**NEWS RELEASE**
July 15, 2026
Contacts:
Stephanie Van Koevering, Michigan Afterschool Partnership
Lisa Lederer, Afterschool Alliance

# Demand Far Exceeds Access to Afterschool and Summer Programs in Kent County, New Study Shows

*Parents give existing programs high marks,*
*but most young people who could benefit are unable to participate*

GRAND RAPIDS, MI — The majority of youth throughout Kent County whose parents want the learning and enrichment opportunities that afterschool and summer learning programs provide for them are not enrolled, most often because of cost:

- Afterschool programs are making a difference for 12,545 Kent County youth. However, more than four in five of the 70,911 County children whose parents want afterschool programs for them are missing out.
- Summer learning programs currently serve 17,650 Kent County youth, creating opportunities that too many youth have yet to access. Two in three of the 52,908 County children whose parents want summer programs for them are missing out.

Those are among the findings from a household survey commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and released today by the Afterschool Alliance and the Michigan Afterschool Partnership. Grand Rapids Mayor David LaGrand met with three summer programs this afternoon to discuss these results, engage with youth activities, and connect with other community leaders.

"While these gaps are persistent, we are grateful to members of the Michigan Legislature who have advanced historic, bipartisan budget support for afterschool and summer programming," said Erin Skene-Pratt, executive director of the Michigan Afterschool Partnership. "A new, $135 million-line item in FY27 will help address the problems identified in this new study. Boosting access to afterschool and summer programs is a broad, public recognition that these efforts are not just nice to have; they are essential infrastructure for Michigan's young people and their families."

The study finds that the barriers that most often prevent enrollment in both afterschool and summer programs in Kent County are cost and issues with location or transportation. Some 94% of Kent County parents whose children are participating rate their child's afterschool program as excellent or very good; and 97% report being satisfied with the summer program their child attends. There is overwhelming bipartisan support among parents in the County for public funding for afterschool and summer learning.

“Afterschool advocates and providers in Kent County and throughout Michigan are doing fantastic work, and the students who are able to participate in programs benefit tremendously,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “The state’s investment is impressive, but too many students and families are still likely to miss out. We need the federal government, local governments, businesses and philanthropies to step up as well, so every parent who wants their child to participate in an afterschool or summer program can enroll them. Quality afterschool and summer programs help students succeed in school and life.”

The new study finds that Kent County parents recognize that afterschool and summer programs offer myriad benefits to both young people and parents. More than 85% say afterschool programs build social skills and responsible decision making; encourage fun and learning, decreasing screen time; and boost teamwork, critical thinking and leadership skills. Ninety-seven percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program say programs lead to less stress because they know their child is safe; 87% say they positively impact parents’ overall well-being; and 84% say they help parents keep their jobs or work more hours.

“Afterschool and other out-of-school time programs help create the conditions young people need to flourish while also supporting their parents and caregivers,” said Trudy Ngo-Brown, Director of Learning and Grantmaking at the Steelcase Foundation, which supported the study. “The Kent County data highlights both the tremendous value families place on these programs and the significant gap between demand and access. We hope these findings spark conversations and action among funders, providers, and community leaders to expand opportunities for children and teens across our region."

The national survey, *America After 3PM 2025*, is based on survey responses from 30,515 American households, with 279 households with 475 children in Kent County screened. The surveys were conducted by Edge Research.

In most respects, the Kent County findings mirror the national survey findings, which include:

**Access is uneven by age**.

- More than half the elementary schoolers not in an afterschool program (58%) would be if a program were available, as would 49% of middle school students, their parents say.

**Cost is the greatest challenge** for families whose child is not in an afterschool program.

- 56% cite cost as an important factor preventing them from enrolling their child.
- These parents cite accessibility as another primary barrier, with 49% saying their child does not have a safe way to get to and come home from afterschool programs and 48% saying program locations are inconvenient.
- Four in ten of these parents (42%) report a lack of programs in their communities.

**Satisfaction among parents with students in afterschool programs is high**.

- Nearly all parents are satisfied with their child’s afterschool program (95%) and rate the quality of the program as excellent, very good, or good (97%).
- Most parents are happy with the opportunities for reading or writing and time to experience the outdoors (both 77%), healthy snacks and meals (75%), and homework help (72%) their child’s program provides; and are satisfied the program helps their child develop social skills (90%); work on communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership (82%); learn responsible decision-making (82%); and build confidence (86%).

**Parents recognize the benefits for children: safety, skills, school engagement, and well-being**.

- The percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs keep young people safe and out of trouble grew from 66% in 2014 to 78% now.
- More than 8 in 10 parents agree that afterschool programs provide opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers and responsible decision making (85%).
- Three-quarters of parents (75%) agree afterschool programs help youth become more excited about learning and improve their attendance.

**Parents say afterschool programs support working families**.

- 85% say programs provide working parents with peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised, and 84% agree these programs allow them to keep their jobs or work more hours.
- 88% of parents with a child in an afterschool program say that it boosts their productivity and 92% say they are less stressed knowing their child is safe.

**Parents want more public funding for afterschool programs.**

- 89% of parents favor public funding for programs that provide afterschool opportunities to students in communities that have few opportunities for children and youth. This is a steady increase from 83% in 2009, 84% in 2014, and 87% in 2020.
- Support is the highest among Black families (92%), families in urban communities (92%), households where both parents work (91%), and working moms (90%).

The Kent County afterschool and summer *America After 3PM* studies were made possible with support from the Steelcase Foundation. Data were collected between January 31 and June 18, 2025. Statewide Michigan findings from the same study are here.

The national *America After 3PM 2025* study is based on a survey of 30,515 U.S. parents or guardians with a school-aged child living in their household. It was conducted in English and Spanish using a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. The margin of error for the national study is +/- <1%. Previous *America After 3PM* surveys were conducted in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2020. It is made possible through the Afterschool Alliance's partnership with the New York Life Foundation.

# # # #

*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.*

*The Steelcase Foundation invests in community initiatives that strengthen public education, recognize the role family well-being plays in students flourishing, and advance change across systems in Kent County. Learn more about the Steelcase Foundation and its grantmaking efforts at steelcasefoundation.org.*

*The Michigan Afterschool Partnership champions statewide access to quality and equitable Out-of-School Time programs to ensure that all children and youth succeed.*