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Staffing Crisis Constraining Most Afterschool Programs

New Survey: Afterschool Programs Coping with Staff Shortages That Are Serious & Worsening

WASHINGTON, DC – The labor shortage that is roiling our country’s economy is having a major impact on afterschool programs, most of which are experiencing serious, in some cases crippling, staff shortages. In every region and every type of community, afterschool program leaders report struggling to retain and hire staff. That is now, by far, providers’ most serious concern, according to an online [survey](#) conducted by Edge Research for the [Afterschool Alliance](#). The new survey also finds a sharp rise in programs reporting having waiting lists, from 37% of physically open programs last spring to 54% today. Providers report the staffing challenges contribute to their inability to serve more students, staff stress and burnout, and higher program costs.

In the new survey, 87% of afterschool program providers report being at least somewhat concerned about finding staff or staffing shortages, with more than half (51%) saying they are extremely concerned. Nearly as many, 83%, report being concerned about their ability to maintain staff through health concerns. Both are substantial increases from responses to the same questions last spring.

Seven in ten respondents to the survey (71%) report that their program has taken action to attract or retain staff, or both. The most common actions are raising salaries (53%), increasing opportunities for professional development (32%), or offering free childcare (18%), signing bonuses (15%), or additional paid time off (10%). Conducted from November 1 to December 13, 2021, the survey includes responses from 1,048 afterschool program providers in 49 states and Washington, DC. It is the sixth 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.

“We have long been concerned that afterschool program staff are underpaid and without the benefits workers rely on, especially during the pandemic, including paid leave, health coverage, and more,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “These new findings are sobering, especially since we know Omicron has increased staffing problems since this survey was conducted. While many programs report using federal COVID relief funds to support staff recruitment and retention, those funds are likely to end long before the afterschool staffing crisis does. If we don’t provide resources to help afterschool programs staff up, students, families, and our country will suffer. Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and provide peace of mind to parents. We need these programs to be fully staffed as we try to manage and recover from the pandemic.”

Other findings from the new survey:

- Concern about staffing is widespread. Sixty-two percent of suburban afterschool program providers report being *extremely* concerned about staffing, as do 50% of urban providers and 48% of rural

providers. Half of providers in the Northeast (53%), Midwest (52%), South (50%), and West (49%) report *extreme* concern about finding staff to hire or staffing shortages.

- Staff shortages are driving up costs. Nearly half of respondents (47%) say their program's cost per child increased for in-person services during the fall. A strong majority of those who report an increase in costs (83%) cite staffing as a reason. The costs of supplies and cleaning protocols are the next most commonly cited reasons, with 55% of respondents naming both.
- Seven in ten programs (71%) have taken steps to attract staff, retain staff, or both, but still, three in four (74%) say it has been difficult hiring or retaining staff and 47% say it has been *very* difficult.
- Many more programs that have accessed COVID relief funding, provided through the American Rescue Plan and administered by the states, have taken steps to attract or retain staff than programs without this additional support. Sixty-nine percent of programs with COVID relief funding have raised staff salaries, compared to 49% without; and 46% of programs with COVID relief funding have added professional development opportunities, compared to 28% without.
- While fewer afterschool providers report concerns about programs' long-term funding and future now (77%) than in the spring of 2020 (when 88% did), the challenges facing the field are taking a toll. The number of providers who report being optimistic about the future of their afterschool program dropped from 80% last summer to 74% now.

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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.