



News Release
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Staffing, Costs Remain Major Challenges for Afterschool Programs. New Survey: Half Report Waiting Lists & One in Four Not Operating at Pre-Pandemic Levels.

With Pandemic Relief Winding Down, Experts Worry Challenges Will Worsen

Washington, DC – As afterschool providers report myriad concerns about young people in their communities, the programs they run are providing children and youth with academic enrichment, time to connect with peers, and opportunities to build life skills. Still, the country’s afterschool programs are operating under considerable stress. More than half (52%) report having waiting lists of students they cannot serve, and 27% are still not able to operate at pre-pandemic levels. While concerns about staffing have eased a bit, still today more than four in five afterschool program leaders (81%) are concerned about finding or retaining staff, or both.

Those are among the findings from [an online survey](#) of 1,116 afterschool providers representing more than 8,800 programs in all 50 states and D.C., conducted from October 31 to December 5, 2023 by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance. The new survey finds that programs that have been able to access federal pandemic relief funds are coping better with cost and staffing challenges – but just 18% of programs have been able to access those funds, which will soon be winding down. At the same time, half of respondents (49%) report that costs have risen over the last year and two in five of them say the increase has exceeded 10%. Program leaders report that staffing, inflation, supplies, and food are most responsible for the increases in the cost of running programs.

“The unmet need for afterschool programs has never been greater. [24.7 million U.S. children](#) not in an afterschool program would be enrolled, if a program were available to them,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “So it is especially troubling that so many programs operating today are facing enormous struggles, with 73% of providers reporting concern – and 46% reporting they are extremely or very concerned – about their program’s long-term funding and future. Those concerns are sure to worsen as pandemic relief funding winds down in coming months.”

“Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, give working parents peace of mind, and help students overcome isolation and trauma,” Grant continued. “Ensuring that we have strong, stable out-of-school-time programs for all students should be a high priority, because these programs do so much to help students succeed in school and in life. But we are not making nearly the investments we need in afterschool and summer learning programs.”

Among other findings from the new survey:

- **Afterschool providers say their students are at risk.** 69% are extremely or very concerned about their students' mental and emotional health, 58% that they are facing learning loss, and nearly half (46%) that they are experiencing food insecurity.
- **Programs are advancing learning and promoting well-being.** 94% report providing academic enrichment; 83% homework or academic help; and 78% STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) opportunities. Almost nine in ten programs (89%) are offering snacks or meals; 88% are providing time to interact with peers and build social skills; and 77% opportunities to develop life skills.
- **Children are being left behind.** Four in five survey respondents (80%) report concern that children in their communities who need afterschool programs are not able to access them.
- **One in four programs (27%) are not operating at pre-pandemic capacity.** The primary reason is staffing shortages, with three in five of these programs (61%) reporting that staffing problems play a role in holding back their program. No other reason was cited by even two in five of these respondents.
- **Four in five programs (81%) overall face staffing shortages.** Programs are trying to address them by increasing wages and salaries (60%), providing additional professional development (43%), providing free child care for staff members (21%), and in other ways. But funding shortfalls make that difficult.
- **Programs receiving pandemic relief funds are at risk.** Just 18% of programs are accessing these funds, but many of them face potentially dire consequences when it ends. 40% expect to reduce programming, activities, and/or support; 38% to reduce staff; 36% to reduce the number of students the program can serve; and 27% to have to reduce staff salaries and/or benefits.

Complete findings from the new survey are available here:

<https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-Programs-Support-Learning-Recovery-Wave-10.pdf>

This online survey of afterschool providers is the 10th in a series begun in response to the pandemic that has evolved to explore new and ongoing challenges facing the afterschool field. Previous waves of the survey, also conducted for the Afterschool Alliance by Edge Research, were conducted beginning in the spring of 2020.

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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.