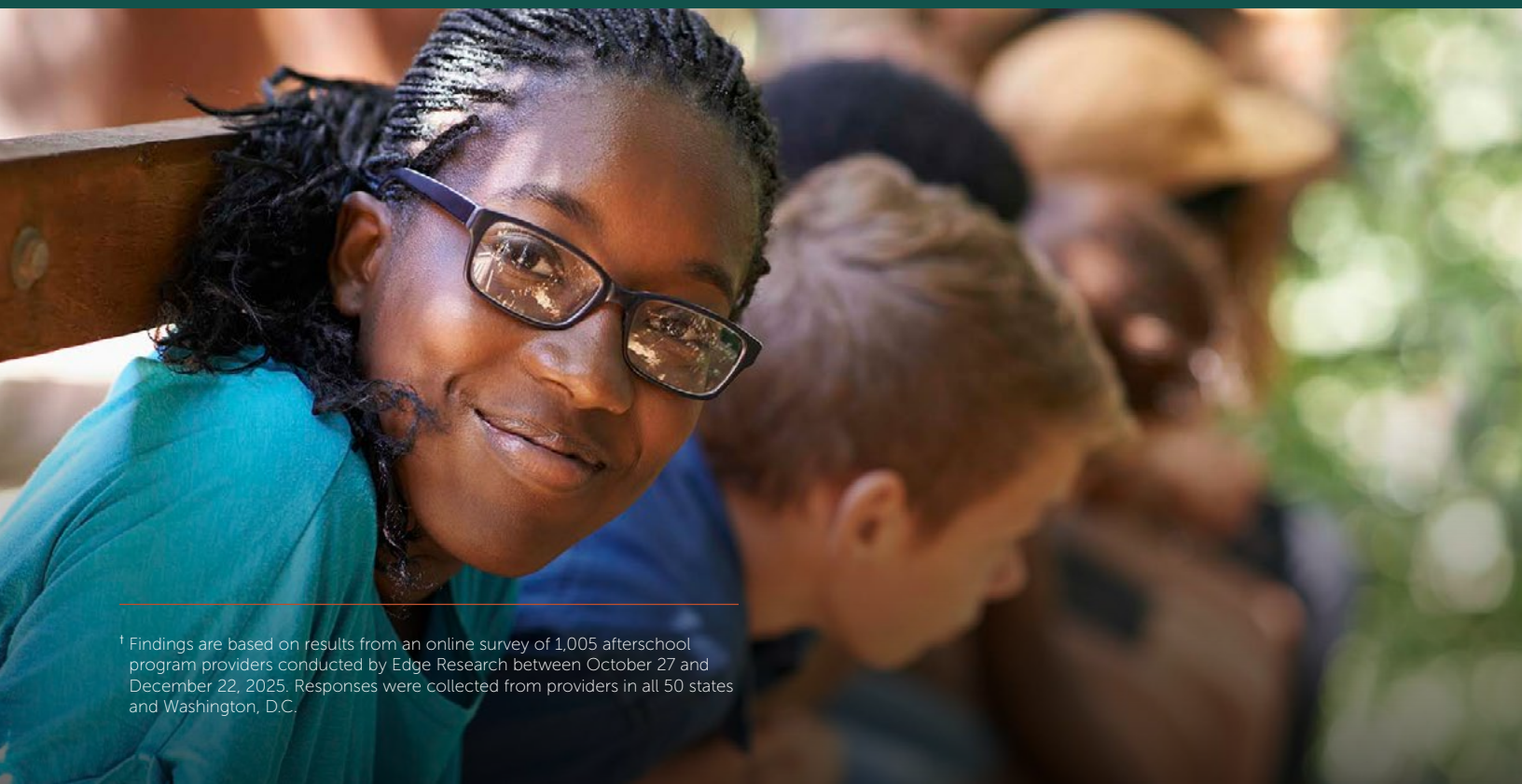


# Uncertain Times for Afterschool Programs:

## CONCERNS OVER SUSTAINABILITY, STUDENTS' WELL-BEING, AND FEDERAL ACTIONS TOP OF MIND

Rising concerns about funding, program sustainability, and young people's well-being are the key themes that emerge from a survey of 1,005 afterschool program providers representing more than 6,500 programs, conducted October 27 through December 22, 2025.<sup>†</sup> Program providers are significantly more concerned about their resources; young people's food security, learning, and screen time; and their program's ability to reach students in need of afterschool programming compared to one year ago. Many report that the children and families they serve were impacted by the six-week federal government shutdown in fall 2025, and an overwhelming majority are worried about the potential impact of proposed federal education budget cuts on their program. The instability at the federal level can be linked to providers' increased levels of concern. Providers who report

that the children and families their program served were significantly impacted by the government shutdown express significantly greater intensity of concern over program funding and students' health, specifically adequate access to food. At the same time, afterschool programs remain resilient and find inspiring ways to respond to the emergencies and meet the needs of young people and families. Programs are serving as a safe space for young people, engaging them in academically enriching activities, and helping them build foundational life skills including teamwork and critical thinking. They also lead efforts to address the gaps their children and families are facing, from helping with basic necessities such as groceries and meals, to serving as an information hub and connector to available resources.



<sup>†</sup> Findings are based on results from an online survey of 1,005 afterschool program providers conducted by Edge Research between October 27 and December 22, 2025. Responses were collected from providers in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

## Sustainability worries on the rise while staffing concerns trend downward

Afterschool program providers expressing concern for their program's funding and sustainability and providers' level of concern noticeably increased from the fall of 2024. Providers concerned about losing funding, permanently closing their program, or laying off or furloughing staff increased by double-digit percentage points from fall 2024, with worries rising for the second consecutive year and now at the highest levels since the early days of the pandemic in 2020 (see **Figure 1**). The intensity of providers' concerns is also reaching 2020 levels. For example, more than three-quarters of program providers are worried about the loss of funding to the program this year, including more than half who are very or extremely worried, an increase of 14 and 16 percentage points respectively from fall 2024, and the highest both numbers have been since fall 2020.

Worries about sustainability are top of mind for afterschool program providers, regardless of their location, affiliation, or community served (see **Figure 2**). An overwhelming majority of programs in the South (90%), Midwest (89%), Northeast (87%), and West (85%); run by community-based organizations (93%) or schools (88%); and in urban (90%), rural (89%), and suburban communities (86%) are concerned about long-term funding and the program's future. Similarly, most programs are concerned about their program losing funding.

A plurality of providers (43%) report that their program's weekly cost-per-child increased over the past year, similar to fall 2024 (42%). Among those reporting higher costs, nearly half (49%) cite an increase of at least 10%, and more than 1 in 3 (36%) experienced increases between 11% and 25%. Driving the increase in costs are staffing (76%), inflation (66%), supplies (59%), and food (50%). For programs serving a high percentage of low-income students<sup>†</sup> compared to programs overall, food (56% vs. 50%) and transportation (43% vs. 33%) are more likely to be reported as contributing to higher program costs.

<sup>†</sup> Programs serving a high percentage of children from low-income families are providers who report that 75% or more of the students they serve qualify for the Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program.



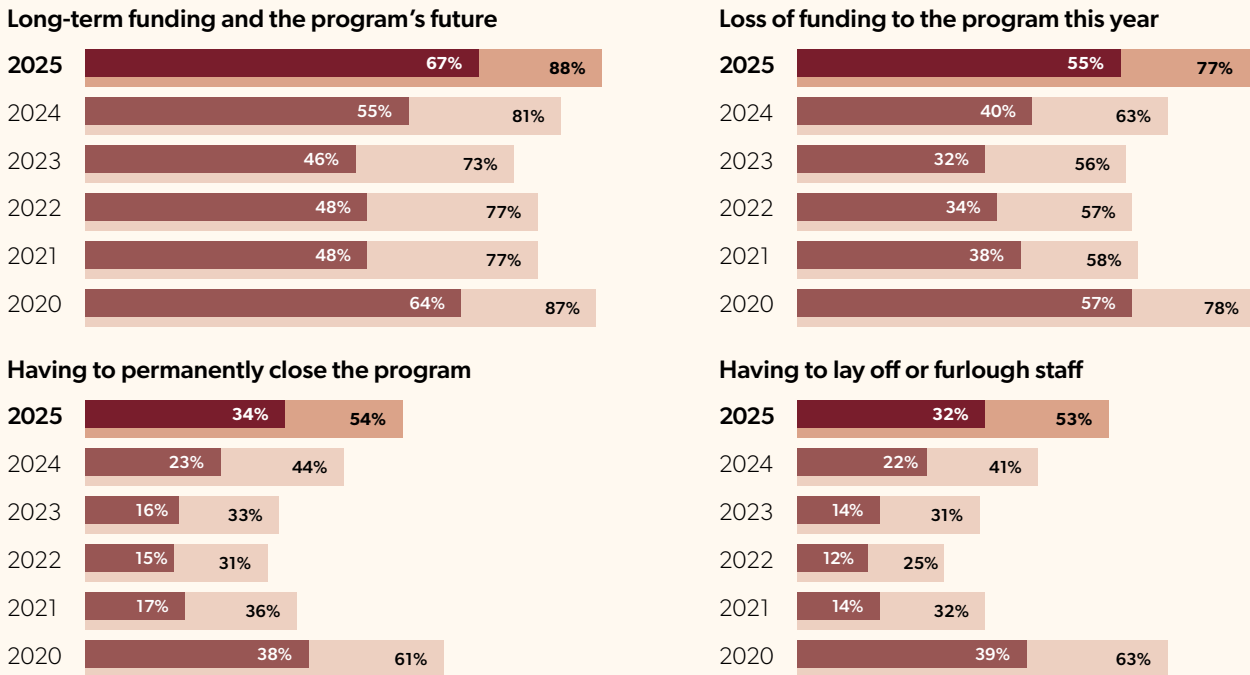
### Afterschool Insight

When asked which resources would be most helpful to their program right now, the top answer selected by program providers reflects their growing concerns about funding. Advice on funding streams and securing foundation funds (48%) is the most in-demand resource, an increase from 44% in fall 2024. The next most helpful resources included advice on staff burnout and keeping teams engaged (32%), tools and trainings to prepare staff to deliver high-quality summer learning programs (28%), tools and resources related to helping provide benefits and supports for staff (27%), communication tools to help families learn more about the supports and benefits of afterschool and summer programs (26%), and trainings and resources to support supervisors and managers (26%).



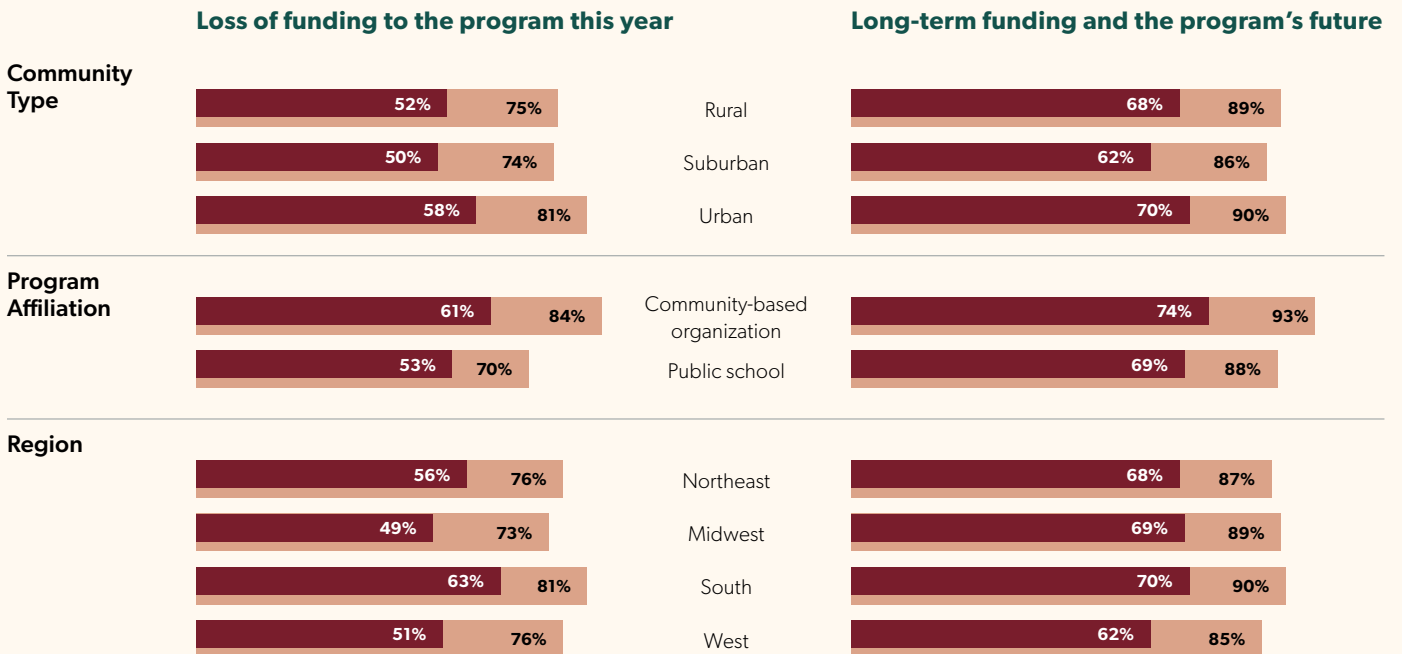
**FIGURE 1: Concerns about sustainability back to 2020 levels**

Percentage of program providers reporting concerns about the following:<sup>\*</sup>



**FIGURE 2: Programs nationwide are concerned about their funding and future**

Percentage of program providers reporting concerns about the following, by community type, program affiliation, and region:



<sup>\*</sup> Bar charts, graphs, and tables in this brief reflect annual program provider surveys conducted during the fall.

Extremely/very concerned Total concern

### Staffing challenges on the decline

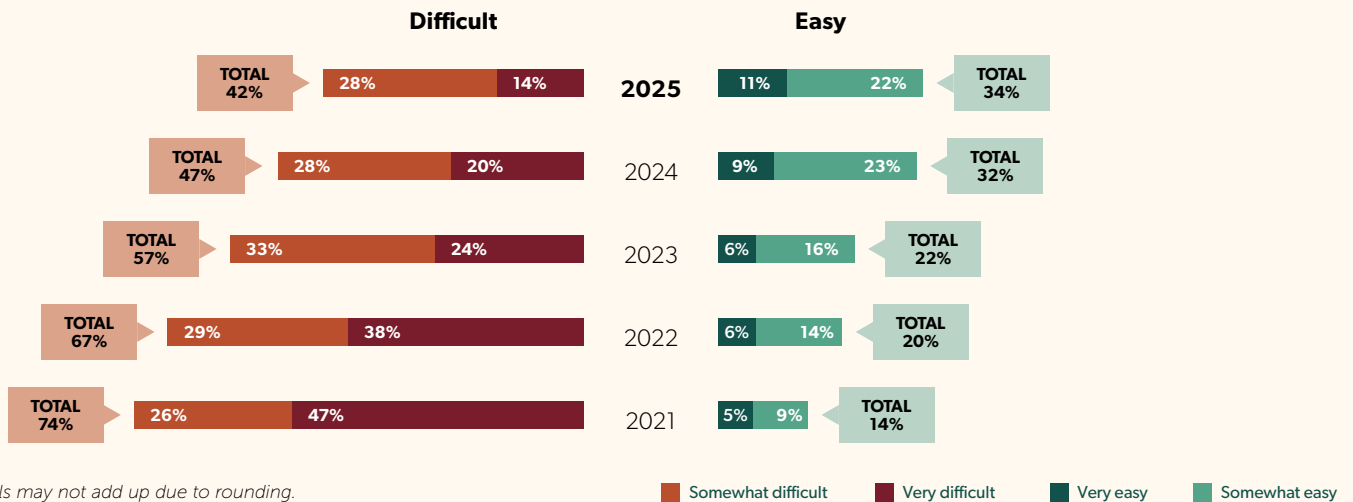
Although more than three-quarters of providers (77%) remain concerned about finding staff to hire or about staffing shortages, with half extremely or very concerned, a bright spot in the data is that providers experiencing staffing difficulties continues to decline (see Figure 3). In addition, those that say hiring staff, retaining staff, or both is very difficult is at its lowest level since this question was first asked in 2021. Currently, 42% of providers say that it is somewhat or very difficult to hire and/or keep staff, with only 14% reporting that it was very difficult, a decrease of more than 70% since fall 2021 when nearly half of providers (47%) said staffing was very difficult.

For those reporting staffing challenges, the inability to compete with the salaries offered by other companies is the most common reason selected for staffing difficulties (67%), followed by not being able to offer more hours to staff (56%), and staff burnout (53%). Programs facing staffing difficulties report negative impacts to their program, including increased staff stress (66%), impediments to their ability to serve more students (61%), lower staff morale (49%), and effects on program quality (48%).



**FIGURE 3: Difficulties with finding staff, retaining staff, or both continue to decline**

Percentage of program providers reporting the level of staffing difficulties they faced:



## Worries about students also grow amidst ongoing challenges with waitlists and concerns over students missing out on afterschool programming

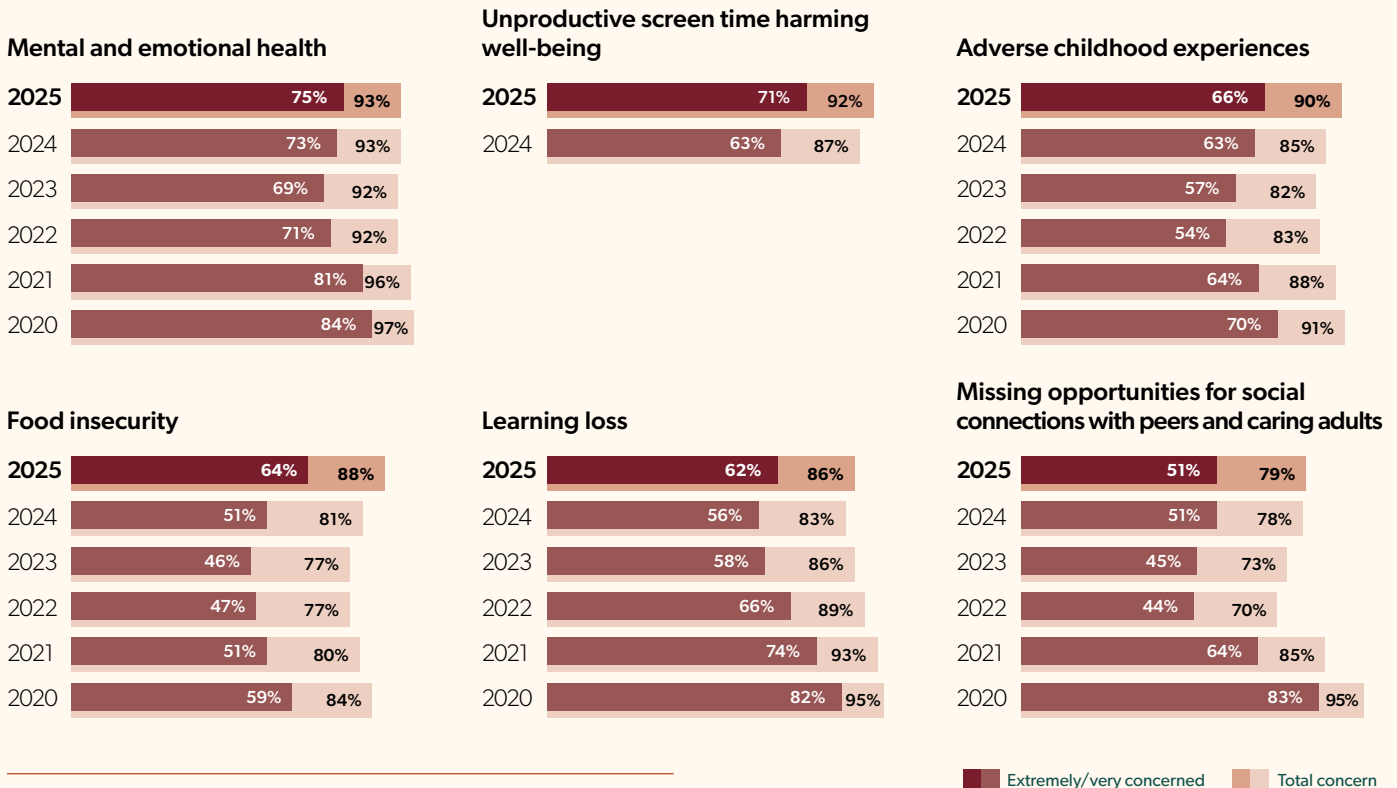
Afterschool program providers continue to voice concerns about their students’ overall well-being, with roughly 9 in 10 concerned about their students’ mental health, access to food, and academic performance. While students’ mental and emotional health remains the most prominent concern among program providers, worries about students experiencing food insecurity, learning loss, and unproductive screen time harming their well-being saw significant gains from the previous fall 2024 provider survey (see Figure 4).

The increase in providers’ level of concern for students experiencing food insecurity is most striking. Providers extremely or very concerned about students experiencing food insecurity grew from 51% in fall 2024 to 64% in fall 2025, the highest level since 2020. Concern is even greater among programs reaching underserved communities. More than 7 in 10 providers who serve a high percentage of children from low-income families (73%), a high percentage of children of color (74%),\*\* or are a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) program (71%) are extremely or very concerned about their students’ access to food. Concern is also higher among community-based organizations (78%) and programs in urban communities (72%).



**FIGURE 4: Program providers continue to worry about their students' well-being**

Percentage of program providers reporting that they are concerned about the following for their students:



\*\* Programs serving a high percentage of children of color are programs where 75% or more of the students they serve identify as Asian American, Black, Hispanic, Native American, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Extremely/very concerned Total concern

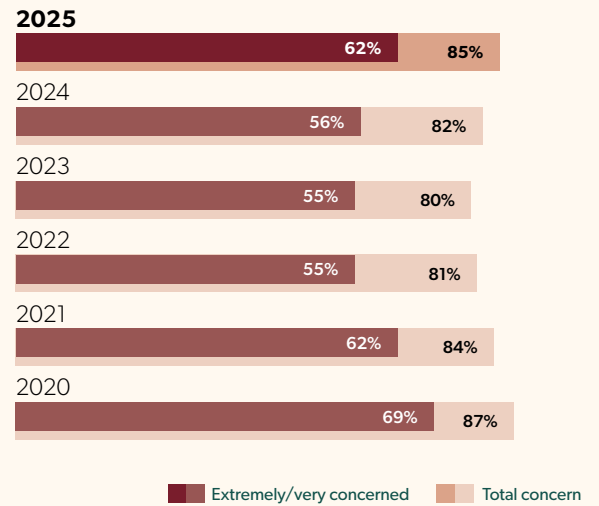
**Worries about students missing out**

As concerns for students grow, so do providers' worries that there are children in their community who need afterschool programs, but are unable to access them. Overall concern has steadily trended upward over the last two years, with 85% of providers currently concerned. Additionally, the intensity of concern jumped from 56% in fall 2024 to 62% in fall 2025, an increase of 6-percentage points and a return to 2021 levels (see Figure 5). Community-based organizations (74%), programs in urban communities (70%) and programs serving a high percentage of children of color (69%) and children from low-income families (65%) are even more likely to be concerned that there are children in their community who need afterschool programming, but are unable to access it.

At the same time, nearly half of providers (48%) report that they have a waitlist. Program providers with a waitlist for their program has been hovering around the 50% mark since 2021, currently down from last year's peak of 53%. Waitlists are highest among programs in urban communities (53%), those located in a public school (53%), and 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs (52%).

**FIGURE 5: Program providers concerned about children missing out on afterschool opportunities is back to 2021 levels**

**Percentage of program providers reporting that they are concerned that there are children in their community who need afterschool programming and are not able to access it:**



## Disruptions and uncertainty at the federal level impacting afterschool programs

Program providers' increasing concerns about funding and their students' overall well-being this past fall, in particular worries about food insecurity, may be due in part to actions and discussions taking place at the federal level. More than 6 in 10 providers (62%) say that the children and families they served were impacted at least somewhat by the six-week federal government shutdown that lasted from October 1 through November 12, 2025. And most providers (86%) are concerned about the impact to their program if proposed federal education budget cuts are implemented (see **Figure 6**). This includes nearly 7 in 10 providers (69%) who are extremely or very concerned.

Programs serving a high percentage of children from low-income families and program providers in urban communities are most likely to report that the children and families they served were impacted a lot by the government shutdown. More than one-third of programs in urban communities and those serving a high percentage of children from low-income families say that the children and families they served were impacted a lot (35%, all), compared to approximately one-quarter of providers overall (27%). 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs are also more likely to say that

they were impacted significantly than programs overall (30% vs. 27%). In open-ended responses describing the impact on children and families, aspects related to food security, such as availability of food banks; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal food assistance program that helps families with low-incomes purchase groceries; and WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, are mentioned most often.

Regarding concerns about proposed federal education budget cuts, rural and urban program providers are more likely to say that they are extremely concerned about the impact of proposed federal education budget cuts than suburban programs (52% and 51% vs. 42%). 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs (69%), providers serving a high percentage of children of color (58%) or children from low-income families (57%), and community-based organizations (56%) are also more likely than programs overall (49%) to be extremely concerned. A very small percentage of programs, regardless of location, community served, or funding stream, are unconcerned about the impact of potential federal education budget cuts.

## Afterschool programs stepping up to support communities

Afterschool program providers share how they responded in real time to the needs of the families in their community during the Fall 2025 federal shutdown:

### Helping Families With Basic Necessities



We are working on setting up food pantries here at our center in addition to our free weekend meals we offer currently. We are also working with local organizations to offer support and services to our families being affected."



We've launched a weekly meal distribution program, providing nutritious snacks and meals to low-income families who relied on the program's food services, alongside digital resources for at-home STEM activities."



We are providing groceries, gift cards, and increasing our Thanksgiving boxes for distribution."

### Connecting Families To Community Resources



We've set up a resource hub with information on local food banks, job assistance programs, and health care options to support families in need."



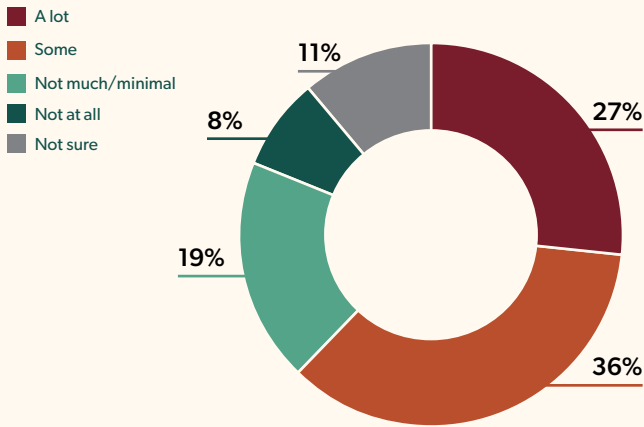
I am currently working on a community event that will connect students and families to community resources like mental health and food distribution services. I am hoping to make this a recurring event to help fill in the gaps for families."



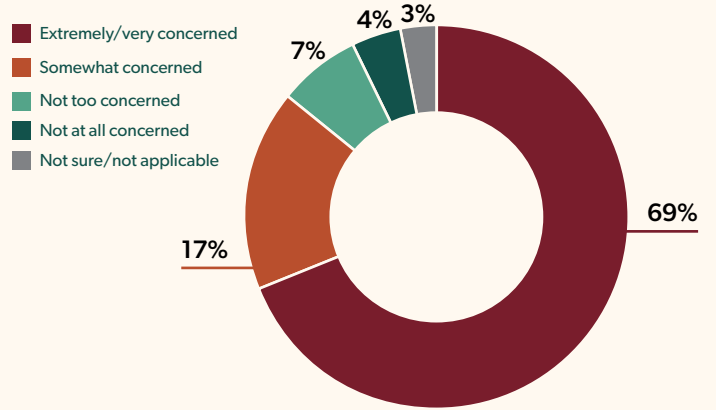
We have responded by increasing support, communication, and stability for the youth and families affected by the shutdown. First, we've expanded our check-ins with families to understand their immediate needs, especially around food, transportation, and access to resources. When families express concerns about delayed paychecks or benefits, we connect them to local community partners, emergency support programs, and trusted resource networks."

**FIGURE 6: Program providers reporting impacts by federal government actions**

How much, if at all, have the children and families you serve been impacted by the federal government shutdown?



Looking ahead to proposed federal education budget cuts, if implemented, how concerned are you that those cuts would impact your program in the future?



**Impact of withholding of federal funds during summer 2025**

On June 30, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education informed state education agencies that nearly \$7 billion in education funds, including \$1.329 billion in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers funds that were expected on July 1, 2025, were being withheld. This meant that states, which historically received federal education funding by July 1 to ensure that schools had resources in advance of the upcoming academic year, were left with uncertainty about their funding and unsure of how to plan for the school year.<sup>1</sup> States that were planning to support programs with the anticipated funds during that summer of 2025 were left scrambling.<sup>2</sup> After a public outcry and bipartisan congressional engagement, funding for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC was released on July 21, with the remaining education funding released on July 28. When asked if this withholding of education funds impacted their program in any way, a plurality of afterschool programs providers (46%) said that they were affected. Providers report

needing to help children and families navigate the uncertainty caused by the temporary freezing of funds (21%), seek short-term funding (12%), and temporarily reduce the number of staff (14%), program offerings and/or hours of programming (13%), or number of students served (12%).

Afterschool programs run by community-based organizations are more likely than programs overall to report helping families navigate the uncertainty (26% vs. 21%) and temporarily reduce program offerings, hours of programming, or both in response to the federal withholding of funds (17% vs. 13%). Community-based organizations and programs in urban communities were more likely than programs overall to need to seek out short-term funding to continue their operations (19% and 14% vs. 12%). 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs are more likely than programs overall to report any impact to their program as a result of the temporary funding freeze, and 10 percentage points less likely than programs overall to say that they did not need to make any changes (see Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7: 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program providers more likely to report an impact from the federal withholding of funds**

Percentage of program providers reporting that they had to take the following measures in response to the federal withholding of funds:

	National average	21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC programs	% point difference
Help children and families navigate the uncertainty caused by the withholding of funds	21%	28%	<b>+7</b>
Temporarily reduce the number of staff	14%	18%	<b>+5</b>
Temporarily reduce program offerings and/or hours of programming	13%	17%	<b>+4</b>
Temporarily reduce the number of students served	12%	15%	<b>+3</b>
Seek short-term funding, lines of credit, etc. to continue operating	12%	15%	<b>+3</b>
Temporarily close one or more program sites	9%	12%	<b>+2</b>
Other	7%	12%	<b>+4</b>
No changes were made	43%	33%	<b>-10</b>

Totals may not add up due to rounding.

### Programs impacted by federal government actions are more likely to be concerned about sustainability and their students' well-being

An examination of afterschool program providers who report that the children and families they served were significantly impacted by the government shutdown and those who said that they were affected by the withholding of education funds during the 2025 summer finds that these programs are more likely than programs overall to express extreme levels of concerns about their program sustainability by double-digit percentage point differences (see Figure 8). Fully 81% of providers who were impacted a lot by the government shutdown and 77% who said that they were affected by the summer withholding are extremely or very concerned about their program's long-term funding and future, 13 and 10 percentage points higher than programs overall (67%). Nearly half of programs impacted by the shutdown or summer withholding (46% and 47%, respectively) are extremely or very worried about needing to permanently close their program, compared to about one-third of programs overall (34%).

While both programs impacted a lot by the government shutdown and those affected by the summer withholding are more likely than programs overall to be concerned about their students' well-being, worries are greater among programs that were significantly impacted by the government shutdown. For example, while 73% of providers affected by the summer withholding are extremely or very worried about their students having adverse childhood experiences compared to 66% of programs overall, among providers impacted a lot by the government shutdown, 82% are extremely or very concerned. Concerns regarding food insecurity is where the largest difference is seen. More than 8 in 10 programs affected a lot by the government shutdown (83%) are extremely or very concerned about their students experiencing food insecurity, 19 percentage points higher than programs overall (64%). As mentioned above, concerns about food insecurity is front and center in providers' responses to an open-ended survey question asking how the children and families they serve were impacted by the government shutdown. One provider writes, "Families are currently facing the loss of SNAP benefits causing them to stress of [sic] where the meals may come from." Another shared, "Food insecurity is a major concern within the communities we serve. The lack of SNAP benefits was very concerning, and the program did our best to provide nutritional, non-perishable food in addition to our usual snack offerings."

Related, programs impacted by actions at the federal level are more likely to be highly concerned that there are children in their community who need afterschool programming, but are unable to access it. Seventy-eight percent of programs affected a lot by the government shutdown and 70% of programs impacted by the summer withholding are worried about access to afterschool programs, 16 and 8 percentage points higher than programs overall (62%).



With recent funding cuts, it has become difficult to plan long term. The freeze of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC and other funding sources and increased competition for other grants have created significant uncertainty at a time when families need our programs more than ever. We have already reduced staff hours and positions to keep services running, and by the end of this calendar year, we may have to close a program or dramatically reduce staffing, operating hours, and the number of students we can serve."

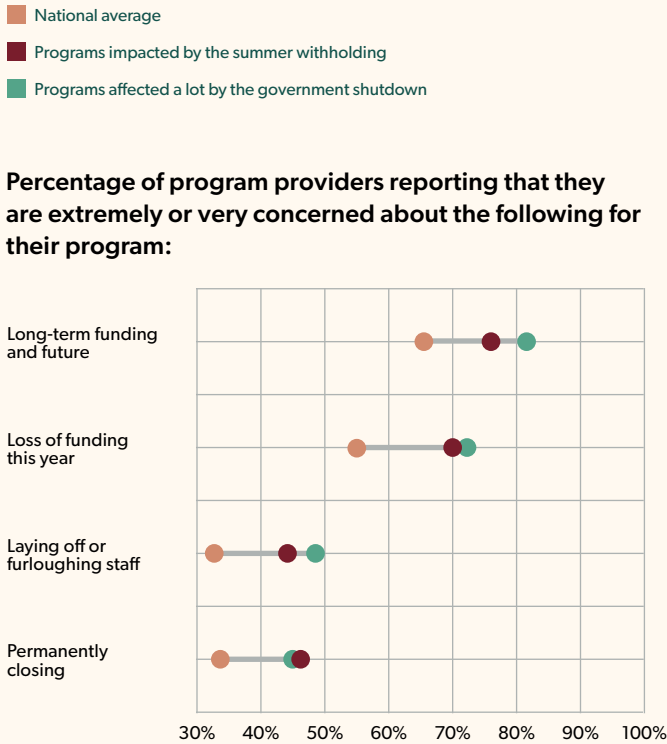
– Fall 2025 program provider survey respondent



It's the uncertainly and upheaval that is hardest on our staff, program, and families. The constant state of chaos creates anxiety."

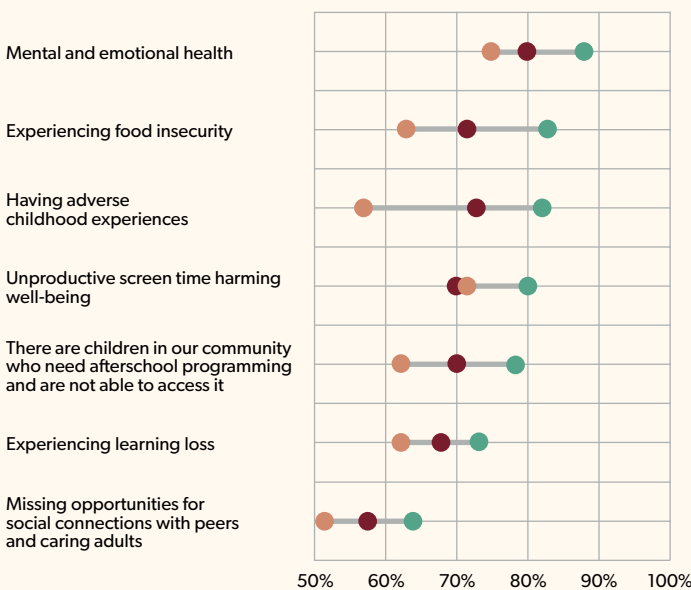
– Fall 2025 program provider survey respondent

**FIGURE 8: Programs impacted by federal government actions are more likely to be highly concerned about sustainability and their students' well-being**



**Percentage of program providers reporting that they are extremely or very concerned about the following for their program:**

**Percentage of providers reporting that they are extremely or very concerned about the following for their students:**



## Afterschool programs provide critical supports to children and families

Despite the challenges and uncertainties facing afterschool programs' operations, they continue to provide young people with opportunities for academic enrichment, time to be active and outdoors, and access to healthy snacks and meals, all while helping to build foundational skills such as the ability to work in teams, think critically, and be leaders. Program providers report offering academic enrichment (91%), including homework help (80%), STEM learning opportunities (78%), and time for reading or writing (69%). They are keeping students healthy by providing snacks and meals (88%), opportunities for physical activity (82%), and time to be outdoors (80%). An overwhelming majority of providers are helping students connect with their peers (84%) and develop communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills (79%), while a strong majority provide opportunities for their students to practice leadership skills (59%).

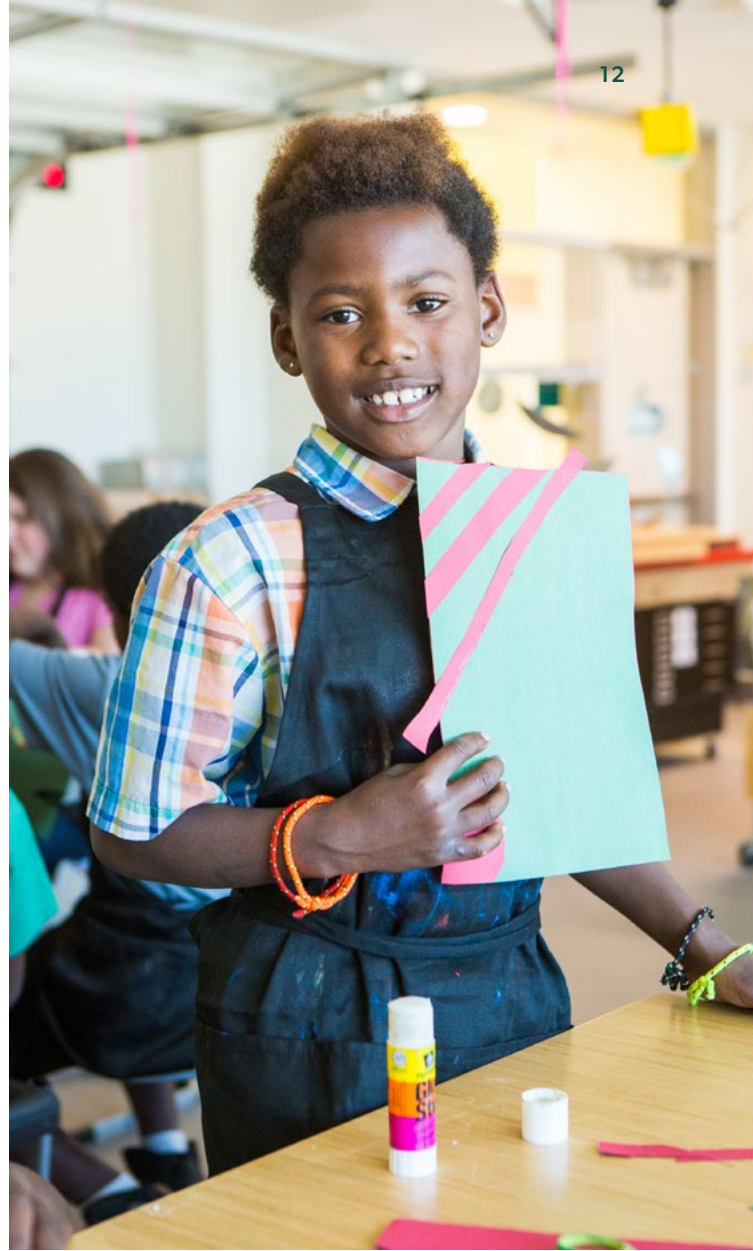
Afterschool programs are also supporting their students' families, with 71% providing family engagement activities, and roughly one-third providing wraparound services connecting families to community resources, such as health or dental clinics or financial planning services (35%), and family leadership opportunities (30%).



## Conclusion

Amidst the mounting concerns about their programs, their students, and their families, afterschool program providers remain optimistic overall about their future. When asked about the future of their afterschool program, approximately 7 in 10 providers (69%) selected that they felt optimistic, an increase from 62% in fall 2024. This data point illustrates the hopeful, adaptable, and dedicated nature of the afterschool field, where in the face of adversity and uncertainty, providers remain confident that they will continue to serve as a trusted resource for the children and families in their community. As one program provider writes, “Funding has really changed the trajectory of the opportunities afforded to our students this year. They have limited access to service providers offering specialty services; field trips are practically non-existent. However, our staff remains positive and consistent. We will be applying for [a round of state grant funding] and are hopeful.”

Given the tumultuousness of the past year, it is understandable that afterschool program providers are on high alert. The current level of worry among providers on so many fronts is troubling. After 12 waves of the program provider survey, the last two surveys indicate a concerning trend of greater anxiousness in the afterschool field at levels not seen since the pandemic. These worries make clear that more investment, resources, and support are needed to help address the financial instability afterschool programs are facing and ease the anxieties providers are feeling, ensuring that programs can focus on meeting the needs of young people, their families, and their communities.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Arundel, K. (2025). 'Immediate harm': Education Department withholds \$6.2B from schools. *K-12 Dive*. <https://www.k12dive.com/news/education-department-withholds-Title-funding-after-school-English-learners-/752116/>; Manuel, P. & Thomas, R. (2025). *East Texas school districts can't continue afterschool programs; Arkansas, Louisiana set to follow due to federal cuts*. KSLA News 12. <https://www.ksla.com/2025/07/16/east-texas-school-district-says-it-cant-continue-afterschool-program-due-federal-funding-cuts/>

<sup>2</sup> Poli, D. (2025). Funding freeze threatens Orange summer, after-school programs. *Greenfield Recorder*. <https://recorder.com/2025/07/03/funding-freeze-threatens-orange-summer-after-school-programs-62138858/>; Abu Tarboush, L. (2025). *Federal funding freeze forces early shutdown of Thomasville summer program*. ABC27 WTXL Tallahassee. <https://www.wtxl.com/thomasville/federal-funding-freeze-forces-early-shutdown-of-thomasville-summer-program>.