



April 2022

# Promoting Healthy Futures:

Afterschool Provides the Supports  
Parents Want for Children's Well-Being



# Methodology

America After 3PM is a nationally representative survey of randomly selected adults who live in the United States and are the parent or guardian of a school-age child who lives in their household. The survey was conducted using a blend of national consumer panels, with the goal of completing at least 200 interviews in every state and Washington, D.C. In states where this goal could not be reached using online panels, supplementary telephone interviews were conducted. This is the second wave of America After 3PM to be carried out using an online survey and supplementary telephone interviews, after the 2004 and 2009 waves were conducted using paper surveys distributed through the U.S. mail and using random-digit telephone dialing. For the 2020 wave of America After 3PM, interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

America After 3PM data included in this report was collected between January 27 and March 17, 2020. A total of 31,055 households were surveyed and answered questions regarding

ways in which their child or children are cared for in the hours after school, participation in organized activities, participation in summer experiences, and demographics. A subset of households, 14,391 respondents, answered a series of follow up questions regarding afterschool experiences or barriers to participation in afterschool, and perceptions of afterschool programs. Data from interviews are weighted on race and income within state and by state population. The overall margin of error for child-level and household-level data is +/- < 1 percent.

Projections for child-level data represent the 57.4 million children and youth in the United States based on numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau's October 2018 Current Population Survey.

National and state America After 3PM data can be found on the interactive data dashboard at: [afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/](https://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/).

This report includes both photos taken pre-pandemic and photos taken during the pandemic.



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# Introduction

**For Susan Prandhan, ourBRIDGE for KIDS, an afterschool program that primarily serves the immigrant and refugee community in Charlotte, North Carolina, made all the difference.**

Born in the Sanischare refugee camp in Eastern Nepal, Susanna came to the United States with her family when she was just 11 years old. Her transition to a new country was difficult. "The language barrier and the culture shock almost felt tangible. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I was bullied because I did not fit the mold the other students were expecting. Everything I did, or did not do, seemed to be a problem," Susanna, now an alumna of ourBRIDGE explained.

But after joining the program, things began to change. "[ourBRIDGE] provided me a safe space where I could thrive academically and socially without fearing judgement from others," Susanna said. "The program helped me improve in English and other school subjects and exposed me to extracurriculars and different aspects of American culture through field trips and camping. Interacting with intelligent and compassionate tutors and volunteers from all walks of life at ourBRIDGE made my experience worthwhile."

Susanna is one of countless young people for whom afterschool and summer enrichment programs have made life-changing differences, providing access to a set of essential holistic supports, such as safe and supportive spaces, caring adult mentors, and help building confidence in who they are and who they can become. These programs are critical for helping young people navigate childhood and adolescence by providing opportunities to build life skills, such as learning to interact positively with others and working collaboratively.

"ourBRIDGE and the experiences I have had because of the program have shaped me into who I am today," Susanna said. Describing herself as, "a young woman who is determined, confident, and not afraid to stand up for what she believes is right. I am constantly seeking new opportunities to challenge myself to learn, grow, and stretch my horizon to become a better leader and, most importantly, a better human being."

Afterschool and summer programs like Susanna's are vital to communities across the nation. They work with students, families, schools, and other community partners, helping provide the positive settings, relationships, and experiences that are the foundational building blocks for young people's healthy development.

That has never been more clear than over the last two years. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns about the well-being of young people have become paramount. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), mental health-related

emergency room visits by 12- to 17-year-olds in 2020 increased 31 percent compared to 2019, and multiple surveys show parents' growing concerns for their children's well-being. For example, an October 2020 Pew Research Center survey found that the majority of parents of school-age children (59 percent) said that they are more worried about their child's emotional well-being than before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> And an early spring 2021 survey by Learning Heroes found that children missing out on social connections and friendships were parents' top concern, 14 percentage points higher than worries about their child falling behind academically (40 percent vs. 26 percent).<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing the serious impact the pandemic has had on young people's health and well-being, in October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association joined together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health.<sup>3</sup>

**"ourBRIDGE and the experiences I have had because of the program have shaped me into who I am."**

Afterschool and summer programs have an important role to play in supporting the healthy development of young people, and are all the more critical today. But the soaring demand for programs is far from being met.

*Promoting Healthy Futures: Afterschool Provides the Supports Parents Want for Children's Well-Being* is the fifth report in a series of publications that examines findings from the 2020 edition of *America After 3PM*, a pre-pandemic national household survey of more than 31,000 parents of school-age children. It takes a closer look at parents' perceptions of afterschool programs, their priorities for their children, and whether, prior to the pandemic, afterschool programs were supporting the healthy development of the children they serve and were positioned to do so going forward. This report also tracks changes over time, comparing 2009, 2014, and 2020 *America After 3PM* survey results to identify gaps in supports and areas of opportunity for policymakers and communities to ensure that young people have the necessary resources to persevere through the pandemic and emerge on the other side healthy, happy, and hopeful.

# Key findings

## I. Parents increasingly view afterschool as important to the healthy development of children

From building social skills and positive relationships with mentors to keeping kids safe in the hours after school, the 2020 America After 3PM study finds that parents overwhelmingly agree that programs are providing a broad set of supports for children that are integral to their healthy development.

- **Parents agree that afterschool programs support young people's healthy development:** More than 8 in 10 parents agree that afterschool programs provide opportunities for young people to engage with their peers and reduce unproductive screen time (85 percent), learn life skills (82 percent), and build confidence (81 percent). And more than three-quarters of parents agree that children in afterschool programs have opportunities to learn responsible decision-making (79 percent) and build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors (77 percent). Additionally, a strong majority of parents agree that afterschool programs provide working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised (83 percent), that they reduce the likelihood that young people will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors (75 percent), and that they keep kids in their community safe and out of trouble (74 percent).
- **Regardless of community, region, or politics, parents agree on the benefits of afterschool:** Across community types, regions of the country, and political affiliations, large majorities of parents agree on the benefits of afterschool programs. For example, more than 8 in 10 parents in urban (85 percent), suburban (83 percent), and rural communities (82 percent); parents in the Northeast (85 percent), Midwest (84 percent), West (83 percent), and South (82 percent); and parents who identify as Democratic (86 percent), Republican (83 percent), and Independent (82 percent) agree that afterschool programs provide working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised.
- **More than ever before, parents believe programs support kids' needs:** Parents are now more likely to agree that programs provide children a wide range of supports than a decade ago. For instance, compared to 2014, parents are more likely to agree that afterschool programs keep kids in their community safe and out of trouble (74 percent vs. 66 percent), reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviors (75 percent vs. 73 percent), and provide working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised (83 percent vs. 75 percent).

- **Parent views on the benefits of afterschool have grown stronger—whether they have kids in programs or not:** Ranging from keeping children safe and out of trouble to helping children build their social skills, more parents with and without a child in an afterschool program agree that programs provide such supports. For example, 90 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program currently agree that afterschool programs keep children safe and out of trouble, 6 percentage points higher than 2014 (84 percent) and 13 percentage points higher than reported in 2009 (77 percent). Among parents without a child in an afterschool program, agreement grew from roughly 6 in 10 parents in 2009 and 2014 (59 percent and 60 percent, respectively) to 70 percent in 2020.

## II. Afterschool programs support healthy development

America After 3PM finds that parents increasingly recognize afterschool programs' role in providing foundational supports to help young people learn and grow—supports that are the primary drivers for the choices parents make when selecting their child's afterschool program. Focusing on the activities and supports provided by afterschool programs, the three most important aspects parents look for when selecting their child's afterschool program are a safe environment, knowledgeable and caring staff, and the opportunity to build life skills. And, in keeping with parents' priorities, America After 3PM finds that afterschool programs are providing the supports that parents are seeking for their child.

- **Parents prioritize and afterschool programs provide safe and nurturing spaces:** By wide margins, a safe environment and quality of staff are the aspects of an afterschool program parents regard as the highest priority. Overall, more than 9 in 10 parents report that safety of environment (93 percent) and knowledgeable and caring staff (93 percent) were important when selecting their child's afterschool program, with 80 percent and 75 percent of parents respectively reporting each were extremely important. The percentage of parents reporting satisfaction with these aspects has increased over time, with the percentage of parents reporting satisfaction with their child's afterschool programs' safe environment growing from 85 percent in 2009, to 88 percent in 2014, and to 92 percent in 2020. Satisfaction with knowledgeable and caring staff at the program has trended upwards as well (76 percent, 84 percent, and 89 percent, respectively).

- **Parents value opportunities for children to build life skills, and afterschool programs are delivering.** Excluding logistics, the opportunity to build life skills is the third most common factor in parents' selection of an afterschool program. Eighty-eight percent of parents report that opportunities to build life skills were important when selecting their child's afterschool program, with nearly 6 in 10 (58 percent) reporting these opportunities were extremely important.

In correspondence with the high percentage of parents prioritizing opportunities to build life skills in their decision-making process, an overwhelming majority of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers time for them to build social skills (90 percent), their self-confidence (82 percent), and life skills (68 percent). Eighty-four percent of parents report satisfaction with opportunities for their child to build life skills, such as interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision-making.

- **The physical activity and nutritious foods provided by afterschool are important factors for parents.** Eighty-four percent of parents report that opportunities for physical activity were important in choosing their child's afterschool program, while 71 percent say the availability of snacks, meals, or both, which include healthy options, was important in their selection of their child's program. Both have increased in importance for parents since the previous America After 3PM survey in 2014 (68 percent and 62 percent, respectively). Currently, 85 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity and 83 percent are satisfied with the opportunities for physical activity, while 70 percent report that their child's afterschool program offers snacks and/or meals that include healthy options and 73 percent report that they are satisfied with the snacks, meals, or both that are offered by their child's afterschool program.

For families with low incomes, families living in urban communities, and families living in the South, as well as Black and Latino parents, the availability of food was more likely to be extremely important when selecting their child's afterschool program than for parents nationally.

- **Parents see afterschool programs as helping to reduce risky behaviors.** When asked if afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviors, 84 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree. However, specific programming to reduce risky behaviors, including substance use, teen pregnancy, and violence prevention programs, is a lower-tier priority for parents of middle and high school students, with a minority of parents (43 percent) reporting that this was extremely important in choosing an afterschool program.

The comparatively low priority that parents place on programming to reduce risky behaviors is consistent with two other findings. First, just 34 percent of parents of middle and high schoolers report that their child's afterschool program offers programming to reduce such risky behaviors. Parents of high schoolers are more likely to report that this is the case (37 percent vs. 31 percent). Second, despite not being as common an offering, 61 percent of parents report that they are satisfied with their child's afterschool programming to reduce risky behaviors. The case can be made that the high percentage of parents who agree with this statement indicates that parents view other supports and activities offered by afterschool programs—such as time to interact with peers and providing opportunities to build life skills—as contributing to reducing risky behaviors and helping young people make positive choices.



Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

### III. Parents of color and families with low incomes especially value afterschool's role in supporting healthy development

While a safe environment and knowledgeable and caring staff are by far the most important qualities in an afterschool program for families overall, according to our survey, parents of color and families with low incomes place higher priority on certain supports than do White and higher-income respondents.

- **Opportunities to build life skills:** Black (67 percent) and Latino parents (64 percent) and families with low incomes (63 percent) are more likely to say that opportunities to build life skills were extremely important in choosing an afterschool program than parents overall (58 percent), White parents (54 percent), and families with higher incomes (56 percent).
- **Programming to reduce risky behaviors:** Higher shares of AANHPI<sup>†</sup> (56 percent), Black (50 percent), and Latino parents (45 percent), as well as parents with low incomes (48 percent), report that programming to reduce risky behaviors was extremely important when choosing their child's afterschool program—higher than parents overall (43 percent), White parents (38 percent), and families with higher incomes (41 percent).
- **Snacks and meals:** For families with low incomes (48 percent) and Black (46 percent) and Latino parents (44 percent), snacks or meals that include healthy options were more likely to be extremely important when choosing their child's afterschool program than parents nationally (40 percent), White parents (38 percent), and families with higher incomes (36 percent).

### IV. Areas of opportunity

Afterschool programs are providing young people a safe and supportive environment where they have opportunities to be active, interact with their peers, build confidence, and learn responsible decision-making. However, America After 3PM identifies areas where afterschool programs can do more to further support young people's healthy development.

- **Parent/family engagement:** While family activities have not been among the top factors for parents when selecting their child's afterschool program (48 percent in 2014), engaging families is an opportunity for afterschool programs to build connections with families, thus helping to strengthen the web of support for children. Yet the America After 3PM survey finds that

only 43 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers parent or family activities, a slight decrease from 45 percent in 2014. As 78 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree that afterschool programs help parents build connections to their child's school day education, increased opportunities for family engagement in afterschool programs can further establish relationships and trust between families and program providers.

- **Service learning/community service:** Forging connections to one's community through activities such as community service and service learning have short- and long-term benefits for young people, including a positive impact on their health outcomes, educational achievement, feelings of connectedness to the community, and economic prospects. However, only 36 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers service learning or community service. While this number jumps to nearly half among parents of high schoolers (49 percent), the number drops back down to roughly 1 in 3 among parents of middle schoolers (37 percent) and elementary schoolers (32 percent). Afterschool and summer programs are an opportune time to engage students in community service or service learning—areas where America After 3PM finds room for growth, in particular for younger students.
- **Addressing parent concerns:** America After 3PM finds that half of parents without a child in an afterschool program (50 percent) report that their decision not to enroll their child in a program is partly based on concerns that programs would expose their child to negative influences, experiences, and values, such as bullying and peer pressure. This concern is greater among Latino (56 percent) and Black parents (54 percent).

Increasing access to information about available afterschool programs—including the supports programs provide and the protocols and structures they put in place to create a safe and inclusive environment—can help ensure that parents are well-informed when making decisions about enrolling in an afterschool program. Only 1 in 4 parents without a child in an afterschool program completely agree that information on afterschool programs is readily available in their community and among parents of likely participants, 60 percent report it was difficult to find an appropriate afterschool program for their child. Information sharing could take a number of forms, such as afterschool programs partnering with local schools to help increase awareness or programs hosting open houses for families to learn more about their offerings.

<sup>†</sup> This report will include findings on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) parents, respondents who selected either "Asian" or "Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander" when asked to describe themselves.



Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

**I**  
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# I. Parents increasingly view afterschool as important to the healthy development of children

From building social skills and positive relationships with mentors to keeping kids safe in the hours after school, the 2020 America After 3PM study finds that parents overwhelmingly agree that programs are providing a broad set of supports for children that are integral to their healthy development.

More than 8 in 10 parents agree that afterschool programs provide opportunities for young people to engage with their peers and reduce unproductive screen time (85 percent), learn life skills (82 percent), and build confidence (81 percent), while more than three-quarters agree that children in afterschool programs have opportunities to learn responsible decision-making (79 percent) and build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors (77 percent).

Strong majorities of parents agree that afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that young people will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors (75 percent) and keep kids in their community safe and out of trouble (74 percent). Parents also agree that afterschool programs provide working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised (83 percent).

Across community types, regions of the country, and political affiliations, large

majorities of parents agree on the benefits of afterschool programs. More than 8 in 10 parents in urban (85 percent), suburban (83 percent), and rural communities (82 percent); parents in the Northeast (85 percent), Midwest (84 percent), West (83 percent), and South (82 percent); and parents who identify as Democratic (86 percent), Republican (83 percent), and Independent (82 percent) agree that afterschool programs provide working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised (*Figure 1*).

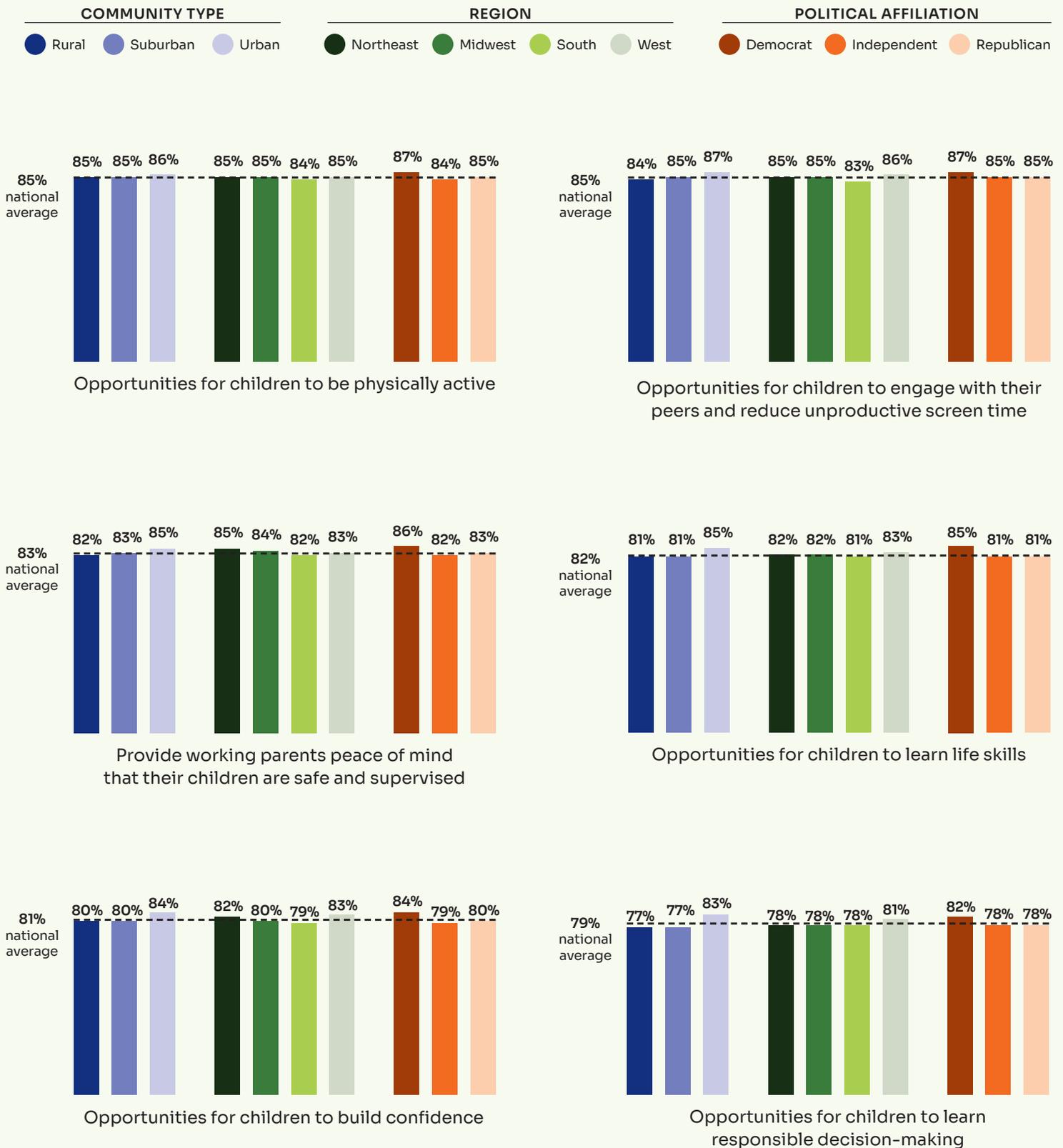


“ At the Boys and Girls Club, we create bonds, meet new people, and just have fun. My afterschool program helped me open up and be more vocal. I now feel more comfortable being able to shout out my opinions when needed. The program brought me out of my shell and without it, I wouldn't be the social and fun person that I think I am. Through the program, I also get the chance to give back to my community. We have lots of community service projects that focus on what people in the community need. One important moment was when we made over 1,000 sack lunches for people experiencing homelessness in downtown Salt Lake City, Utah. It was so great to work with so many different people and connect with others to make a difference.”

- Noah, Miller Family Boys & Girls Club  
Murray, Utah

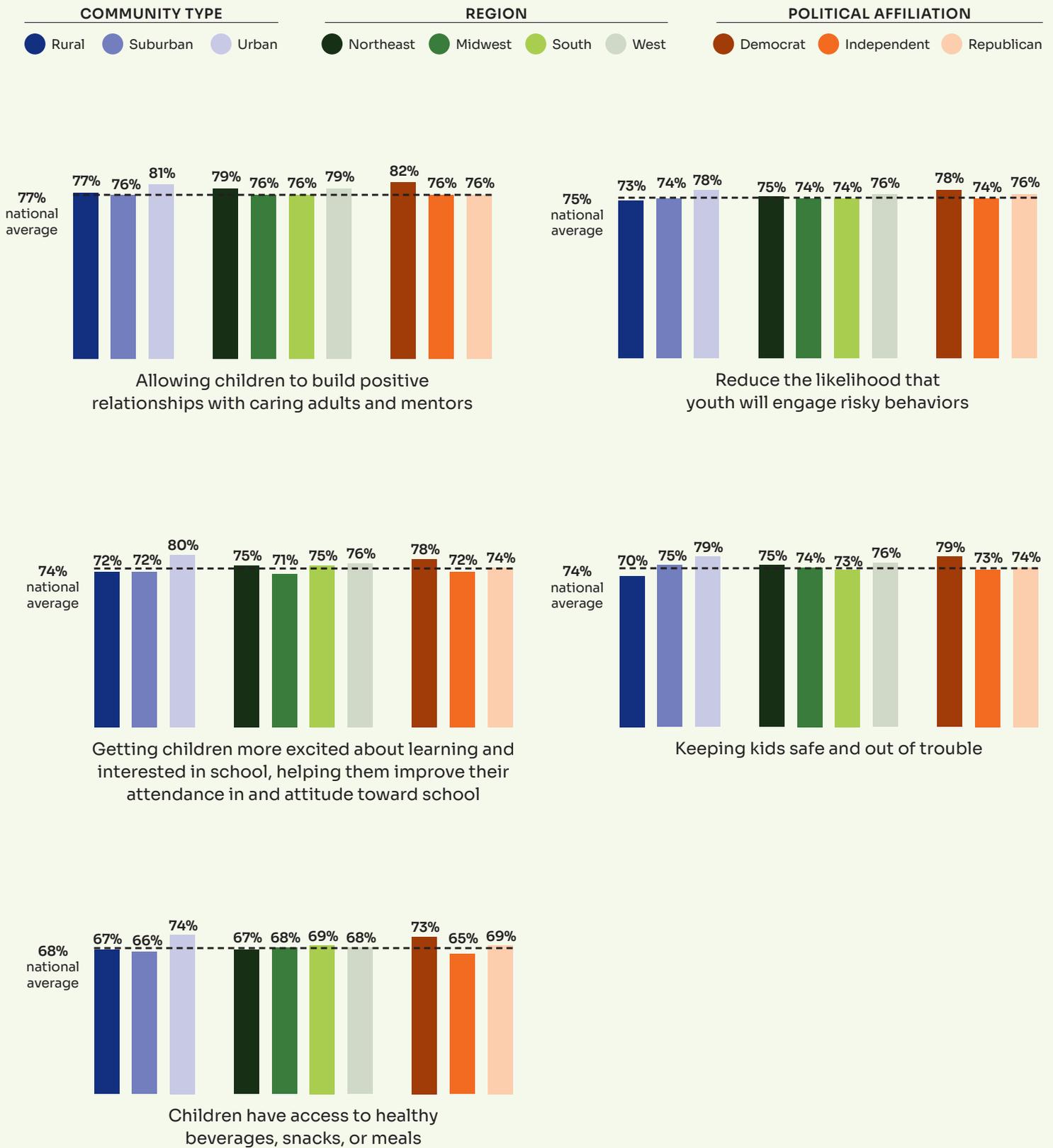
**Figure 1:** Across community types, regions of the country, and political affiliations, parents agree that afterschool programs support young people’s healthy development

Percentage of parents that agree that afterschool programs provide the following supports and benefits:



**Figure 1 (continued):** Across community types, regions of the country, and political affiliations, parents agree that afterschool programs support young people’s healthy development

Percentage of parents that agree that afterschool programs provide the following supports and benefits:



## Agreement on benefits rises

Parents are now more likely to agree that afterschool programs provide children a wide range of supports than in past America After 3PM surveys. For instance, compared to 2014, parents are more likely to agree that afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviors (75 percent vs. 85 percent), keep kids in their community safe and out of trouble (74 percent vs. 66 percent), and provide working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised (83 percent vs. 75 percent) (Figure 2).

## SUPPORTING HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

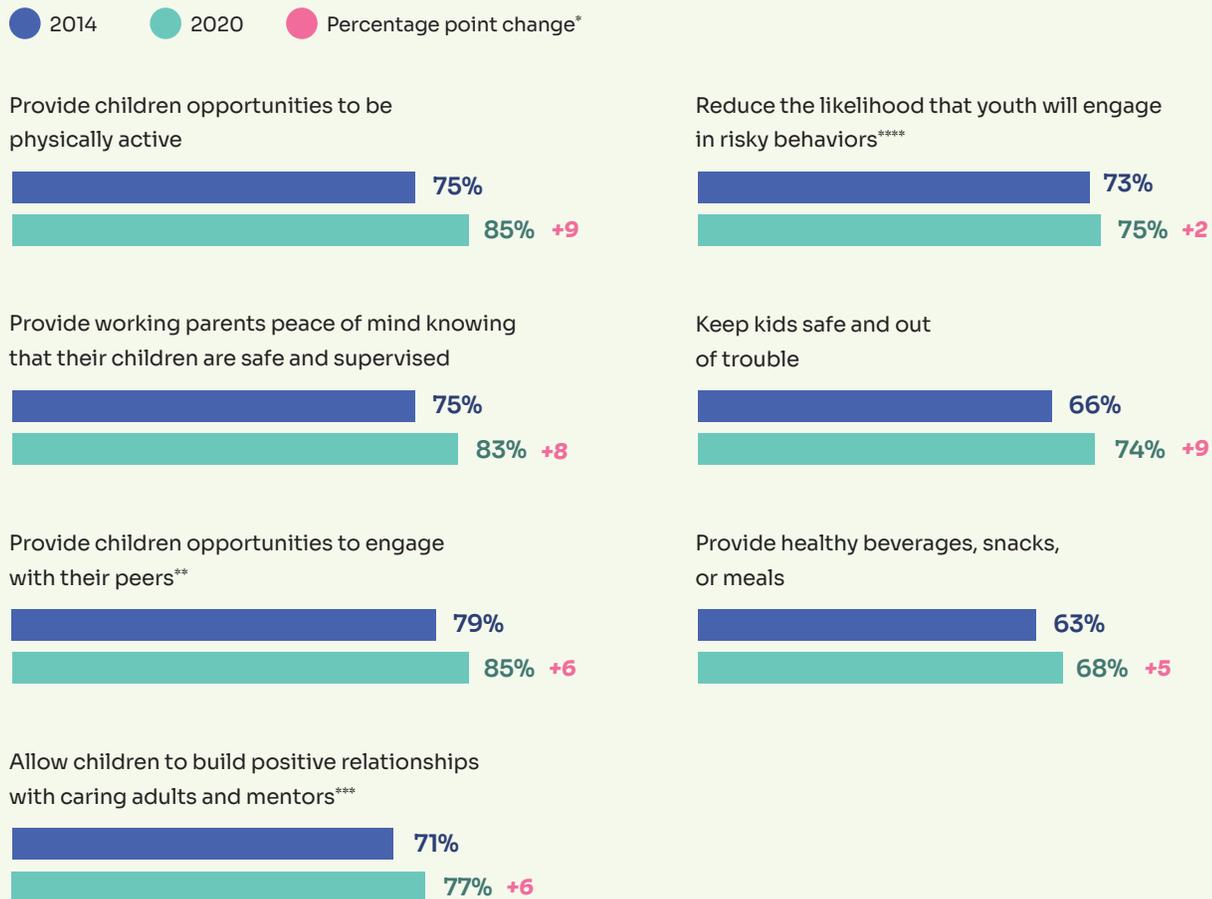
During the fall of 2020, more than 8 in 10 parents reported that they were concerned about their child's well-being (84 percent), that their child had friendships and personal connections (82 percent), and that they were active on a regular basis (81 percent). When asked about the types of experiences they most wanted for their child, parents were most likely to report they thought their child needed more opportunities for physical activity (44 percent) and time to build life skills (40 percent).

National survey of 1,202 parents conducted by Edge Research on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance Oct. 12-29, 2020.



**Figure 2:** Parents increasingly agree that afterschool programs support children's healthy development

Percentage of parents that agree that afterschool programs provide the following supports and benefits:



\* Percentage point calculations may be different due to rounding.

\*\* The 2014 America After 3PM survey asked about "develop social skills through interaction with peers," while the 2020 survey asked about "opportunities to engage with peers and reduce unproductive screen time."

\*\*\* The 2014 America After 3PM survey asked about "access to caring adults and mentors," while the 2020 survey asked about "build[ing] positive relationships with caring adults and mentors."

\*\*\*\* The 2014 America After 3PM survey asked about "reduced likelihood that youth will engage in risky behaviors, such as commit a crime, use drugs, or become a teen parent," while the 2020 survey asked about "reduced likelihood that youth will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors."

Among parents with children in afterschool programs, recognition of the benefits of afterschool programs has strengthened considerably. From keeping children safe and out of trouble to providing nutritious snacks and meals, larger shares of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree that programs provide such supports (Figure 3).

In 2020, 90 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree that afterschool programs keep children safe and out of trouble, 6 percentage points higher than 2014 (84 percent), and 13 percentage points higher than what afterschool program

parents reported in 2009 (77 percent). A much larger increase in agreement is seen regarding afterschool program staff being supportive, with 89 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreeing that programs allow children to build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors, 4 percentage points higher than in 2014 (85 percent), and 22 percentage points higher than in 2009 (67 percent).<sup>‡</sup> Additionally, parents' belief that afterschool programs help children develop social skills has remained high during the course of America After 3PM, rising from 2009 to 2014, and again in 2020 (81 percent, 88 percent, and 92 percent, respectively).<sup>§</sup>

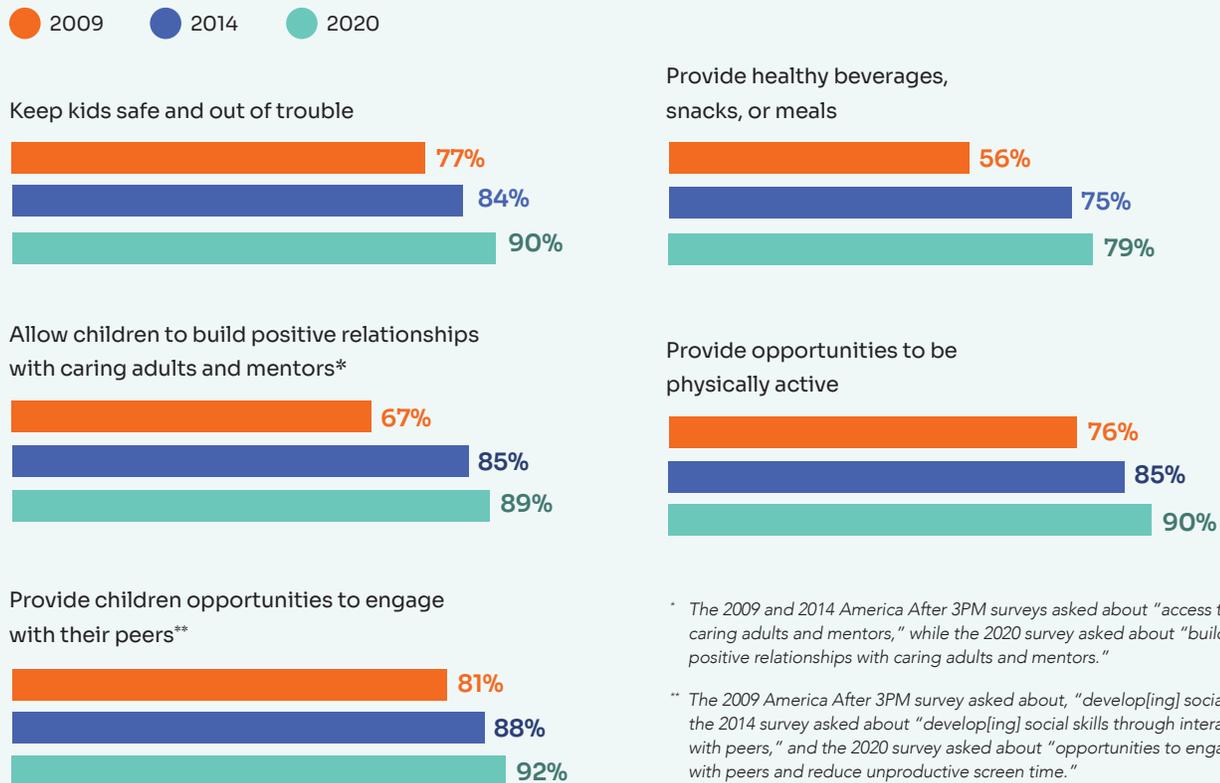
Similar increases are evident regarding opportunities for physical activity and access to snack and meals, with 90 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program in agreement that children in afterschool programs have physical activity and 79 percent agreeing that programs provide healthy beverages, snacks, or meals, 5 and 3 percentage points higher than 2014 (85 percent and 75 percent, respectively), and 14 and 23 percentage points higher than in 2009 (76 percent and 56 percent, respectively).

<sup>‡</sup> The 2009 and 2014 America After 3PM surveys asked parents if afterschool programs provide "access to caring adults and mentors," and the 2020 survey asked parents if "afterschool programs allow kids to build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors."

<sup>§</sup> The 2009 America After 3PM survey asked parents if afterschool programs help children "develop social skills," the 2014 survey asked parents if programs help children "develop social skills through interaction with their peers," and the 2020 survey asked parents if programs provide children with "opportunities to engage with their peers and reduce unproductive screen time."

**Figure 3: Parents with a child in an afterschool program: Positive views on the benefits of afterschool programs**

Percentage of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreeing that afterschool programs:



\* The 2009 and 2014 America After 3PM surveys asked about "access to caring adults and mentors," while the 2020 survey asked about "building positive relationships with caring adults and mentors."

\*\* The 2009 America After 3PM survey asked about, "develop[ing] social skills," the 2014 survey asked about "develop[ing] social skills through interaction with peers," and the 2020 survey asked about "opportunities to engage with peers and reduce unproductive screen time."

Afterschool program parents also appear to hold a more favorable view of programs' ability to improve outcomes for children. Although the wording of these specific questions is not precisely identical across America After 3PM surveys, parents' belief in afterschool programs' positive influence on children is stronger today than in the past (Figure 4). In 2009, nearly 7 in 10 parents with a child in an afterschool program agreed that afterschool programs helped reduce their child's chance of using drugs (68 percent) or committing or becoming the victim of a crime (68 percent), and 56 percent agreed that programs helped prevent their child from engaging in sexual activity. By 2014, more than 8 in 10 afterschool program parents (83 percent) agreed that

programs reduced the likelihood that youth would engage in risky behaviors, such as committing a crime, using drugs, or becoming a teen parent. Similarly, in 2020, 84 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreed that programs reduced the likelihood that youth will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors.

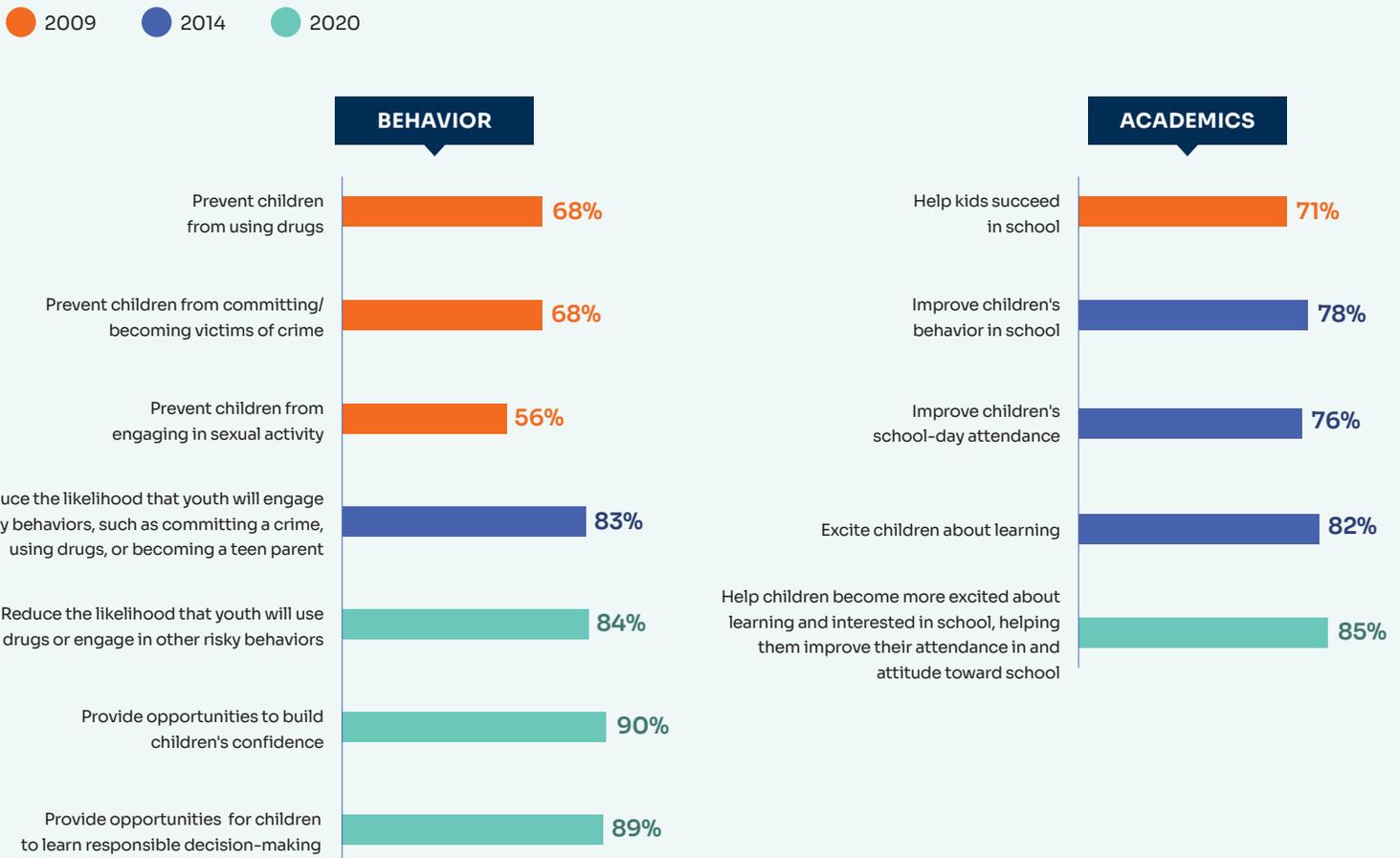
The survey also indicates that parents believe afterschool programs have a positive impact on children's performance in school (Figure 4). In 2009, 71 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreed that programs helped children succeed in school. When asked about school-day behavior and attendance in 2014, more than 3 in 4 parents agreed that afterschool

programs can help children improve their behavior in school (78 percent) and school-day attendance (76 percent). Finally, in 2020, 85 percent of afterschool program parents agree that programs help children become more excited about learning and become interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school.

While recognition of the benefits of afterschool is strongest among parents with children in afterschool programs, even parents whose children do not attend afterschool have taken note. Indeed, agreement on the benefits of afterschool programs has grown significantly among parents who do not have a child in an

**Figure 4:** Although wording of questions has evolved across America After 3PM surveys, the findings show parents' views on the positive influence of afterschool have grown stronger over time

Percentage of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreeing that afterschool programs:



afterschool program over the years.\*\* For example, compared to 2009, there are double-digit percentage point increases among this group of parents regarding agreement that afterschool programs keep children safe and out of trouble, provide opportunities for children to develop social skills and take part in physical activities, and that they are staffed by caring adults and mentors (Figure 5).

In 2009, 59 percent of parents without a child in an afterschool program agreed that programs keep children safe and out of trouble, with little difference in 2014 at 60 percent. However, in 2020, 70 percent

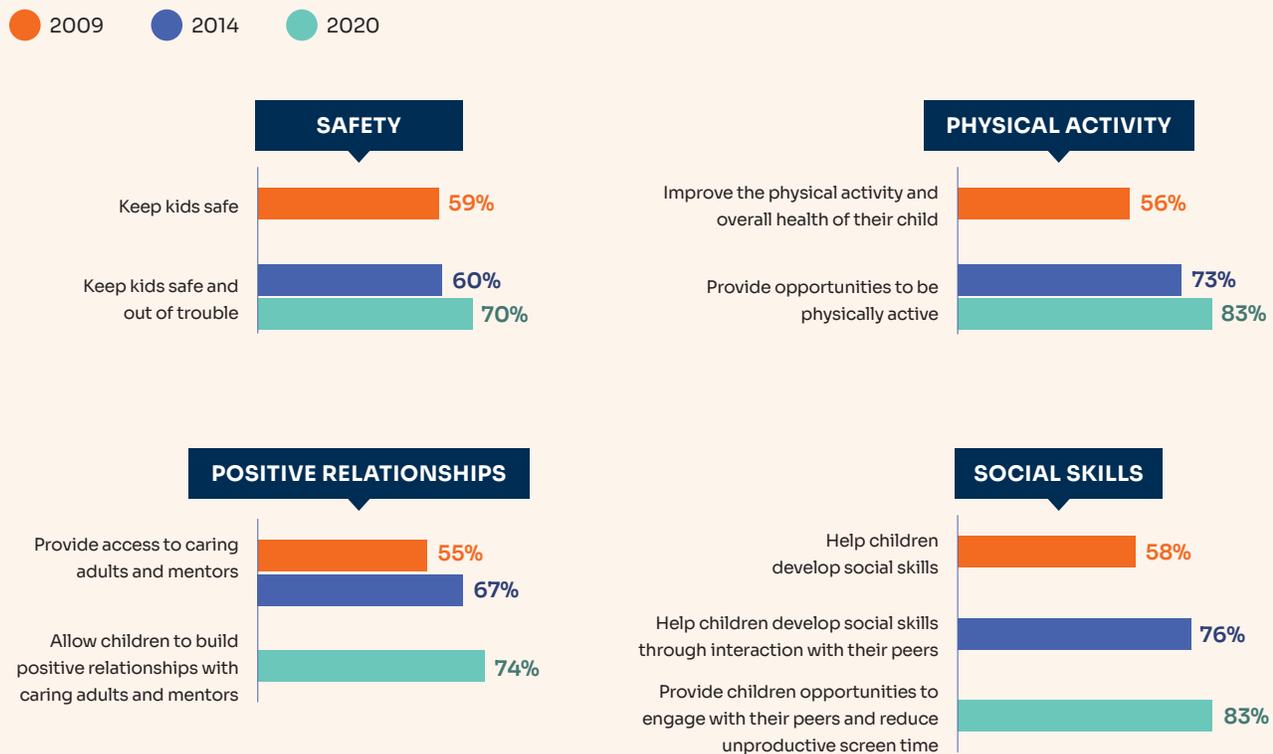
of parents without a child in an afterschool program agree that programs keep children safe and out of trouble. Similarly, in 2009, 55 percent of parents in this group agreed that programs provide access to caring adults and mentors, but that grew to 67 percent in 2014. In 2020, 74 percent of parents without a child in an afterschool program agree that programs allow children to build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors. In 2009, 56 percent of parents without a child in an afterschool program said programs would improve the physical activity and overall health of their child. The percentage of parents in agreement that afterschool programs provide opportunities for children

to be physically active rose to 73 percent in 2014 and 83 percent in 2020. Parents without a child in an afterschool program are also now much more likely to agree that programs have a positive impact on young people’s decision-making and school-day performance (Figure 6). In 2009, a minority of parents believed that afterschool programs would help their child stay in school and graduate (46 percent) or improve their behavior in school (45 percent). By 2014, a majority of parents without a child in an afterschool program agreed that programs helped children get excited about learning (59 percent) and improved their school-day behavior (56 percent) and attendance (54

\*\* In the 2009 America After 3PM survey, parents without a child in an afterschool program were asked, “Compared to your current methods of after school care, please indicate to what extent you feel that you or your child would benefit in the following ways from an afterschool program.” In the 2014 and 2020 America After 3PM surveys, parents without a child in an afterschool program were asked, “In general, to what extent do you agree or disagree that children can benefit from afterschool programs in the following ways.”

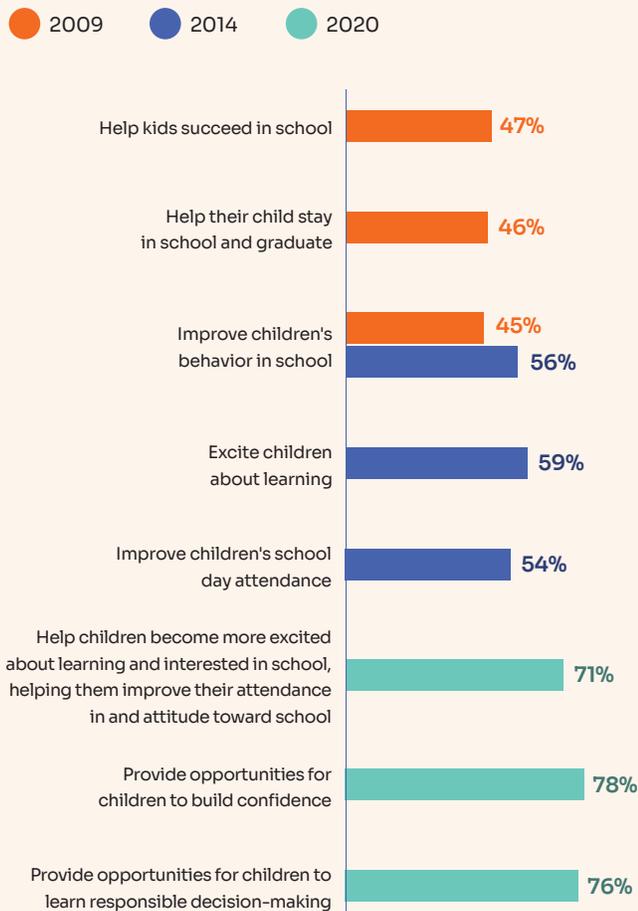
**Figure 5: Parents without a child in an afterschool program: Positive views on the benefits of afterschool programs growing over time**

Percentage of parents without a child in an afterschool program agreeing that afterschool programs:



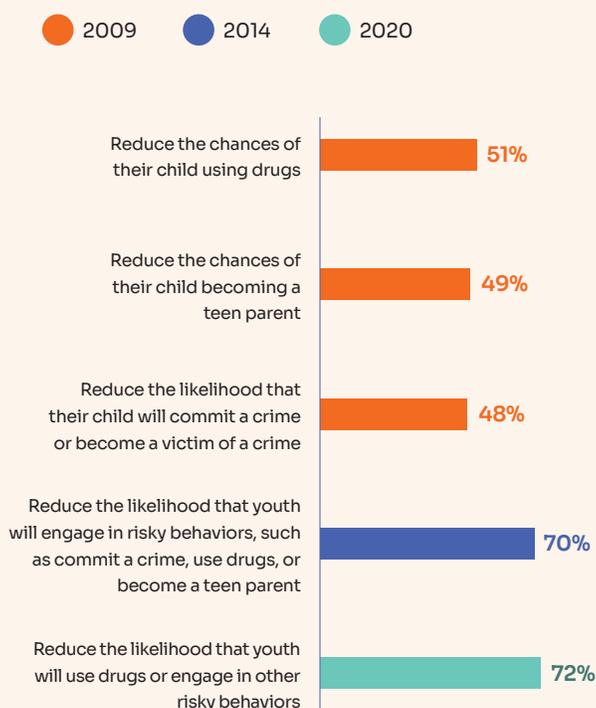
**Figure 6:** Parents without a child in an afterschool program: Views on afterschool program's ability to improve school-day performance

Percentage of parents without a child in an afterschool program agreeing that afterschool programs:



**Figure 7:** Parents without a child in an afterschool program: Views on afterschool program's ability to reduce risky behaviors

Percentage of parents without a child in an afterschool program agreeing that afterschool programs:



percent). In 2020, 71 percent of parents without a child in an afterschool program agree that afterschool programs increase children's excitement about learning and interest in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school. Additionally, in the most recent America After 3PM survey, more than 3 in 4 parents without a child in an afterschool program agree that children in programs have opportunities to build confidence (78

percent) and learn responsible decision-making (76 percent).

In 2009, roughly half of parents without a child in an afterschool program agreed that programs would help reduce risky behaviors, such as their child using drugs (51 percent), becoming a teen parent (49 percent), or committing a crime or becoming the victim of a crime (48 percent) (*Figure 7*). In 2014, 70 percent of parents of non-participants

agreed that afterschool programs reduced the likelihood that youth would engage in risky behaviors, such as committing a crime, using drugs, or becoming a teen parent. And, in 2020, 72 percent of this group of parents agree that afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that youth will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors.



### For parents without a child in an afterschool program, a tension between the potential benefits of, and concerns about, afterschool

More than 9 in 10 parents (94 percent) are satisfied with their child's afterschool program overall, and parents with or without a child in an afterschool program show stronger agreement on the benefits of afterschool programs. However, views toward afterschool programs are complex. Half of parents without a child in an afterschool program (50 percent) report that their decision not to enroll their child is in part out of concern that programs would expose their child to negative influences, experiences, and values, such as bullying and peer pressure.

Moreover, 60 percent of parents without a child in a program who say that they would be likely to enroll their child in an afterschool program report that worries about negative influences and experiences was important in their decision not to enroll their child compared 35 percent of parents unlikely to enroll their child. That said, parents of likely participants are more likely to agree that afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviors (81 percent vs. 61 percent) and keep kids safe and out of trouble (78 percent vs. 60 percent), as well as agree that afterschool programs help children learn responsible decision-making (87 percent vs 59 percent) and allow them to build positive relationships with adults (84 percent vs. 58 percent) than parents unlikely to enroll their child.



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**Afterschool programs support  
healthy development**

## II. Afterschool programs support healthy development

**America After 3PM finds that parents increasingly recognize afterschool programs' role in providing foundational supports to help young people learn and grow, supports that are the primary drivers for parents when choosing their child's afterschool program.**

Focusing on the activities and supports provided by programs, the three most important aspects parents look for when selecting an afterschool program are a safe environment, knowledgeable and caring staff, and the opportunity to build life skills (Figure 8). And, in keeping with parents' priorities, America After 3PM finds that afterschool programs are providing the supports that parents seek for their child (Figure 9).

### Creating safe and nurturing spaces

By wide margins, a safe environment and quality of staff are the aspects of an afterschool program parents prioritize most. Eighty percent of parents report that safety of environment was extremely

important when selecting their child's afterschool program and 75 percent report that knowledgeable and caring staff were extremely important in their decision-making process—13 and 8 percentage points higher than the next most common response of convenient program hours (67 percent). Overall, more than 9 in 10 parents report that safety of environment (93 percent) and knowledgeable and caring staff (93 percent) are either extremely or somewhat important when selecting their child's afterschool program.

Both factors continue to lead parents' rationale for selection of an afterschool program, although parents today are much more likely to report on their value than in

the past. Parents reporting that a program's safe environment<sup>††</sup> was important grew from 81 percent in 2014 to 93 percent in 2020, and quality of staff<sup>‡‡</sup> grew from 80 percent in 2014 to 93 percent in 2020.

Presently, the percentage of parents reporting satisfaction with afterschool programs' safe environment is the highest it has been through the editions of the survey, reaching 92 percent in 2020, compared 88 percent in 2014 and 85 percent in 2009. Parent satisfaction with afterschool program staff has also increased over the years. In 2009, 76 percent of parents were satisfied with knowledgeable and caring staff at the program. This grew to 84 percent in 2014 and reached 89 percent in 2020.

<sup>††</sup> The 2014 America After 3PM survey asked if the program was "a safe haven," while the 2020 survey asked about "safety of environment."

<sup>‡‡</sup> The 2014 America After 3PM survey asked about "knowledgeable and well-trained staff," while the 2020 survey asked about "knowledgeable and caring staff."



“

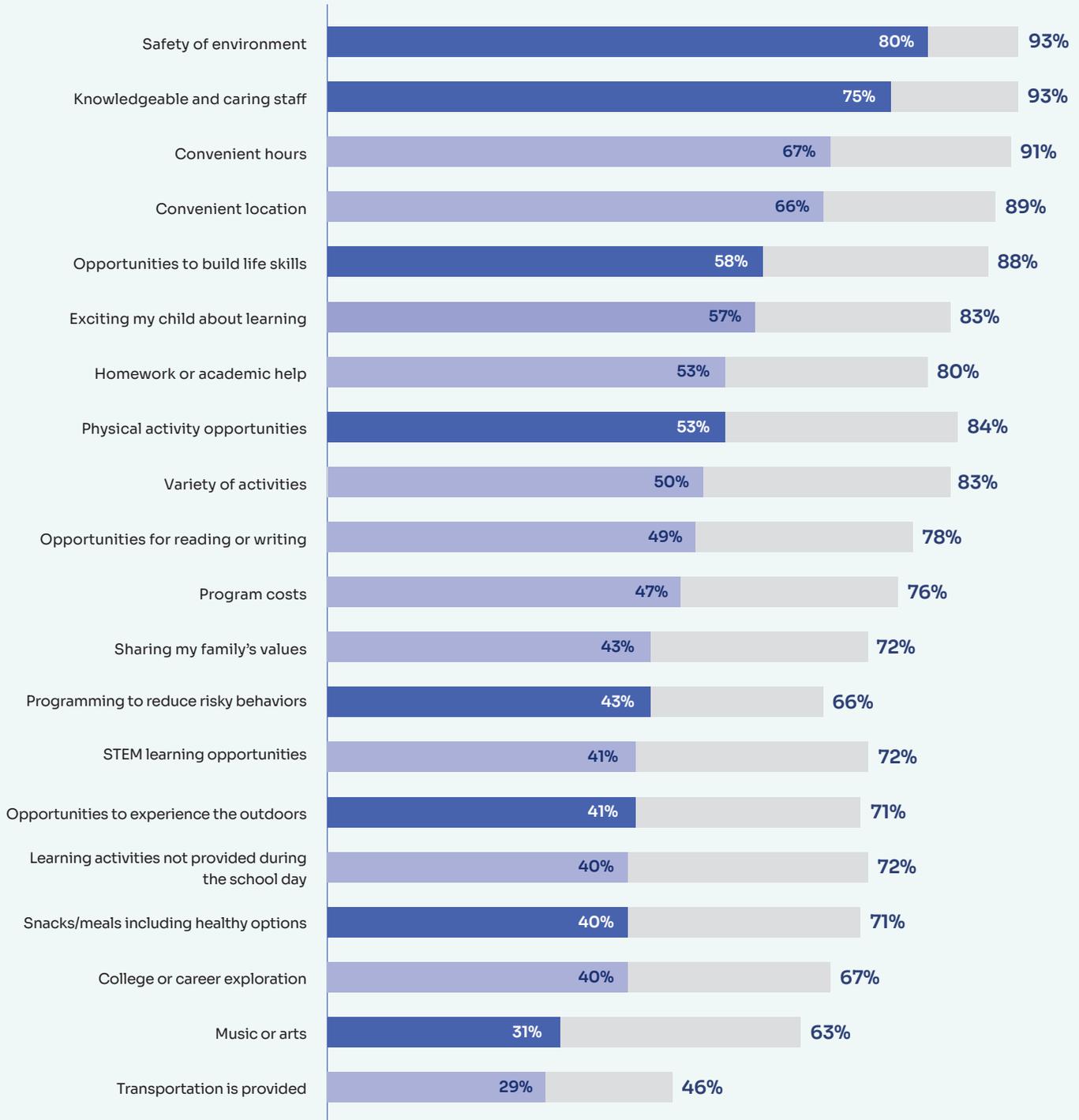
We all keep coming back to our afterschool program for the relationships and connections we are making with the staff. It's my favorite thing about my afterschool program—the staff and the connections I make with them. During the pandemic, it was hard on us, especially not being able to socialize and connect with friends, but my program distributed at-home activity kits and hosted daily Zoom meeting where we could play online games with each other. My program was also a huge support to the community, sending out meals every Thursday. Even for families that weren't enrolled in the program, there was a time that members of the community could pick up meals.”

– Juliana, Boys & Girls Club, Kennebec Valley  
Gardiner, Maine

**Figure 8:** Parents are looking for a **safe environment, knowledgeable and caring staff, and opportunities for their child to build life skills**

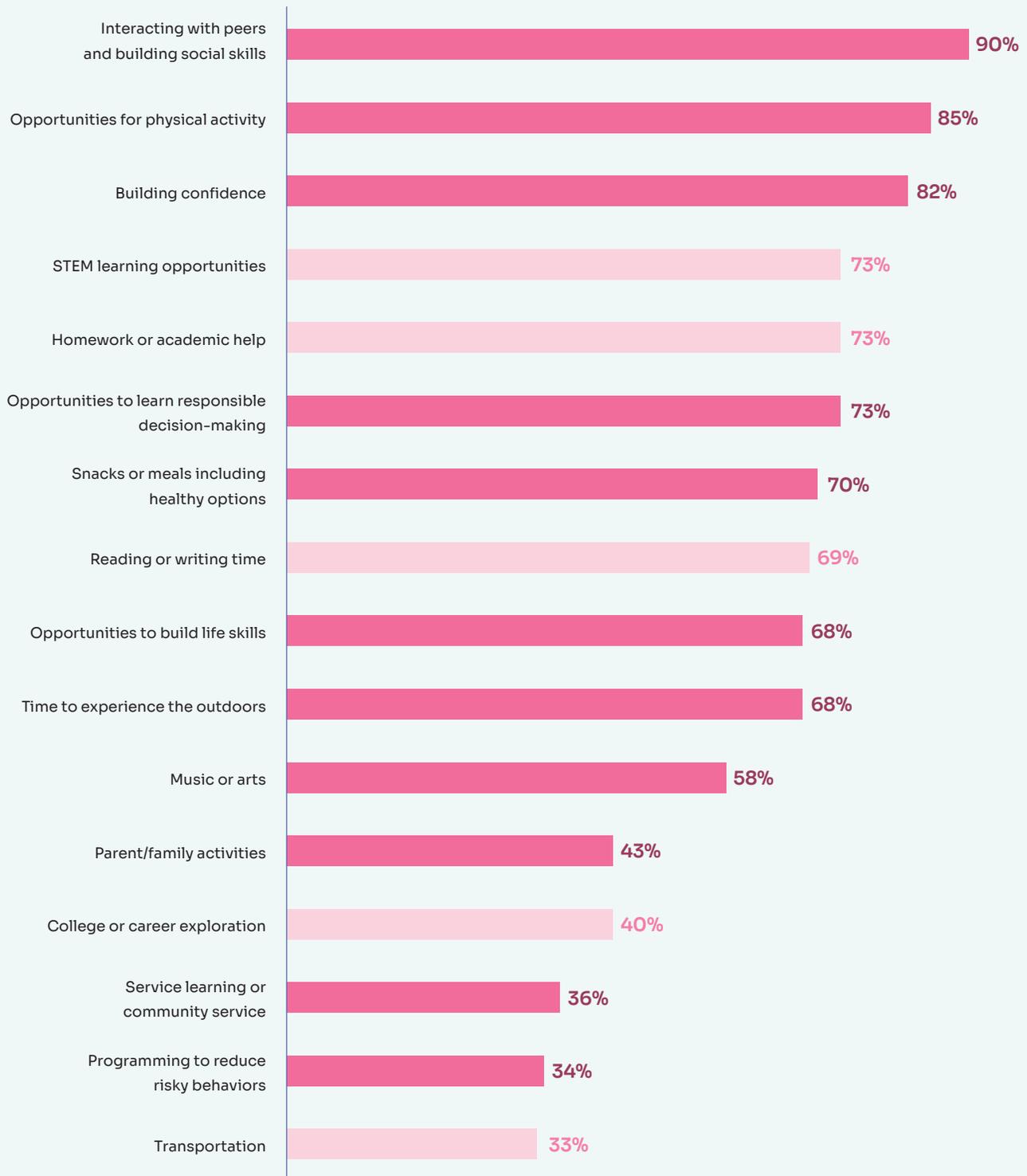
Percentage of parents reporting the following items were important in selecting their child's afterschool program:

● ● Extremely important



**Figure 9:** Afterschool programs are providing the supports **young people need for their healthy development**

Percentage of parents reporting that their child's afterschool program offers the following supports:





## SUPPORTING HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

During the pandemic, afterschool and summer learning programs further established themselves as integral partners in the network of supports necessary to ensure that all students, in particular those who were struggling and missing out, were provided the care and opportunities that they needed to emerge from the pandemic re-engaged and re-energized.

Afterschool and summer programs reporting that they are providing their students:

● Fall 2021   ● Summer 2021   ● Spring 2021

Time to interact with peers  
and build social skills



Physical activity



Opportunities to develop life skills



Opportunities to talk with their peers  
or staff members about their feelings



Snacks and/or meals



Family/parent activities



Home visits and/or check-in calls  
with students and families



National surveys of afterschool and summer program providers conducted by Edge Research on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance Feb. 19-Mar. 15, Jun.2-28, and Nov.1-Dec. 13, 2021.

### Building life skills

Past iterations of the America After 3PM study have included questions about parents' views on afterschool programs' role in supporting students as they develop the foundational skills that will help them thrive in school, in work, and in life—such as the ability to form relationships with their peers and work well with others. For example, in 2014, America After 3PM found that 71 percent of parents overall, both those who did and did not have a child in an afterschool program, believed that afterschool programs should help children develop skills such as teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking. This edition of America After 3PM fine-tuned the questions in this area, asking parents specifically how important it is for their child to have opportunities to build life skills, such as interacting with peers, developing social skills, and learning responsible

decision-making. When excluding logistics that factor into a parent's selection of an afterschool program, such as convenient program hours and location, opportunities to build life skills is the next most common response. Eighty-eight percent of parents report that opportunities to build life skills were important when selecting their child's afterschool program, with nearly 6 in 10 reporting these opportunities were extremely important (58 percent). Notably, that 58 percent "extremely important" result exceeds items such as homework help (53 percent) and the variety of activities (50 percent), which have been highly sought after based on results from previous surveys, as well items like opportunities to learn science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science (41 percent), which have seen an increase in prioritization among parents compared to the previous surveys.

Parents are even more likely to report that their child building life skills was extremely important in their program selection than costs (58 percent vs. 47 percent).

Overwhelming majorities of parents report that their child's afterschool program delivers opportunities to build life skills. Ninety percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers time to interact with their peers and build social skills, and 89 percent agree that afterschool programs allow children to build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors. Moreover, 82 percent say that their child is building confidence, 73 percent say that their child is learning responsible decision-making, and 68 percent say that their child is developing life skills in their afterschool program.

Parents' satisfaction regarding these supports is also strong, with 84 percent reporting satisfaction with opportunities for their child to build life skills, such as interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision-making.

### Providing physical activity and nutritious foods

Keeping young people physically active and providing healthy snacks and meals are also important to children's healthy development and supports parents prioritize and afterschool programs provide. Eighty-four percent of parents report that opportunities for physical activity were important in their selection of their child's afterschool program, while 71 percent say the availability of snacks, meals, or both that include healthy options, were important. Both have increased in importance for parents since the previous America After 3PM survey in 2014 (68 percent and 62 percent, respectively).

In 2009, 77 percent of parents were satisfied with their child's afterschool program providing opportunities for physical activity, and in 2014, 8 in 10 parents were satisfied with the amount (79 percent) and variety of physical activity offered (79 percent). In the most recent survey, 85 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity and 83 percent are satisfied with the opportunities for physical activity.

Access to snacks, meals, or both in afterschool programs has seen fluctuations through the years, but is higher now than it was in 2009. Seventy percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers snacks and/or meals that include healthy options. This increases to 78 percent among parents with an elementary school child in an afterschool program.

## PROMOTING HEALTHY FUTURES

### IN AFTERSCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

#### HELPING HANDS CLUB North Olmsted, Ohio

In late 2021, the Helping Hands Club afterschool program was launched as a new initiative to build empathy, inclusion, and connectedness among the student body at Chestnut Intermediate School. The disability awareness program teaches students about the importance of inclusiveness, building empathy through a greater understanding of what it means to live with different disabilities, and the value of embracing one another's differences. In an interview with News 5 Cleveland in December 2021, Chestnut Intermediate School Principal Brett Monnin said, "We're in this infancy stage right now, but it's amazing...the differences you're seeing in the way that kids are acting toward one another in the hallway."



“

Being able to go to my afterschool program gave me the opportunity to go out and interact with people outside my household during the pandemic. My tutor, Ms. Gwen, made a huge impact on my life. She was always there to help us out and was someone who always brought positivity to a situation. Her comments really showed us that you can keep going, no matter the moment you are in.”

- Belen, Community Lodgings  
Alexandria, Virginia

While slightly lower than what parents overall reported in 2014, at 72 percent, it remains an increase from 2009, when 56 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreed that afterschool programs provided healthy snacks and/or meals for their children. Additionally, 73 percent of parents report that they are satisfied with the snacks and/or meals offered by their child's afterschool program, similar to satisfaction reported in 2014 (74 percent).

For families with low incomes, families living in urban communities, and families living in the South, as well as for Black and Latino parents, snacks, meals, or both, were more likely to be extremely important when selecting their child's afterschool program than for parents overall (*Figure 10*).

### Reducing risky behaviors

When asked if afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviors, 84 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree. However, specific to programming to reduce risky behaviors, including substance use, teen pregnancy, and violence prevention programs, parents of middle and high school students place less priority on these offerings. A minority of parents (43 percent) report that programming to reduce risky behaviors was extremely important in their selection of an afterschool program. While also not among the most commonly reported factors when choosing an afterschool program, parents living in urban communities (52 percent), families with low incomes (48 percent), and parents of high schoolers (46 percent), are more likely than parents

## PROMOTING HEALTHY FUTURES

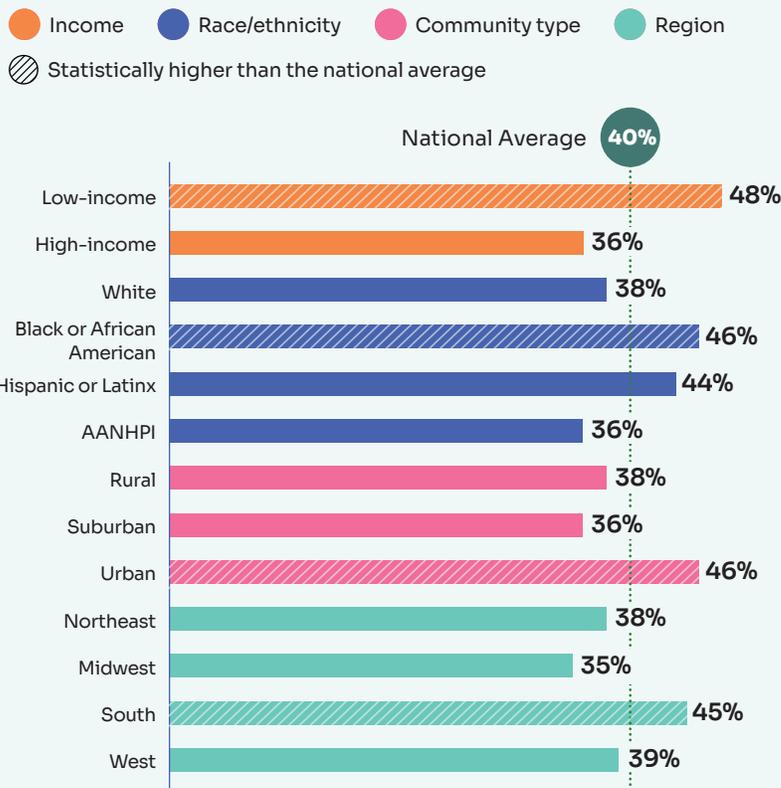
### IN AFTERSCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

#### CITY KIDS WILDERNESS PROJECT Washington, D.C.

Middle and high school students in City Kids have the opportunity to explore the wilderness and experience a broad spectrum of outdoor activities, including rock climbing, kayaking, and backcountry hiking. During the school year, students hike, bike, and kayak in national and state parks in close proximity to Washington, while during the summer, they travel to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to the program's Broken Arrow ranch. High schoolers also have leadership, internship, and job opportunities through the program. City Kids reports that 97 percent of its participants over the past six years have graduated high school. Ninety-four percent of families said that because of the program, their children "more often try again when experiencing failure," and 93 percent of participants say that they are, "eager to do well in school and other activities."

**Figure 10:** Access to food is a greater priority among select families

Percentage of parents reporting that snacks or meals was extremely important in their selection of their child's afterschool program:





## The outdoors and arts

Spending time outdoors and the arts have also been found to enhance one's health and well-being, including reducing stress, promoting cognitive development, and improving engagement and motivation.<sup>4</sup> These opportunities, while not among the most commonly reported reasons behind parents' selection of an afterschool program, are important to a majority of parents. Seventy-one percent of parents say that opportunities to experience the outdoors are important in their selection of their child's afterschool program, with parents living in urban communities (75 percent) and in the South (74 percent), and parents who identify as Republican (76 percent) more likely to say it was important. The share of parents who report that arts or music was important in their selection of their child's afterschool program, grew from 50 percent in 2014 to 63 percent in 2020. Arts or music is more important to parents living in urban communities (69 percent), parents living in the West (69 percent), and AANHPI (76 percent) and Latino parents (68 percent).



Photo Credit: Shaunta Marsh/Big Car Collaborative

More than 2 in 3 parents (68 percent) report that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities to experience the outdoors and 58 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers arts or music. Satisfaction with these offerings is also high; 72 percent of parents are satisfied with opportunities to experience the outdoors and 63 percent are satisfied with the arts or music programming at their child's afterschool program. Although down slightly from 2014, when 63 percent of parents reported arts or music was offered in their child's afterschool program and 71 percent reported satisfaction, parent satisfaction has improved from 2009, when 56 percent of parents reported that they were satisfied with the music, art, and culture offerings by programs.

overall to select this as extremely important, as are parents of color. A higher percentage of AANHPI (56 percent), Black (50 percent), and Latino parents (45 percent) report that programming to reduce risky behaviors was extremely important when selecting their child's afterschool program.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

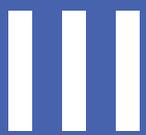
Given parents' low prioritization of programming to reduce risky behaviors, it is consistent that 34 percent of parents of middle and high schoolers report that their child's afterschool program offers programming to reduce risky behaviors, with

parents of high schoolers more likely to report that this is the case (37 percent vs. 31 percent). Similarly, parents living in urban areas (43 percent) and Latino (39 percent) and Black parents (37 percent) are more likely to report that programming to reduce risky behaviors is offered. However, the same is not found among families with low incomes (34 percent) and AANHPI parents (22 percent).

Despite not being as common an offering, 61 percent of parents report that they are satisfied with their child's afterschool programming to reduce risky behaviors. The

case can be made that the high percentage of parents satisfied with the programming offered, as well as the 84 percent of parents referenced at the start of this section in agreement that programs help to reduce the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behaviors, indicates that parents view other supports and activities offered by afterschool programs—such as time to interact with peers and providing opportunities to build life skills—as contributing to helping young people make positive choices.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>This report will include findings on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) parents, respondents who selected either "Asian" or "Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander" when asked to describe themselves.



**Parents of color and families with low incomes especially value afterschool's role in supporting healthy development**

# III. Parents of color and families with low incomes especially value afterschool's role in supporting healthy development

**A safe environment and knowledgeable and caring staff are by far the most important qualities in an afterschool program for all families. However, for parents of color and families with low incomes, certain supports play a larger role in their selection of an afterschool program (Figure 11).**

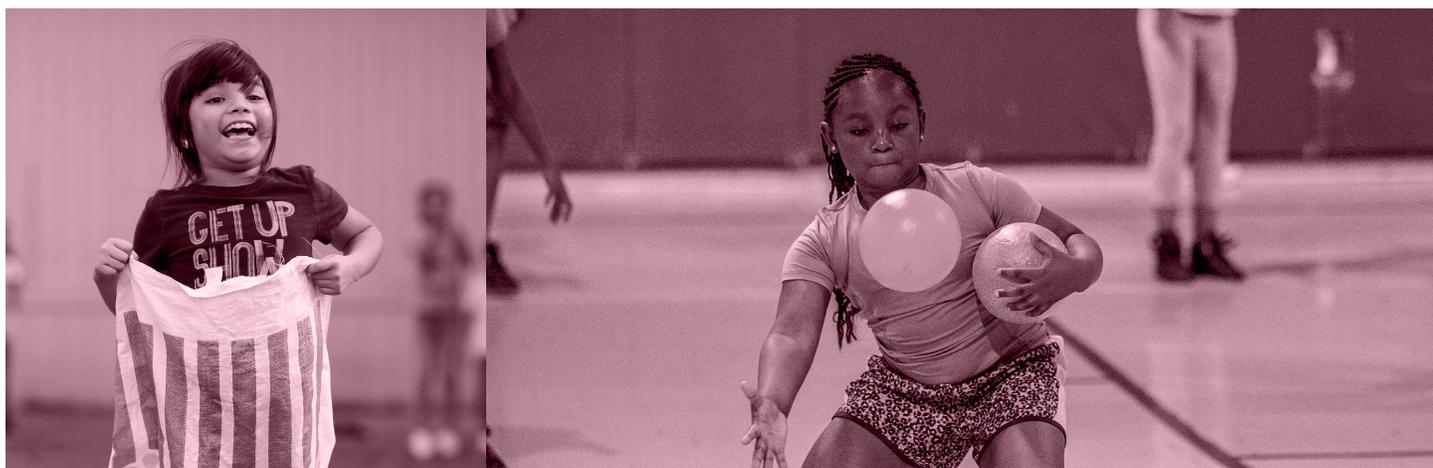
Across the board, Black parents are more likely than both parents overall and White parents to report that each of the 20 indicators were extremely important in their selection of their child's afterschool program. For example, approximately 2 in 3 Black parents report that homework or academic help (65 percent) and exciting their child about learning (65 percent) were extremely important in selecting their child's afterschool program, 12 and 8 percentage points higher than parents overall (53 percent and 57 percent, respectively) and 19 and 13 percentage points higher than White parents (47 percent and 52 percent, respectively). Similarly, Black parents are more likely than parents overall and White parents to report that factors related to the well-being of their child, including opportunities to build life skills (67 percent vs. 58 percent and 54 percent, respectively), programming to reduce risky behaviors (50 percent vs. 43 percent and 38 percent, respectively), and snacks or meals that include healthy options (46 percent vs. 40

percent and 38 percent, respectively) were extremely important when choosing their child's afterschool program.

Latino and AANHPI parents are also on the whole more likely than both parents overall and White parents to report that certain factors were more important in their selection of their child's afterschool program. For example, Latino parents are 9 percentage points more likely than parents overall and 14 percentage points more likely than White parents to report that STEM learning opportunities were extremely important when selecting their child's afterschool program (50 percent vs. 41 percent and 36 percent, respectively) and AANHPI parents are 11 percentage points more likely than parents overall and 13 percentage points more likely than White parents to report that music or arts were extremely important (42 percent vs. 31 percent and 29 percent, respectively). Majorities of Latino parents report that opportunities to build life skills (64 percent

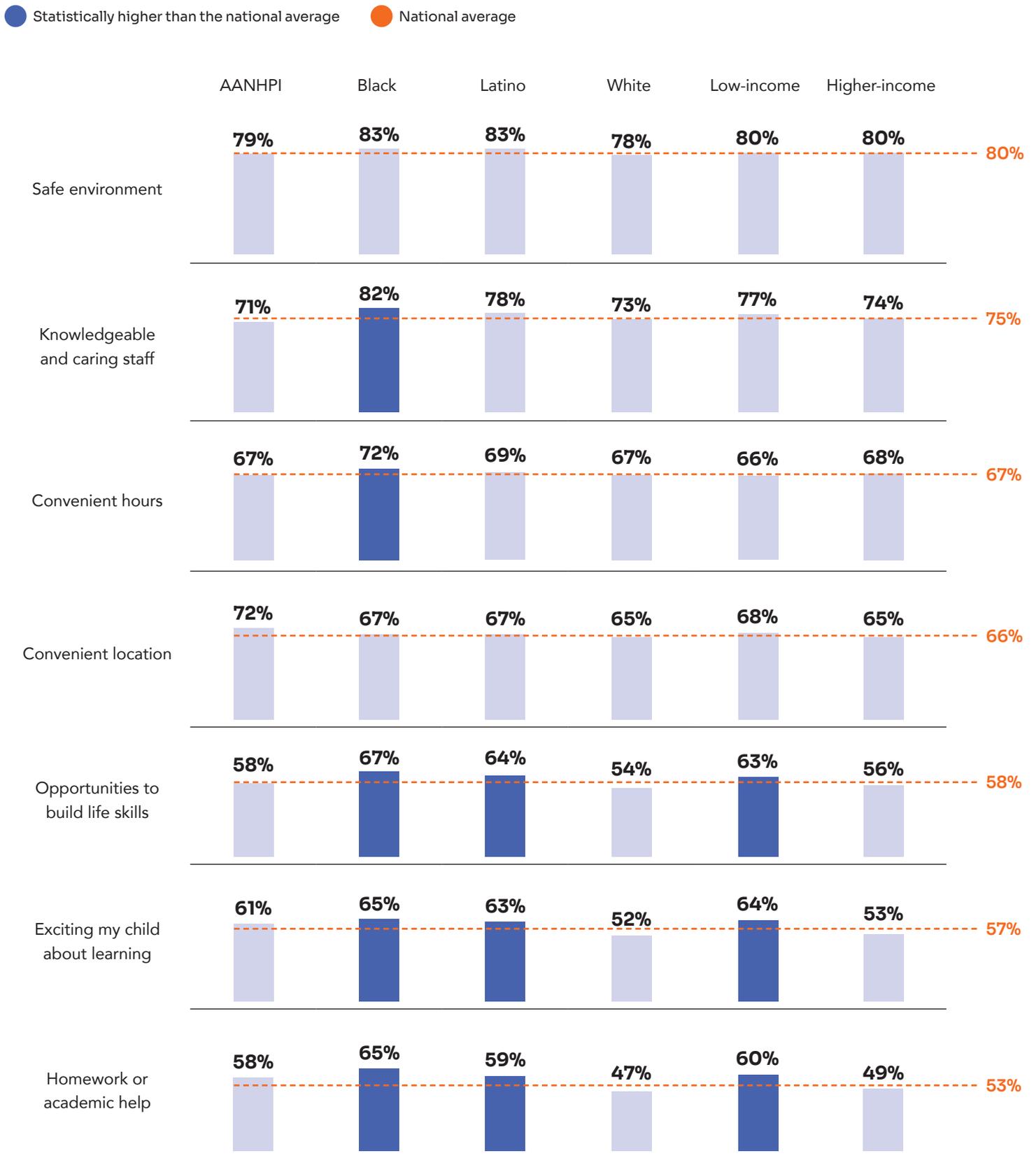
and physical activity (58 percent) were extremely important in their decision-making process—6 and 5 percentage points higher than parents overall (58 percent and 53 percent, respectively) and 10 and 7 percentage points higher than White parents (54 percent and 51 percent, respectively). Among AANHPI parents, a majority report that programming to reduce risky behaviors was extremely important (56 percent), compared to only 43 percent of parents overall and 38 percent of White parents.

For families with low incomes, availability of snacks or meals (48 percent vs. 40 percent and 36 percent, respectively), opportunities to build life skills (63 percent vs. 58 percent and 56 percent, respectively), programming to reduce risky behaviors (48 percent vs. 43 percent and 41 percent, respectively), and time to experience the outdoors (44 percent vs. 41 percent and 40 percent, respectively) were more important compared to parents overall and families with higher incomes.



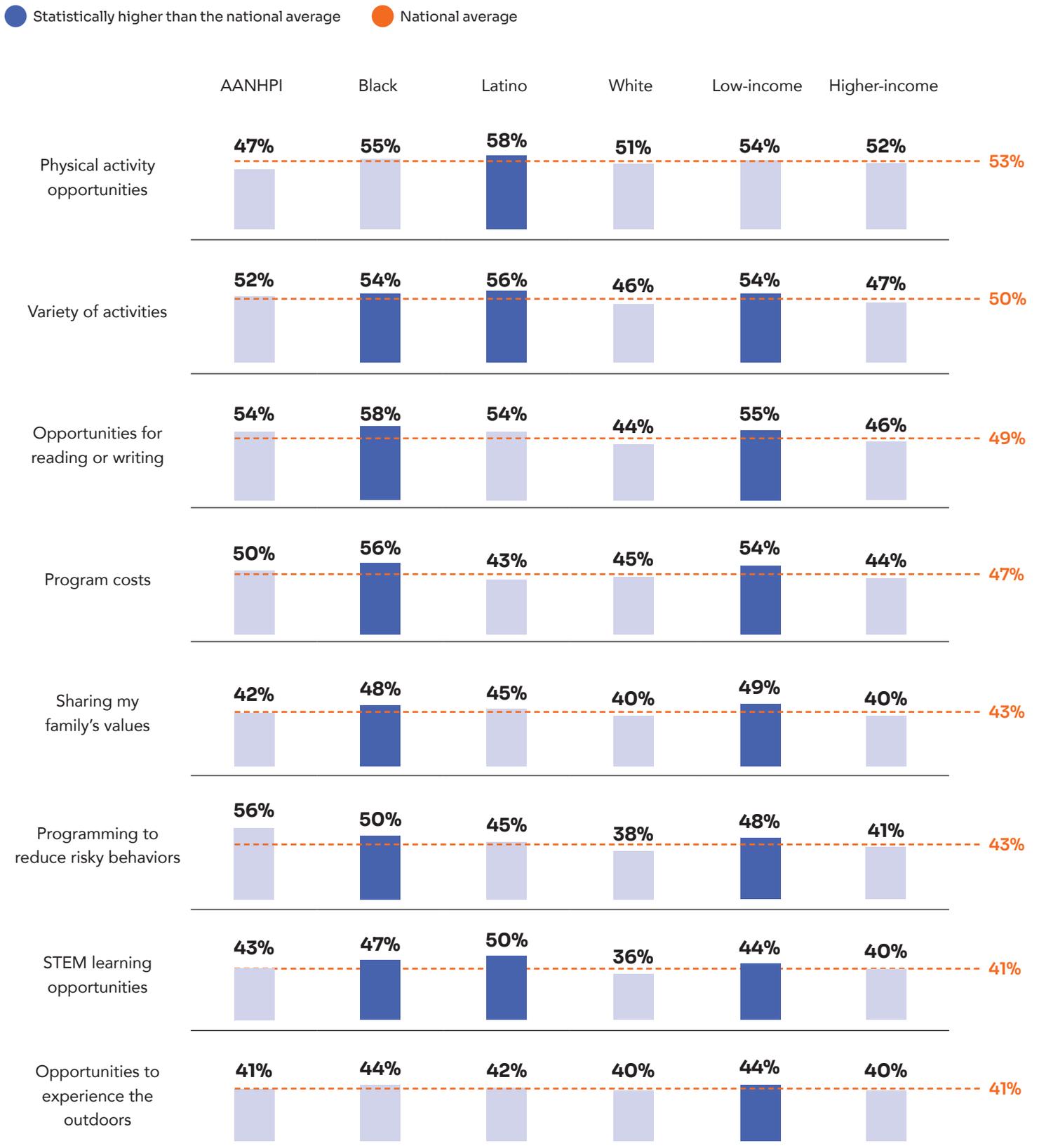
**Figure 11:** A number of offerings are more important to parents of color and families with low incomes, including supporting their child’s well-being

Percentage of parents reporting the following were extremely important in their selection of their child’s afterschool program:



**Figure 11 (continued):** A number of offerings are more important to parents of color and families with low incomes, including supporting their child's well-being

Percentage of parents reporting the following were extremely important in their selection of their child's afterschool program:



**Figure 11 (continued):** A number of offerings are more important to parents of color and families with low incomes, including supporting their child's well-being

Percentage of parents reporting the following were extremely important in their selection of their child's afterschool program:



Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

## SUMMERTIME AND HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT



The report, *Time for a Game-Changing Summer, With Opportunity and Growth for All of America's Youth*, established that similar to the hours after school, a safe environment and knowledgeable and caring staff were the primary deciding factors when parents selected what their child did during the 2019 summer. However, unlike priorities during the school year, parents are more likely to report that opportunities such as time to experience the outdoors (52 percent vs. 41 percent), physical activity (60 percent vs. 53 percent), and building life skills (63 percent vs. 58 percent) were extremely important in their decision-making process when selecting a summer program.

For their child's summer, parents say that they want programs that offer activities that are engaging, offer choice, and keep their child active and outside, more so than a summer experience focused on academics.

During the pandemic, a national survey of parents commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance in August 2020 found that parents continued to prioritize a safe environment (90 percent), knowledgeable and caring staff (88 percent), and opportunities to build life skills (85 percent) when choosing their child's activities for the 2020 summer. Also among the top five reasons parents selected their child's summer activities were safety and cleaning precautions against COVID-19 (86 percent) and time for their children to interact with peers and supportive staff (84 percent). Similar to findings in the America After 3PM survey, more parents said that supports for their child's well-being was important than academics—even more so than helping keep their child from losing academic ground over the summer (78 percent).





# IV

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## Areas of opportunity

# IV. Areas of opportunity

**Afterschool programs are providing young people a safe and supportive environment where they have opportunities to be active, interact with their peers, build confidence, and learn responsible decision-making. However, America After 3PM identifies areas where afterschool programs can do more to further support young people's healthy development.**

## Parent/family engagement

Parents and families are critical in supporting their children's growth and development, influencing how children see themselves, their attitudes toward others, and their behavior and academic performance.<sup>5</sup> However, a minority of parents (48 percent) reported that family activities were an important factor in their selection of their child's afterschool program in 2014, and the 2020 America After 3PM survey finds that only 43 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers parent or family activities—a slight decrease from 45 percent in 2014. Parents of high schoolers are most likely to report this offering (46 percent), followed by parents of elementary schoolers (43 percent) and parents of middle schoolers (40 percent).

Engaging families is an opportunity for afterschool programs to build connections to support children. Afterschool programs can serve as a connector and facilitator between parents and schools, helping families navigate the educational system and become more involved in their child's education. As 78 percent of parents with

a child in an afterschool program agree that afterschool programs help parents build connections to their child's school day education, increased opportunities for family engagement in afterschool programs can further establish relationships and trust between families and program providers.

## Service learning/community service

Forging connections to one's community through activities such as community service and service learning have short- and long-term benefits for young people, including a positive impact on their health outcomes, educational achievement, feelings of connectedness to the community, and economic prospects.<sup>6</sup> However, only 36 percent of parents report that their child's afterschool program offers service learning or community service. While this number jumps to nearly half among parents of high schoolers (49 percent), the number drops back down to roughly 1 in 3 among parents of middle schoolers (37 percent) and elementary schoolers (32 percent). Afterschool and summer programs are an opportune time to engage students in community service or service learning and is

an area where America After 3PM finds room for growth, in particular for younger students. Young people of all ages, from elementary to high school, can learn and benefit from activities where they engage with their community.

### AFTERSCHOOL INSPIRATION



Through its Life, Service, Action initiative, middle schoolers attending After-School All-Stars Hawaii take part in student-led service learning projects, identifying a community need and designing a project to address it. Past projects have included organizing a fair, complete with food and games, to serve the homeless population in the area. And during the pandemic, students made holiday ornaments for residents in a senior care center to bring holiday cheer.



“ My afterschool program helped me feel more comfortable talking to new people, giving me public speaking opportunities and the chance to build partnerships with others in my community. One of the first in-person speaking events that I did was through my afterschool program, and it's really helped me to be more confident in the way that I present myself and understand that it's up to me to make change in my community.”

– Naomi, **EntreYouership**  
Los Angeles, California



Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

### Addressing parent concerns

America After 3PM finds that half of parents without a child in an afterschool program (50 percent) report that their decision not to enroll their child is partly out of concern that programs would expose their child to negative influences, experiences, and values, such as bullying and peer pressure. This concern is greater among Latino (56 percent) and Black parents (54 percent).

At the same time, only 1 in 4 parents without a child in an afterschool program completely agree that information on afterschool programs is readily available in their community, and among parents of likely participants, 60 percent report it was difficult to find an appropriate afterschool program for their child.

Steps to increase access to information about available afterschool programs, including supports provided by programs and the protocols and structures in place to create a safe and inclusive environment, can help ensure that parents are well-informed when making decisions about enrolling their child in an afterschool program. Information sharing could take a number of forms, such as afterschool programs partnering with local schools to help increase awareness or programs hosting open houses for families to learn more about their offerings.

### AFTERSCHOOL INSPIRATION



During *Lights On Afterschool 2021*, Greenmount West Community Center in Baltimore, Maryland, hosted an open house where guests were invited to tour the space and after, in a panel style-format, youth in the afterschool program moderated a discussion, interviewing a group of parents and students about their experience in the program.



Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

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# Conclusion

# Conclusion

By April 2020, 41 states and the District of Columbia had issued statewide stay-at-home orders and schools in 45 states were closed for the academic school year.<sup>7</sup> Two years later, children and families continue to cope with disruptions to school, work, relationships, and everyday life. In a 2021 advisory report on youth mental health, the U.S. Surgeon General wrote, “Ensuring healthy children and families will take an all-of-society effort, including policy, institutional, and individual changes in how we view and prioritize mental health... coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an unprecedented opportunity as a country to rebuild in a way that refocuses our identity and common values, puts people first, and strengthens our connections to each other.”<sup>8</sup>

Afterschool and summer learning programs are a pivotal component of the network of supports that young people need, now more than ever. However, from 2014 to 2020, afterschool program participation has decreased as barriers to participation and unmet demand for afterschool programs have grown. The number of children in an afterschool program fell from 10.2 million in 2014 to 7.8 million in 2020, while unmet demand for afterschool programs has grown 60 percent since 2004. In 2020, there were 24.6 million children who were not in an afterschool program but would be enrolled in one if available to them. Parents are more likely to report barriers to afterschool participation now than in 2014, citing the cost of programs, transportation issues, and availability of programs most often. For example, a majority of parents (57 percent) now report cost was a reason they did not

enroll their child in an afterschool program, 14 percentage points higher than in 2014 (43 percent).

Parents increasingly look to afterschool programs to support young people’s overall health and development, but issues of access prevent millions of young people from benefiting from the opportunities that programs provide. Action is needed at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure access to afterschool programs for every young person who wants to participate. For young people like Susanna, Noah, Juliana, Belen, and Naomi, their afterschool programs provided a place where they felt that they belonged, where they had supportive adults and mentors, where they gained confidence, and where they found their voice. All young people deserve the same opportunities to help them forge healthy futures.



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