



To: The Afterschool Alliance

From: Lake Snell Perry & Associates
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Subject: Findings from a Nationwide Survey on Afterschool Programs¹

Date: October 28, 2003

A recent nationwide survey of likely voters shows overwhelming support for afterschool programs. Voters not only believe the programs are necessary, they believe they are an *absolute* necessity (80 percent agree, 48 percent strongly agree) and they strongly support a comprehensive program to enrich learning opportunities for America's children and teenagers (88 percent favor). Support for afterschool programs is broad and deep, extends across every region of the country, and includes majority support among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike. Voter commitment to afterschool programs is strong enough that they in turn support their local, state, and federal governments reciprocating by setting aside funds specifically for afterschool programs (77 percent support federal set asides, 75 percent state, 63 percent local).

Context of Support

Voters' strong support for afterschool programs is based on two pillars. First, voters want children to be safe and out of trouble during afterschool hours. More than eight in ten voters are concerned that many children in their community in fact have no place to go after school (85 percent concerned) and 86 percent are concerned that children and teens are unsupervised after school and have too much unstructured time. Additionally, voters are nearly unanimous in their belief that children should have some type of organized activity or place to go to after the school day ends (94 percent agree).

Second, voters sense that there are not enough afterschool programs in their communities. Most voters do not believe there are enough afterschool programs available for children in their area. Less than a third of voters (29 percent) believe there are enough (24 percent) or more than enough programs (5 percent) in their area while a

¹ **Methodology:** Lake Snell Perry & Associates and The Tarrance Group designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached 800 adults, 18 years or older who are registered to vote. This survey was conducted between September 9th and 14th, 2003. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-3.5%.

majority (55 percent) believe there are not enough. Parents are the most likely to say there are not enough programs (67 percent), yet even non-parents sense a shortage (48 percent not enough).

Those two pillars underline the following **key findings**:

There is both broad and deep support for afterschool programs. After hearing a description outlining a comprehensive afterschool program,² nearly nine out of ten voters (88 percent) favor the program, including 58 percent who do so strongly. Support for the program has remained strong over the last five years and extends beyond partisanship: Democrats 94 percent favor, Republicans 82 percent, Independents 86 percent. Both parents (91 percent) and non-parents (86 percent) favor the program and support is relatively even among younger and older voters (89 percent compared to 86 percent, respectively).³ When voters are told the program may cost \$1,500 per student, 62 percent indicate a willingness to use federal and state taxpayer money to put these programs in their community. Voters are even willing to increase their own state taxes by \$100 a year to pay for every child to attend an afterschool program (52 percent favor, 26 percent strongly favor) and they are more favorable when told the tax increase would be put in a trust fund so that the money could only go to afterschool programs (60 percent favor, 38 percent strongly).

Voters want funding for afterschool programs protected and are concerned that budget restrictions put programs at risk. Three in four voters (75 percent) are concerned about President Bush's commitment to leaving no child behind when they are informed of his proposal to cut federal funding for afterschool programs (51 percent are very concerned). Voter concern is equally strong when informed that the lack of new funds means that no new programs will be created but also that existing programs may need to close their doors or reduce services (76 percent concerned, 44 percent very concerned). Additionally, 80 percent of voters are concerned that budget problems in states have already resulted in some programs reducing their services or ceasing operations. Perhaps more importantly, *voters are reluctant to support candidates who advocate cutting afterschool funding.* Sixteen percent of voters say that any public official who wants to cut afterschool funding does not deserve their vote and a near majority (45 percent) say they would be reluctant to vote for a candidate who wants to cut funding (61 percent total).

Voter commitment to afterschool programs is further illustrated in their support for setting aside taxpayer money that will go toward afterschool programs. Three quarters of voters support set-asides for federal and state governments to specifically target afterschool programs. Seventy-seven percent support the federal government setting aside specific funds to be used for afterschool programs and support is equally

2 Question: "Now let me read you a description of a program some people have recommended implementing. This comprehensive afterschool program would take place during after school hours five days a week to provide children and teens with fun, enriching learning opportunities that extend beyond school's traditional academic style, that challenge them, and that give them more individualized attention."

3 Older voters are age 50 and older, younger voters are under age 50.

high on the state level with 75 percent indicating favor for setting aside funds by the state government.

Voters believe afterschool programs should serve a host of purposes, including becoming an enriching learning experience. They do not, however, believe that afterschool programs should be judged solely on children’s academic or test performance. Barely four in ten voters (41 percent) believe the primary goal of afterschool programs should be to improve the test scores of children in the programs, while the majority (52 percent) does not believe that test improvement should be the primary goal. When voters are given more information using dialogue from contemporary discourse, voters move more strongly toward believing that afterschool programs should not become an extension of the school day but should instead be a place where children have hands-on enriching learning experiences (56 percent enriching, 34 percent extension of the school day).⁴

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Overall, voters strongly support comprehensive afterschool programs. They believe there are not enough programs in their areas and they support specific government set asides to fund programs. Primarily, voters want to make sure that children and teenagers have a safe place to go to after school hours where they can learn and grow. Support crosses the political spectrum and is strong in all regions of the country.

4 “Some people/other people say that with the new academic standards required of children today we need to make sure they spend as much time as possible learning in a classroom environment. Afterschool programs can become an extension of the school day allowing more time for children to learn and better preparing them to meet the standards. We need to do all we can to make sure all children have the chance to succeed academically and afterschool programs are one way to get there.

OR

Some people/other people say that afterschool programs should not become more school. They say helping to meet the new academic standards should not be an expectation of afterschool programs. Afterschool programs should be a place where children have hands-on, enriching learning opportunities, recreation, community service, and creative activities in a relaxed, fun environment. Afterschool programs can’t be expected to fix the problems of a failing school system – that is not realistic for the programs or fair to the children.”