

# Back to School in the Time of COVID-19

“While this year is a challenge for all of us, I am grateful to be able to be the support that families need right now. While many in our community are still working remotely, there are others who are unable to do so and we are able to assist them through these difficult times.” The *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* Wave 3 survey finds that afterschool program providers are rising to meet the challenges posed by the continuing pandemic. In a sampling of responses, program providers also share, “Adaptive programming has allowed for new opportunities to hone in on specific learning needs while offering a more targeted learning approach through afterschool, both in-person and virtual.” “We were able to move into the virtual world and become a program that feels confident we can provide in-person and virtual services, and that makes our programming even more valuable than it was before.” “We are needed and appreciated by our families. We feel we are serving an important group of families that depend on us greatly. We are thankful for this opportunity.”

Afterschool programs are adapting to the various school reopening scenarios that are being implemented across the country. The Wave 3 survey provides a snapshot of the education landscape in the United States, focusing on how afterschool program providers are supporting and complementing school-day learning as schools operate in person, virtually, and with hybrid schedules.

As schools and families deal with the rapidly changing local circumstances related to the coronavirus, afterschool programs are stepping up and tailoring their services to support students and address gaps: extending program hours, offering access to healthy meals and services, and providing care to the children of essential workers. *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* Wave 3 data were collected from Sep. 28 to Oct. 27, surveying 1,445 program providers representing more than 7,300 program sites in 48 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

## Breakdown of program providers responding to the *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* Wave 3 survey

### School or school district operating status

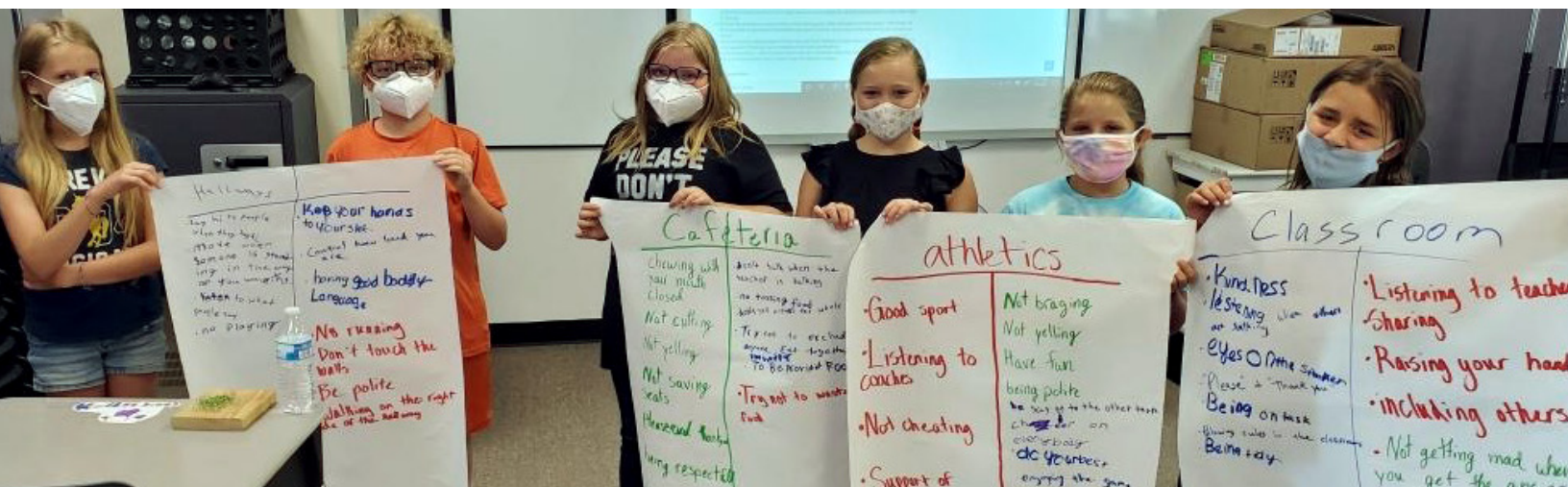
- 17% Open in-person for some or all students
- 55% Hybrid
- 22% All virtual
- 5% Other

### Community type

- 42% Urban
- 37% Rural
- 28% Suburban

### % of students served qualifying for the federal free or reduced price lunch program

- 54% More than 75%
- 19% 50-75%
- 11% 26-49%
- 7% 25% or less



<sup>1</sup> *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* survey data are based on online surveys of afterschool and summer providers, conducted by Edge Research. *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* Wave 3 data were collected Sept. 28-Oct. 27, surveying 1,445 program providers representing more than 7,300 program sites in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Wave 2 data were collected from Jul. 20 to Aug. 31, surveying 1,047 program providers representing more than 7,600 program sites in 49 states and the District of Columbia. Wave 1 data were collected from May 28 to Jun. 30, surveying 914 program providers representing more than 6,000 program sites in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

## More afterschool programs opening their doors to students this fall

More afterschool programs are finding ways to provide in-person services, in at least some capacity, this fall than in the spring and summer. The percentage of programs physically open grew from 19% in the spring, to 49% in the summer, to 68% now. Only 3% of programs report that they are currently completely closed, compared to approximately 1 in 4 programs (26%) that were closed in the spring.

### This fall, afterschool programs are largely open and serving students and families

*% of program providers reporting their operating status this fall*

We are physically open in at least some capacity

68%

We are physically closed, but offering virtual programming for students and families

24%

We are physically closed, but delivering or offering new services for students and families

10%

Other

5%

We are completely closed

3%

Not applicable

1%

*Total will not equal 100% as program providers were able to select all answers that applied.*

Among programs that are physically open, 83% are open to all children — a significant increase from the spring, when 55% of providers reported that they were serving students in person. Almost all providers offering in-person services report instituting health and safety protocols at their programs, with 92% of programs establishing new cleaning protocols, employing social distancing, requiring students and staff to wear masks, and/or reducing student-to-staff ratios.



## Afterschool programs adapting to the new normal of virtual school

When asked about the types of supports being provided in response to COVID-19, a majority of programs (53%) report taking on a new role necessitated by COVID – providing a safe, supervised learning environment during virtual school days. Of programs that are physically open, 1 in 4 report having extended program hours in order to accommodate students during virtual school days. Programs have extended their hours to be open longer during the school day (76%), after school (30%), and before school (26%).

Programs that are physically open in some capacity and report that their school district or local schools are operating on an all-virtual schedule are more than twice as likely to report that they have extended their hours to operate in person than programs overall (59% vs. 25%).

## Demand for in-person programming

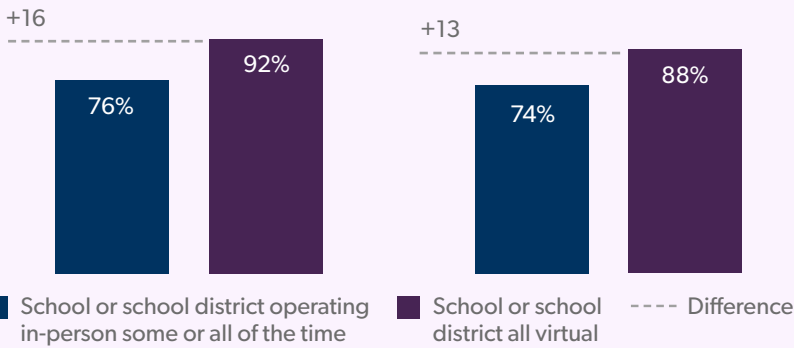
This fall, many program providers report that they are not able to accommodate all the students who need their services. Close to 2 in 5 program providers who offer in-person programming (38%) report that there is a waitlist for their program. Providers whose school or school district is on an all-virtual schedule and are offering in-person services are even more likely to report having a waitlist (48%).

### Program providers in schools or school districts that are on all-virtual schedules are worried about students who are unable to access afterschool programs

% of program providers reporting that they are concerned about the following:

Children in their community who need afterschool programming and are not able to access it

Ability to meet the needs of families who will need programs for longer periods of time due to schools' operations



Differences in calculations may be due to rounding.

While demand for services is high, programs are operating at reduced capacity. The average number of students that programs anticipate serving this fall is half the number they report having served last fall, decreasing from an average of 435 to just 205 children. The number of programs reporting serving 50 or fewer students increased by 17 percentage points and the number of programs reporting serving more than 200 students decreased by 17 percentage points—which may be due in part to implementation of health and safety guidelines.

A higher percentage of providers whose school or school district is on an all-virtual schedule are worried about the children in their communities who need afterschool programs but are unable to access them, as well as their program's ability to meet the growing needs of families.



Source: The 50 State Afterschool Network

## Afterschool programs provide comprehensive supports this fall

Once again, afterschool programs, in particular those serving families that are further away from economic opportunity, are providing supports including food assistance and connecting families to community resources. Roughly half of respondents (53%) report serving as a meals site, delivering meals, or distributing other resources to families and connecting families with community resources (47%). Among programs that are physically open, 77% offer onsite snacks and/or meals to students. Additionally, 58% of programs overall report serving youth remotely and finding alternate ways to stay connected to young people.

**21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs that are open are much more likely than non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs to offer onsite snacks and meals (86% vs. 70%).**

Programs that serve mostly children living in low-income households are more likely than programs overall to report serving as a meals site or delivering meals or other resources (61% vs. 53%) and connecting families with community resources (55% vs. 47%).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, programs supported by the federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiative (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs) that serve primarily students in families with low incomes are more likely than non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs to serve as a meals site or deliver meals or other resources to families (58% vs. 48%) and connect families with community resources (52% vs. 43%). 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs that are open are also much more likely than non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs that are open to offer onsite snacks and meals (86% vs. 70%).

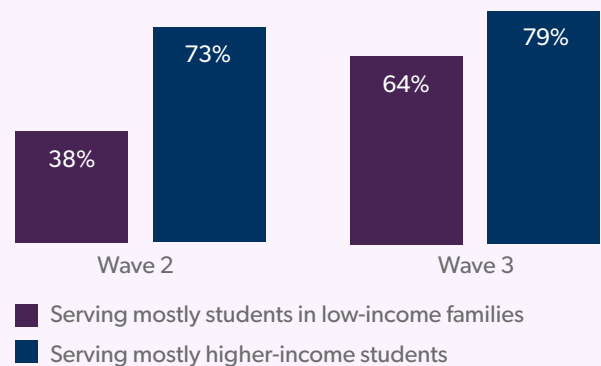
More programs are reporting that they are providing care for children of essential workers than in earlier waves of this survey, with 42% of programs reporting that they are currently providing this service, up from 18% in the spring and 27% in the summer.

## Access to afterschool programs remain unequal

A key finding from the *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19 Wave 2* survey was the emerging disparity in access to in-person afterschool programs between higher-income students and their peers in families with low incomes. While the gap has dramatically narrowed from the summer, programs serving mostly higher-income students continue to be more likely to report being physically open than programs serving mostly students in families with low incomes (79% vs. 64%). Afterschool programs that rely solely on parent fees are also much more likely to be physically open than programs overall (79% vs. 68%).

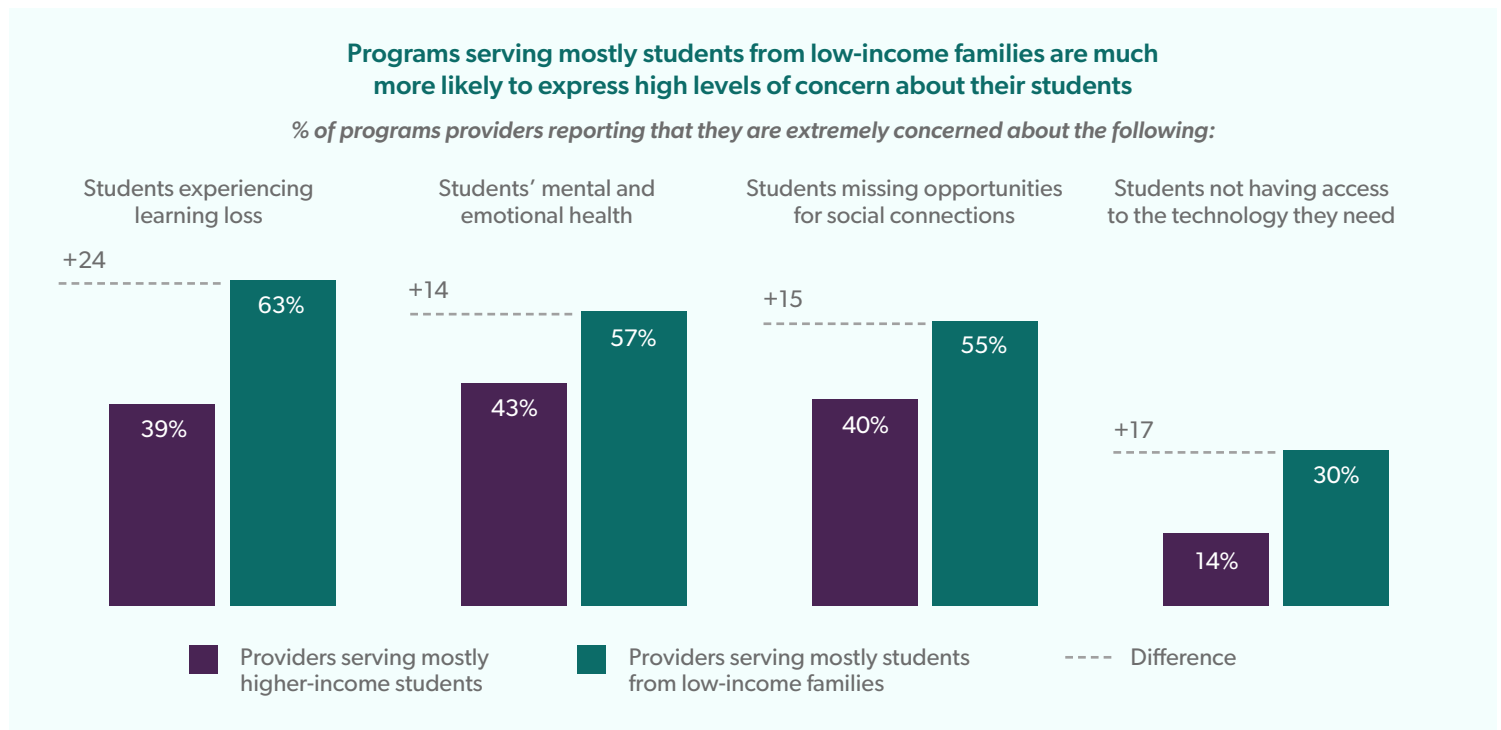
### Programs serving mostly higher-income students more likely to offer in-person services

% of program providers reporting that they are open to students in person in some capacity



<sup>2</sup>For 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.

At the same time, many more providers serving mostly students from low-income households are concerned about students' learning and well-being than providers serving mostly students from households that are higher income. For example, 63% of providers at programs that serve mostly students from low-income households are extremely concerned that their students are experiencing learning loss, 24 percentage points higher than providers at programs serving mostly students from higher-income families.



### ***Logistical challenges greater at programs serving students in families with low incomes and programs with schools or school districts on all-virtual schedules***

When asked what primary factors are preventing them from serving students in person, nearly 2 in 3 of the program providers that are not offering in-person services this fall (63%) report that ongoing changes to school district policies and procedures is a contributing factor. This is the second most common reason after concerns about the health and safety of staff and students (66%).

An additional logistical challenge is that roughly 1 in 4 program providers overall (26%) report that they are not operating in their usual location and space this fall. Reasons include schools being closed to community partners (58%) and not enough space for social distancing in their usual locations (30%). One in ten providers (11%) report that there is no way to safely handle transportation from the school to their usual location.

Programs serving mostly students in families with low incomes report many more logistical challenges. For instance, this group of program providers is more likely to report that they are not operating at their normal location than programs serving higher-income students (30% vs. 19%). 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program providers who are not open in person are much more likely than non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs to report that ongoing changes to school district policies and procedures is a primary factor preventing them from providing in-person services (70% vs. 55%). A greater share of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program providers are located in a public school (87%) than non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs (52%).

Schools' all-virtual schedules have also created challenges for afterschool programs trying to offer in-person services. A majority of program providers whose schools or school district has instituted an all-virtual schedule say that they are not able to operate in their usual space this fall, which is 3.5 times higher than programs whose schools are operating in-person fully or partially (53% vs. 15%). This group of programs overwhelmingly report that they are unable to operate in their usual location because schools are closed to community partners (71%).

## **Program sustainability remains a concern for most program providers**

Although providers' level of concern about their future is not as high as it was in the summer, most continue to express worries about their sustainability, with 87% saying they are concerned about their program's long-term funding and future. Nearly 2 in 3 providers (64%) are concerned that their program will not be able to provide services—in person or virtually—next fall, during the 2021-22 school year. A similar percentage (61%) report that they are concerned about having to permanently close their program.

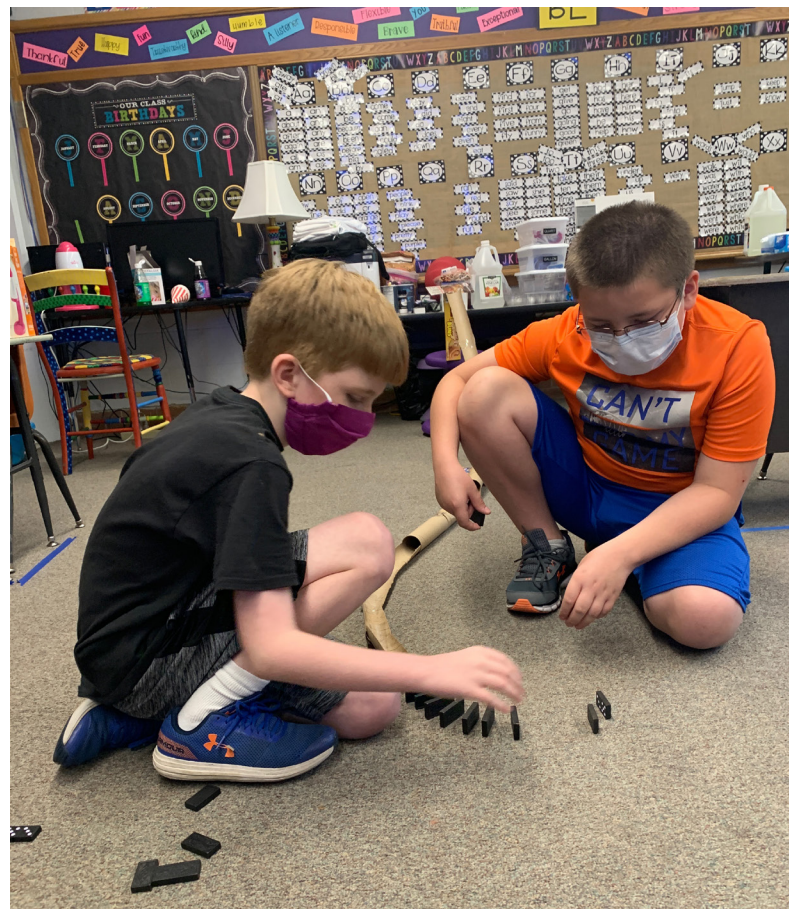
When asked if the pandemic continues into 2021, which best describes their program's likely situation if they do not receive additional financial support, 28% of programs say that they will have to raise parent fees or find new sources of revenue. Close to 1 in 5 programs (17%) say that their program will have to shut down.

Programs serving mostly students in families with low incomes are much more likely than programs serving mostly higher-income students to report that their program will have to shut down (21% vs. 13%). Uncertainty is also much higher among programs serving mostly students from families with low incomes, with 30% reporting that they are unsure what they will do; only 22% of programs serving mostly higher-income students gave that answer.

Programs serving mostly higher-income students are twice as likely as programs serving mostly students from families with low incomes to expect to have to raise costs for parents or find new sources of revenue (42% vs. 21%).

### **In the Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19 Wave 3 survey, program providers share the logistical challenges they face**

- “ We [are] able to operate in the schools we have used in the past but we are not using classroom spaces and have been restricted to large group spaces such as the cafeteria or the library. We are doing as much programing outside as possible.
- “ We are using our school's outdoor areas: playground, blacktop, fields, but not indoor [areas] except for bathrooms. We don't have permission from the district to operate indoors at this time.
- “ Transportation shortage as the school district has lost 15 bus drivers.
- “ We are serving as a virtual learning hub at our physical location. While we do typically provide programming at this space, we usually provide our afterschool programming at a school in our neighborhood.



## A work in progress

Afterschool program providers report that they are working with schools and school districts, but greater coordination is needed to meet urgent needs created by the pandemic. Fully 84% of providers are concerned about meeting the needs of families who will need afterschool programs for longer periods of time due to schools' mix of virtual and in-person teaching. More than 9 in 10 (91%) are concerned about their students experiencing trauma, with 37% describing themselves as extremely concerned.

It is an encouraging sign that 70% of program providers report being involved in conversations organized by their school district or individual schools about how best to support students' learning this fall. This is an improvement from the spring and summer survey waves, when only 62% and 60% of programs respectively said that they were involved in conversations with school districts and schools about how and when to safely reopen schools.

However, program providers' concerns about the future persist. While 53% report being optimistic about the future, only 1 in 5 believes the worst is over. With a strong majority of providers (62%) reporting that they are currently providing or planning to provide a safe, supervised learning environment during virtual school days, and 70% reporting that they are currently providing or planning to provide services to reach youth remotely in order to stay connected to them, even more afterschool programs are finding ways to meet the needs of their students and families during these immensely challenging times.

### Afterschool programs report a mixed picture on staffing changes this fall

**21%** have laid off or furloughed staff

**25%** have reduced hours of staff

**36%** have hired fewer staff

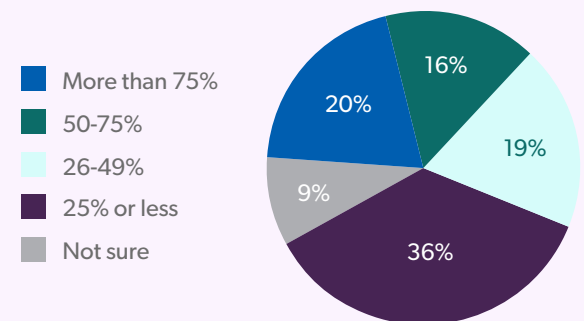
**16%** have hired more staff

**11%** increased hours of staff

*Totals are greater than 100% as providers could select all that apply.*

Among programs that laid off or furloughed staff, more than one-third (36%) report that they laid off or furloughed at least half of their program staff.

### Percent of afterschool program staff who have been laid off or furloughed



Source: The 50 State Afterschool Network



Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs.