

How Afterschool is Supporting Learning and Recovery During COVID-19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | JULY 2020



On March 19, 2020, California became the first state to issue a statewide stay-at-home order in response to COVID-19.¹ Over the course of the following 12 days, 33 additional states followed suit issuing stay-at-home orders,² and all 50 states, including the District of Columbia, ordered schools to close.³ By early April, more than 90 percent of people living in the U.S., including more than 55 million students, found their lives upended by the country's response to slow the spread of the coronavirus.^{4,5} At the time of the release of this issue brief, the U.S. alone has more than 4.2 million confirmed cases and lost more than 146,000 lives due to the virus.⁶

Joining local efforts to meet the immediate health, economic, and basic day-to-day needs of communities, afterschool programs across the country adjusted their operations to deliver meals, provide care for children of essential workers, keep students engaged in learning, and remain a source of support to students and families to ensure that young people emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, and hopeful.

“One of the certainties as we navigate through this pandemic is that all children will benefit from being well known, well cared for, and well prepared. Afterschool programs have a long history of designing programs based on what young people need in order to help them be healthier and more ready to learn. Together schools and community organizations can co-design the future of learning in ways that interrupt historic inequities and help ALL young people emerge from this crisis strong, resilient and hopeful.”

- Tony Smith, former Illinois State Superintendent and Oakland Unified School District Superintendent

Challenges on multiple fronts

In addition to a national health crisis, the effects of the pandemic have reached into all corners of life in the U.S., reverberating through the economy, the educational system, and individuals' overall well-being.

An economic crisis

After more than a year and a half of an unemployment rate staying at or below 4 percent, unemployment is currently in the double digits, from a high of 14.7 percent in April to 11.1 percent in June.⁷ Between mid-March and June, more than 52 million people filed for unemployment.⁸ As a result of layoffs, furloughs, and reduced hours due to stay-at-home orders, individuals have found themselves struggling to meet basic needs. Feeding America estimated that 9.9 to 17.1 million people could experience food insecurity as a result of COVID-19,⁹ and a July housing survey found that more than 1 in 3 renters (36 percent) and 30 percent of homeowners reported that they were unable to make that month's full on-time payment.¹⁰

A crisis in education

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the K-12 school system. It is estimated that students missed approximately 30 percent of in-person learning during the 2019-2020 school year,¹¹ and an Education Week survey of teachers found that approximately 1 in 5 students are not attending online classes or staying in contact with their teachers.¹² Research by NWEA projects that due to school closures, students may start the new school year having lost close to 30 percent of their learning gains in reading and 50 percent of their gains in math from the previous year.¹³

A crisis of wellbeing

While the pandemic's toll on physical health of the country is evident, the negative effect it is having on the mental and emotional wellbeing of children is also becoming apparent. A survey of youth ages 6 to 18 found that more than 1 in 5 reported that they were anxious (27 percent), stressed (23 percent), and unhappy (22 percent),¹⁴ and in a June Gallup poll, 3 in 10 parents reported that their child is "experiencing harm to emotional or mental health" due to social distancing and business and school closures.¹⁵

Exacerbating existing disparities

The pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated the inequities that exist in the U.S., from the disparities in the health care system to the widening income gap. Based on available data, communities of color have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, with an overrepresentation of COVID-19 hospitalizations among Black/African Americans and higher death rates among Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx persons than among white and Asian individuals.¹⁶ Surveys have also



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found differences in economic security when looking at race and ethnicity. A Pew Research survey found that 61 percent of Hispanic/Latinx and 44 percent of Black/African American respondents reported that due to the coronavirus, someone in their household had become unemployed or lost wages, compared to 38 percent of white respondents.¹⁷

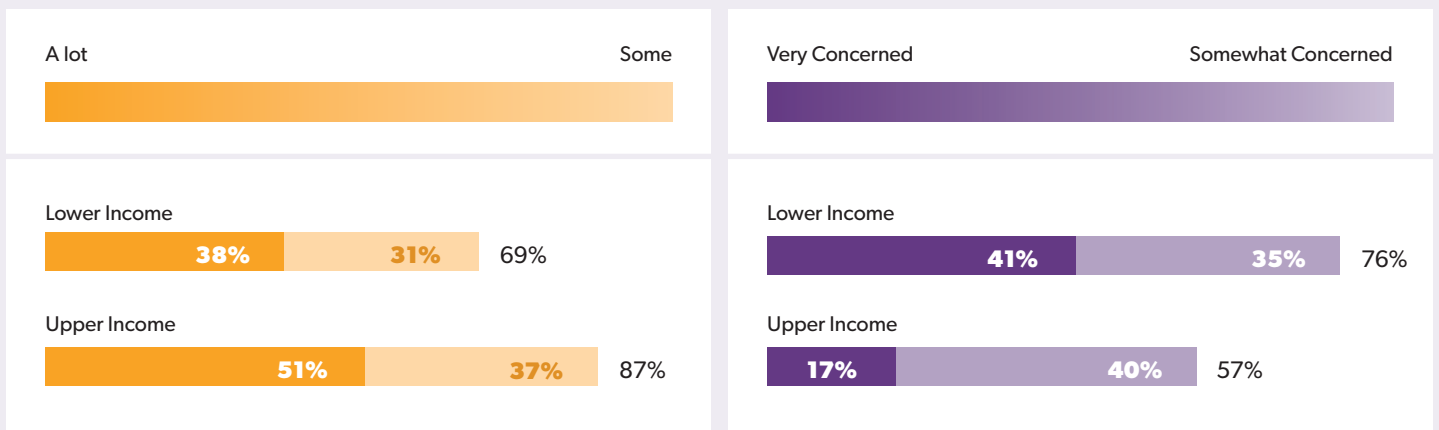
Lower-income families also are experiencing greater adversity in regard to education during the pandemic. In a Pew Research Center survey, higher-income parents were much more likely than lower-income parents to report that their children had received some online instruction from their school since it closed (87 percent vs. 69 percent).¹⁸ Moreover, low-income families are nine times more likely to say their child will not be able to complete their schoolwork because of lack of access to a computer at home (36 percent vs. 4 percent).¹⁹

Educational disparities during COVID-19

Surveys have found disparities in access to educational supports during the pandemic, which in turn are exacerbating inequities between higher and lower-income families.

Lower-income families are less likely than their higher-income counterparts to report that their child has received "a lot" or "some" online instruction from their school since it closed...

...while at the same time expressing higher levels of concern that their children are falling behind in school as a result of disruptions caused by the coronavirus.



Based on a Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted April 7-12, 2020. Lower-income and upper-income family designations are based on Pew Research Center's tiers, where a lower-income family's (a three-person household) average annual income is approximately less than \$41,000 and an upper-income family household income is greater than \$120,400.

Totals may be different due to rounding.

Afterschool programs stepping up

Across the country, afterschool programs continue to be a source of support to children and families in their community as they adapt to the challenging circumstances and stressors created by the pandemic. Although the shift in programs' activities and services varied as school closures and shelter-in-place orders went into effect and continue to evolve as states move through the phases of reopening, there is a clear through line of programs' support in remaining connected and responsive to the needs of their community and placing the well-being and safety of children and families at the forefront of their efforts.

Providing essential care for the children of essential workers

As states issued stay-at-home orders and schools closed to slow the spread of COVID-19, many essential workers, including health care workers, first responders, and grocery store employees, were faced with the predicament of finding a safe and supervised space for their children while they reported in-person to work. In Georgia, the **YMCA of Metro Atlanta**, while closed for regular services, opened its doors to 2,000 children of Atlanta's essential workers. Open Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., YMCA of Metro Atlanta provides homework help, enrichment activities, and time for physical activity, while following CDC safety guidelines.

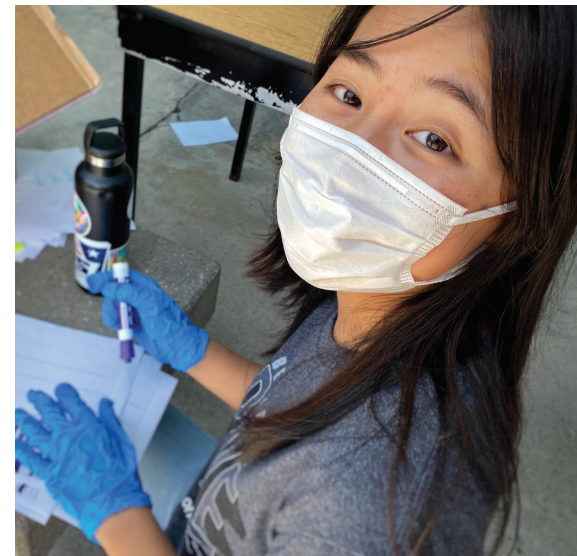
Providing critical supports to underserved communities

Afterschool programs are an integral community partner to reach groups that are traditionally underserved. In Waterville, a rural community in Kansas, **Valley Heights Community Education** responds to circumstances created by the pandemic by delivering meals to families who are experiencing food insecurity in their community, bringing hardcopies of school work and other materials to families without internet access, partnering with the school family advocate to provide or help connect with other necessary resources, and completing more than 300 home visits over the course of three months. In Charlotte, North Carolina, **ourBRIDGE for KIDS (ourBRIDGE)**, responds to the needs of their community by distributing more than 100,000 meals and bags of groceries to immigrant and refugee families in Charlotte's east side neighborhoods; translating information related to the pandemic in Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Farsi, French, Hindi, Nepali, Spanish, and Swahili; and serving as an advocate for families experiencing challenges accessing resources available to them.

Keeping kids engaged in learning

At the **Irwin A and Robert D Goodman Community Center (GCC)** in Madison, Wisconsin, and **Breakthrough Miami**, in Florida, staying connected to their students and families have been the driving force behind their response to the coronavirus. To support school-day learning, GCC provides an array of online programming for students, including academic support, global learning, book clubs, and teen leadership. Staff also regularly communicate with school day teachers to find out if there are students that would benefit from additional support. Breakthrough Miami shifted its programming to distance learning, offer additional parent and family education, and provide or connect families to needed supports, such as food, housing assistance, and technology. Each week following their district's school closures, Breakthrough Miami introduced new program elements, including virtual courses and academic support sessions to help their scholars with distance learning.

Both programs also recognized the challenges moving to an online learning environment. GCC helped their middle and high school students navigate learning remotely, while Breakthrough Miami hosted virtual workshops to walk parents through various learning platforms and best practices to help keep their kids engaged in learning.



Supporting the wellbeing of children and families

As the pandemic has taken an emotional and mental toll on children and families, the supports provided by afterschool programs—including a safe environment, trusted adults and mentors, and connections to community resources families need—have become that much more indispensable. In response to the impact of COVID-19 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, **AfterOpp**, part of The Opportunity Project, a citywide intermediary for expanded learning, and the **Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg**, West Virginia, prioritized checking in on the health and wellness of their students and families.

AfterOpp initiated phone banks to help their families obtain basic necessities, such as food and personal hygiene products, and the Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg check in with their families on a weekly basis, asking about food insecurity, transportation needs, internet access, and other immediate needs. Related to their students' wellbeing, AfterOpp produced a series of mindfulness videos that students could participate in, as well as reflection activities, which included a COVID-19 time capsule and journaling, to encourage students to think about, capture, and process their feelings during the pandemic. The Boys & Girls Club of Parkersburg lead regular video “teen chats” to stay in touch with students and remains on call to provide a safe outlet for their students.

Conclusion

As the country looks ahead to the fall, the conversation has shifted from reacting to the extraordinary circumstances created by the pandemic to rethinking how learning can look. Schools, afterschool programs, and community partners will need to come up with new solutions related to timing, space, and staffing to ensure that all kids' educational, health, and social and emotional needs are being met. Additional resources will be needed from federal, state, and local governments as expenses for programs and schools will rise to implement health and safety protocols.

Although the pandemic has had a devastating impact worldwide, it also presents our country with the opportunity to re-envision how learning can happen, as well as encourage schools and community-based groups to establish new and strengthen existing partnerships as the country navigates through the current economic, health, and educational challenges, and the challenges that lie ahead as we recover from this health crisis.

To learn more, read the full issue brief and program spotlights at: <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm>

“...we need to acknowledge and address the inequity and trauma of this current pandemic crisis before we can expect learning to resume as usual.”

– American Institutes of Research²⁰



70 percent of afterschool program providers report serving students in some capacity since the pandemic hit, however, due to the challenging circumstances created by the coronavirus, **84 percent are concerned that they will not be able to provide services in the fall.**

Source: Online survey conducted by Edge Research between May 28-June 30, 2020 of 914 program providers on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance.

ENDNOTES

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