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Two in Five Western New York Children Whose Parents Want Structured Summer Learning Programs for Them Are Missing Out, Most Often Due to Cost

Parents of Students Who Are Enrolled Give Programs High Marks

BUFFALO, NY — The summer struggle is daunting for working families in Western New York. Parents want affordable summer programs that keep their children safe, build their confidence, and offer opportunities to develop positive relationships, with staff who are knowledgeable and caring. But there is vast unmet need in Western New York for these programs, which include enrichment or sports programs, summer camps or schools, and jobs or internships.

The parents of 159,431 Western New York children want summer programs for them, but while 87,933 Western New York children are enrolled, another 71,498 are being left behind. The barriers that most often prevent enrollment are cost, difficulty finding information on summer programs, issues with location or transportation, and programs not being available in their communities.

Those are among the findings in [The Summer Struggle for Western New York Families](#), a household survey commissioned by the [Afterschool Alliance](#) and released today by the [Cullen Foundation](#) and the [Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation](#). Conducted by Edge Research, it is based on survey responses from 30,515 U.S. households, with 700 households with 1,232 children in Western New York screened.

The Summer Struggle finds that many families face barriers to accessing summer programs, but parents whose children are attending give them high marks. Ninety-one percent of Western New York parents whose child is enrolled report being satisfied with the program their child attends. Nine in ten Western New York parents (92%) favor public funding for summer learning opportunities, with support exceeding 90% among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

“Finding affordable summer programs for their children is a major challenge for too many Western New York families,” **said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant**. “Parents need to stay in their jobs to provide for their families, but when they can’t find affordable summer programs, their children may be unsupervised, on screens, at risk, and in some cases without healthy food during the summer months. In Western New York, throughout New York state, and nationwide, we can and must do better by investing more in the summer programs that keep kids safe, engaged, and learning while giving working families peace of mind.”

“This survey lays bare what families and providers across Western New York have known for far too long, too many children are being denied the opportunities for growth and connection that out-of-school time provides,” **said David Egner, president and CEO of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation**. “Afterschool and summer learning are essential investments in young people that positively impact the overall health of our communities. We know these programs work, now expanding access to them must be a priority for everyone.”

“In Western New York, we are truly fortunate to have strong nonprofit partners providing opportunities for children and youth to learn and grow in the afternoons and over the summer,” **said Florine Luhr, president of the Cullen Foundation.** “This study confirms what local program providers know very well: Demand for these programs exceeds supply, and too many families who need them can’t afford them. We need to change that. Quality afterschool and summer programs are critical for the success of children and working families.”

Nationally, just 13% of children in low-income families; 26% of children in middle income-families; and 45% of children in high-income families attend a summer program. In most respects, the Western New York findings mirror the national survey findings, which also include:

Affordability is the most common barrier faced by families unable to enroll their child.

- 38% of these families cite cost as a factor contributing to their inability to enroll their child in a summer program.
- 18% cite program’s location or transportation as a reason.
- 13% report having difficulty finding a program, say summer programs are not available in their community, or the program’s hours do not meet their needs.
- 10% say programs had no open slots.

Parents with a child enrolled give summer programs high marks.

- 96% of these parents report being satisfied with the summer program their child attends, with 63% reporting extreme satisfaction.
- Half of parents with a child in a summer program (50%) say they are extremely confident their child will be well prepared for the coming school year, compared to 43% of parents whose child is not in a summer program.

Parents’ support for public funding for summer programs is strong and growing.

- Nine in ten parents (89%) favor public funding for summer learning opportunities, up from 83% in 2009, 85% in 2014, and 88% in 2020.
- In the current study, 94% of Democrats, 89% of Independents, and 87% of Republican parents support public funding.
- 93% of parents in urban communities, 89% of those in suburban communities, and 87% of parents in rural communities support public funding.

Across demographic lines, parents want summer opportunities for all children.

- 87% of parents agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs.
- 92% of parents who are Democrats and 85% of those who are Independents or Republicans agree.
- 88% of parents in suburban and urban communities, and 85% of those in rural communities agree. Support is overwhelming in every region of the country.
- At least 86% of parents of every race/ethnicity agree.

The Summer Struggle for Western New York Families is made possible with support from the Cullen Foundation and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. Findings from Western New York [are here](#) and New York statewide findings [are here](#). Western New York data were collected between January 31 and June 18, 2025.

The *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 based on research funded by The Wallace Foundation.

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About the Afterschool Alliance

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.

About the Cullen Foundation

The Cullen Foundation serves the residents of Erie County (New York) by providing funding and support that significantly enhances the education of students in grades pre-K through 12 and advances theatre and the performing arts. Within its education focus area, the Foundation’s priority is to fund programs with direct, measurable academic outcomes, particularly those that serve economically disadvantaged students in grades pre-K through 12. Cullen Foundation is an independent, private foundation located in Buffalo, New York, created in 2003 and funded by the estate of the late John S. "Jack" Cullen II.

About the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect the devotion of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his beloved Buffalo Bills NFL team. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson provided that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation that bears his name. Based in Detroit, the Foundation began with a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson’s desire for the Foundation’s impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable, and overseen by those who knew him best. For more information visit www.rcwjrf.org.

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