



NEWS RELEASE

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Most Middle School Students Are Without Access to the Afterschool Programs Their Parents Want for Them

New Household Survey: Satisfaction and Support for Afterschool Programs High, But Cost and Access Are Insurmountable Barriers for Many Families with Middle Schoolers

WASHINGTON, DC – Unmet demand for afterschool programs among parents of students in middle school (6th, 7th and 8th grades) has risen sharply, even as satisfaction with programs has reached a new high. For every middle schooler in an afterschool program today, three more are waiting to get in, according to [America After 3PM 2020](#), a new household survey. Commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and conducted by Edge Research, the study finds that the number of [middle school students](#) who are not in an afterschool program, but whose parents would enroll them if a program were available, has grown from 4 million in 2014 to nearly 5 million today.

America After 3PM 2020 finds that afterschool participation has dropped, with 1.8 million middle school students in programs in 2020, down from 2.3 million in 2014. It finds drops in afterschool participation among students in elementary and high school as well. The decline means more children lack essential supports that can help them succeed. It also signals that, while publicly funded afterschool programs have helped millions of students, public dollars are not nearly sufficient to keep up with demand today.

The study is based on responses from more than 10,000 U.S. families of middle school students. It builds on household surveys conducted in 2004, 2009 and 2014. It offers a pre-pandemic snapshot of how children and youth spend their afternoons and has significant implications for our post-pandemic world. *America After 3PM* also includes a separate survey of parents conducted this fall, in which two in three middle school parents report concern about whether their child is staying on track in school. More than half of these parents (55%) report stress about continuing to provide learning support if virtual school and distance learning continues.

In *America After 3PM*, satisfaction with programs is the highest it has ever been, with 93% of parents of middle schoolers saying they are satisfied with their child's program (up from 89% in 2014 and 88% in 2009).

“Middle school parents say afterschool programs are doing a stellar job, helping meet many of their children's needs and supporting their families as well. But investments in afterschool have failed to keep up with demand, and that puts millions of children and youth at risk. The pandemic is exacerbating the struggles,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant.

“A large body of evidence indicates the critical role of middle school in determining a young person’s long-term academic trajectory. Quality afterschool programs help middle school students successfully transition from 8th to 9th grade and position them for long-term success and a brighter future,” said Marlyn Torres, senior program officer, New York Life Foundation. “In addition, these programs provide benefits that extend beyond academics, helping develop the whole young person—socially, and emotionally. All middle school youth, especially youth in marginalized and under-resourced communities, need access to the important enrichment opportunities and resources afterschool programs provide.”

Core findings from *America After 3PM 2020*:

- **Cost and access are barriers to afterschool participation for middle school students.** While some parents of middle schoolers say that they prefer their child be at home with them or another adult, or that their child is old enough for self-care, more than half (57%) of parents who have not enrolled their middle school child in an afterschool program cite cost as the reason. Forty-two percent report a program is not available in their community. Both are significant increases since 2014.
- **Low-income families are more likely to cite cost as a barrier.** Three in five low-income parents of a middle schooler (60%) say program cost is a reason for not enrolling their child in an afterschool program. Fifty-seven percent cite lack of a safe way to get their child to and from the program; and 44% say there is no program available in their community.
- **The cost of afterschool programs for middle school youth averages \$104.70 per week, parents report.**
- **Parents recognize that afterschool programs make middle schoolers more successful.** An overwhelming majority of parents of middle schoolers recognize that afterschool build social skills (90%), keep kids active (85%), and help them engage in academically enriching activities such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) learning (74%).
- **Parents of middle schoolers say afterschool programs help to address a range of family needs.** More than three-quarters of middle school parents (77%) agree that afterschool programs allow them to keep their jobs or work more hours. Seven in ten (71%) say programs help them build their own skills through classes or workshops. Fifty-nine percent credit programs with connecting them to community resources.
- **Eighty-seven percent of parents of middle school students favor public funding for programs** that provide afterschool opportunities to students in communities that have few opportunities for children and youth. Support crosses demographic and political divides, with 91% of parents who identify as Democratic, 87% of those who identify as Independent, and 85% of parents who identify as Republican in favor of public funding.

“Every parent should have access to an affordable, quality afterschool program that will keep their child safe, supervised and learning,” Grant added. “At the Afterschool Alliance, we are proud of our partnership with The New York Life Foundation, which has made middle school a priority. Through its Aim High grants, over the last five years, the New York Life Foundation

has already provided more than \$6 million to middle school programs. These funds make afterschool programs even stronger. We need even more business, philanthropic, federal, state and local support in order to meet the needs of students and their families after school.”

Findings from *America After 3PM 2020* are based on 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. A total of 31,055 households, including 10,114 households with a child in middle school, were surveyed in English or Spanish, and a subset of households (14,391 respondents) answered follow-up questions regarding afterschool experiences or barriers to participation in afterschool, as well as perceptions of afterschool programs. Data from interviews are weighted on race and income within states and by state population. The overall margin of error for child-level and household-level data is +/- < 1 percent. The survey included at least 200 interviews in every state and the District of Columbia. Data were collected between January 27 and March 17, 2020, by Edge Research.

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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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.