



News Release

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Five Million U.S. Middle Schoolers Are Unable to Access the Afterschool Programs Their Parents Want for Them

Survey of 10,000+ Parents of Middle Schoolers Finds Nearly 4 in 5 Families Who Want Programs Are Being Shut Out, Most Due to Cost, Accessibility, Availability

Washington, D.C. – A remarkable 95% of parents of middle school students who attend an afterschool program report being satisfied with their child’s program – but nearly four in five middle school students whose parents want afterschool programs for them (78%) are being shut out. The parents of nearly 6.7 million middle schoolers want afterschool programs for their children, but just 1.4 million of our nation’s middle schoolers attend an afterschool program, according to [America After 3PM for Middle School Youth](#). Released today, the survey of 30,515 U.S. parents of school-age children who live in their households, including 10,072 with a middle schooler, was commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and conducted by Edge Research.

Unmet demand for afterschool programs for middle schoolers has increased sharply and steadily since this study began looking at this age group in 2009. Today it is appreciably higher among middle schoolers in urban families (69% of those not in an afterschool program would be, if a program were available) than middle schoolers in rural (44%) and suburban communities (43%). Unmet demand is also higher for middle school students in low- and middle-income families (54% and 47%, respectively) than those high-income families (35%); and for middle school students in Black (69%) and Hispanic (61%) families than white families (45%).

“Middle school is a pivotal time and it’s especially important that we give students in that age group places to go where they will be safe and learning, engaged and challenged, and have the chance to interact with caring adults, mentors and peers after the school days ends,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “Afterschool programs boost students’ academic achievement, help address our youth mental health and chronic absenteeism crises, provide alternatives to screen time, and give working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised. But there aren’t nearly enough programs. We need greater support from federal, state, and local governments, philanthropy, and businesses to change that. Every child deserves access to a quality afterschool program.”

The new study finds that 87% of parents of middle schoolers agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs, up from 84% who agreed with that statement in 2020. Today, 88% of these parents favor public funding for afterschool programs.

“Afterschool programs are an especially critical support during middle school and the challenging transition to high school,” said Heather Nesle, president of the New York Life Foundation (NYLF) and board member of the Afterschool Alliance. “That’s why, over the last nine years, the New York Life Foundation’s Aim High initiative has awarded \$13.35 million to afterschool programs serving middle school youth. Afterschool programs foster resilience, build essential skills, and provide safe, supportive spaces for learning and growth while helping parents work and growing the economy. They support families, strengthen our communities, and help give every child the opportunity to succeed.”

Other findings from *America After 3PM for Middle School Youth*:

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

- 56% of these parents cite cost as an important factor preventing them from enrolling their child.
- Nearly half report challenges such as their child not having a safe way to get to and come home from a program (48%), or program locations not being convenient (47%).
- Four in ten middle school parents (41%) report a lack of programs in their communities.

Satisfaction among parents with middle school students in afterschool programs is high.

- Nearly all these parents are satisfied with their child’s afterschool program (95%) and 84% rate its quality as excellent or very good.
- These parents say they are satisfied that their child’s program has knowledgeable and caring staff (91%), provides opportunities to interact with peers and build social skills (90%), offers a safe environment (89%), and provides opportunities to develop positive relationships with peers (88%).
- Four in five say their child’s program gets them excited about learning (80%) and provides learning opportunities not offered during the school day (78%). Strong majorities are satisfied that their child’s program provides opportunities for physical activity (83%), reading and writing help (75%), and homework help (74%).

Parents of middle schoolers say afterschool programs support working families.

- 89% of these parents say their child’s afterschool program helps them be less stressed because they know their child is safe after the school day ends.
- Four in five (80%) agree afterschool programs allow them to keep their jobs or work more hours.
- Seventy-eight percent say programs help connect them with other families in the community.

The [*America After 3PM*](#) study is based on a survey of 30,515 U.S. parents or guardians with a school-aged child living in their household, including 10,072 parents of middle schoolers. It was conducted in English and Spanish using a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. Data were collected between January 31 and April 21, 2025. The margin of error 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.

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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.

Inspired by New York Life's tradition of service and humanity, the New York Life Foundation has, since its founding in 1979, provided over \$470 million in charitable contributions to national and local nonprofit organizations. The Foundation supports programs that benefit young people, particularly in the areas of educational enhancement and childhood bereavement. The Foundation also encourages and facilitates the community involvement of employees and agents of New York Life through its Volunteers for Good program and Grief-Sensitive Schools and Grief-Supportive Workplace Initiatives. To learn more, please visit www.newyorklifefoundation.org.