



NEWS RELEASE
October 12, 2006

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New Survey Finds Afterschool Funding Precarious in Tennessee

As Tennessee Celebrates Lights On Afterschool Today, New Survey Finds Fewer Than Half the State's Afterschool Programs Say Funding Fully Secure for Next Two Years; Most TN Programs Serving Low-Income Students

A new survey released today in conjunction with *Lights On Afterschool*, a national rally with more than 7,500 events around the country, finds that many of Tennessee's afterschool programs are fully subscribed but still unable to meet the demand in their communities. The web-based survey of 64 Tennessee afterschool providers, who collectively serve more than 27,500 children, finds that budget cuts and stagnation are taking a toll on afterschool programs, and the youth and families they serve.

Uncertain Times: Funding Insecurity Puts Afterschool Programs at Risk finds that afterschool programs in Tennessee are serving a high need population, serving more children than expected, and struggling to maintain their funding. Nearly all respondents say that more children in their communities could benefit from afterschool programs, if they were available.

"There is no question that we need more afterschool programs in Tennessee, and more secure funding for the programs we have," said Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Executive Director Linda O'Neal. "79 percent of respondents said there are children in their communities who need afterschool programs and don't have them. We must do better for our kids."

"Afterschool programs offer a variety of critically important services and supports, from homework help to mentoring opportunities to sports and fitness activities, to job training and career development," added Cathy Kitts, Director of the Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority Education Center and an Afterschool Ambassador with the Afterschool Alliance. "They keep children safe, inspire them to learn and help working families. When we shortchange afterschool programs, we put our future at risk."

Tennessee respondents to the survey represent 325 afterschool program sites. They report:

- 78% of afterschool programs operated at or above maximum capacity during the 2005/2006 school year.
- Tennessee's Afterschool programs are serving a high-need population. At 59 percent of programs surveyed, more than three in five students qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

- 32% of respondents say that funding is down a little (16%) or a lot (16%) in the last two years. Another 37% say it is unchanged. 21% say it is up a little, and just 10% say funding is up a lot.
- If programs are able to see an increase in funding, they are most likely to increase the number of students they serve.
- Respondents say the top three barriers to participation in afterschool programs are transportation, not enough knowledge about the program or afterschool, and older youth need to work or care for younger siblings.

“By not providing stable, secure funding, we’re playing Russian roulette with the afterschool programs that are critical to our children and families,” warned Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “But programs cannot serve all the children who need them when they are underfunded and have uncertain futures. We can, and must, do better.”

The bi-partisan *No Child Left Behind Act* authorizes \$2.5 billion for the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) afterschool initiative in FY 2007, but funding has fallen far behind authorized levels. Congress is on track to provide less than \$1 billion next year. If the initiative were funded at *No Child Left Behind* levels, 1.5 million more children would have access to quality afterschool programs. Most states and local communities are unable to pick up the slack.

Afterschool supporters around the country are joining the seventh annual *Lights On Afterschool*, the national rally for afterschool, today and throughout October. Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, this year’s *Lights On Afterschool* includes some 7,500 events throughout the nation and at military bases around the world at which a million Americans will urge their leaders to support the afterschool programs that keep children safe, inspire them to learn and help working families.

UNCERTAIN TIMES used web-based survey software and the survey was emailed to more than 10,000 contacts in the Afterschool Alliance database in August and September of 2006. Recipients were encouraged to forward the survey to afterschool program staff, and programs were asked to be certain that only one person per program completed the survey and to provide responses from a site-level coordinator when possible. 2,614 responses were reviewed. 503 of them did not provide sufficient data to be included in the final analysis or were duplicate responses; therefore the final sample was 2,111 responses which represent approximately 9,813 afterschool sites serving more than 1.5 million children. (Many respondents are responsible for multiple sites.)

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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 by 2010. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.