

LEARNING AND RECOVERY



YMCA of Metro Atlanta

Atlanta, Georgia

3,000

Average number of students served during the school year

150/day*

Average number of students served during COVID-19

*in person

25%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- Program fees

Providing essential care for the children of essential workers

On March 16, 2020, 25 states and the District of Columbia ordered schools to close and on March 19, California became the first state to issue a statewide stay-at-home order in response to COVID-19. By early April, more than 90 percent of people living in the U.S., including more than 55 million students, found their lives upended by the country's response to slow the spread of the coronavirus. At the time of the release of this issue brief, the U.S. alone has more than 4.2 million confirmed cases and lost more than 146,000 lives due to the virus.

Joining local efforts, afterschool programs across the country adjusted their operations to best address the urgent needs of the children and families in their community: delivering meals, providing care for children of essential workers, finding ways to keep students engaged in learning remotely, and remaining a source of support to students and families to help young people emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, and hopeful.

Overview

The **YMCA of Metro Atlanta** (Y-Metro Atlanta) typically provides a host of services to youth and their families, from afterschool programs to wellness classes. During COVID-19, the Y-Metro Atlanta suspended its typical services, however, they opened up an emergency childcare program to serve children of essential workers, where kids could complete their schoolwork and participate in enrichment and wellness activities. This summer, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta is opening its doors to all children in the community, offering a daily day camp with activities ranging from swimming to LEGO robotics.

A typical day in response to COVID-19

Although the YMCA of Metro Atlanta stopped normal services during the COVID-19 pandemic, they opened their doors to serve children of essential workers. With expanded hours from 5:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., each day the program offered time for homework help, enrichment activities such as STEAM lessons, and physical activity. This summer, the Y-Metro Atlanta is switching from their regular week-long specialty camps to a daily day camp model where kids will participate in activities such as LEGO robotics, swimming, soccer, and tumbling, in hour-long blocks. Following the field guide for camps on

implementation of CDC guidance, drafted by the American Camp Association and the YMCA of the US, to minimize the spread of the coronavirus and help identify cases, kids will be placed into daily group cohorts when they arrive in the morning, rotating between activities with the same cohort.

Impacts

As of June, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta had served approximately 165,000 meals to community members, averaging 7,000 meals a week across 11 distribution sites. The Y-Metro Atlanta has also opened their doors to 2,000 children of essential workers. Families have expressed their gratitude for the program, with one family in particular indicating that if it were not for the program, they would have no other safe option for childcare.

Program characteristics

When Georgia's schools began to close in March, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta knew that they had an opportunity to continue to serve their community. Although they shuttered their regular services, they immediately formed a crisis response team and prioritized where they could help meet unmet needs in the community. Determining that childcare was needed for essential workers, the Y-Metro Atlanta launched their emergency childcare program, partnering with hospitals in the area to best reach and serve the children of healthcare workers.

They opened up seven childcare sites, strategically spread out throughout the city, to serve as a childcare hub. Previously, each site operated independently. Now, sites functioned as one program. The program also adjusted their hours of operation to accommodate for healthcare workers' long hours, moving from a 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. schedule to a 5:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. schedule. To protect the health of the youth and their staff members, the Y-Metro Atlanta instituted safety measures, including taking temperatures in the morning, adjusting staff to student ratios, keeping kids in the same groups throughout the day, and incorporating lots of handwashing time. Although programming looked different than normal, the Y-Metro Atlanta made sure to still stick to their program basics—teaching character, creating a sense of accomplishment, and fueling a sense of belonging.

At the same time, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta expanded programming to help struggling families. For example, the program provided more meals through their hunger relief program, distributed groceries through a partnership with local food banks, and provided laptops to students without the technology to complete their online school work. One partnership that helped benefit families and local businesses was their partnership with the Arthur Blank Foundation and the Atlanta Falcons, where restaurants based in the Mercedes-Benz Stadium provided 500 meals a week to two Y-Metro Atlanta sites.



Challenges

In addition to a national health crisis, the effects of the pandemic have reached into all corners of life in the U.S.:

An economic crisis. Between mid-March and June, more than 52 million people filed for unemployment. As a result of layoffs, furloughs, and reduced hours due to stay-at-home orders, individuals are struggling to meet basic needs, including food security and paying rent.

A crisis in education. It is estimated that students missed approximately 30 percent of in-person learning during the 2019-2020 school year and teachers have reported that 23 percent of students are not attending online classes. Research by NWEA projects that students may start the new school year having lost close to 30 percent of their learning gains in reading and 50 percent of their gains in math.

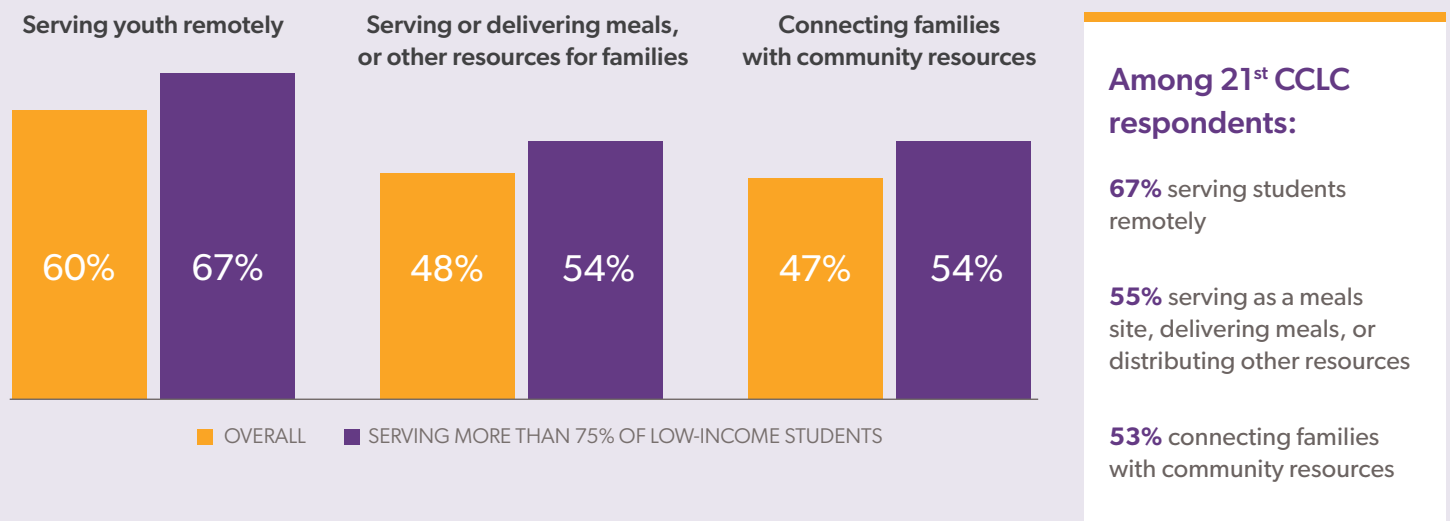
A crisis of well-being. A survey of youth ages 6 to 18 found that more than 1 in 5 reported that they were anxious (27 percent), stressed (23 percent), and unhappy (22 percent).

Exacerbating existing disparities. For instance, communities of color have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, with death rates among Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx persons higher than that of white and Asian individuals. Regarding education, lower-income parents were much less likely than higher-income parents to report that their children had received some online instruction from their school since it closed (69 percent vs. 87 percent), and nine times more likely to say their child will not be able to complete their schoolwork because of lack of access to a computer at home (36 percent vs. 4 percent).

Read [How Afterschool is Supporting Learning and Recovery during COVID-19](#) to learn more.

Afterschool programs supporting learning and recovery during COVID-19

A survey of 914 afterschool program providers conducted May 28-June 30, found that afterschool programs continue to provide critical supports in their communities during the pandemic, with programs serving high-need students and families especially active. **Overall, 70 percent of respondents report serving students in some capacity.**



Source: Online survey conducted by Edge Research on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance.

This summer, responding to new rotating work schedules of many parents, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta is switching to a daily day camp model. Normally offering week-long specialty camps in the summer, where kids participate in swimming or soccer for an entire week, this summer, they will take specialty camp activities and offer them in hour-long blocks throughout the day to allow parents to sign their children up for programming on a daily, rather than weekly, basis.

Program history

The oldest nonprofit in Atlanta, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta was founded over 160 years ago as a way to give men a home away from home and provide a source of spiritual guidance. Throughout the years, the Y-Metro Atlanta has expanded programming opportunities to adapt to meet the changing needs of the community. For example, swimming programs were added in response to an increase in deaths by drowning, they expanded programs into the suburbs during post-WWII suburbanization, and added afterschool programs as more women entered the workplace and needed after school care for their children. Today, with more than 30 programs in 13 counties in Georgia, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta focuses primarily on ensuring school readiness, improving academic achievement, inspiring civic leadership, and empowering healthy living.

Recommendations

for providing essential care for the children of essential workers:

- ▶ Try to provide a daily option for care. This exposes more kids to the program, since some parents may only need care a few days a week because of their work schedules. A daily schedule this summer will also enable you to be better prepared in the fall if schools are only open a few days a week.
- ▶ Schedules this summer have to be super focused—have a structured schedule with specific activities that are intentionally designed to ensure social distancing. Free time this summer is not going to work, as kids likely have a different idea of what safe activities are.



Afterschool Alliance

afterschoolalliance.org