

# New England After 3PM



# Spotlight on Maine



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## Introduction

*Can afterschool programs support the success and safety of children in Maine? Do working families rely on the services these programs provide? Should afterschool programs offer enrichment and recreational activities, as well as academic support? Should they continue over the summer?*

The Afterschool Alliance and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation have been exploring the answers to questions like these throughout New England in a series of reports designed to examine afterschool in the region today. *Spotlight on Maine* is the fifth installment of the Afterschool Alliance's *New England After 3 PM* series, and the first to focus exclusively on afterschool and summer programs in Maine. The first four installments focused on afterschool in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island, exploring the views of parents, program providers, municipal leaders, principals and superintendents. The complete *New England After 3 PM* series is available online at [www.afterschoolalliance.org/NE\\_3pm.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/NE_3pm.cfm).

In developing *Spotlight on Maine*, the Afterschool Alliance worked with the Maine Afterschool Network, in cooperation with the Maine Principals' Association, to survey school principals in the state. The survey, distributed via the Internet in May 2008, asked Maine school principals about their views on school-based afterschool and summer programs in their communities and the role these programs play in supporting student success. The Afterschool Alliance received responses from 194 school principals, representing more than one-third of the 525 principals contacted through the Maine Principals' Association. All responses are voluntary and anonymous.

In this survey, school leaders voice strong support for afterschool and summer programs. Almost all principals surveyed say that it's important for all children and youth to have access to quality, affordable summer programs, and a majority agrees that high-quality summer learning opportunities should primarily focus on a balance of enrichment, recreational activities and academics. Principals throughout the state say that there are many more students who would benefit from participating in a summer program; however, they do not have enough funding to meet the demand. Maine principals also say that afterschool programs are an absolute necessity and that federal and state elected officials are not doing all they should to meet the need for afterschool and summer programs in their communities.

## Maine Principals Value Afterschool and Summer Programs and See a Need for More Opportunities for their Students

In Maine, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC), the only federal funding stream dedicated to afterschool, provides funds for before-school, afterschool and summer programs, serving primarily Title I students. Schools, community-based organizations, and other public, private or faith-based organizations can apply for these grants. Currently in Maine there are 129 schools serving more than 10,000 students through 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC—or about five percent of K-12 students. While more than half of survey respondents (56 percent) say they were aware of the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative prior to taking the survey, only a small fraction say their school has funding from the state-administered federal program.

"All children need access to enriching programs and not just those who can afford it. The low socio-economic children in our society keep having fewer and fewer opportunities as compared to their peers whose families can afford to give them enriching opportunities and who know how to look for these opportunities."

-- Maine Principal and Survey Respondent

- 🔔 Forty-three percent of respondents say their school does not provide a summer program that includes a coordinated offering of academic, enrichment and recreational activities.
- 🔔 Two in three of those surveyed say they do not have an afterschool program at their school that operates 10 or more hours per week before and/or after school and has a coordinated offering of academic and enrichment activities.
- 🔔 Only 16 percent of respondents report that their school receives 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding.

Regardless of funding or the availability of afterschool and summer programs in their schools, principals agree that it's important for all children and youth to have access to afterschool and summer programs. An overwhelming majority also say that there are more students in their schools who could benefit from a program, who are currently not participating.

- 🔔 Ninety-seven percent say that it's important for all children and youth to have access to quality, affordable summer programs. Seventy-two percent agree that it's very important.
- 🔔 Ninety-three percent of respondents say there are students at their school who could benefit from participating in a summer program who currently do not participate.
- 🔔 Eighty-nine percent of respondents agree that afterschool programs are an absolute necessity in their community. Fifty-six percent strongly agree.

## **Principals Believe Academics, Enrichment and Recreation Are All Critical to a Quality Summer Learning Experience**

When it comes to the components of a summer program, principals place top priority on academic support such as tutoring—but there is unanimous agreement that a quality summer program should offer a range of activities, including recreational sports and experiential hands-on learning, that meet a variety of developmental needs.

- 🔔 Seventy-six percent say that the primary focus of a high-quality summer program should be a combination of academics, enrichment and recreational activities. Only 18 percent say the primary focus should be solely on academic support, and five percent say the focus should be solely on enrichment and recreation.

"In most families today, one or both of a student's parents have to work through the summer, often leaving their children to fend for themselves. Often that means sitting around watching television or hanging out. Kids need exercise, intellectual stimulation and challenge, and positive engagement with other peers and adults. Summer programs for children and young adults that are active, engaging, and intellectually enriching are enormously valuable for those individuals, for their families, and for their communities. The evidence in our community is that kids who participate in our summer programs make greater progress in school, are fitter, and happier than those who do not."

-- Maine Principal and Survey Respondent

- 🔔 Almost all principals (99 percent) say that academic support is somewhat important or very important. More than eight in ten also agree on the importance of enrichment, recreation, hands-on learning and life skills, but to varying degrees.

Q. In your opinion, how important is it for summer programs to offer the following activities?

	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important
Academic support such as tutoring	0.5%	0.5%	0%	13.7%	85.2%
Enrichment such as creative/performing arts	2.8%	2.8%	7.8%	43.3%	43.3%
Recreational sports and exercise	2.2%	4.4%	8.3%	38.1%	47%
Hands-on learning such as building an electric car	4.4%	4.4%	11.6%	42%	37.6%
Life skills	1.7%	3.4%	13.5%	41.6%	39.9%

## Maine Principals Need More Support to Provide Afterschool and Summer Programs for All

Maine principals are committed to meeting the needs of the children and youth that they serve. They recognize the potential of afterschool and summer programs to provide supports that have an impact in the classroom. More than eight in ten principals agree that making good use of the summer months has the potential to level the playing field for American children. Thirty-six percent are in strong agreement.

Yet, in order to help level the playing field for all children, school leaders need the support from federal and state policy makers to make the summer and afterschool opportunities more widely available.

- 🔔 Seventy-two percent of survey respondents say that the federal government is not doing all it should to meet the need for afterschool programs.
- 🔔 Three in four think the Maine state government is not doing all it should to meet the need for afterschool programs in their communities.
- 🔔 When asked about funding specifically for summer programs, more than half (51 percent) say they do not have enough funding to meet the demand for programs at their schools. Thirty percent say they have no funding at all for summer programs. Only 16 percent say they have enough funding to meet the demand for summer programs at their schools.

- 🔔 Thirty-seven percent say funding is down a little (15 percent) or a lot (22 percent) for summer programs compared to five years ago. Twenty-six percent of respondents say they have about the same amount of funding for summer programs as they did five years ago. Another one-quarter of respondents are not sure how funding now compares to funding in years past.

"In a small rural area like ours, we do not have a summer recreation program so whatever the kids get for activities and academic support comes from the school. If we do not do it, then our kids are missing out."

"Some students lose ground over the summer, therefore putting them behind before the next year starts. We can offer more diversified programming to reach all learners in a summer program, as the day is free to structure, which is not the case in the regular school year, with all the requirements we need to meet. Summer programs that are done right will create a love of learning for students."

-- Maine Principals and Survey Respondents

## **Community Partners Are Important to Providing Quality Afterschool for All**

Although most respondents want more students to have access to afterschool and summer programs, and support increased investment, some express concern that schools are being asked to do too much. While principals are generally supportive of these programs, not all agree that the school is the appropriate venue for summer recreation and enrichment. One respondent writes, "I'm afraid that schools are being expected to carry the responsibility burden where they shouldn't." Some respondents note that, in their communities, community organizations, parks and recreation departments and other partners in the school district are already sharing the responsibility to provide academic, enrichment and recreational opportunities to meet the needs of their students.

Community organizations can play an important role in the out-of-school time field and do provide quality afterschool and summer programs throughout Maine—sometimes in partnership with schools, and sometimes not. While this survey cannot quantify the extent of those opportunities from this survey, it does provide some key insights into the level of partnership between schools and public, private and community organizations that share the responsibility of providing school-based programs.

- 🔔 Of the principals who say they have an **afterschool program** available at their school, almost three in four (73 percent) say they have at least one community partner. Twenty-one percent say they have at least three community partners.
- 🔔 Of the principals who say a **summer program** is available at their school, 59 percent say they have at least one community partner. Eleven percent say they have at least three community partners.

These school-community partnerships can be critical to the sustainability and success of a quality afterschool and summer program.

## Maine Principals Join the Charge for Afterschool—and Summer Programming—for All

Examining the findings from this survey in the context of other existing research illustrates that Maine’s school leaders’ views align with the prevailing national view that many more students could benefit from quality afterschool and summer programs, and that these programs are a great necessity for our communities. According to *America After 3 PM*, the Afterschool Alliance’s groundbreaking household survey of Americans’ views on afterschool released in 2004, more than 50,000 Maine youth (23 percent) are responsible for taking care of themselves in the hours after school. These hours are the most dangerous, because they are when youth are most likely to be perpetrators or victims of crime, and to engage in drinking, drug use or sexual activity. Afterschool programs not only keep kids away from these dangerous activities, but also engage them in enrichment and learning opportunities, connect them with caring adults and mentors, and many offer opportunities to learn and grow in the summer.

Research also suggests that quality summer learning opportunities, such as those that combine academic, enrichment and recreational activities, have the potential to fill the learning gap that occurs when children are out of school for the summer—particularly for students with limited access to enriching, informal learning opportunities such as vacations, trips to libraries and museums, sports leagues and recreation camps. More than 100 years of research finds that all children score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do when it begins.<sup>i,ii</sup> A study comparing the long-term academic outcomes of children with early access to quality summer learning opportunities and children without enriching summer opportunities found that two-thirds of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. Also, the study found that the consequences of the summer learning shortfall continue well into high school and beyond.<sup>iii</sup>

Public support for afterschool programs is overwhelming. A November 2006 poll commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance found that eight in ten voters believe there should be some type of organized activity or safe place for children and teens to go after the school day ends that gives them opportunities to learn. Nationally, more than seven in ten voters want elected officials at all levels—federal, state and local—to increase funding for afterschool.

This survey indicates that Maine education leaders agree that federal and state officials are not doing enough to support afterschool and summer programs. With bipartisan support in Congress, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, the only federal funding stream dedicated to afterschool, received a slight increase in

“We structure our summer programs to keep an academic focus and to maintain smaller student: teacher ratios. The instruction is delivered using an integrated approach that includes multi-stage groupings, weekly thematic studies, a greater emphasis on the arts, and using the local community and surrounding attractions as living learning sites. Students who struggle during the school year flourish in this kind of program. Many of them develop a much more positive outlook on school. Others maintain basic literacy skill levels and are better prepared for school in the fall. The children also develop positive relationships with adults other than their classroom teacher, meaning that they see the summer school staff as mentors/advocates during the school year. These factors have created a very successful summer school program for a limited number of students.”

-- Maine Principal and Survey Respondent

FY2008—the first increase since 2002. It was great news for students, families and communities in Maine, because it made this year the first since 2004 that new 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants were awarded in the state. However, President Bush has proposed a budget for FY2009 that would cut 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding by 27 percent.

While there is no federal funding stream specifically for summer programs, more than half of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs offer summer programming. In addition, Congress recently passed the Summer Term Education Programs for Upward Performance Act (STEP UP), which would create summer learning opportunities in five states. The program was authorized as part of the America COMPETES Act, but it does not yet have funding.

It is clear that parents and community and education leaders across Maine want to make afterschool and summer programs available to all students who want and need them. *America After 3 PM* found that the parents of 43 percent of children and youth in that state say their children would be likely to participate in an afterschool program if one were available to them. To date, more than 70 partners in Maine have joined *Afterschool for All*, a national sign-on campaign of community leaders and concerned citizens who believe that young people deserve positive, enriching opportunities after school and in the summer. Community and education leaders who have pledged their support



include Governor John Baldacci and First Lady Karen Baldacci, the Maine Children's Alliance and the Governor's Children's Cabinet, as well as former Portland Mayor Nathan H. Smith.

Federal lawmakers in Maine also are showing support for afterschool and summer programs with strong representation in the Senate and House Afterschool Caucuses, a bipartisan coalition of congressional leaders working to support afterschool. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), a Founding Member, and Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) have joined the Senate Afterschool Caucus, and Congressmen Michael Michaud (D-ME) and Tom Allen (D-ME) the House Afterschool Caucus.

*"It is important to provide children with an afterschool program that offers parents an option in providing a safe and enriching environment for their children after the school bell rings. As a founding member of the Afterschool Caucus, I worked with my colleagues to secure a \$100 million increase in federal afterschool funding in fiscal year 2008—the first increase in five years—and I will work to continue this trend so that the 14 million children who go home alone after the school day ends have the option to participate in high-quality, safe, afterschool programs."*

**--Senator Susan Collins**

State lawmakers also are taking initial steps to help meet the demand for afterschool and summer programs. The 123rd Maine Legislature passed Resolve Chapter 211, "Resolve, To Study Ways To Increase Access to Afterschool Programs." It directs the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education to study ways to fund afterschool programs where there are currently none, and to report to the legislature in January 2009.

This report is designed to be one more stepping stone on the path to afterschool for all for Maine and the rest of the country. *Spotlight on Maine* demonstrates that principals strongly believe in the value of afterschool and summer programs, and see a real need to open more programs for children, youth and families. The voices of these education leaders are a powerful addition to the chorus of voices, across Maine, New England and the country, who are calling for afterschool for all.



## Acknowledgments

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<sup>i</sup> White, W.S. (1906). Reviews before and afterschool vacation. *American Education*, 10, 185-188.

<sup>ii</sup> Miller, B.M. (2007). *The learning season: The untapped power of summer to advance student achievement*. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

<sup>iii</sup> Alexander, K., Entwisle, D., Olson, L. (2007). Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72, 167-180.