

# AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

## POLL REPORT

No. 4

July/August 2001



Funding provided by the C.S. Mott Foundation and JCPenney Afterschool  
A Report on Findings of a Nationwide Poll of Registered Voters on Afterschool Programs

## Public Supports Expanding Afterschool

When we set out to do a fifth national poll on voter attitudes toward afterschool this year, we didn't know what to expect relative to voter interest in this issue. After all, since the first poll conducted by the Mott Foundation in 1998, support for afterschool couldn't get much stronger. And indeed, for the fourth year in a row, voters continue to tell us that America's youth very much need some type of organized activity after school and that afterschool programs are a necessity to fill this void.

Still, in our 2001 poll, voter support for afterschool took on a new dimension. Voters underscored their support saying there should be a national commitment to the issue. Almost nine out of ten voters expressed that view. And when we probed how strong their support really is by asking if they would feel the same way even if federal funding is doubled from current levels, still almost seven out of ten remained steadfast about a national commitment.

Even our pollsters were a bit surprised.

"Given the state of the economy, we expected the numbers of voters willing to direct more of their tax dollars to afterschool to be lower than in years past, however, support actually increased during the past year, which underscores voters' unwavering support for

afterschool programs," says Alysia Snell, vice president of Lake Snell Perry & Associates.

Indeed, our 2001 poll sends a message loud and clear that American voters, regardless of race, gender, geographic region or party affiliation, want afterschool programs. They believe that there are not enough programs in communities today, and they are willing to use federal or state funds to pay for more programs to serve our youth.

## Emerging Trends

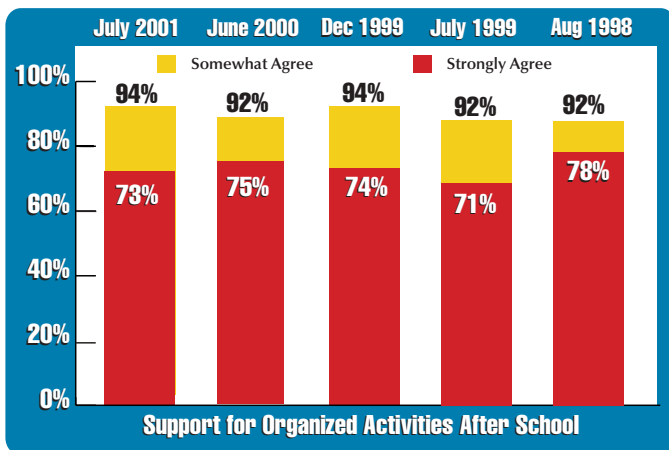
Lake Snell Perry, along with the Tarrance Group, has conducted five bi-partisan national polls on voter attitudes toward afterschool since 1998. To maintain continuity, the same team has crafted and administered each poll. Key questions are repeated to help identify trends in voter attitudes even while new issues are explored. This particular poll was conducted prior to the events of September 11, however, its findings are consistent with previous efforts.

Other key findings in this year's poll include the fact that voters are increasingly willing to have their taxes raised to support programs. Moreover, they believe that state and federal governments should dedicate significantly more resources to afterschool programs.

"Support for additional government funding of afterschool programs holds up against every test or challenge," says Dave Sackett, a partner at The Tarrance Group. "Even in the face of potential tax increases [at the time this poll was taken] the American electorate stands fast in its desire to provide all children with access to afterschool."

## Building on the Past

All told, this year's poll reinforces voter belief that afterschool programs keep kids safe, give them creative outlets to improve academically and help working families. Combined with previous polls, these findings



The findings discussed in this publication are based on a nationwide survey of 800 adults, 18 years of age or older, who are registered voters. The poll was conducted July 31–August 2, 2001 by the polling firms of Lake Snell Perry & Associates and The Tarrance Group. The margin of error for this poll is +/-3.5 percent.

## Building, continued

paint a picture of consistent and increasing support among American voters for afterschool programs in the face of changing national conditions. They tell us that, over time, Americans remain concerned that kids have safe, stimulating activities after school, and that kids have an opportunity to learn new academic and social skills. They tell us that, over time, Americans are willing to put their money behind their commitment and want to see their government do the same through funding increases that help expand access by creating more programs.

It appears that support from the American public is beginning to coalesce around a defined national afterschool movement. And that comes none too soon for afterschool advocates.

Actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who served as Honorary Chairman of our *Lights On Afterschool!* 2001 event in October, says it well: “The hours after school are when kids are most susceptible to negative influences and I have seen first hand the unbelievable difference it makes when a child has a safe place to go after the school day ends. [Afterschool] programs enrich students, support families and make our nation stronger. It is our responsibility to ensure every child in this country has a great afterschool program to call their own.”

*Our thanks to the Mott Foundation and JCPenney Afterschool for their continued funding of this research. The Afterschool Alliance*

## Key Findings

### American voters want more daily, quality afterschool programs.

- ◆ More than nine out of ten voters (94 percent) believe that there is a need for some type of organized activity or place where children can go after school every day that provides opportunities to learn.
- ◆ Eight out of ten Americans (80 percent) describe afterschool programs as a necessity for [their] community and three out of four (75 percent) call them an *absolute* necessity.
- ◆ Two-thirds of voters (67 percent) think there are not enough afterschool programs available for children in America today.

### American voters support expanding afterschool programs.

- ◆ Almost nine out of ten voters (86 percent) say there should be a national commitment to ensuring that every child has a space in an afterschool program.
- ◆ Eight out of ten voters (80 percent) believe that increasing the availability of afterschool programs will help working families.
- ◆ More than eight out of ten voters (82 percent) say afterschool programs help working families by exposing youth to more creative activities.

### Increases of Statistical Significance

Voters favor providing a comprehensive afterschool program that “uses public school buildings during after school hours five days a week to provide children with fun, enriching learning opportunities that extend beyond school’s traditional academic style, that challenge them and that give them more individualized attention.”

2001      2000      % Increase

94%      88%      + 6

Voters want afterschool programs to take place in public schools.

57%      50%      + 7

Voters believe all taxpayers should share in the responsibility of paying for afterschool programs.

78%      65%      + 13

Voters are willing to use additional federal or state taxpayer money for local afterschool programs that cost \$1,000\* per child per school year.

77%      66%      + 11

Voters are willing to pay \$100 in additional state taxes each year to expand afterschool programs.

67%      62%      + 5

Children are better off going to an afterschool program than going home after school.

77%      66%      + 11

\* This figure is derived from the average annual cost of a sampling of school-based afterschool programs conducted three hours per day, five days per week during the school year.

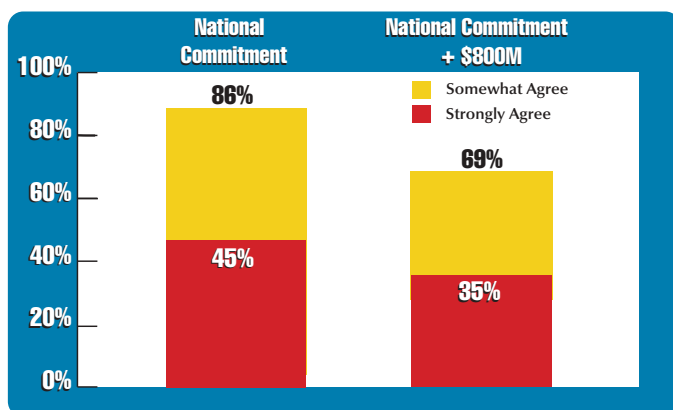
- ◆ Almost eight out of ten voters (78 percent) believe afterschool programs also help by keeping children safe and giving them a chance to learn and master new skills.
- ◆ Almost eight out of ten voters (77 percent) say that children would be better off taking part in an afterschool program than going home after school.

### Americans are willing to commit federal and state tax dollars to afterschool programs.

- ◆ Almost eight out of ten voters (78 percent) say all taxpayers should share the responsibility for paying for afterschool programs.
- ◆ Almost seven out of ten voters (69 percent) agree that the federal government should increase funds for afterschool by \$800 million per year over current-year spending.
- ◆ Two-thirds of voters (67 percent) support having their state taxes raised by \$100 per year to pay for every child to attend an afterschool program.

## Expanding Afterschool: The Nation

Past voter support for afterschool programs took on new urgency in light of this year’s finding that voters believe there should be a “national commitment” to fund afterschool. This is underscored by voter belief that lack of funds is the biggest barrier to expanding programs. Voters place a high priority on providing federal funds to afterschool programs, with more than eight out of ten (85 percent) saying the federal government should set aside specific funds for afterschool. As times passes, voters appear to be more comfortable with defining a specific role for government in expanding afterschool.



### Poll Bites

- ◆ Two-thirds (63 percent) of voters say they place afterschool programs as a “top” or “high” priority on their list of issues deserving federal funds (“reducing class size” and “training for teachers” ranked higher). Prioritizing federal funding for expanding afterschool

programs is more important to voters under the age of 64, although four out of ten seniors (40 percent) still say federal funding for afterschool programs is a “top” or “high” priority for them.

- ◆ More than half (58 percent) of voters surveyed believe the federal government is spending too little on afterschool programs.
- ◆ Sixty-nine (69) percent, or nearly seven out of ten voters, agree that the federal government should increase funds for afterschool by \$800 million per year over current-year spending. Slightly more African-American (74 percent) and Hispanic (71 percent) voters agree than white voters (68 percent).
- ◆ Parents *without* school-age children are almost as willing as are parents *with* school-age children—72 percent vs. 80 percent—to use additional taxpayer money to ensure that their communities have afterschool programs.

## Expanding Afterschool: States

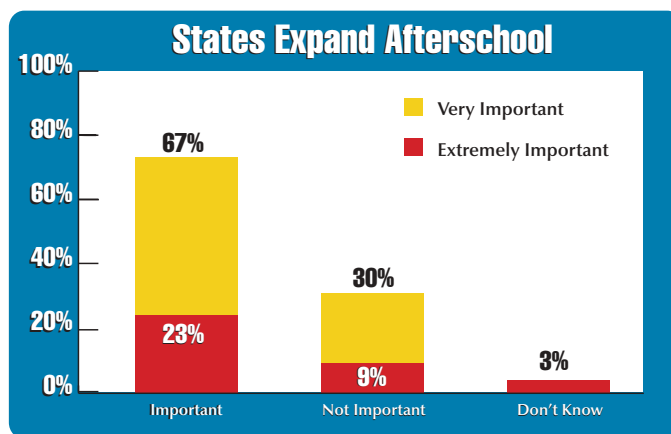
Since the first afterschool poll in 1998, interest in afterschool at the state level has increased in many parts of the country through new legislation, grants and state budget allocations specifically for afterschool. To investigate voters’ perceptions of afterschool in their states, this year’s poll asked several new questions regarding performance and funding.

Generally, more than two-thirds of voters say that states need to do a better job on expanding afterschool programs, and that it is important to them that their states expand those programs.

Voter support for dedicating additional state tax dollars each year to afterschool programs increased over previous years and, as with the federal government, they believe state governments should set aside specific funds for afterschool.

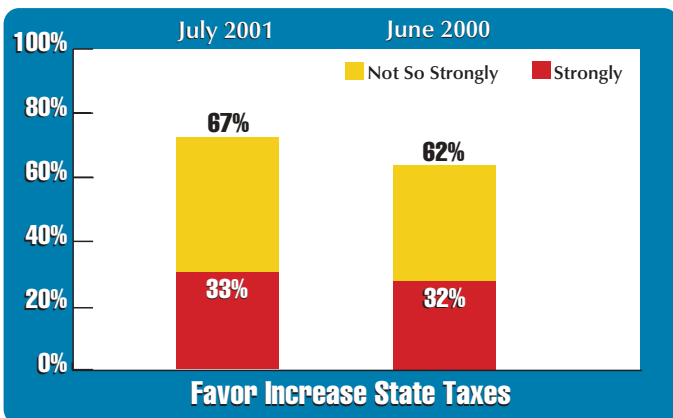
### Poll Bites

- ◆ Almost nine out of ten (86 percent) of voters favor their state governments setting aside specific funds to



be used for afterschool—56 percent of these *strongly* favor setting aside funds.

- ◆ Willingness among voters to have their state taxes increased by \$100 per year to expand afterschool programs has increased five (5) percent since last year to 67 percent. Of these, voters in the Northeast\* are slightly more in favor of increasing taxes (71 percent) compared to those in the Midwest and West (each at 68 percent) and those in the South (64 percent).
- ◆ African-American voters are more likely than their white and Hispanic counterparts to believe their states are not doing a good job of expanding programs—75 percent vs. 58 and 65 percent respectively.



## Afterschool on the Ballot

Given that afterschool is such a popular issue among voters, we decided to ask how they would view candidates and their stands on the issue. A plurality of voters (43 percent) say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increasing taxes by \$100 per year to expand programs. Of that plurality, the majority includes parents with children attending afterschool programs, dual income parents, working women, or African American or Hispanic voters.

One third of voters (32 percent) say it would make no difference if the candidate votes to increase taxes. Of that 32 percent, the majority includes women homemakers, parents with no children attending afterschool programs, white or African American voters, and single-income households that include adults who are separated, divorced or widowed.

Fewer than two out of ten voters (17 percent) say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports increasing taxes to fund programs.

## Afterschool Need and Availability

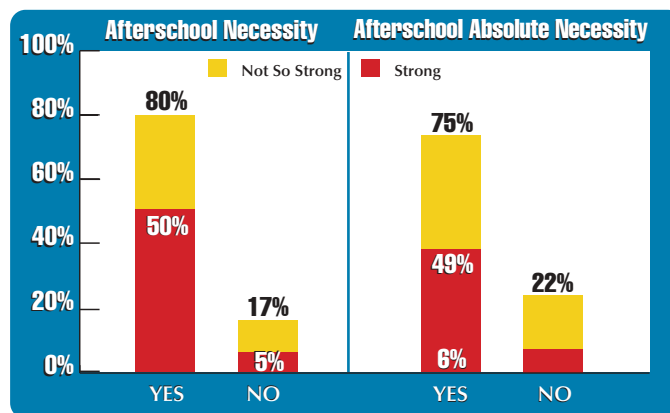
Since polling began in 1998, voters have felt strongly that afterschool programs are a necessity and that there are not enough of them available in their communities.

In 1999, we went one step further and asked voters how important it is to them to ensure that afterschool programs are available for all kids. Taking the issue to heart, then and each year since more than eight out of 10 (86 percent) voters have said that it is indeed important to them to personally ensure access to afterschool for all kids.

As increasing evidence of the intensity with which voters support afterschool, this year 75 percent of Americans say they believe that afterschool programs are an *absolute* necessity. Of that number, the majority are voters under the age of 40, African-Americans and Hispanics, and single or divorced parents with kids under the age of 12 who already attend afterschool programs.

### Poll Bites

- ◆ Two-thirds of voters (67 percent) continue to believe there are not enough afterschool programs available. Only 15 percent of voters say there are enough afterschool programs and only four (4) percent say there are more than enough programs.
- ◆ Six out of ten voters (62 percent) say they think it is difficult for parents to find afterschool programs in their communities.
- ◆ Hispanic (93 percent) and African-American (84 percent) voters believe that afterschool programs are a necessity slightly more strongly than white voters (79 percent).
- ◆ Almost five out of ten voters (47 percent) say the



\*Regional Designations: **Northeast** includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont. **Midwest** includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin. **South** includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia. **West** includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

biggest barrier to expanding afterschool programs is lack of funds.

- ◆ Voters believe all levels of government — local, state and federal — as well as parents, should play equal roles in ensuring afterschool programs for children.

## Afterschool Outcomes

**H**ow do voters expect afterschool programs to benefit kids, parents and ultimately communities? Since 1998, voters consistently count on afterschool programs to provide kids with a safe place after school. In fact, almost eight out of ten voters believe kids will be safer in afterschool programs.

They also look to afterschool programs to encourage kids' academic and social development. Eight out of ten voters believe youth will be exposed to more creative activities by participating in afterschool programs, and almost as many believe programs will give kids a chance to learn and master new skills.

And finally, voters have consistently looked to afterschool programs ultimately to help parents who otherwise would worry about their kids being alone and unsupervised during those hours between school and the time they get home from work.

Eighty (80) percent of voters, whether it personally affects them or not, recognize that working families will be helped if more afterschool programs are available in their communities. In fact, 91 percent of voters agree that stress is reduced for working families who have kids in afterschool programs.

As Americans increasingly focus on their families and the quality of life they enjoy with them, this finding holds particular significance.

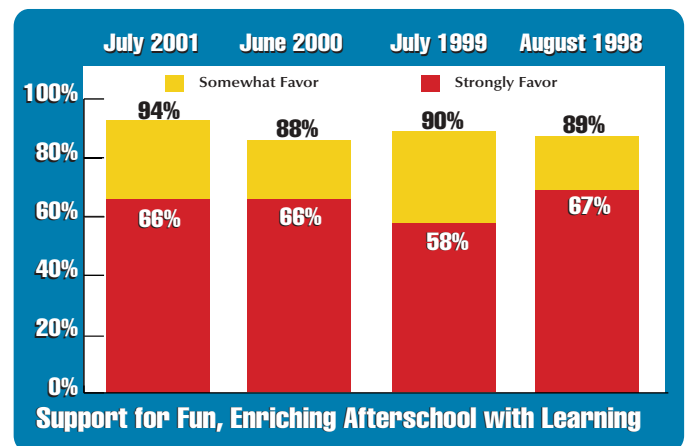
In this year's poll, voters link what happens in afterschool programs each day with changes in behavior of kids and families. Eighty-nine (89) percent agree that kids in afterschool programs receive additional values training and thus have a better chance of avoiding drug and alcohol use.

Almost the same number of voters agree that kids in afterschool learn how to get along with each other, which translates into better behavior during school hours than kids who don't participate in afterschool programs.

Action and outcome. Cause and effect. Voters are beginning to recognize and to articulate how afterschool directly impacts communities.

## Poll Bites

- ◆ When asked to choose from a list of items they *most associate* with afterschool programs, voters rank highest "adult supervision" (23 percent), "creative outlet" (22 percent) and "safety" (19 percent).
- ◆ When asked to volunteer an opinion on what they believe are the *most important things afterschool programs provide for children today*, voters most often say educational/academic learning, keeping kids safe, keeping kids out of trouble and off the streets, and [providing] adult supervision. These four items appeared most often on a list of 22 non-prompted responses.
- ◆ African-American voters hold significantly stronger beliefs than white or Hispanic voters that afterschool programs reduce stress for working families, help kids avoid alcohol and drug abuse, help kids get along better, and help reduce juvenile crime.



## A Profile of Parents...

- ◆ More than eight out of ten (84 percent) parents of children 18 or younger say programs are a necessity (56 percent yes, strongly) compared to three-quarters (74 percent) of voters without children ages 18 or younger (45 percent yes, strongly).
- ◆ Mothers and fathers respond in relatively equal numbers—86 percent yes, necessity, 59 percent, strongly, among dads; and 82 percent yes, necessity, 53 percent, strongly, among moms.
- ◆ Parents of children ages 12 and under are even more likely to recognize the necessity of afterschool programs than parents of children ages 13–18 (86 vs. 76 percent).

## Afterschool: It's Working

- ◆ Among kids participating in afterschool programs in 12 high-risk California communities, vandalism and stealing dropped by two-thirds, violent acts and carrying a concealed weapon fell by more than half, and arrests and being picked up by police were cut in half. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, *California's After-School Choice: Juvenile Crime or Safe Learning Time*, September 2001)
- ◆ Students at project Ka Upena Hoohui, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers afterschool program in Pukalani, Hawaii, showed a 29 percent increase in math grades and a 42 percent increase in science grades. (U.S. Department of Education, July 2000)
- ◆ A survey of a statewide afterschool program in California shows that afterschool participants' standardized test scores (SAT-9) in both reading and math increased more than scores of other students, and afterschool participants also had better attendance. Participants scoring above the 25th percentile in reading increased their scores by 5.8 percent, almost twice the statewide increase of 3 percent. Students who participated for 150 days or more increased their reading scores by 8.5 percent. Math scores increased by 7.4 percent for participants who were in the program for more than 150 days, compared to the statewide increase of 4.5 percent. (California Department of Education, *Evaluation of California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program: 1999-2000, Preliminary Report by Department of Education, University of California at Irvine in cooperation with Healthy Start and After School Partnerships Office*, May 2001)
- ◆ Of the 40 schools in Chicago's afterschool Lighthouse Project, test results in 39 schools showed achievement gains in mathematics and in 30 schools showed achievement gains in reading scores. (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, *Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids*, June 1998)
- ◆ A North Carolina study of 36 afterschool programs found that 92 percent of the programs resulted in increased academic performance, with over half the programs producing GPA increases of 16-69 percent. (North Carolina Central University, 1998)
- ◆ Teens who do not participate in afterschool programs are almost three times more likely to skip classes at school than teens who do participate. They are also three times more likely to use marijuana or other drugs, and they are more likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes and engage in sexual activity. (YMCA of the USA, *After School for America's Teens*, March 2001)

For the latest afterschool research and poll results from our organization and others, visit [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org) and click on "Research."



CHARLES STEWART  
MOTT FOUNDATION

The C.S. Mott Foundation was established in 1926 with a mission to support efforts that promote a just, equitable and sustainable society. During its more than 60 years of funding community education, Mott has provided more than \$200 million locally, nationally, and internationally for the development of community-school partnerships. Mott has committed more than \$100 million over seven years to afterschool and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) afterschool initiative of the U.S. Department of Education for training, technical assistance, evaluation and public awareness building.

To learn more, visit :

[www.mott.org/21stcentury](http://www.mott.org/21stcentury)



Launched in 1999, JCPenney Afterschool is a multi-million dollar initiative of the J.C. Penney Company, Inc. that supports the afterschool work of the Afterschool Alliance, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and the YMCA of the USA. Nearly 1,100 JCPenney department stores nationwide feature Afterschool Community Zones that provide customers with information on local afterschool and summer programs, as well as Afterschool Coaches who educate co-workers and customers about afterschool. J.C. Penney Company, Inc. is one of America's largest department store, drugstore, catalog and e-commerce retailers, employing approximately 270,000 associates.

To learn more, visit :

[www.jcpenney.com/afterschool](http://www.jcpenney.com/afterschool)



Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is a coalition of public, private and nonprofit organizations dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children. Supporting the work of the Alliance are the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, JCPenney Afterschool, The Advertising Council, The Entertainment Industry Foundation, the Creative Artists Agency Foundation, Open Society Institute/The After-School Corporation and American Isuzu Motors, Inc.

To learn more, visit : [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)