

America After 3PM among Middle School Youth



Introduction

Across grade levels, afterschool programs are helping young people find their passions, express themselves and develop the foundational skills that will help them thrive in and out of school. Afterschool experiences range from opportunities for kindergartners to work in teams and hone cooperation skills, to giving 12th graders real-world work experience through civil engineering design projects completed in conjunction with business leaders in the community. These programs play an integral role in preparing young people in the middle school grades—which for the purposes of America After 3PM are 6th, 7th, and 8th grade—for their transition to high school, providing a holistic set of academic and social and emotional supports.

The hours between 3 and 6 p.m. look different for middle school youth than for their older and younger peers. Middle schoolers are more likely to be alone and unsupervised after school than elementary school children, yet more likely than high schoolers to be enrolled in an afterschool program. However, similar to

their younger and older peers, for every middle schooler in an afterschool program, three more would participate if a program were available to them.

In a nationally representative survey of parents (commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance in the fall of 2020 to supplement data collected before the schools and states began to close in response to the pandemic), 2 in 3 parents of middle school students reported that they were concerned about their child staying on-track in school. More than half of these parents (55 percent) reported feelings of stress thinking about continuing to provide learning support for their child if virtual school and distance learning continues. In the midst of the pandemic, parents continue to value the supports that afterschool programs provide, with a full 70 percent of parents of middle schoolers reporting that the experience of the coronavirus has made them appreciate school teachers and afterschool providers more than ever.

Unmet demand for afterschool programs among middle school youth continues to rise

The 2020 edition of America After 3PM finds that the number of middle schoolers who are not in an afterschool program, but would enroll if a program were available to them, increased by nearly 1 million students since 2014, from 4 million students in 2014 to slightly fewer than 5 million students in 2020 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The number of middle school youth who would likely participate in an afterschool program increased by nearly 1 million students since 2014

Percentage of middle school youth who would be enrolled in an afterschool program if one were available

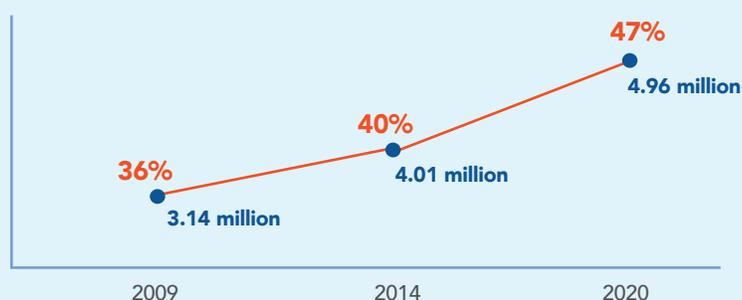
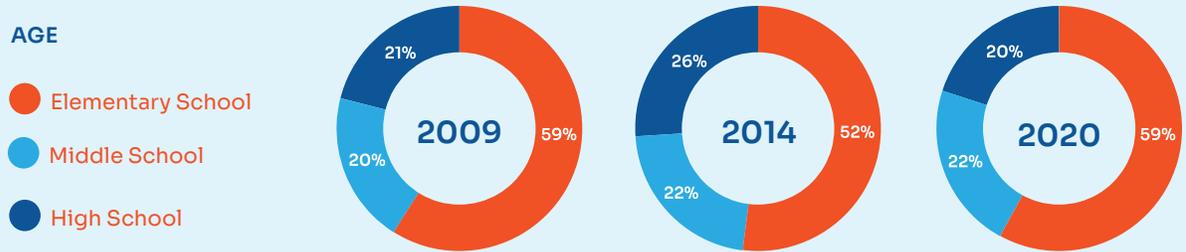


Figure 2: Composition of likely afterschool program participants by*:



*Totals may not add up to 100 percent as respondents were able to select all answers that apply

Unmet demand for afterschool programs among middle school students (47 percent) falls in-between their younger and older peers (56 percent of elementary school students and 36 percent of high school students), and compared to previous America After 3PM results, middle school youth continue to comprise roughly one-fifth of the young people who are not in an afterschool program but would be enrolled if a program were available (Figure 2).

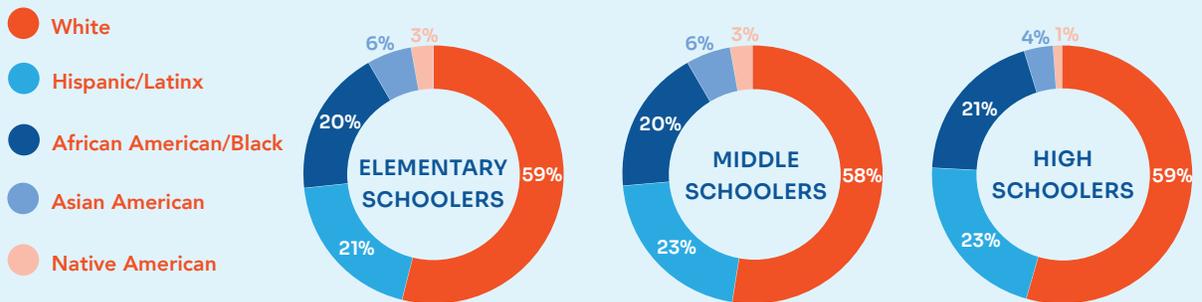
The race and ethnicity make up of middle schoolers who would participate in an afterschool program if one were available to them is similar to elementary and high school students who are

likely participants, with White students representing close to 60 percent of likely participants, followed by Latinx and Black students each representing approximately one-fifth of likely participants (Figure 3).

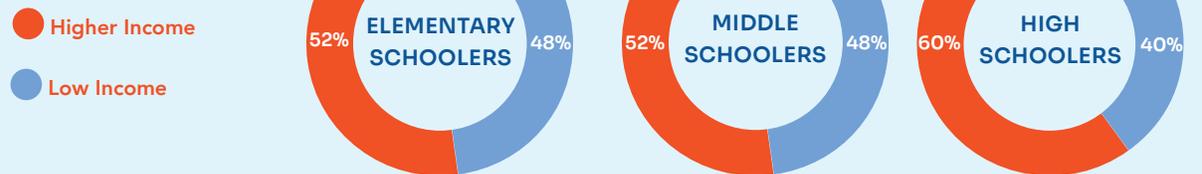
A difference does arise between the grade levels examining the composition of likely participants by income. Elementary and middle school students with low income and high income are close to evenly split; among high school students, higher income high schoolers make up 60 percent of likely participants versus 40 percent of low-income high schoolers (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Composition of likely afterschool program participants by grade level and:

RACE/ETHNICITY



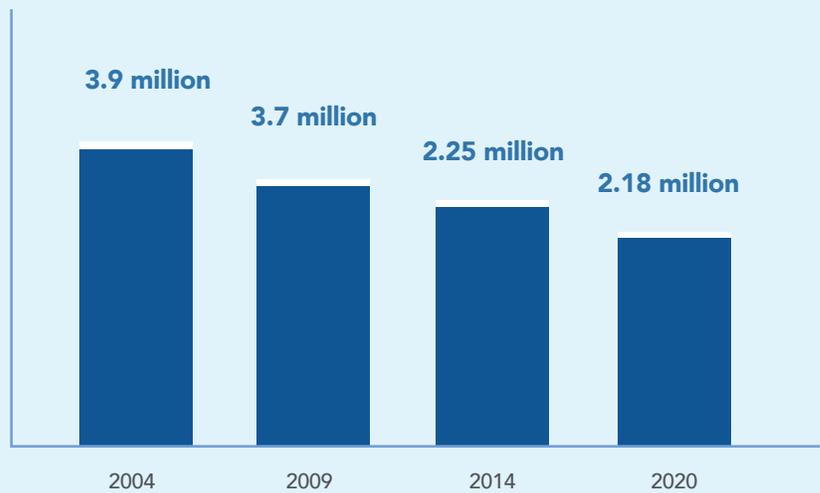
INCOME LEVEL



Middle school youth fall in the middle when it comes to being on their own after school

America After 3PM 2020 finds that middle schoolers are much more likely to be alone and unsupervised between 3 and 6 p.m. compared to elementary school students, but much less likely to be on their own than their high school peers.

The number of middle school students alone and unsupervised after school continues its downward trend, dropping from 3.9 million middle schoolers in 2004 to 3.7 million in 2009, 2.25 million in 2014, and 2.18 million in 2020.



Children alone and unsupervised between 3 and 6 p.m.

The number and percentage of children, by grade level, who are in self-care after school

Elementary school students	4%	855,347
Middle school students	18%	2,184,811
High school students	35%	5,878,688



Majority of parents of middle school students report affordability and access are barriers to afterschool enrollment

The top two reasons parents of middle school students say that they did not enroll their middle schooler in an afterschool program are that they preferred their child stay with them or another adult during the afterschool hours (59 percent) and their child was old enough to care for him or herself (59 percent).

Yet majorities of parents report that factors including cost (57 percent) and a lack of a safe way to and from the program (53 percent) were important reasons they did not enroll their middle schooler in an afterschool program, an increase of 14 and 12 percentage points respectively from 2014

(Figure 4). Roughly half of parents in 2020 report program location (50 percent) and hours of operation not meeting their needs (45 percent) are barriers, and 42 percent of parents say that afterschool programs are not available in their community, all double digit percentage point increases from 2014.

Low-income parents with a middle school student are more likely than their higher income counterparts to report that program cost (60 percent vs. 54 percent), lack of a safe way to and from programs (57 percent vs. 50 percent), and no available programs in their community (44 percent vs. 40 percent) influenced their decision to not enroll their child in an afterschool program. Parents with low incomes are also more likely to express concern that afterschool programs would expose their middle schooler to negative influences than higher income parents (52 percent vs. 46 percent).

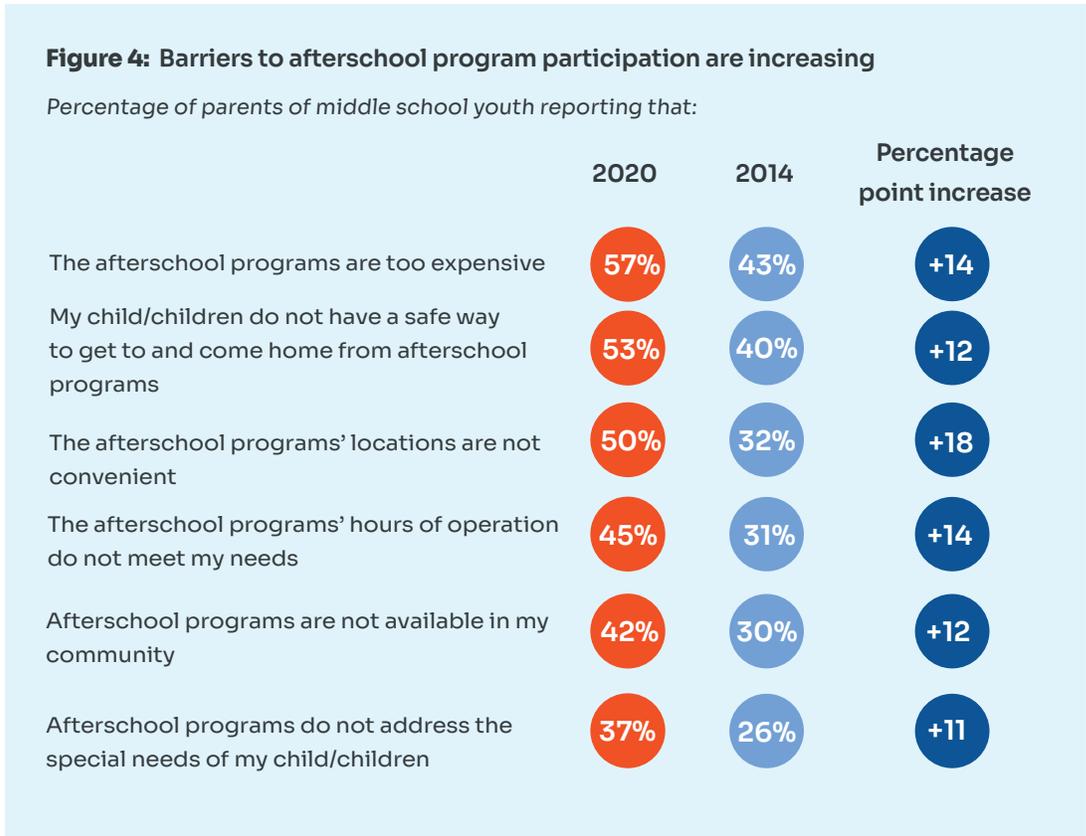
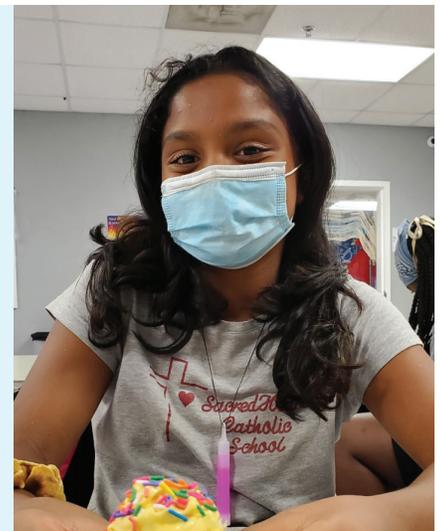
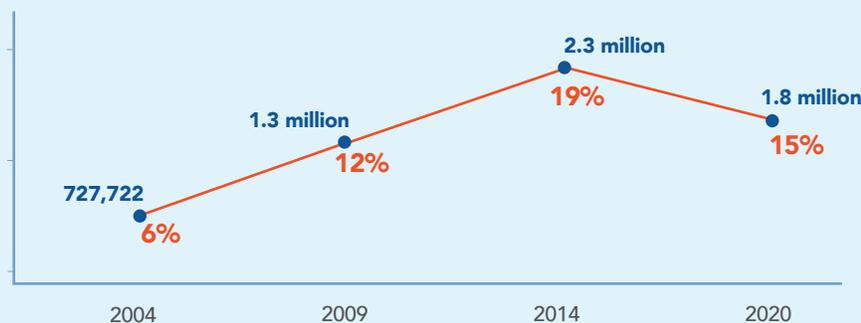


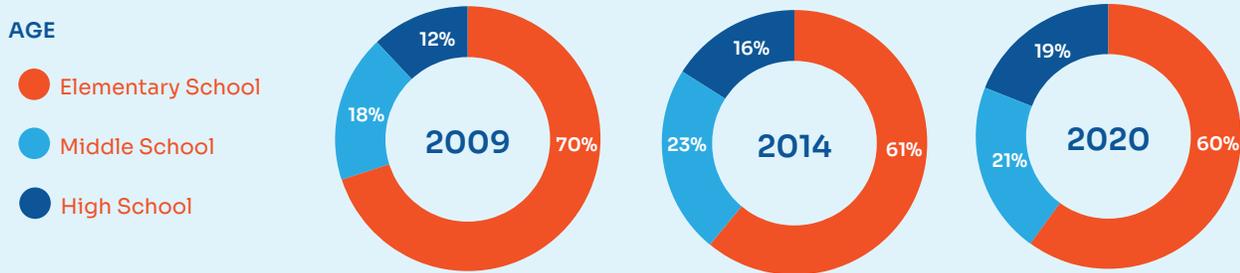
Figure 5. The number of middle school youth participating in afterschool programs has declined by more than half a million young people

Percentage of middle school youth participating in an afterschool program



Following the national trend, the number of middle school students who participated in an afterschool program decreased—from 2.3 million students in 2014 to 1.8 million students in 2020 (Figure 5). However, the percentage of middle schoolers participating in afterschool programs is above 2009 levels, and middle school youth remain approximately one-fifth of the participants in afterschool programs (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Composition of afterschool program participants by* :



*Totals may not add up to 100 percent as respondents were able to select all answers that apply

Afterschool programs are providing critical supports for middle school participants and parents

More than 9 in 10 parents (93 percent) report that they are satisfied with their middle schoolers’ afterschool program, an increase from 89 percent in 2014 and 88 percent in 2009. Moreover, 57 percent of parents in 2020 report that they are extremely satisfied with their middle school child’s afterschool program, up from 44 percent in 2014.

An overwhelming majority of middle school students in afterschool programs are engaging in academically enriching

activities, such as STEM learning opportunities (74 percent) and reading and writing (69 percent), as well as are building their social skills (90 percent), being active (85 percent), and developing life skills (70 percent). Parents are satisfied with these offerings as well, with a large majority reporting that they are at least somewhat satisfied with opportunities that include physical activity (78 percent), reading or writing (77 percent), homework help (74 percent), STEM learning (67 percent), and music or art (62 percent) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Parents are satisfied with the supports offered in their middle schooler’s afterschool program

Percent of parents reporting that an aspect was offered in selecting their middle school child’s afterschool program and percent reporting that they are satisfied with the offering

	Offered	Satisfied		Offered	Satisfied
Physical activity	85%	78%	Reading or writing time	69%	77%
Homework or academic help	74%	74%	Experience the outdoors	67%	69%
STEM	74%	67%	Snacks/meals including healthy options	64%	69%
Build life skills	70%	81%	Music or arts	57%	62%



Afterschool for Middle School Youth	1,797,904 Number students in afterschool programs	4.9 Average hours per week	3.7 Average days per week
	77% Parents reporting that their child's afterschool program is located in a public school building	\$104.70 Average weekly cost* <small>*Among parents who report that they pay a fee for their child's afterschool program</small>	14% Parents receiving governmental assistance with the cost of afterschool programs

Most parents also report that their middle schooler is building confidence (80 percent) and learning responsible decision making in their afterschool program (73 percent).

Regarding the assistance afterschool programs provide parents, parents with a middle school student in an afterschool program report that programs are helping them in a range of ways. More than 7 in 10 parents agree that the afterschool program allows them to keep their job or work more hours (77 percent) and builds their own skills through classes or workshops (71 percent), and 59 percent agree that the program connects them with community resources.

Similar to parents overall, parents of middle school students report selecting an afterschool program based on a safe environment (94 percent), knowledgeable and caring staff (92 percent), convenient hours of operation (91 percent) and location (89 percent), and opportunities to build life skills (89 percent), with most parents reporting satisfaction with their child's afterschool program in these areas (Figure 8). Parents of middle school students select afterschool programs based on the same factors that influence the choices made by parents of elementary and high school students.

Figure 8. A safe environment and caring staff top the list of factors parents of middle school students look for in an afterschool program

Percentage of parents of middle school students reporting the select following items were important in choosing their child's afterschool program and the percentage reporting that they were satisfied with the offering

	Important	Satisfied		Important	Satisfied
Safety of environment	94%	91%	Convenient location	89%	81%
Knowledgeable and caring staff	92%	90%	Opportunities to build life skills	89%	81%
Convenient hours	91%	90%			



More than half of middle schoolers in afterschool programs participate in programs run by a public school (52 percent). Others participate in programs run by a city or town (14 percent), Boys & Girls Clubs (14 percent), a private school (13 percent), or a YMCA (10 percent) (Figure 9). Among middle schoolers who are enrolled in an afterschool program, 52 percent are female and 48 percent are male.

Among middle school parents who pay for their child's afterschool program, the average cost per week is \$104.70, higher than the average weekly cost of \$99.40 across grade levels. However, parents of middle schoolers are more likely than parents overall to report that their child's afterschool program is free or no cost to them (30 percent vs. 23 percent).

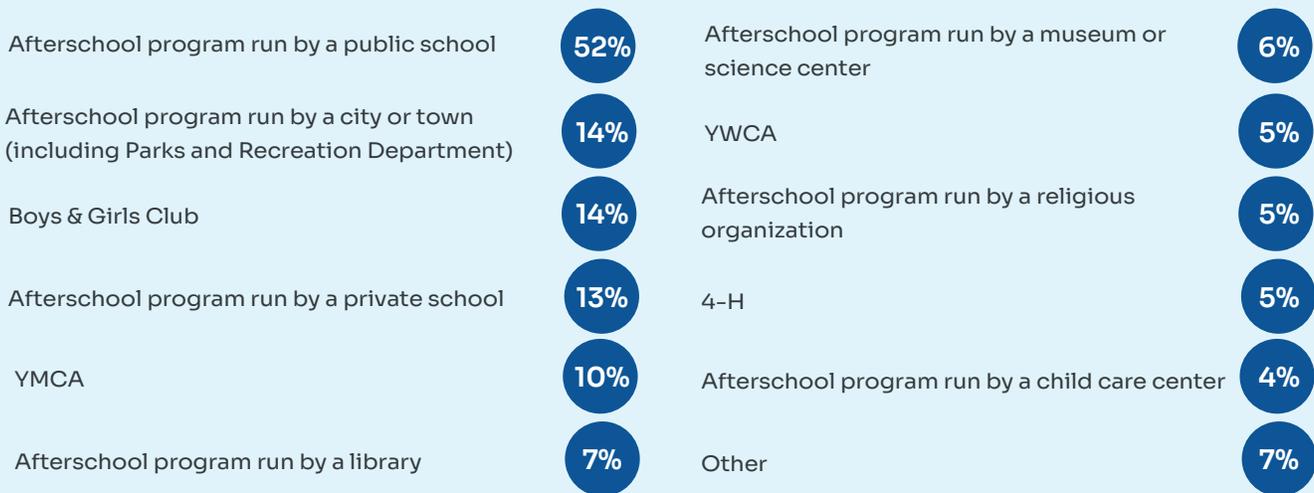
Outside of participation in afterschool programs, more than 3 in 4 middle school students (77 percent) take part in at least one organized activity after school, including organized team sports

(51 percent), special lessons like music or dance (34 percent), clubs (23 percent), and study groups or tutoring (21 percent). Roughly 1 in 5 middle schoolers (21 percent) do not participate in any of these activities.

Areas of improvement

Parents of middle school students are much less likely than parents of high school students to report that their child's afterschool program offers college or career exploration (28 percent vs. 53 percent) or entrepreneurship (17 percent vs. 29 percent). Parents of middle schoolers are also much less likely to say that they are satisfied with the college or career exploration or readiness opportunities offered, compared to parents of high schoolers (54 percent vs. 72 percent). Middle school students' afterschool programs are also less likely to offer service learning or community service than high school students' programs (37 percent vs. 49 percent).

Figure 9. Half of middle school afterschool program participants are enrolled in a program run by a public school, followed by programs run by a city or town and Boys & Girls Clubs*



*Totals may not add up to 100 percent as respondents were able to select all answers that apply

Parents of middle school students see afterschool programs favorably

Parents of middle school students say that programs are beneficial for young people and parents, with a strong majority in agreement that programs enable children to engage with their peers and reduce unproductive screen time (85 percent), help children build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors (77 percent), engage young people in learning and help them to become more interested in school (73 percent), keep young people safe and out of trouble (73 percent), and help working parents keep their jobs (81 percent).

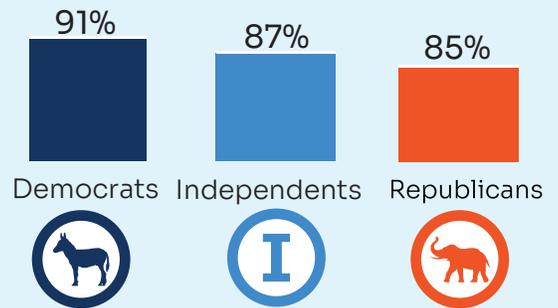
Recognition of these benefits helps explain why approximately 5 in 6 parents of middle school students (84 percent) agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs. Parents of middle school students also support public funding to increase access to the supports afterschool programs provide. Nearly 9 in 10 parents of middle school students (87 percent) favor public funding for programs that provide afterschool opportunities to students in communities that have few opportunities for children and



youth. Similar to national findings, support for public funding for afterschool programs by parents of middle school youth is high across political affiliations, with 91 percent of parents of middle school youth who identify as Democratic, 87 percent who identify as Independent, and 85 percent who identify as Republican in favor.

In the October 2020 survey of parents, support for funding of afterschool programs during the pandemic remained high, with 84 percent of parents of middle school youth agreeing that as part of the federal government's response to the pandemic, Congress should provide additional funding for the K-12 educational system and 79 percent agreeing that additional funding should be appropriated to afterschool programs to provide a supervised, enriching environment for students during virtual school days.

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Methodology

America After 3PM is a nationally representative survey of randomly selected adults who live in the United States and are the parent or guardian of a school-age child who lives in their household. The survey was conducted using a blend of national consumer panels, with the goal of completing at least 200 interviews in every state and Washington, D.C. In states where this goal could not be reached using online panels, supplementary telephone interviews were conducted. For the 2020 wave of America After 3PM, interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

America After 3PM data included in this report were collected between January 27 and March 17, 2020. A total of 31,055 households were surveyed and answered questions regarding ways in which their child or children are cared for in the hours after school. A subset of households, 14,391 respondents answered a series of follow up questions regarding afterschool experiences or barriers to participation in afterschool, and perceptions of afterschool programs. The overall margin of error for child-level and household-level data is +/- < 1 percent.

The October 2020 survey of parents was conducted by Edge Research and is a nationally representative online survey fielded October 12-29, 2020, of 1,202 parents of school-aged children.

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For more information about the national and state-specific America After 3PM survey findings, visit <http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM>.

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.