



NEWS RELEASE
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As a Million Americans Turn the Lights On for Afterschool Today, Survey Finds Afterschool Funding Lagging; Programs Forced to Cut Services, Limit Slots, Cut Staff Pay

As Americans gather to show support for afterschool programs on the seventh annual *Lights On Afterschool*, a new survey finds those programs are struggling. According to the survey of afterschool program staff conducted by the Afterschool Alliance, many afterschool programs are fully subscribed but still unable to meet the demand in their communities. Respondents to the web-based survey say budget cuts and stagnation are taking a toll on afterschool programs, and the youth and families they serve. Providers report that future funding is insecure, and many have already been forced to make painful cuts to their programs.

The new survey, **Uncertain Times: Funding Insecurity Puts Afterschool Programs at Risk**, also finds that afterschool programs are serving a high need population and serving more children than expected.

“The results of this survey are sobering, and underscore the consequences of failing to fund the afterschool programs our children so urgently need,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “87 percent of respondents say there are children in their communities who need afterschool programs and don’t have access to them. Too many of those kids engage in risky behaviors such as using drugs, joining gangs, or engaging in inappropriate sexual activity. Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families – but we don’t have nearly enough quality afterschool programs in the United States today. Changing that should be a high priority for lawmakers, corporations, foundations and the public.”

More than 2,100 afterschool program leaders responded to the survey. Preliminary data were released in early September, but the full results are now available. Today’s release includes a considerably larger sample of respondents, data on more questions, and breakdowns for certain states. The survey found:

- 75% of afterschool programs operated at or above maximum capacity during the 2005/2006 school year.
- Nearly half of programs responding to the survey (48%) say that funding is down a little (23%) or a lot (25%) in the last two years. Another 30% say it is unchanged. Just 17% say it is up a little, and only 5% say it is up a lot.
- When programs are forced to make changes due to budget cuts or stagnation, the most common response (35%) is to increase the fees parents must pay. But programs also have

been forced to diminish their program offerings, reduce the number of students they serve, or cut staff pay: 32% cut field trips, 29% cut the variety of activities they offer students; 22% decreased the staff-student ratio (fewer staff to students); 22% reduced the number of children they served; 20% reduced staff pay or benefits.

- Transportation problems are seen as the most significant barrier to participation in the program – 43% of respondents cite it as a significant barrier. Transportation problems common to afterschool programs include the availability and cost of buses, safety concerns, and great distances to be covered (often in rural areas).
- Nearly a third of respondents (31%) cite cost as a significant barrier to participation, and nearly three in ten (29%) cite the lack of available slots in the program as a significant barrier.
- If programs are able to see an increase in funding, they are most likely to increase the number of students they serve.
- Afterschool programs are serving a high-need population. At more than half (55%) of the programs surveyed, more than three in five students qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

The bi-partisan *No Child Left Behind Act* authorizes \$2.5 billion for the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) afterschool initiative in FY 2007, but funding has fallen far behind authorized levels. Congress is expected to provide less than \$1 billion next year. If the initiative were funded at *No Child Left Behind* levels, 1.5 million more children would have access to quality afterschool programs.

Today is the seventh annual *Lights On Afterschool*, the national rally for afterschool. Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, this year's *Lights On Afterschool* includes some 7,500 events throughout the nation and at military bases around the world at which a million Americans will urge their leaders to support afterschool programs.

UNCERTAIN TIMES used web-based survey software and the survey was emailed to more than 10,000 contacts in the Afterschool Alliance database in August and September of 2006. Recipients were encouraged to forward the survey to afterschool program staff, and programs were asked to be certain that only one person per program completed the survey and to provide responses from a site-level coordinator when possible. 2,614 responses were reviewed. 503 of them did not provide sufficient data to be included in the final analysis or were duplicate responses; therefore the final sample was 2,111 responses which represent approximately 9,813 afterschool sites serving more than 1.5 million children. (Many respondents are responsible for multiple sites.)

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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 by 2010. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.