or furloughing staff and 44% reporting hiring fewer staff. Nearly 1 in 3 programs reported reducing staff hours (31%). Compared to the workforce in summer 2019, the summer program workforce in 2020 saw significant declines, with full-time staff decreasing by almost one-third and part-time staff dropping by 41%.

Widening inequities as the pandemic continues

Based on findings from the program provider survey and parent survey, it appears that disparities in regards to access to afterschool and summer programs are growing, with young people who stand to benefit the most being the least likely to connect to such opportunities. Programs serving majority children from higher-income families were almost two times as likely as programs serving majority children from low-income families² to report being physically open (73% vs. 38%). Among programs that were physically open, programs serving majority children from higher-income families were also much more likely to be open to all children, which includes children of essential and non-essential workers, than programs serving children from low-income families (95% vs. 73%).

An overwhelming majority of providers are concerned that there are children in their community who need summer programming and are not able to access it (69%) and that they are going to lose touch with students in need (79%).

Percentage of Summer Program Staff Who Have Been Laid Off or Furloughed



Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



²For the purposes of this brief, programs serving majority low-income families are defined as program providers who report serving more than 75% children who qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program and programs serving majority higher-income families are program providers who report serving less than 50% children who qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program.

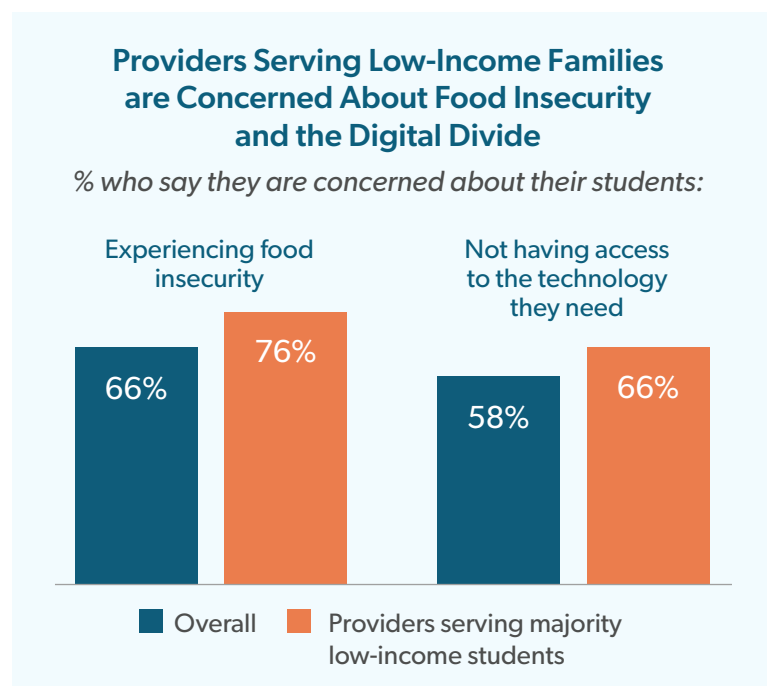
Similarly, 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program providers, who are mandated to serve lower-income communities, were less likely to report being physically open in some capacity this summer, compared to non-21st CCLC program providers (38% vs. 55%). It is worth noting that 21st CCLC program providers were also much more likely to report being located in a public school than non-21st CCLC programs (86% vs. 52%). With many schools remaining closed through the summer, the closures would have limited school-based providers' ability to provide services.

Looking to the fall, programs serving majority higher-income students were more likely than programs serving majority low-income students to report planning to serve students in person or employ a hybrid model during the fall (73% vs. 57%), with programs serving majority higher-income students close to three times as likely to be planning to provide in-person services only (44% vs. 15%).

On the other side of the coin, while close to half of parents (48%) are uncomfortable with the idea of sending their child to an afterschool program in person in the fall, parents in low-income households (52%), Black parents (55%), and Latinx parents (60%) are the least comfortable with sending their child to an in-person afterschool program in the fall, compared to 44% of white parents and 40% of parents in higher-income households.

High level of concern regarding the welfare of young people with limited resources

Afterschool and summer program providers also express concerns about food insecurity and technology needs, with concerns higher among providers serving majority low-income students. Additionally, 78% of providers serving majority low-income students said that it is "extremely" or "very" important to get more online resources and more student access to technology in their summer program compared to 53% of programs serving a majority of higher-income students. Low-income parents are also more likely to be very concerned about technology and internet access for their child to participate in distance learning compared to higher-income parents (50% vs. 40%).



Programs stepping up to meet needs, at least in the short term

In spite of the pandemic, summer program providers reported that they were open and serving kids, including the children of essential workers. Based on survey respondents, it appears that overall, summer programs were able to adapt to challenges the coronavirus posed and remain open in some capacity, with only 5% reporting that they were completely closed. This is a significant difference from the spring, when 26% of program providers reported that they were completely closed and not offering in-person or virtual services.

9 in 10 parents with a child in a summer program reported that they were satisfied with their child's overall summer experience, with more than half (57%) reporting that they were "extremely" satisfied.

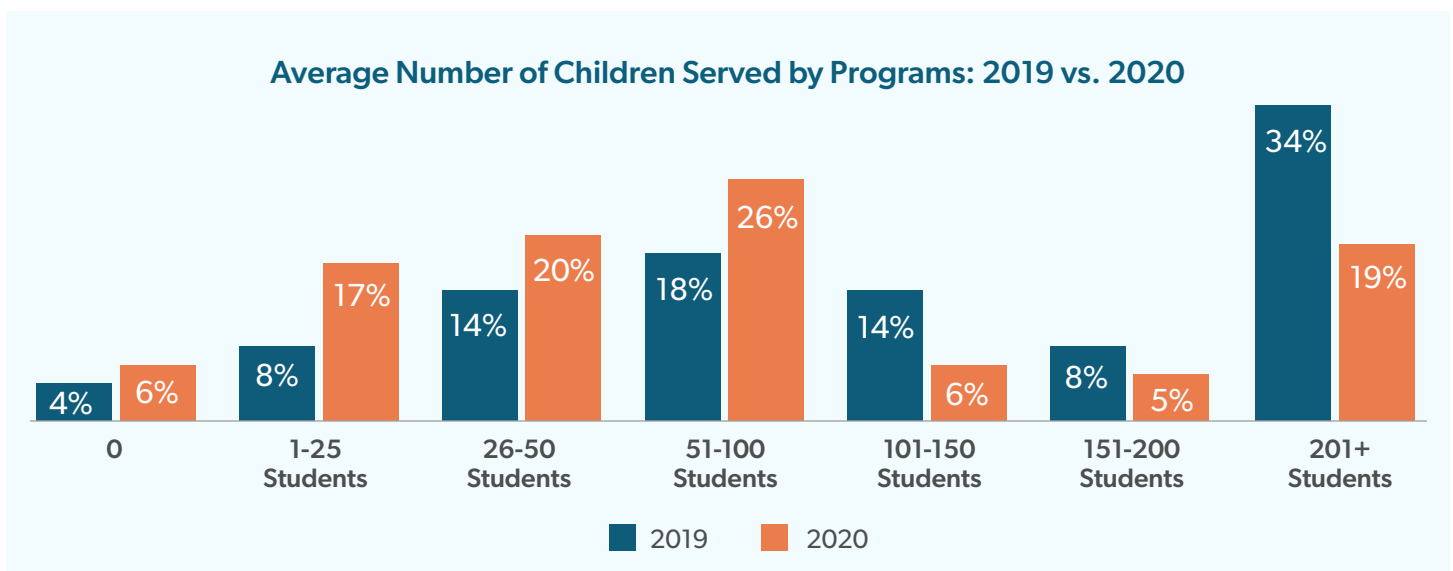
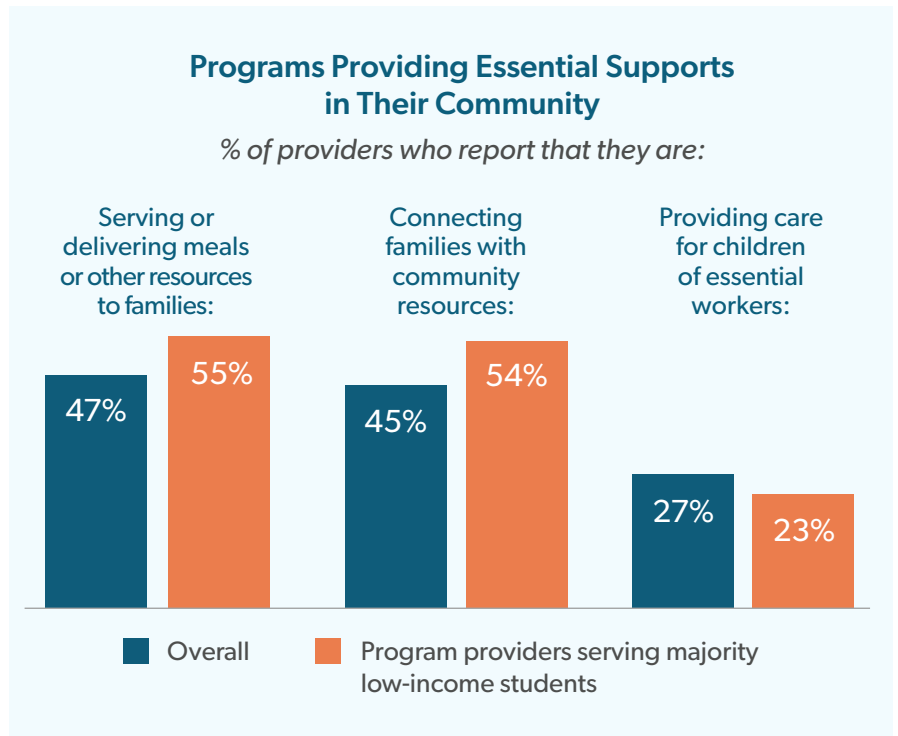
Half (49%) of programs reported that they were physically open in some capacity, 34% were physically closed but offering virtual programming, and 24% said that they were closed but delivering or offering new services for students and families. Among programs that were open in some capacity, 82% reported that they were physically open to all children rather than only children of essential workers, up 27 percentage points from the spring (55%).

Similar to Wave 1 results, programs continued to provide critical supports in their communities, including serving or delivering meals or other resources to families, connecting families to community resources, and providing care for the children of essential workers.

Although the data show programs were open, summer 2020 programs averaged serving approximately half as many children as compared to summer 2019. Due to social distancing guidelines and reduced student-to-staff ratios, summer program providers served smaller groups of students, compared to last summer.

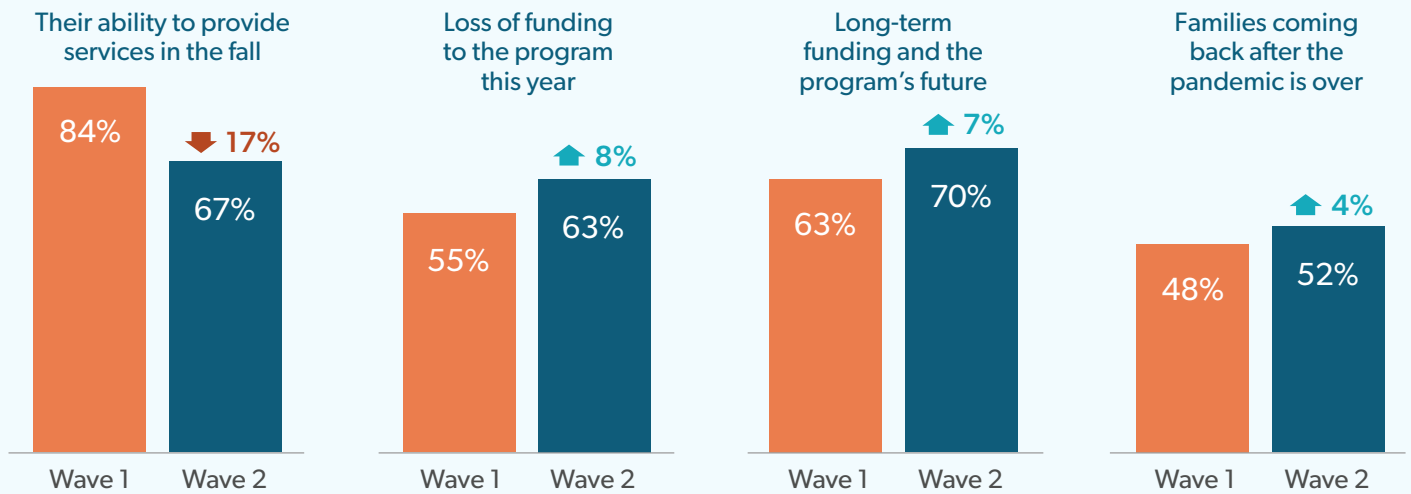
When asked about their fall programming, more than half of program providers plan to serve students either in person (23%) or in person and virtually (39%). Roughly 1 in 4 (27%) report that they will provide virtual service only.

While approximately three-quarters of parents agree that someone in their household will be able to provide learning support (76%) and child care (74%) if virtual school and distance learning continues, a plurality also express concerns about being able to juggle working remotely themselves and monitoring their child’s distance learning (48%), with concerns higher among parents living in urban communities and parents of elementary schoolers (59% and 56%, respectively).



Worries About the Long-Term Future of Afterschool Have Grown

% of providers reporting that they are extremely or very concerned about the following:



A growing uncertainty

Although program providers are less concerned than they were in the spring about their ability to provide services this fall, more program providers are worried about their long-term future, in particular in the face of new protocols, new safety procedures, and, potentially new operational logistics. 3 in 4 programs are concerned about the ability to serve families who will need afterschool programs for longer periods of time due to schools' mix of virtual and in-person teaching, 65% are concerned about maintaining adequate staff through health concerns and new procedures, and 61% are concerned about availability of physical space to offer programming while meeting public health guidelines.

Feelings about the future of afterschool have not changed much since the spring, though optimism is dimming. Providers who are optimistic about the future of their afterschool program dropped below half, from 52% to 47%, and providers who feel that the worst is to come increased from 23% to 30%.



Parents value programs and want more public funding

Parents see afterschool and summer programs as critical during the unprecedented situation created by the coronavirus, with 77% of parents agreeing that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs and 80% agreeing that schools and afterschool programs need to collaborate locally on the best ways to meet families' needs. Nearly half of parents (49%) say that they are likely to have their child participate in an afterschool program in some form, whether in-person, virtually, or a hybrid model.

Parents also believe in public funding to support afterschool and summer programs, with an overwhelming majority of parents in favor of public funding for afterschool opportunities (84%) and summer learning opportunities (84%).

Parents overall agree that afterschool programs inspire kids to learn, keep them safe, and help working parents

Connection to learning

70% of parents agree that afterschool programs will provide additional academic support to help children catch up and keep up in school

60% of parents agree that afterschool programs will help parents build connections to their child's school day education

Keeping kids safe

71% of parents agree that afterschool programs will keep kids safe and out of trouble

Supporting social and emotional wellbeing

75% of parents agree that afterschool programs will allow kids to build positive relationships with caring adults

Support working parents

7 in 10 parents agree that afterschool programs will provide working parents peace of mind (**71%**) and will help working parents keep their jobs (**71%**)

