



NEWS RELEASE
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CONTACT: Gretchen Wright
202/371-1999

New Survey: Recession Hurting Rural Afterschool Programs And the Children & Families They Serve

More Struggling Students & Fewer Resources for Rural Programs to Use to Help

Just as America's children need more help, afterschool leaders in rural areas say they are being forced to increase fees and reduce staffing, activities and hours to cope with budget cuts and rising costs. Ninety-five percent of rural respondents to a survey of afterschool programs say the recession is affecting their communities, and most report higher food prices and more families struggling to provide for children. Yet afterschool programs are unable to offer as much help as children need because their budgets are down. Eighty-three percent of rural respondents say children in their communities need afterschool care and are unable to access it.

Those are among the findings from a web-based survey that was completed by 489 rural afterschool leaders across the country. 1,447 afterschool leaders in all (urban, suburban and rural) completed the survey; they represent 8,587 afterschool sites that serve 1.2 million children. The survey was conducted by the Afterschool Alliance in April and May.

“Uncertain Times 2009: Recession Imperiling Afterschool Programs and the Children They Serve” finds that about half of rural programs report a loss in funding due to the recession. Eighty-nine percent expect the recession to impact their budget for the coming school year. Ten percent report a significant loss of funds that will cause cutbacks, or force one or more of their sites to close. In response to funding woes, many rural programs are being forced to add or increase fees. Rural communities report a higher number of youth who are unable to participate in afterschool programs because of transportation costs caused by higher gas prices than urban and suburban programs.

Four in five rural respondents offer summer programs and 43 percent expect enrollment to be higher this summer, adding more strain to program budgets.

“This survey documents a world of hurt all across the country,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “We’re not protecting our kids from the economic pain, or even maintaining the safety nets they count on. Afterschool programs serve a high need population; 62 percent of students at rural afterschool programs qualify for free or reduced price lunches. When programs must charge or raise fees or reduce hours, more children will be unsupervised and at risk after the school day ends. It is alarming that nearly half the rural respondents to our

survey (46 percent) say their budgets are inadequate to meet the needs of students and families. We have to do better by our kids.”

A “Roadmap to Afterschool for All” released by the Afterschool Alliance in April found that there are afterschool programs for children whose parents and guardians can afford to pay tuition and fees, but our afterschool system is leaving behind millions of low-income children whose parents cannot pay. This assessment found that the federal government covers only eleven percent of the cost of afterschool, even though 29 percent of children in programs qualify for federal assistance. It concludes that a federal investment of less than \$18 billion would give 5.6 million low-income youth access to the academic support, supervision, mentoring and fitness opportunities, snacks, and other benefits.

Yet federal funds are lacking. Funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), the chief federal funding stream for afterschool programs, is stalled at \$1.13 billion even though the *No Child Left Behind Act* authorized \$2.5 billion. President Obama’s FY2010 budget proposal would flat fund 21st CCLCs.

In recent weeks, federal lawmakers have introduced bills in the House and Senate to provide additional support to rural afterschool programs. The Investment in Afterschool Programs Act calls for a pilot program to establish or improve rural afterschool programs. The bill would grant \$25,000 or more to programs to invest in projects or activities needed to create or strengthen rural afterschool programs. Funds could be used for expenses including: transportation, professional development and training, access to technology, staffing and planning grants, among other things. Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Mark Begich (D-AK) are the Senate sponsors, and Representatives Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO) and Phil Hare (D-IL) are cosponsors in the House.

“We will work hard to convince Congress to pass this bill this year,” Grant added. “Quality afterschool programs do incredible work keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn and helping working families. These programs also provide students with healthy snacks, sometimes dinner and breakfast, and a range of social services that students and families urgently need. But afterschool programs cannot serve all the children who need them when they are badly underfunded. Even in these tough economic times when there’s tremendous pressure for resources, we have to find a way to do better. Investing in afterschool programs pays off over time in healthier, more successful students and youth.”

Methodology: Uncertain Times 2009 used web-based survey software. The Afterschool Alliance emailed a link to the survey to more than 10,000 contacts in April 2009. In rural areas, 489 programs responded. 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 it, and to provide responses from a site-level coordinator when possible. 1,834 national responses were reviewed. 387 of them did not provide sufficient data to be included in the final analysis or were duplicates. (Many respondents are responsible for multiple sites.)

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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.