



NEWS RELEASE
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CONTACT: [Lisa Lederer](#)
202/421-5825

New Report Finds Unmet Demand for Afterschool Programs in America's Rural Communities Rising Sharply

Rural Students of Color and from Low-Income Families Most Likely to Miss Out

WASHINGTON, DC — Just 11% of America's rural children are enrolled in an afterschool program. For every rural child in an afterschool program, four more are waiting to get in. That's an even higher ratio than in the country overall, where for every child in an afterschool program, three more are waiting to get in. [Spiking Demand, Growing Barriers: The Trends Shaping Afterschool and Summer Learning in Rural Communities](#), released today, also finds that 92% of rural parents are satisfied with the afterschool program their child attends, up from 85% who were satisfied in 2014.

Some 4.5 million rural children who are not in an afterschool program would be enrolled if a program were available, their parents say. That is a 43% increase since the study was last conducted in 2014. Rural children of color and rural children from families with low incomes are most likely to be without the afterschool programs their parents want for them. The unmet need for summer learning programs has also surged in rural communities.

Spiking Demand, Growing Barriers is based on a household survey conducted by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance. It finds a drop in rural children enrolled in afterschool programs from 13%, or 1.19 million rural kids, enrolled in 2014 to just 11%, or 1.15 million kids, enrolled in 2020. The drop mirrors national trends on afterschool participation as public funding for afterschool programs has not kept up with demand. The new study finds that cost and transportation are significant barriers that prevent many rural parents from enrolling their child in an afterschool program.

"The inequities in terms of access to afterschool and summer learning programs are profoundly troubling," said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. "More than 46 million people in this country live in rural communities, where one in five residents are people of color and poverty is higher than in urban and suburban communities. Out-of-school-time programs boost children's chance to succeed in school and in life but too often rural students are shut out of the opportunities these essential programs provide."

"Increasing access to both afterschool and summer learning programs must be an urgent priority for lawmakers and funders," Grant continued. "We need to invest many more resources so that all students, regardless of the size of their community or their family's race or income, can access this support. As we emerge from the pandemic, afterschool and summer learning programs will be even more critical in helping children learn, feel safe and cared for, and strengthen their social and emotional health."

Spiking Demand, Growing Barriers is based on survey responses from more than 31,000 U.S. families, including 9,690 rural households. It includes national-level findings from smaller surveys of parents and program providers conducted in 2020 and 2021, also by Edge Research. Among the key results:

- **A growing number of parents in rural communities face barriers to afterschool.** Fifty-five percent of rural families cite cost as a barrier to enrollment in 2020, compared to just 40% who said that in 2014. Fifty percent cite not having a safe way to and from the afterschool program as a barrier to enrollment, compared to 36% who said that in 2014. And 45% cite lack of available programs, compared to 29% who said that in 2014.
- **Rural communities of color and rural families with low incomes have the highest levels of unmet demand for afterschool programs.** While 47% of rural parents overall whose child is not in an afterschool program say they would have liked to enroll her or him, that figure is 59% for rural Black parents; 57% for rural Latino and rural Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander parents; and 52% for rural low-income parents.
- **Rural student enrollment in summer learning programs is growing, but still not nearly meeting the demand.** In 2008, 20% of rural parents reported having a child who participated in a summer program. That figure rose to 28% in the summer of 2013 and 38% in the summer of 2019. But still, today, for every rural child in a summer learning program, two more are waiting to get in. Thirty-five percent of rural parents whose child is not enrolled in a summer program say that cost was an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child, and one in five said a program was not available in their community.
- **Cost is lower for rural programs and offerings more scant.** The average weekly cost for afterschool programs as reported by rural parents is \$69.30, compared to a national average of \$99.40 and an average for families living in non-rural communities of \$106.90. Summer programs, too, cost less in rural communities. Rural students are spending less time in their afterschool programs now than in the past. Fewer rural than urban and suburban parents report that their child's afterschool program offers science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), although more rural parents report programs are offering STEM now than in the past. Today, 70% of rural parents report that their child's afterschool programs offer STEM learning, compared to 66% in 2014.
- **Rural afterschool programs have stepped up during the pandemic to support students and families.** In early July of 2020, more than half of rural afterschool program providers reported that their program was serving as a meal site, delivering meals, or distributing resources to families. By the summer of 2021, 84% of rural programs were physically open in some capacity with more than 9 in 10 providing academic enrichment, outdoor activities, and time for students to interact with peers and two-thirds providing snacks or meals. Thirty-seven percent of rural programs reported having a wait list this spring and 45% had a wait list this summer.
- **Strong majorities of rural parents support public funding for afterschool and summer learning programs.** Eighty-six percent of rural parents support public funding for afterschool in communities that have few opportunities for children and youth; and 86% of rural parents support public funding for summer learning opportunities.

The new study includes a series of recommendations. Among them: grow public awareness about the need for more afterschool programs in rural communities through concerted outreach; improve the accessibility of afterschool programs in rural communities; conduct more research to better understand the views about afterschool programs among rural parents of color; and increase overall support for rural afterschool programs.

Findings in *Spiking Demand, Growing Barriers: The Trends Shaping Afterschool and Summer Learning in Rural Communities* are based on *America After 3PM*, 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 59,983 children, were surveyed in English or Spanish between January 27 and March 17, 2020. Nearly 10,000 respondents (9,690) reported that they live in a “rural area/small town.” The overall margin of error for child-level and household-level data is +/- < 1 percent. Data were collected by Edge Research.

Spiking Demand, Growing Barriers: The Trends Shaping Afterschool and Summer Learning in Rural Communities was supported by the Walton Family Foundation. The 2020 *America After 3PM* survey was made possible with support from the New York Life Foundation, Overdeck Family Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, Altria Group, and the Walton Family Foundation, as well as the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The full study, *America After 3PM*, and accompanying data, are available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

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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.