



Candidate Resource Guide on Afterschool

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Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org

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Afterschool and summer learning programs keep youth safe, give parents peace of mind, and improve academic achievement. They help build safer, stronger, and smarter communities. During the pandemic, programs rose to the moment to help students learn and grow, inspiring young learners during a challenging time, providing students the freedom to explore their interests and helping them reach their full potential. Widespread, bipartisan agreement among voters and policymakers demonstrates that Americans recognize the benefits of afterschool programs. This guide serves as an overview on the essentials of afterschool and summer learning, including demand for programs, public opinion, and research on outcomes and return on investment.

Introduction

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization that works to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities. Since 2000, our network of more than 26,000 afterschool partners has been expanding learning opportunities for students nationwide and tapping community partners to keep children safe and well-nourished while providing engaging, hands-on activities that raise school attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates.

This guide provides information on ways afterschool programs provide real-time, evidence-tested solutions to some of the most prevalent campaign issues, constituent interests, and community concerns. Additional information, including research briefs, fact sheets, and survey data can be found on our website. We are also happy to answer any questions and help provide additional information to any office, candidate, or constituent provided we are able under our 501 (c) (3) operating status. We can connect offices with on-the-ground programs to visit as well. Contact us anytime.

Afterschool is an issue you should be talking about. Americans understand that high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs are important. Nearly 9 in 10 adults (89 percent) agree that afterschool programs that provide students with a healthy snack or meal, homework help, hands-on activities, and diverse learning opportunities that allow them to explore new interests and develop new skills, are important to their community. During the pandemic, afterschool programs continue to play an integral role to make sure that students emerge on the other side healthier, happier, and ready for what comes next.

- ▶ The majority of parents nationwide want afterschool programs for their children. Unmet demand has climbed over the past 10 years. For every child in a program, four are waiting to get in.
- ▶ 88 percent of parents support public funding for afterschool programs. This isn't a partisan issue: 94 percent of Democrats, 88 percent of Republicans, and 85 percent of Independents support public funding for afterschool.

- ▶ A 2021 Learning Heroes survey found that parents with a child in an out-of-school-time program were more likely to report that their child is performing above grade level and prepared for the next school year than parents whose children are not in a program.

Moreover, decades of research show the positive effect afterschool programs can have on major issue areas of constituent attention and interest, including the economy, crime and safety, and preparing the future workforce.

Afterschool: An Issue for Voters

Afterschool programs help the economy; help build robust, safe communities; and help our children find their passion and emerge from the pandemic strong, resilient, and hopeful.

Afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs (85 percent) and provide peace of mind about their children when they are at work (85 percent), according to a survey of parents with a child in an afterschool program.¹ Additionally, parents agree that during the pandemic, afterschool programs are providing support to parents who are trying to find a job (77 percent).

Regular participation in afterschool programs has been shown to narrow the achievement gap between high- and low-income 5th graders, providing a broader base of qualified and equally equipped future workers.²

Worker productivity drops among parents without afterschool care. Missed days of work and distractions due to child health and safety concerns when childcare is inconsistent or unavailable cost businesses up to \$300 billion annually in lost productivity.³

Youth who participate in afterschool programs are less likely to use drugs or alcohol or engage in other risky behaviors.⁴

Students in afterschool programs attend school more often, do better in school, and are more likely to graduate.⁵

Due to the pandemic's effect on children's mental health and well-being, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association joined together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health.⁶ Parents with a child in an afterschool program report that their child is provided opportunities to interact with peers and build social skills, is able to connect with caring adults, learn responsible decision-making, and build their confidence.

Every taxpayer dollar invested in afterschool programs saves an estimated \$3 on future law enforcement and social services expenses, as well as offers longer term benefits such as increased earning potential.⁷

Three in four parents recognize afterschool programs can help reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in risky behaviors.⁸

During the hours when juvenile crime peaks between 3 and 6 p.m., 7.7 million children are on their own after school. Engaging programs provide an alternative to these unsupervised hours.

Afterschool programs can expose students to new academic and professional opportunities, and are a proven strategy for preparing students to be competitive in the 21st century job market, especially in the STEM arena, where 4.3 million students are currently involved in afterschool programs with STEM offerings.

The need for afterschool and summer learning programs is also popular across party lines: 88 percent of Democratic, 80 percent of Independent, and 82 percent of Republican parents agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs.

Working Families Depend on Afterschool Programs

Challenge

For the parents and guardians who are still at work when the school bell rings, the afterschool hours can present a real challenge. Families report that the gap between work and school schedules can be up to 25 hours per week. This leads to stress and missed work time for parents. Parental concerns about afterschool care result in decreased productivity that costs businesses up to \$300 billion per year.⁹ During the pandemic, when schools were operating remotely or in a hybrid model, children's schedules became an even greater complication for working parents. In an October 2020 survey, half of working parents (50 percent) said that they were concerned about juggling working and monitoring their child's distance learning.¹⁰

Afterschool programs give working parents peace of mind and help them keep their jobs.

Afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs by ensuring that children are safe and learning while parents are still at work. Among parents with a child in an afterschool program:¹¹

- ▶ 86 percent agree that afterschool programs help them keep their job or work more hours.
- ▶ 91 percent agree the programs provide working parents peace of mind about their children when they are at work.
- ▶ 89 percent agree that the experience of the coronavirus pandemic made them appreciate school teachers and afterschool providers more than ever before.

Throughout the pandemic, afterschool programs provided critical supports to families:

- ▶ In the early days of the pandemic, afterschool and summer programs worked to provide in-person care for children of essential workers.
- ▶ During the 2020-21 school year and the patchwork of school operating models, many afterschool programs extended their hours of operation to provide in-person, safe learning opportunities during virtual school schedules.
- ▶ More than 7 in 10 parents who were working from home (78 percent) or working onsite (73 percent) said that their child's afterschool program was providing a safe, supervised learning environment during virtual school days.¹²
- ▶ 77 percent of parents agree that afterschool programs provide support to parents who are trying to find jobs.



Parents value afterschool programs for many reasons and are highly satisfied.

Parents view afterschool programs as more than just a safe environment for children. They recognize that these programs provide a wide range of activities and enriching learning opportunities for children and teens, especially in light of the pandemic. Parents want their child's out-of-school experience to be fun and varied—and they want it to provide learning activities that are not offered during the regular school day.

Among parents with a child in an afterschool program:

- ▶ 90 percent rate the quality of the program as excellent or very good.
- ▶ 95 percent are satisfied with the program overall.
- ▶ 91 percent are satisfied that program staff are knowledgeable and caring.
- ▶ 87 percent are satisfied that programs provide their child opportunities to build life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and learning responsible decision-making.
- ▶ 88 percent are satisfied with the physical activity opportunities offered.

Parents cite several factors as very important when selecting an afterschool program. They want a program that:

- ▶ Offers a variety of activities.
- ▶ Provides a safe haven.
- ▶ Offers high quality care.
- ▶ Has a knowledgeable and well-trained staff.
- ▶ Helps build life skills.



Afterschool programs provide critical support for working parents and the economy.

Particularly as a result of the pandemic, parents are increasingly turning to afterschool programs to meet their needs, as well as those of their children in the hours after school. Parents who are fortunate enough to have access to afterschool programs are highly satisfied, but the demand for available programs far exceeds the supply. For every child in an afterschool program, four more are waiting to get in. We need federal, state, and local governments, philanthropies, and businesses to step up, because every child who wants to participate in an afterschool program should have that opportunity. More than 8 in 10 parents (85 percent) agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

Afterschool Programs Keep Kids Safe, Help Them Avoid Risky Behaviors

Challenge

There are nearly 7.7 million children and youth who are alone and unsupervised from 3 to 6 p.m. every day across the United States. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention report that these hours after school are the peak hours for young people to commit crimes or become victims of crimes.¹³

Afterschool programs provide a safe environment and help young people develop valuable life skills.

Afterschool programs give young people a safe place to learn, engage with positive role models and peers, and develop leadership skills and the ability to make responsible decisions. Council for a Strong America—a national, bipartisan nonprofit that includes law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, and business executives—identifies afterschool programs as a key policy approach to set the stage for strengthening the nation in their 2022 Blueprint for a Stronger America.¹⁴ Afterschool programs help children:¹⁵

- ▶ Reduce risky behaviors, such as tobacco, marijuana, and alcohol use.
- ▶ Gain self-control and confidence.
- ▶ Improve school-day attendance and behavior.
- ▶ Improve work habits and grades.
- ▶ Build healthy relationships with their peers and adults.

Parents depend on afterschool programs, and believe they keep children safe and out of trouble.

Today, 6.4 million children participate in afterschool programs, while another 24.7 million children would participate if a program were available. Since 2004, unmet demand for afterschool programs has grown by more than 60 percent.

“Afterschool programs can increase school-day attendance and test scores and reduce dropouts—all of which can lead kids towards successful lives and away from crime.”

**– Michael A. Ramos,
Former San Bernardino County
District Attorney, CA**

COUNCIL FOR A STRONG
AMERICA'S "A BLUEPRINT
FOR A STRONGER AMERICA"

Among parents with a child in an afterschool program:

- ▶ 93 percent agree the programs keep young people safe and out of trouble.
- ▶ 84 percent agreed afterschool programs reduced the likelihood that youth will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors.¹⁶

Afterschool is a smart investment.

Every \$1 invested in afterschool programs saves at least \$3 by reducing crime costs, improving student's performance at school, and increasing young people's earning potential.¹⁷ We need to invest in afterschool programs—at the federal and state levels—to ensure that afterschool is available to all.

Afterschool Programs Help Young People Thrive in School and Life

Challenge

The pandemic has had a significant impact on students' academic progress, in particular students of color and students attending high-poverty schools. During spring 2022, student achievement levels in reading and math were lower than before the pandemic, with Black, Latino, and American Indian or Alaska Native students, as well as students attending high-poverty schools showing larger declines.¹⁸ Researchers estimate that it will take several years for academic achievement levels to return to normal. Reaching one's full potential in school and life requires a solid academic foundation, as well as skills such as the ability to work collaboratively, problem solve, make responsible decisions, and communicate effectively.

Students who regularly participate in afterschool programs perform better academically.¹⁹ They demonstrate gains in reading and math and improved school attendance, work habits, and grades. They also are more likely to advance to the next grade and have higher graduation rates. Additionally, regular participation in afterschool programs help to narrow the achievement gap between high- and low-income students in math.²⁰

Afterschool programs help children develop the skills they need to learn, grow, and thrive in school and in life. Research shows students who regularly participate in quality afterschool programs:²¹

- ▶ Develop strong social skills.
- ▶ Make better decisions.
- ▶ Improve their self-perception and esteem.
- ▶ Are excited about learning.
- ▶ Behave better in the classroom.

Parents believe afterschool programs help their children reach their full potential and they are seeing the results.

An overwhelming percentage of parents with children in afterschool programs say the programs help their children:

- ▶ Develop social skills. (91 percent)
- ▶ Complete homework or get academic help. (79 percent)
- ▶ Practice reading or writing. (80 percent)
- ▶ Engage in science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science learning opportunities. (67 percent)
- ▶ Build confidence. (86 percent)
- ▶ Build life skills. (78 percent)

Investing in afterschool is critical to children's success.

Afterschool programs offer enriching experiences that engage students, encourage creativity, and inspire a love of learning. They help students stay in school, graduate, and gain valuable life skills. All children deserve the opportunity to take part in afterschool programs that provide the building blocks they need to thrive in school, in career, and beyond.

The pandemic and resulting remote schooling for millions of students—which led to the need for significant learning recovery—further confirmed the need for students to have additional supports to accelerate learning, build their sense of connectedness, and foster their overall well-being during the hours when school is out. Engaging, enriching learning that bring to life the lessons learned in the classroom can help re-engage students in their own education and develop the skills they need to be successful in life.

Afterschool Programs Prepare Students for College and the Workforce

Challenge

Given our complex and changing world, today's students need to be critical thinkers who can tackle modern challenges. Learning in science, technology, engineering, math, and computer science—the subjects called “STEM”—builds knowledge and skills that help students reason through tough problems and come up with creative, effective, and reasonable solutions. Young people also need to develop 21st century skills necessary for future success, such as leadership, cooperation, shared understanding, and civic engagement.

Afterschool programs help students graduate from high school and gain workforce skills.

Students who participate in afterschool programs are more likely to advance to the next grade and have higher graduation rates. Afterschool programs also are stepping up to offer learning experiences that connect lessons students learn in the classroom to future careers while developing a new generation of problem solvers in STEM fields. Parents value afterschool STEM.



- ▶ Afterschool programs offer STEM learning experiences to 4.3 million young people in the United States.
- ▶ Afterschool programs encourage students to seek more opportunities to engage in STEM learning, sparking a life-long connection and curiosity in STEM fields.²²
- ▶ 77 percent of parents with children who participate in afterschool STEM programs are satisfied with the STEM learning opportunities.
- ▶ 78 percent of parents report that STEM learning opportunities were important when selecting their child's afterschool program.
- ▶ STEM education is also important to parents of students from groups underrepresented in the STEM workforce—84 percent of Latino and 74 percent of Black parents say that STEM learning opportunities were important when selecting their child's afterschool program.

Parents strongly agree that afterschool programs play a key role in building interest and skills in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Seventy-six percent of parents agree that afterschool programs help children gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science.²³

Afterschool programs help our nation's students prepare for the future.

Afterschool programs do more than support learning that takes place during the regular school day. The afterschool space gives young people the freedom to explore outside of core curriculum subjects and engages them in hands-on learning that promotes collaborative thinking, leadership, and civic participation.

As a nation, we have much more work ahead of us to ensure that all children are afforded the opportunities afterschool programs offer. It will take a united effort to increase the availability of quality afterschool programs that help children reach their full potential and thrive in school, college, career, and beyond.

Afterschool Programs Provide Supports for Healthy Futures

Challenge

For children and families alike, the conditions of the pandemic have led to unease and anxiety, feelings of isolation, and increased levels of stress.²⁴ Recognizing the serious impact the pandemic has had on young people's health and well-being, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association joined together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health.²⁵ Surveys of parents have found that the majority are more worried about their child's emotional well-being than before the pandemic and place missing out on social connections and friendships as a top concern.²⁶ Now, more than ever, children are in need of a network of supports that prioritize their overall health and well-being.

Afterschool programs provide the supports that young people need for their healthy development:

- ▶ 91 percent of parents report that their child is able to interact with their peers and build social skills in their afterschool program.
- ▶ 86 percent of parents say that their child is building confidence at the afterschool program.
- ▶ 87 percent of parents are satisfied with the opportunities for their child to build life skills in their afterschool program.
- ▶ 81 percent of parents are satisfied with the opportunities for their child to connect with caring adults in their afterschool program.
- ▶ 88 percent of parents are satisfied with the opportunities for physical activity their child has at their afterschool program.

Afterschool programs help children forge healthy futures.

Taking a comprehensive approach to wellness—which includes building social skills and forming healthy relationships and extends to more traditional aspects of health, such as physical activity and healthy eating—can provide the necessary supports to help healthy children grow into healthy adults. Afterschool and summer learning programs are well-situated to be an integral component of initiatives that address the whole child.

Children in quality programs feel safe and supported by caring mentors, work collaboratively with peers, develop new skills, gain confidence as they learn to set goals and make responsible decisions for themselves, have access to healthy snacks and meals, and take part in physical activities.

Afterschool and summer learning programs are embracing broad definitions of health set forth by national health leaders like the World Health Organization and the Department of Health and Human Services and are part and parcel of the support system ensuring that children become healthy, happy, and capable adults.²⁷



Afterschool and Summer Programs Work to Broaden Opportunity for All

Challenge

The academic achievement gap between students from lower- and higher-income families has persisted for roughly half a century. During the pandemic, this disparity has grown even larger, with students attending high-poverty schools showing larger declines in reading and math achievement during spring 2022 than students attending low-poverty schools.²⁸ Research suggests that unequal access to opportunity is one reason for this disparity. More generally, higher-income families often have more access to the tutors, mentors, homework help, and enrichments that provide their children with the extra time and attention they need to build and hone their skills toward school, college, and career success. For example, families in the highest income bracket spend more than five times as much on out-of-school time activities for one child annually, compared to families in the lowest income bracket.²⁹ Ensuring that all students, regardless of family income, have access to enrichment should be a top national priority.

Consistent participation in high-quality afterschool programs can help eliminate the achievement gap.

Afterschool programs can help accelerate learning for all students:

- ▶ Programs can help stem the tides of intergenerational poverty by providing enriching learning opportunities to low-income students.
- ▶ 81 percent of low-income parents report their child's afterschool program offers homework or academic assistance.
- ▶ 73 percent of low-income parents report programs offering reading and writing opportunities.
- ▶ 62 percent of low-income parents say programs provide opportunities in science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science (STEM).

Research has found that regular participation in afterschool programs helps to narrow the achievement gap between high- and low-income students in math.³⁰ Afterschool programs are helping create the best conditions for students' futures.

Families with bountiful resources can guarantee that their children receive the benefits of academic guidance and cultural enrichment when school is out, yet children of families with limited resources should not be denied access to these essential supports. Afterschool and summer programs provide the links that many students need to keep their progress from the school day and school year on-going. With these links, all students have an opportunity to thrive and move up the ladder together.

Afterschool Funding

Despite all we know about the benefits of afterschool programs, most children are missing out. Meeting the need for quality afterschool programs will take a commitment from more than a single funder, funding stream, or sector. It will require significant public investment to spur private contributions and systems change at every level—local, state, and federal.

Who is paying for afterschool?³¹

Parents are paying the majority of the afterschool bill. On average, parents pay more than three-quarters (76 percent) of the cost of afterschool through tuition and fees; paying on average \$2,400 per year per child for afterschool programs.

Even in low-income communities, parents pay more than half (54 percent) of the total afterschool budget and contribute an average of \$1,722 per year per child.

Program estimates place the real cost to provide quality programming to one child at \$3,190, demonstrating the chasm between parents' substantial contributions and the costs of sustaining quality programs.

What other funding support is available?

- ▶ Federal support: The federal government contributes only 11 percent of the cost of afterschool, even while 32 percent of the children in afterschool programs meet the federal government's definition of low-income and in need of federal assistance.
- ▶ The American Rescue Plan and other federal COVID relief funding made at least \$30 billion available to schools that can be used for afterschool and summer learning, however only about 13 percent of those funds have been used for quality, comprehensive out of school time programs. Efforts continue to maximize the use of those federal COVID relief dollars.³²
- ▶ Community partnership support: Between 2006 and 2010, partner organizations contributed more than \$1 billion to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs.³³

How can we relieve the financial burden on families?

We need a strategy that establishes concrete objectives for achieving, in the not too distant future, afterschool for all students. This strategy must:

- ▶ Account for the economic reality that some parents are unable to afford fees, while others can;
- ▶ Recognize the important role of diverse funding sources— government at all levels, philanthropic support, businesses, and parent fees;
- ▶ Continue to foster policies that encourage partnerships among a range of stakeholders in order to leverage a variety of funding sources, including school-community partnerships that leverage COVID relief funds at both the school district and municipal levels;
- ▶ Account for a broad range of programs from a variety of sponsors, reflecting the rich diversity of American communities and;
- ▶ Focus on approaches that sustain successful quality programs, while allowing innovative new programs to develop.

The Public Supports Greater Investment in Afterschool Programs

Voters want their elected officials to invest more in afterschool programs, and are willing to devote taxpayer money to pay for these programs.

Broad bipartisan support is evident, as 88 percent of parents overall, and 94 percent of Democratic, 88 percent of Republican, and 85 percent of Independent parents support public funding for afterschool.

Sixty-seven percent of parents say that they are more likely to vote for an elected official who supports public funding for afterschool and summer learning programs.³⁴



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