



Uncertain Times: Funding Insecurity Puts Afterschool Programs at Risk

For a minority of families across America, afterschool programs provide a critical support that helps children do better in school and reassures parents that their children are safe and well cared for after the school day ends. Some 6.5 million children participate in afterschool programs, but an additional 15 million would participate if a program were available. Unfortunately, funding for afterschool has not nearly kept pace with demand. What has been the effect of recent budget cuts and stagnant funding on afterschool programs and the youth and families that they serve? The Afterschool Alliance's new national survey of afterschool providers, *Uncertain Times: Funding Insecurity Puts Afterschool Programs at Risk*, offers answers.

Program leaders report that they are serving a high-need population, serving more children than expected, and struggling to maintain their funding. Nearly all respondents to this web-based survey say that more children in their communities could benefit from afterschool programs, if programs were available.

In early September the Afterschool Alliance released a preliminary summary of findings from *Uncertain Times* from the first 1,600 respondents. Today the Alliance is releasing updated results from a total of 2,111 afterschool program leaders. They represent 9,813 program sites and serve more than 1.5 million children. 42% percent of respondents are located in urban communities, 34% are in rural communities, and 24% are in suburban communities. The survey finds that during the 2005/2006 school year:

- 75% of afterschool programs operated at or above maximum capacity.
- 87% of respondents say that there are children in their community who need afterschool programs and don't have access to them.
- Afterschool programs are serving a high-need population. At more than half (55%) the programs surveyed, more than three in five students qualify for free or reduced price lunches.
- Nearly half of programs responding to the survey (48%) say that funding is down a little (23%) or a lot (25%) in the last two years. Another 30% say it is unchanged. Just 17% say it is up a little, and just 5% say it is up a lot.
- When programs are forced to make changes due to budget cuts or stagnation, the most common response is to increase the fees parents must pay.
- If programs are able to see an increase in funding, they are most likely to increase the number of students they serve.
- Parent fees are the most accessible funding resource in the nation. 42% percent of respondents rate parent fees as accessible or very accessible. Only 39% of respondents rate 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the only federal funding stream solely devoted to afterschool programs, as accessible or very accessible.
- Fewer than half (47%) of respondents feel fully secure about their funding for the next 1-2 years. Only 20% feel fully secure about their funding for the next 3-5 years.

- Program operators consider the top three barriers to participation in afterschool programs to be: not enough knowledge about the program or afterschool; older youth need to work or care for younger siblings; and transportation.

Respondents who reported receiving 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, are particularly unable to meet the demand in their communities and are in need of even greater support. The survey finds that for afterschool programs receiving 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants:

- 82% of programs are operating at or above maximum capacity; 7% more than the overall national average.
- 72% of programs have more than three in five students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program; 17% more than the national average.
- Funding is down a little or a lot for 53% of programs; 5% more than the national average.
- Only 12% of respondents receiving 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants feel secure about their funding for the next 3-5 years; 8% fewer than the national average.

In sum, *Uncertain Times* finds that many afterschool programs are fully subscribed but still unable to meet the demand, and that budget cuts and stagnation are taking a real toll on afterschool programs and the youth and families they serve. A lack of secure long-term sustainability prevents programs from reaching more youth and families in their communities who could benefit from afterschool.

Methodology: UNCERTAIN TIMES used web-based survey software and the survey was emailed to more than 10,000 contacts in the Afterschool Alliance database in August and September of 2006. Recipients were encouraged to forward the survey to afterschool program staff, and programs were asked to be certain that only one person per program completed the survey and to provide responses from a site-level coordinator when possible. 2,614 responses were reviewed. 503 of them did not provide sufficient data to be included in the final analysis or were duplicate responses; therefore the final sample was 2,111 responses which represent approximately 9,813 afterschool sites serving more than 1.5 million children. (Many respondents are responsible for multiple sites.)