



News Release
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Struggling Students, Wait Lists, and Uncertain Futures: Afterschool Programs Contend with Growing Challenges as They Serve More Children This Fall than Earlier in the Pandemic

Washington, DC – Eight months into COVID-19, three key trends are shaping the landscape of afterschool programs across the nation. First, many more afterschool programs are operating now than were in the spring and summer. Second, programs are able to serve only about half as many students as they supported before the pandemic. Third, the children being left behind are disproportionately those from low-income families. Those are key findings from the [third in a series of national surveys of afterschool providers in the pandemic](#), conducted by Edge Research and released today by the Afterschool Alliance. The survey finds that just 3 percent of afterschool programs are completely closed – a sharp drop from previous surveys. But two in five programs (38%) that are physically open have wait lists, and program leaders across the board report that afterschool students and their families are struggling with food insecurity, need community resources, and face social/emotional challenges.

The percentage of afterschool programs that are physically open has grown steadily, from 19 percent in the spring to 49 percent over the summer to 68 percent now. In fact, one in four programs has extended its hours to accommodate students during virtual school days, allowing children of working parents to be supervised in person during the school day. Many other programs are operating virtually. But programs are able to serve an average of just 205 students this fall, compared to 435 a year ago.

Students from low-income families are less likely than others to have access to afterschool programs that are operating in-person. While the gap has narrowed, programs serving mostly higher-income students are still more likely to report being physically open than programs serving mostly students in low-income families (79% vs. 64%). Most programs report providing additional supports due to the pandemic. Right now, 53 percent of afterschool programs overall and 61 percent of those serving mostly students from low-income households are serving as a meals site, delivering meals, or distributing other community resources. Seventy-seven percent of programs that are physically open are offering snacks and meals for students.

“This survey shows, once again, that afterschool programs are doing a remarkable job of adapting to the various and ever-changing school reopening scenarios in their communities,” said Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance. “But the challenges are significant, student needs are greater than ever, and budgets are inadequate. That’s why the out-of-school-time community continues to urge Congress to provide flexibility to local programs funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative so they can support students during all the hours schools are now closed, and to boost 21st CCLC funding so programs can do more to help during this difficult time. We are especially concerned that students from low-income households are being left behind. That must not continue.”

Among other findings from the new survey of afterschool providers:

- The percentage of programs serving children of essential workers has also grown steadily, from 18 percent in the spring to 27 percent over the summer to 42 percent now.
- More than nine in ten afterschool providers (91%) are concerned about their students experiencing trauma, with 37 percent describing themselves as extremely concerned.
- Eighty-four percent of afterschool providers are concerned about being able to meet the needs of families who need afterschool programs for longer periods of time due to schools' mix of virtual and in-person teaching.
- More than three in five (63%) afterschool providers at programs that serve mostly students from low-income households are concerned that their students are experiencing learning loss, which is 24 points higher than providers at programs serving most students from higher-income households.
- While a significant majority of all afterschool providers are worried that children in their communities may not be able to access afterschool programs (87%), and about their program's ability to meet the growing needs of families (84%), those worries are even more commonly expressed by programs serving schools or districts on all-virtual schedules (92% and 88%, respectively).
- Afterschool budgets are stretched to the breaking point. Nearly nine in ten providers (87%) are concerned about their program's long-term funding and future. Nearly two in three (64%) are concerned that their program will not be able to provide services in-person or virtually next fall.
- Just one in five respondents believe the worst is over.

A fact sheet with the survey results is available at <http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-COVID-19-Wave-3-Brief.pdf>.

The data are based on an online survey of afterschool providers, conducted by Edge Research, that was fielded from September 28 to October 27. One thousand four hundred forty-five providers representing more than 7,300 program sites in 48 states and the District of Columbia participated.

In this study, programs serving majority/mostly low-income families are defined as those with more than 75 percent of children in the program qualifying for the federal free or reduced price lunch program; and programs serving mostly/majority higher-income families are defined as those for which less than 50 percent children in the program qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program.

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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.