



NEWS RELEASE

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Afterschool Programs Helping Students Re-Engage and Heal as Many Cope with Anxiety, Depression, Persistent Sadness

New Data: Parents Recognize Afterschool Programs Support Mental Health, Wellness, and Recovery for Children and Youth

Washington, D.C. – Few afterschool providers were surprised in December when the U.S. Surgeon General issued [a sobering warning](#) about the mental health of America’s youth, reporting that rates of anxiety, depression, and sadness were high before the pandemic and that COVID-19 was making them much worse. Indeed, [mental health-related emergency room visits](#) by 12 - 17-year-olds increased by 31% from 2019 to 2020. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [just reported](#) that 4 in 10 high school students report feeling “persistently sad or hopeless” and 1 in 5 have contemplated suicide. The CDC noted that “school connectedness” is a protective factor for youth facing mental health challenges.

These studies confirm what afterschool providers have been reporting and validate the trust parents have in afterschool programs to support their children’s healthy development, social engagement, and mental health. A 2020 household survey of more than 31,000 U.S. parents of school-age children, conducted by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance and released today, shows that parents see afterschool and summer learning programs as a pivotal support young people need.

According to [Promoting Healthy Futures: Afterschool Provides the Supports Parents Want for Children’s Well-Being](#), parents’ top concern is that their children have been missing out on social connections and friendships. Most see afterschool programs as part of the solution. Nine in ten parents of afterschool students report their afterschool program gives their child time to interact with peers and build social skills, 82% say it helps build their confidence, and 73% say it helps their child learn responsible decision-making. The supports afterschool programs provide are especially important to parents of color and families with low incomes.

“In addition to the academic support afterschool and summer learning programs are providing at this time when many students have experienced learning loss, these programs offer critically important opportunities for students to engage with their peers, learn life skills, and build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “Afterschool programs are stepping up to help meet the challenges children and youth are facing and doing more than ever to support students’ overall well-being.”

“But too many young people are missing out, and there are alarming inequities in terms of which students have access to afterschool programs,” Grant continued. “For every child in an afterschool

program in the United States today, [three more are waiting to get in](#). The families of 24.6 million children — more than ever before — are unable to access a program. Black and Latino children are among the least likely to have access to the afterschool programs their parents want for them. We need to make it possible for all students to participate in afterschool programs, which help them build the resilience, hope, and connectedness they need to succeed in school and in life.”

Promoting Healthy Futures also finds:

- Eighty-five percent of parents say afterschool programs reduce unproductive screen time, 82% say they help students build life skills, 81% say they build confidence, 75% say they reduce the likelihood that young people will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors, and 74% say they keep kids safe and out of trouble.
- Agreement on the benefits afterschool programs provide crosses all demographic and political lines, with more than 8 in 10 urban, suburban, and rural parents agreeing that these programs give working parents peace of mind. Agreement spans every region, and 86% of Democrats, 83% of Republicans and 82% of Independents agree with that statement.
- More than 3 in 4 parents in all 50 states and the District of Columbia say that afterschool programs provide students with time to interact with peers and build life skills, like the ability to communicate and work in teams; and approximately 7 in 10 in every state and D.C. say these programs help build confidence and help children learn responsible decision-making.
- A safe environment, knowledgeable and caring staff, and the opportunity to build life skills are most important to parents selecting an afterschool program. Ninety-three percent say a safe environment was important in choosing their child’s program and 92% are satisfied with the environment the program provides. Similarly, 93% say staff was important in choosing a program and 89% are happy with the program’s staff. Eighty-eight percent of parents say the opportunity to build life skills was important in choosing a program and 84% are satisfied with the opportunities the afterschool program offers for their child to build life skills.
- Parents of color and those with low incomes place a higher priority on programs helping students build life skills, with 67% of Black parents, 64% of Latino parents, and 63% of parents in families with low incomes saying that was extremely important in their selection of a program, compared to 58% of parents overall. Black, Latino and low-income parents also are more likely to say knowledgeable and caring staff, and a focus on reducing risky behaviors, was extremely important in their choice of an afterschool program.

The full study, *America After 3PM*, and accompanying data, are available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

Data from this special report is based on the 2020 *America After 3PM* survey results, which was made possible with support from the New York Life Foundation, Overdeck Family Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, Altria Group, and the Walton Family Foundation, as well as the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

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. America After 3PM data included in this report were collected between January 27 and March 17, 2020. A total of 31,055 households were surveyed. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. 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.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.