



Executive Summary

Afterschool in Communities of Concentrated Poverty



Research has documented the positive impacts associated with participation in afterschool programs, including academics and social and emotional outcomes, and many news stories have raised awareness about the essential supports and services afterschool programs provide to students and their families. Afterschool programs have come to be recognized as critical partners in helping to ensure that all children are afforded the opportunities that will help them thrive and meet their full potential. Afterschool programs can enact meaningful change by encouraging children to explore different interest areas to find their passion, finding new and creative ways to keep kids excited about learning, offering academic help to students who are struggling with their school day lessons, and helping keep their students from hunger by providing nutritious foods.

In particular, afterschool programs have the ability to help address some of the inequalities facing families living in communities of concentrated poverty. Findings from *America After 3PM: Afterschool in Communities of Concentrated Poverty* document the role that afterschool programs play in supporting families living in high-poverty areas by answering questions about what afterschool program participation looks like, what the demand for afterschool programs is, what is preventing parents from taking advantage of and children from participating in afterschool programs, and what the afterschool program experience is like for families in communities of concentrated poverty.

The demand for afterschool and summer learning programs in communities of concentrated poverty is high

- The demand for afterschool programs in communities of concentrated poverty is much higher than the national average, where more than half of children (56 percent) not in an afterschool program would be enrolled in one if it were available to them, compared to the national average of 41 percent.

What are communities of concentrated poverty?

Communities of concentrated poverty are neighborhoods, or groupings of neighborhoods, in a community where there is a high concentration of families that live below the federal poverty line. In 2016, the federal poverty guideline for a family of four was \$24,300. Scholars have included areas with at least 20 percent of families living below the poverty line up to at least 40 percent of families living below the poverty line as a community of concentrated poverty. For the purposes of *America After 3PM*, survey respondents living in communities of concentrated poverty are those that meet the following criteria:

- Live in a zip code that falls within a census tract that the Census Bureau has designated as a community of concentrated poverty, and
- Live in a zip code that has poverty rate of 30 percent or above.

Department of Health & Human Services. (2016). *Computations for the 2016 Poverty Guidelines*. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/computations-2016-poverty-guidelines>; Bishaw, A. (2014). *Changes in Areas with Concentrated Poverty: 2000-2010*. American Community Survey Reports. United States Census Bureau.

- Two out of three parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (66 percent) would like their child to take part in a summer learning program, 15 percentage points higher than the national average of 51 percent.

A detailed description of *America After 3PM*'s survey methodology can be found in *America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand*, available at: http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM_National_Report.pdf.

- Afterschool program participation in communities of concentrated poverty is higher than the national average. Close to 1 in 4 children living in communities of concentrated poverty participate in an afterschool program (24 percent), compared to less than 1 in 5 children nationally (18 percent).
- More than 4 in 10 parents living in areas of concentrated poverty (41 percent) report that their child took part in a summer learning program, 8 percentage points higher than the national average (33 percent).
- African-American families, who constitute a significant percentage of families living in high-poverty areas, have higher levels of participation in and demand for afterschool programs. More than 7 in 10 African-American children (71 percent) living in communities of concentrated poverty who are not in an afterschool program would be enrolled if a program were available to them. Close to 3 in 10 African-American children living in communities of concentrated poverty (27 percent) take part in an afterschool program.

Families living in communities of concentrated poverty face key obstacles

Although the rate of participation in afterschool programs is higher among communities of concentrated poverty compared to their higher-income counterparts, so too is the demand for programs. *America After 3PM* finds three key hurdles standing between children in communities of concentrated poverty and participation in an afterschool program.

Accessibility

Parents living in communities of concentrated poverty—both parents with and without a child in an afterschool program—report challenges regarding the availability and accessibility of afterschool programs in their area.

- More than 2 out of 3 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (67 percent) report that finding an enriching environment for their child in the after school hours was a challenge, compared to 46 percent of parents living outside of these areas.
- Looking only at parents who do not have a child in an afterschool program:

- More than 4 in 10 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (42 percent) report that the lack of afterschool programs in their community was a very important factor in the decision not to enroll their child in a program, 14 percentage points higher than parents living outside of areas of concentrated poverty (28 percent).
- Parents living in areas of concentrated poverty were more likely than their higher-income counterparts to report that lack of a safe way for their children to get to and home from afterschool programs (51 percent versus 39 percent), hours of operation (47 percent versus 31 percent) and inconvenient locations (41 percent versus 33 percent) were important factors in their decision not to enroll their child in a program.

Affordability

For parents living in communities of concentrated poverty, the cost of an afterschool program weighed heavily both in their selection of a program and in the decision some made to not send their child to an afterschool program.

- More than 6 in 10 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (61 percent) agree that current economic conditions have made it difficult for them to afford placing their child in an afterschool program, 14 percentage points higher than parents living outside of communities of concentrated poverty (47 percent).
- Close to 3 in 4 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (73 percent) say that program cost was very important in their selection of an afterschool program, compared to 67 percent of parents living outside communities of concentrated poverty.¹
- Among parents who do not have a child in an afterschool program, almost half of parents living in communities of concentrated poverty (47 percent) report that the cost of afterschool programs was a very important factor in their decision not to enroll their child in a program, compared to 43 percent of parents living outside of high-poverty areas.

¹ Parents with a child in an afterschool program were asked on a 7-point scale, where 7 represented "extremely important" and 1 represented "not at all important," "How important were each of the following reasons in selecting your child's primary afterschool program?" For the purposes of this report, "very important" is defined as parents whose response to the question was a 6 or a 7.

Negative perceptions of afterschool programs persist among parents who do not have a child involved in an afterschool program

In addition to issues of accessibility and affordability, a close examination of parental responses finds that, although a positive afterschool program experience is reported by parents with a child enrolled in a program, a number of negative perceptions of afterschool programs among parents living in communities of concentrated poverty influenced the decision not to enroll their child in a program. The lack of research on perceptions of parents living in areas of concentrated poverty relating to education, programs and services in the community makes it difficult to determine if this finding is unique to afterschool programs or in line with the sentiments toward other offerings in the area.

- Among parents without a child in an afterschool program, parents living in communities of concentrated poverty were more likely to say that the quality of services in afterschool programs were unsatisfactory than parents living out of high-poverty areas. The difference was more than 10 percentage points.
- Parents living in communities of concentrated poverty who do not have a child in an afterschool program were also less likely to see the value of programs for their child. Again, more than 4 in 10 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty agree that their child does not enjoy afterschool programs (43 percent) and would not benefit from programs (41 percent), 10 and 9 percentage points higher, respectively, than parents living outside of concentrated poverty areas (33 percent and 32 percent).

Afterschool programs creating opportunities for all students

Children living in high-poverty areas take part in a wide variety of learning experiences and access a number of essential resources that can be a lifeline for families living in communities of concentrated poverty. Additionally, the afterschool program experience of children living in communities of concentrated poverty looks very similar to that of children living outside of these areas.

- An overwhelming majority of parents living in communities of concentrated poverty report that their child's afterschool program provides opportunities for physical activity (87 percent); homework assistance (81 percent); STEM learning opportunities (78 percent); opportunities for reading or writing (76 percent); and beverages, snacks or meals (75 percent).
- Satisfaction with the experiences and opportunities provided by their child's afterschool program is high among parents living in communities of concentrated poverty, with most parents reporting that they are satisfied with their child's afterschool program overall (91 percent), the program's quality of care (85 percent), the knowledge and training of program staff (81 percent), the program's variety of activities (80 percent), the opportunities for reading or writing (78 percent), and the healthfulness of the snacks or meals provided by the program (77 percent).





Parents living in communities of concentrated poverty look to afterschool programs as a source of support

For parents living in communities of concentrated poverty, afterschool programs also help to provide services that other families may take for granted—such as a safe environment and nutritious foods. *America After 3PM* found that access to these fundamental necessities is especially important to parents living in areas of concentrated poverty when selecting their child’s afterschool program.

- Families living in communities of concentrated poverty look to afterschool programs as a source of support to help meet their family’s everyday needs—much more so than families living outside of these communities. Eighty-six percent of parents living in areas of concentrated poverty say that safety was very important in their selection of a program, compared to 80 percent of parents living outside of high-poverty areas. Close to 7 in 10 parents (68 percent) living in areas of concentrated poverty report that snacks and meals were important in their decision, higher than parents living outside of high-poverty areas (55 percent).
- To parents living in communities of concentrated poverty, afterschool programs are also a support system that provides much-needed assistance to working families. Eighty-three percent of parents living in communities of concentrated poverty agree that afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs, compared to 74 percent of parents living outside of these high-poverty areas.
- Agreement on the value of afterschool programs is also strong among parents living in communities of concentrated poverty. An overwhelming majority of parents living in

communities of concentrated poverty agree that afterschool programs can help their child develop social skills (86 percent), and improve his or her school day behavior (77 percent) and attendance (74 percent). A large percentage of parents living in communities of concentrated poverty also agree that programs can excite their child about learning (79 percent) and reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in risky behaviors (83 percent).

- The supports that afterschool programs provide are especially important to African-American parents. Close to 9 in 10 African-American parents agree that afterschool programs help give working parents peace of mind (87 percent) and that there should be some type of organized activity or place for children and teens to go after school every day that provides them opportunities to learn (88 percent). Approximately 3 in 4 African-American parents (74 percent) said that their child getting snacks or meals at a program was important in their selection of a program, with 57 percent saying it was extremely important in their program selection.

Recommendations

Taken collectively, this report’s findings help to establish the unmistakable value of afterschool programs as one strategy to address the inequalities prevalent in communities of concentrated poverty. At the same time, these findings underscore the number of children living in communities of concentrated poverty who are missing out on taking part in an afterschool program and the number of benefits and supports being missed by children who are unable to take part in an afterschool program. The following are recommendations to bring more quality afterschool programs to children and families living in communities of concentrated poverty and help bring opportunity back into balance in these high-poverty areas.

- **Make investment in afterschool programs a priority.**

Designating investment in afterschool programs as a priority at the national, state and local levels will help afterschool program providers better meet the needs of children and families in communities of concentrated poverty. Targeted investments that support afterschool and summer learning programs can help programs expand their capacity to serve more children and families in communities of concentrated poverty, provide services at an affordable rate, retain qualified staff, and implement program evaluations to monitor and refine program quality. Nine in 10 parents living in communities of concentrated poverty support public funding for afterschool programs.

- **Capitalize on opportunities in the Every Student Succeeds Act to meet the needs of children and families during the afterschool hours.**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) places much of the decision making authority in the hands of state and local education agencies. In the implementation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative, state education agencies should take great care to ensure that children living in communities of concentrated poverty have access to afterschool and summer learning programs funded by 21st CCLC. One way to do this is including schools that are at least 40 percent Free and Reduced Price Lunch as a statewide category of schools that are eligible for 21st CCLC funding.

- **Better integration of afterschool programs and additional supports for families in communities of concentrated poverty.**

Comprehensive afterschool programs can play a central role in helping coordinate a wide variety of supports for families in need by serving as a platform for—or a connector to—such services as mentoring programs, access to nutritious meals, healthcare and wellness check-ups, and housing. Whether as a part of a community school initiative, Promise Neighborhood effort, other place-based strategy or as a standalone program, afterschool programs are a natural hub for the types of supports families can use to meet a variety of needs.



- **Raise awareness about the array of supports afterschool programs can provide in communities of concentrated poverty.**

Increasing awareness of the opportunities and supports afterschool programs offer can help begin to address the disconnect between the afterschool program experience of children living in communities of concentrated poverty and the experience parents without a child in an afterschool program envision. Outreach to parents, schools and community partners can play a role in educating parents living in communities of concentrated poverty that afterschool programs are not only a resource for their child, but are a resource for the family as well.

- **Increase awareness among afterschool program providers of available resources.**

More work is needed to ensure that afterschool program providers are aware of the resources at the federal, state and local levels that are available to them. Program providers can be better informed of professional development opportunities for staff, successful practices around establishing citywide supports and infrastructures that maximize the use of resources, and ongoing research on program improvement and evaluation. By helping ensure that programs serving communities of concentrated poverty are aware of and accessing available resources, we can better ensure that the services provided are high quality and are meeting the needs of children and families.

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