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Parents Report that Afterschool Programs Promote Healthy Eating, Physical Activity

Low-Income Parents Especially Value Health Benefits Afterschool Programs Provide

Washington, DC — Afterschool programs are emerging as an effective tool in the nation’s ongoing battle against childhood obesity, according to a national household survey conducted by Shugoll Research for the Afterschool Alliance. The special report released today, [Kids on the Move: Afterschool Programs Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#), reveals parents’ views about the role afterschool programs play in improving kids’ health and physical fitness. Findings are based on responses collected for *America After 3PM* from 30,000 U.S. households, including in-depth interviews with more than 13,000 parents and guardians.

Most parents (72 percent) report that their child’s afterschool program provides children with beverages, snacks and/or meals, and 81 percent of these parents are satisfied that the food served is healthy. In addition, 80 percent of parents agree that afterschool programs should offer opportunities for physical activity and 80 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program report that the program does just that. Eighty-four percent of those parents say they are satisfied with both the amount and the variety of physical activity offered.

“Afterschool programs are a proven, but sometimes underappreciated, weapon in the battle against childhood obesity and physical inactivity,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “We’ve known for a long time that afterschool, before-school and summer programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working parents. These new data make clear that they also do a tremendous amount to help keep kids healthy, now and for the future. The healthy habits afterschool programs help instill can last a lifetime.”

“Across the country, afterschool programs engage children in fun, educational activities to expand their skills, keep them active and healthy, help them with homework, and much more,” said Kevin Washington, President and CEO of the YMCA of the USA. “This survey is encouraging, but it also identifies some challenges. Afterschool providers and advocates need to do more to keep older youth active; help parents understand the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards, which recommend best practices related to food and activity, including 60 minutes of physical activity per day; and help policymakers understand the full range of benefits afterschool programs provide.”

Key findings from *Kids on the Move*:

- **Older youth are less likely than younger children to attend an afterschool program that offers food and less likely to be physically active in their program.** One-third of parents of older youth (33 percent) report that their child's afterschool program does not offer snacks or meals, compared with 20 percent of parents of younger children. Among parents of older youth, 21 percent say their afterschool program does not offer physical activity, compared with 12 percent of parents of younger children.
- **Providing healthy food during afterschool programs is especially important to low-income, African-American and Hispanic parents.** Two out of three African-American (67 percent) and Hispanic parents (66 percent) with children in afterschool say that providing healthy food during an afterschool program was very important in choosing their child's program, compared with 55 percent of white parents. Similarly, low-income parents (74 percent) are more likely than higher-income parents (69 percent) to agree that afterschool programs have a responsibility to provide healthy food to their students. Among parents with a child in an afterschool program, low-income parents are more likely than higher-income parents to say that providing healthy food was important when selecting their child's program (67 percent versus 58 percent).
- **Opportunities for physical activity are important to African-American, Hispanic and low-income parents.** When asked about opportunities for physical activity, 71 percent of African-American parents and 71 percent of Hispanic parents report that it was very important when selecting their child's afterschool program. In addition, 79 percent of low-income parents agreed that afterschool programs should offer children opportunities for physical activity.
- **Many parents are unaware that standards for healthy eating and physical activity exist for afterschool programs.** Roughly 4 in 10 parents are unaware of the recommended standards for healthy eating (36 percent unaware) and physical activity (44 percent unaware).

Kids on the Move offers recommendations for making afterschool programs even more effective in promoting health, including ensuring that providers are aware of policies and programs that support a healthier environment and doing more to increase awareness of HEPA Standards. Many parents who reported that their children had 30 minutes of physical activity each day in their program were satisfied with that, suggesting that parents believe afterschool programs play a key role in helping children meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity.

“The afterschool community is committed to doing even more to stop childhood obesity,” Grant said. “These results point the way. Quality afterschool programs are a vital part of the fabric of our communities, providing a rich array of needed services to children and families. We must increase support for these programs from government at all levels, philanthropies, businesses and others if we are to help the next generation lead long, healthy lives and prepare children and youth to succeed in school and life.”

In October 2014, the Afterschool Alliance released findings from [America After 3PM](#) related to children's participation in afterschool. That data revealed a dramatic increase in participation in afterschool over the past decade, from 6.5 million to 10.2 million children. The survey also documented a vast and growing unmet demand for afterschool, with the parents of 19.4 million children reporting that they would enroll their child in a program, *if one were available*. National

and state-by-state results from that report and from this special report are available at www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/.

Findings from *America After 3PM* are based on in-depth interviews with 13,709 households with children, completed by way of an online survey using a blend of national consumer panels. Shugoll Research collected and analyzed the data for *America After 3PM*. In order to participate, respondents had to live in the United States and be the guardians of a school-age child living in their household. All interviews were completed between February 28 and April 17, 2014.

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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. More information is available at www.AfterschoolAlliance.org.