America After 3PM

FIFTH EDITION

Leading States in Afterschool Program Participation, Accessibility, and Parent Recognition

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Support for afterschool programs has grown over the past two decades. Today, there are more parents in every state in favor of public funding for afterschool compared to 2009 when this question was first asked in *America After 3PM*.

In addition to growing support, *America After 3PM* 2025 finds that the demand for afterschool programs remains significant, with nearly 30 million children who are enrolled in an afterschool program or who would be if one were available to them. In the face of such high demand, many states have made progress to increase afterschool program enrollment, availability, and public support through state- and local-level investments, quality improvement systems, and ongoing advocacy and quality supports from local and statewide intermediary organizations, including statewide afterschool networks.

This brief presents the leading states for afterschool in three distinct categories: afterschool program participation, afterschool accessibility, and parent recognition. These categories reflect the broad array of state initiatives that support high-quality afterschool programming for youth. While efforts vary across states, this brief synthesizes actions that leading states have taken to build the afterschool field's infrastructure and increase the capacity of programs to provide high-quality services.

TOP 10 STATES FOR

Afterschool Program Participation

Findings from parents in the *2025 America After 3PM* survey support decades of research revealing the benefits of afterschool program participation, including the development of life skills, building excitement about learning, and reducing risky behaviors.

Additionally, the amount of time spent in programs, or the intensity of afterschool program participation, plays a role in these outcomes, with research finding that the more regularly children attend programs, the greater gains they see.[1]

Compared to the national average, states in the top 10 for afterschool program participation have a higher percentage of students involved in programs and who typically spend more hours in programs each week. Washington, D.C., which secured the top spot for afterschool program participation, is a model example of this, with 38% of students in K-12 engaged in an afterschool program—nearly three times as high as the national average (13%)—as well as above-average hours of participation. Since 2020, afterschool program participation in Washington, D.C., has increased by 14 percentage points (from 24% to 38%), with nearly 36,000 students now enrolled in afterschool programs within the nation's capital. Additionally, compared to 2014, Washington, D.C., has seen the rate of children unsupervised during the after school hours reduce by half, dropping from 26% in 2014 to 13% in 2020, and remaining at the same level today.

Over the past eight years, Washington, D.C., made significant investments in afterschool programs to expand the number of options available for youth and their families. In 2017, Mayor Muriel Bowser established the Office of Out of School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes (OST Office) to support the expansion of high-quality programs. As the largest grantmaking entity for afterschool programs in Washington, D.C., the OST Office has played a critical role in increasing the availability of seats for afterschool program participation. In fiscal year 2024, the OST Office awarded more than $27 million to nonprofits offering afterschool and OST programming. Since its launch, the OST Office has awarded over $113 million to out-of-school time programs, reaching more than 82,500 students.[2]

Top 10 States for Afterschool Program Participation

1. Washington, D.C.
2. Hawai'i
3. South Dakota
4. California
5. Connecticut
6. New York
7. Florida
8. Massachusetts
9. Minnesota
10. Washington

Along with Washington, D.C., California, Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, and Minnesota have all made statewide investments in afterschool programs. California, ranked fourth for afterschool program participation, has a robustly funded afterschool system composed primarily of statewide competitive and formula grants, facilitating programming for approximately 1.1 million children. California's dedicated state investments, including $650 million in Afterschool Education and Safety (ASES) grants and $4 billion in Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P) formula funds for fiscal year 2024, play a key role in program availability. These statewide investments are bolstered by federal allocations, most notably $147 million in 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) dollars, resulting in a well-funded afterschool system.* Similarly, New York, which also receives a substantial 21st CCLC allocation, made $103 million available through Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Supports (LEAPS) grants during fiscal year 2024. LEAPS combines two existing state funding streams and contributes an all-time high investment in community-based afterschool programs that support academic enrichment, social and emotional development, and community and family engagement. Similarly, Connecticut's dedicated funding stream supports academic enrichment and family engagement opportunities. In the 2023-2025 fiscal years, the Connecticut After School Grant Program invested $5.8 million in competitive grants to implement and expand high-quality programs for K-12 students, one of several contributing factors that has helped raise the state's afterschool program participation rate back to 18% after seeing consecutive decreases in participation in the 2014 and 2020 *America After 3PM* studies.

Additionally, several states in the top 10 have local afterschool funding in major metropolitan areas, such as Florida, Massachusetts, California, and New York, which helps to increase their afterschool program participation rates. For example, in addition to the $70 million in federal funding from the 21st CCLC initiative, Florida's Children's Services Councils (CSCs), which are local dedicated funding sources established by county voters, provide substantial funding to afterschool providers delivering high-quality, research-based programming that is free or low-cost for families. CSCs are located within 11 densely populated counties, including Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach, collectively serving more than half of the state's birth-to-age-18 population. With no statewide afterschool funds available in Florida, CSCs are among the largest investors in afterschool programming in the state, having invested $178 million, or more than one-quarter of their total expenditures, on afterschool and out-of-school time programs in the 2023 fiscal year. With these funds, CSCs help support programming for nearly 100,000 youth every year.[3] In Boston, the afterschool field is supported by

* 21st Century Community Learning Center allocations are based on a federal need-based formula in which every state receives funds based on its share of Title I funding for low-income students.

both state- and city-wide funding. At the local level, the city introduced the Youth Development Fund, a competitive grant aimed at increasing the number of free, high-quality programs for youth aged 14-24. During the 2025 fiscal year, the grant supported 99 organizations serving 7,500 youth across the city. And for the 2026 fiscal year, the Youth Development Fund will grant $1.5 million to support both emerging programs and larger, more established youth serving organizations.[4]

Hawai'i, holding the second spot for afterschool program participation, has a variety of federally and state-funded programs and initiatives aimed at keeping students safe, active, and engaged beyond school hours, contributing to its high afterschool program participation rate (23%). Aside from the 21st CCLC initiative, three additional state programs support Hawai'i's afterschool field, including the Afterschool Plus (A+) Program; United Peer Learning, Integrating New Knowledge (UPLINK); and Resources for Enrichment, Athletics, Culture, and Health (REACH), all hosted within the Community Engagement Branch of the Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE). The initiatives serve HIDOE public schools and vary in focus—from UPLINK working to reduce risky behavior, to the A+ program's attention to reducing the number of children unsupervised after school—but are all a part of HIDOE's broader mission to support the academic success and positive development of the state's K-12 students.

Beyond state and local funding, several states in the top 10 have rallied strong support for afterschool programming through advocacy efforts led by statewide afterschool networks. For example, Washington State's afterschool network, School's Out Washington (SOWA), has helped build quality and capacity in the state's expanded learning field for almost 40 years through a community-centered approach. Despite a lack of statewide funding, Washington state has local afterschool funding in several municipalities, and significantly in Washington's most populous county, King County, through the Best Starts for Kids (BSK) Initiative, a voter-supported tax initiative that invests in comprehensive supports for children and youth, including investments in youth development and expanded learning. SOWA partners with King County to administer the BSK Expanded Learning investments, awarding more than $16 million in grants to 65 BIPOC-led organizations and place-based collaboratives from 2022 to 2025, helping them expand to serve over 5,000 youth.[5] In addition, the organization advocates for a state infrastructure that supports the youth development field through state-level funding and policies. Since 2023, SOWA and its coalition, the Youth Development Strategy Table, have been advocating to establish a youth development fund and office at the state level to address the major gaps in access that exist across the state, especially in regions without local funding.

Along with having a strong statewide afterschool network dedicated to expanding participation and quality, South Dakota's third place ranking is largely driven by its well-above-average hours of student participation, where youth spend an average of 7.7 hours in afterschool per week, compared to the national average of 5.3 hours weekly. A potential reason behind South Dakota's high dosage rates is the increased prevalence of 4-day school weeks throughout the state's rural school districts. During the 2024-2025 school year, approximately one-quarter of South Dakota school districts operated on a shortened week—a trend that has been growing steadily in the state.[6] To address child care concerns for working families, some districts implement full-day afterschool programs on Fridays, such as the Burke School District, which partnered with a local nonprofit to administer full-day programs through a grant from the Governor's Office of Economic Development.[7]

TOP 10 STATES FOR

Afterschool Accessibility

In the *2025 America After 3PM* survey, the most significant barriers to afterschool program participation that parents reported facing include cost, safe transportation to and from programs, and program availability.

For instance, a majority of parents without a child in an afterschool program (56%) report that an important factor preventing them from enrolling their child in a program is that programs are too expensive. And nearly half of parents report their child lacked a safe way to get to and from programs or inconvenient program locations are barriers to enrollment (49% and 48%, respectively). States within the top 10 for accessibility have taken measures to reduce common obstacles to afterschool program enrollment, including state grants prioritizing organizations serving areas with limited options for afterschool programming, grants supporting transportation as an allowable use, and mapping initiatives that increase the efficiency of finding and funding programs.

While the national average of parents agreeing that afterschool programs are difficult to afford remains virtually unchanged from 2020 to 2025 (58% vs. 57%), Washington, D.C., saw a double-digit decrease, dropping from 67% in 2020 to 48% in 2025, contributing to its top ranking regarding program accessibility. Through coordinated efforts, organizations in D.C. have helped families across the city access afterschool programming by supporting the availability and expansion of low- or no-cost programs. Specifically, the District's Learn24 Initiative—a network of D.C. agencies providing or funding afterschool programs—provides grants for programs, resources for families, and coordination across government agencies such as the Department of Parks and Recreation and D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), to promote access to free and high-quality programs. For example, as a partner agency of Learn24, DCPS provides free afterschool programs at 55 Title I schools, funded by both DCPS and the 21st CCLC initiative. Other states in the top 10, like New York and Connecticut, have also supported program affordability through statewide grants that subsidize free and low-cost programs.

Top 10 States for Afterschool Accessibility

1. Washington, D.C.
2. Kansas
3. New Mexico
4. Alaska
5. South Dakota
6. New York
7. Illinois
8. Maine
9. Georgia
10. Connecticut

Program accessibility is not only an issue of cost, but also is impacted by staffing, with staffing shortages and high turnover reducing capacity and ability to meet demand. Maine is working to mitigate the financial barriers child care workers encounter, including those who work with school-age youth during the afterschool hours, to help them stay in their jobs. Maine's Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplements, initiated with American Rescue Plan funds and currently annualized to $30 million in the biennial state budget, provide monthly salary supplements to increase the pay of early childhood and school-age educators working in licensed child care facilities enrolled in the salary supplement program. By investing in the youth-serving workforce, Maine has helped increase the retention and credentials of early childhood and school-age educators, contributing to program quality and capacity to serve more youth.[8]

America After 3PM reveals that more than 4 in 10 parents (45%) report that it is difficult to find an appropriate afterschool program for their child. Through efforts like program mapping and program databases, often curated by statewide afterschool networks, several states within the top 10 have made finding programs easier for busy families. In Washington D.C., the D.C. Policy Center conducted a 2023 OST needs assessment in the District, finding that locating program information was one of the most significant challenges to accessing out-of-school time programming.[9]

In response, D.C. implements several strategies to better disseminate information on afterschool offerings, such as its annual "Afterschool in the City" fair, which spotlights over 100 free afterschool programs for families to explore. In addition, as part of Washington, D.C.'s $22 million investment in afterschool in the 2024 fiscal year, a portion of the funds was dedicated to building the My Out-Of-School-Time DC portal—a streamlined, user-friendly online map and database of the District's afterschool and summer offerings. The portal enables parents to filter programs by location, school name, and cost and also allows them to apply directly to programs within the portal, simplifying the search and application process. Currently, 74% of D.C. parents agree that information on afterschool programs is readily available in their community—10 percentage points higher than the national average.

Other states in the top 10, such as New Mexico, Illinois, South Dakota, Alaska, and Georgia, have developed comprehensive statewide maps, not only to support access for families but also to provide critical information for policymakers and advocates to address opportunity gaps. The New Mexico Out-of-School-Time Network (NMOST), in partnership with the New Mexico Department of Health, was among the first states to develop comprehensive maps including overlay indicators that illustrate the distribution of state and federally funded afterschool programs, showing that many communities, including those in low-income or rural areas,

lack available options. In Illinois, the ACT Now Coalition—a diverse network of stakeholders dedicated to supporting high-quality afterschool programs in the state—has also developed an exhaustive map of programs across the state, which can be filtered based on geographic location, grade range, and program offerings, allowing parents to easily find suitable programs for their children. Additionally, the map allows users to add overlays, including poverty, race, and educational attainment, to better understand how afterschool programs are distributed throughout the state and which areas may require more resources.

These mapping efforts have enabled advocates and policymakers to strategically align resources to underserved communities across their states, thereby increasing access to programs. In 2023, the New Mexico Public Education Department, in partnership with NMOST, established a competitive statewide grant for school districts and community-based organizations, investing $20 million over three years in out-of-school time programs that primarily serve rural or tribal areas with limited afterschool programs. In addition to programming, the grants are used to support staffing and transportation services to increase participation in remote areas. In addition, New Mexico recently announced a call for universal child care, including before-school and afterschool programs, a move that will position them well for even greater gains in afterschool accessibility.

Several other states in the top 10 have made efforts to address disparities in program access, particularly for rural communities. For example, over the past six years, the State of Alaska invested state cannabis tax revenue to expand access to afterschool programs. The Positive Youth Development Afterschool Program provides funding for afterschool programs that support middle school students in building protective factors to help prevent the initiation of substance misuse. The fund has increased access to free or low-cost afterschool programs in 33 communities throughout the state. In Kansas, 21st CCLC applicants that are serving students in REAP-eligible (Rural Education Achievement Program) districts may request up to an additional $25,000 to support transportation services to and from 21st CCLC programs. In South Dakota, a new initiative in Sioux Falls seeks to expand program access to middle schoolers by building Community Learning Centers directly in three middle schools, with the goal of increasing the number of schools served in the coming years. For instance, through a partnership with George McGovern Middle School in Sioux Falls, the Boys & Girls Club of the Sioux Empire has opened a Club location directly on the middle school campus, allowing students to seamlessly transition from the school day to their afterschool programs without the obstacle of transportation. Additionally, through Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) funds, Georgia has worked to expand program availability in high-priority counties, or those not served by a 21st CCLC or Out of School Services Program site. By the 2023-2024 grant year, or the third year of the initiative, 45 high-priority counties in Georgia operated a BOOST site.[10]

Further addressing opportunity gaps, states within the top 10 have implemented initiatives that prioritize access for students and families who are systemically disadvantaged and face greater barriers to afterschool program participation, such as those from low-income households, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and justice-involved youth. New York's $103 million competitive LEAPS grant prioritizes programs serving "high-need" school districts, which are defined as those with a student population where at least 50% of families are economically disadvantaged. In addition to prioritizing youth furthest from economic opportunity, Georgia's BOOST initiative provides targeted grants for programs serving youth experiencing foster care, young people impacted by the justice system, and students living in rural areas. In the 2023-2024 grant year, 13 organizations received targeted grants, helping them to serve more youth, reduce barriers to participation, such as by providing transportation, and improve programmatic quality.[11] Lastly, in Illinois, the state has invested $17.8 million in the Teen REACH program, a statewide afterschool initiative supported by the Illinois Department of Human Services, to provide enriching opportunities for youth (particularly 11- to 17-year-olds) who are vulnerable to disengagement, including but not limited to those at risk of chronic absence, LGBTQ+ youth, youth experiencing homelessness, and youth who are pregnant or parenting.

TOP 10 STATES FOR

Parent Recognition

The final top 10 category, parent recognition, highlights the value placed on afterschool programs based on parent perceptions.

Indicators in this category reflect parents' overall perspective on the impact that afterschool programs have on youth and the broader community, ranging from helping students develop life skills to keeping them safe and out of trouble, as well as supporting working families' careers and peace of mind. State and local policy, advocacy from lawmakers and state networks, and statewide support for quality programming all contribute to parents' recognition of the role afterschool programs play in young people's development and the well-being of their communities.

The top three locations for parent recognition—New York, Washington, D.C., and Vermont—have all made meaningful strides toward securing universal afterschool. New York, whose top ranking in this category is partly driven by the overwhelming majority (71%) of parents strongly agreeing that "all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs," has seen a push for universal afterschool programs at both the local and state levels. Building upon years of policy and advocacy aimed at increasing the number of afterschool slots in the city, in 2025, the city unveiled a $331 million "After-School for All" plan to ensure every K-8 public school student has access to afterschool in the coming years. Beginning in the 2026 fiscal year, with a $21 million investment, the city plans to increase funds and seats over the following three school years, making an additional 20,000 slots available to students and families. By 2028, the plan sets out to serve 184,000 K-8 students, with $755 million baselined annually within the city's budget.[12] In addition to supporting program availability, funds will enhance existing programs, enabling them to build capacity to support their staff and serve more students. At the state level, alongside increased investments in afterschool programs, the 2024-2025 state budget requests the state to conduct a feasibility study on universal afterschool, representing the first-ever call for a statewide universal afterschool system by state legislators.[13]

Washington, D.C.'s significant investments in its afterschool infrastructure are also a part of a larger effort to implement a universal afterschool system. In 2023, Councilmember Matt Frumin introduced the Universal Out-of-School Time Amendment Act of 2023, a bill that would require a 10% annual expansion of afterschool and summer programs to achieve universal afterschool access by 2035. Although D.C. ranks first in the country for afterschool program

Top 10 States for Parent Recognition

1. New York
2. Washington, D.C.
3. Vermont
4. South Carolina
5. Minnesota
6. Georgia
7. New Jersey
8. Connecticut
9. California
10. Texas

participation, more than two-thirds of its students who are not participating in a program would be enrolled if one were available to them. To address this unmet demand, this legislation would prioritize access in locations where unmet need is the greatest and for students who face greater barriers to participation, such as low-income students and students with disabilities. As of 2025, passage of the bill remains pending; however, a public hearing in November 2024 revealed strong public support for the act.

Strong legislative support for universal afterschool is evident in Vermont, as well. In 2020, Governor Phil Scott committed to advancing universal afterschool in his State of the State speech.[14] With leadership from the statewide afterschool network, Vermont Afterschool, the state has established a cross-agency team to develop and support the coordinated system, convened a State Youth Advisory Group to gain insights into barriers to participation, and prioritized actions like quality improvement and creating sustainable funding to build the capacity of its afterschool field. To support expansion, the Vermont legislature passed the Universal Afterschool and Summer Special Fund in 2023, which uses cannabis sales tax revenue to maintain a grant program that promotes expansion of afterschool programs, with a focus on underserved areas.

Likewise, California is also working toward the vision of universal afterschool programs, with every school district in the state receiving funds to provide afterschool and summer activities through the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P).

South Carolina's high ranking in parent recognition is partly driven by the nearly 50% of parents who completely agree that afterschool programs help young people develop life skills. Since the 2017-2018 school year, the South Carolina Department of Education has adopted the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate (PSCG), comprised of three core competencies for every student to master for college and career readiness and life-long success: world-class knowledge, world-class skills, and life and career characteristics.[15] The profile is not only intended to be a guiding framework in classrooms, but in all spaces where young people learn, including afterschool programs. In recognizing that afterschool programs are prime examples of spaces where youth can develop PSCG competencies, the South Carolina Afterschool Alliance (SCAA) introduced the College and Career Innovation Digital Badge (CCIDB) program, which allows afterschool educators to assess students' mastery of PSCG skills and award them digital badges to display their mastery of the profile categories and track their progress toward college and career readiness.

To bolster the overall infrastructure of the afterschool field, states such as South Carolina, Georgia, and Connecticut have focused on promoting quality improvement. In an effort to raise afterschool quality standards and best practices throughout the state, South Carolina legislators dedicated $159,000 for the South Carolina Afterschool Alliance to pilot a quality improvement system at select programs during the 2018-2019 fiscal year. The successful pilot period led to the legislature passing two resolutions highlighting SCAA's quality improvement efforts and the importance of high-quality programming for the state's youth, setting the stage for a $1.2 million allocation in the 2019-2020 state budget that supported the expansion of a quality improvement system throughout the state. Georgia and Connecticut have also developed robust quality improvement systems, with support from their state afterschool networks. Both states have adopted afterschool program quality standards with supporting self-assessment tools for program use. Additionally, the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network and the Connecticut Network for Children and Youth offer direct training, coaching, and professional development opportunities to support alignment with quality standards.

Along with having strong networks focused on quality improvement, Connecticut and New Jersey have two of the longest standing afterschool networks in the country—both founded nearly 40 years ago. Through decades of partnerships, cross-collaboration with state agencies, and advocacy, the Connecticut Network for Children and Youth and NJSACC: New Jersey's Afterschool & Out-of-School Time Professional Network have successfully conveyed the necessity for afterschool programs, helped increase the quality and capacity of programs, and rallied support from the grassroots up to key decision-makers in their states.

At the local level, Minnesota and Texas, ranked fifth and tenth, respectively, both have strong city-wide networks and intermediaries that are members of Every Hour Counts, promoting high-quality, accessible, and affordable afterschool programs within the states' most populated cities. For instance, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Sprockets is a city-level afterschool network focusing primarily on increasing program access, quality, workforce support, and youth voice in decision-making in local government. Key to their quality improvement efforts, Sprockets encourages all programs to participate in annual continuous program improvement, known as their Activator Cycle, where the network assists providers with collecting and analyzing program data to enhance programming and supports for students and families. Through additional measures such as providing professional development and facilitating data sharing across providers, Sprockets plays a pivotal role in strengthening Saint Paul's afterschool programs. In Dallas, Texas, Dallas Afterschool similarly promotes quality programming, partnering with 270 afterschool sites to assess quality, provide training and coaching, and mobilize partners to advocate for increased public funding while presenting strong data to support the case for afterschool in Texas. In the 2023-2024 program year, Dallas Afterschool trained 1,300 afterschool professionals and recruited and placed over 100 trained educators, achieving a 90% annual retention rate, helping to strengthen and sustain a robust OST workforce in Dallas.[16]

Conclusion

This brief finds that leading states for afterschool often have a comprehensive approach to afterschool investment, including statewide formula and competitive grants supporting afterschool expansion, mapping projects to identify programs and opportunity gaps, as well as supportive decision-makers that recognize the importance of afterschool programs for youth, families, and the state overall. Although much work remains to ensure that the 22.6 million children waiting for a program can access one, gaining insights from the effective strategies that leading states have implemented can place us closer to a reality where all young people have access to safe, affordable, and high-quality afterschool programs.

Methodology

To determine state rankings, composite scores were calculated for all 50 states and Washington, D.C., across three categories and compared to the national average. These scores consisted of multiple weighted variables for each of the three categories. The afterschool program participation category measured the percentage of children in an afterschool program and the weekly average number of hours students attend. The categories for afterschool accessibility and parent recognition included a broader range of variables. The accessibility category considered factors such as afterschool participation, the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch, the percentage of parents who disagree that it is difficult to find and afford afterschool programs, and the percentage of parents who agree that information about afterschool programs is readily available in their community. Lastly, the parent recognition category included variables including the recognition of child and community benefits—such as parents' agreement that afterschool supports working parents, keeps children safe and out of trouble, and helps young people develop life skills—as well as the percentage of parents who agree that all young people deserve access to high-quality afterschool programs.

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About the Survey

America After 3PM is a national online survey of parents or guardians of school-aged children, with supplemental interviews conducted by telephone. Data were collected by Edge Research on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance. The fifth edition of *America After 3PM* surveyed 30,515 U.S. parents or guardians with a school-age child living in their household, completing at least 200 interviews in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., between January 31 and April 21, 2025. The overall margin of error for the child- and household-level data is +/- < 1%. Projections for child-level data represent school-age children in the United States, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's October 2022 Current Population Survey.

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America After 3PM Afterschool Alliance

About the Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs. Learn more at afterschoolalliance.org

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