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Most Summer Learning Programs Will Open and Return to In-Person Services This Year, But Most Programs Have Not Yet Accessed COVID Relief Funds, And Staffing Is a Major, Growing Challenge

WASHINGTON, DC – A large majority of the country’s summer learning programs will open this summer, and 94% of those that will open plan to serve students mostly or entirely in person – a significant increase from the 64% of providers who reported planning to serve students mostly or entirely in person a year ago. But two-thirds of program leaders (66%) are concerned about being able to hire enough staff this summer and just one in five programs has accessed the federal COVID education relief funds designed to help students recover.

That is according to [an online survey](#) of 948 program providers conducted by Edge Research for the [Afterschool Alliance](#) from March 21 to April 12 of this year. It finds that just 6% of programs that offered summer learning in the past do not plan to do so this year, with another 3% uncertain at the time the survey was conducted. Programs in urban, suburban and rural communities plan to open and provide in-person services, as do programs in every region of the country.

The survey finds growing optimism about a return to normal among afterschool and summer program leaders. Nearly one in three programs (31%) will expand to serve more students this summer, with programs that have been able to access COVID relief funding, most recently provided through the American Rescue Plan and administered by states and local education agencies, more likely to be able to do so than programs that have not. Almost one in three programs (31%) plan a more intentional focus on addressing students’ holistic needs and overall well-being this year than in the past.

But the new survey finds a major and growing concern about staffing. In the spring of 2021, 44% of programs leaders reported being concerned about being able to hire enough staff. That grew to 57% last summer and 66% who report staffing concerns today.

“Many of our children and youth are struggling to recover from isolation and trauma caused by the pandemic, making it more important than ever that they have a chance to engage and learn over the summer,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “So it is good news that most summer learning programs will be operating this year, but the staffing problems they face are significant. Federal COVID relief funds are helping, but not nearly enough programs have been able to access those funds. Afterschool and summer learning programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and provide working parents with peace of mind. Our kids need these programs now more than ever, as they try to manage and recover from the pandemic. Getting funds to these programs should be a priority for all education and civic leaders so they can improve staff pay and benefits and provide more support for students.”

Other findings from the new survey:

- Just one in five respondents (20%) report that their program has received COVID relief funds. A majority (56%) report having been in conversations with their school district or local schools about how best to support students' learning this summer, but 33% have not.
- Almost one in three program providers (31%) say they will place a greater emphasis on ensuring a balance of academic and enrichment activities for students this summer than in the past. This is the case for 38% of programs serving mostly students in families with low incomes and 37% of urban program providers.
- Sixty-six percent of respondents are concerned about being able to hire enough staff for the summer. The next most common concern is being able to meet demand, expressed by 41%, and being able to meet the academic needs of students, expressed by 39%. Just 15% of program leaders worry about reduced enrollment due to health and safety concerns – a much lower number than earlier in the pandemic.
- Three in four respondents (76%) report being optimistic about the future of their program, and 64% say they feel the worst of the pandemic is over.

The survey includes responses from afterschool and summer learning program providers in 50 states and Washington, DC. It is the seventh in a series, first fielded in the spring of 2020, that is tracking the pandemic's impact on America's afterschool and summer learning programs.

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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.