



News Release
April 2, 2026

Contact: [Lisa Lederer](#)
202/371-1997

Under Stress

New Survey: High Costs, Food Insecurity, Uncertain Program Funding Creating Major Challenges for Afterschool Programs and the Students They Serve

Washington, DC – Concerns about young people’s mental health and access to food are soaring among afterschool program providers, with many reporting federal shutdowns and last year’s afterschool funding freeze caused harm to students and their families. Worries about program funding and sustainability have increased substantially since late 2024, and nearly half of programs (48%) have waitlists of students they are unable to serve.

Those are among the findings from an [online survey](#) of 1,005 afterschool providers representing more than 6,500 programs across the country. It was conducted by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance from October 27 to December 22, 2025, and includes respondents in every state and the District of Columbia.

Roughly nine in ten providers report concern about their students’ overall well-being, including their mental health (93%), food insecurity (88%), and learning loss (86%). Sixty-four percent are *extremely* or *very* concerned that their students are experiencing food insecurity, up from 51% in the fall of 2024. Concern about access to food is even greater among providers whose programs serve a high percentage of children from low-income families and children of color. Ninety-two percent of providers are concerned that unproductive screen time is harming their students’ well-being.

“Afterschool programs are providing badly needed supports to students and families, while they are under considerable stress themselves,” says Jen Rinehart, Afterschool Alliance Senior Vice President for Strategy and Programs. “At this time when so many families are struggling, programs are keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn, and giving parents peace of mind that their children are safe, supervised and learning when schools are out. Programs are providing supports young people need – from academic enrichment to helping them develop foundational skills such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking. But there aren’t nearly enough afterschool programs, and many that are open today are at risk of closing tomorrow. More than three-quarters of providers worry about losing funding for their program this year, including more than half who are extremely worried. Those concerns are felt by programs in every region. It’s clear we need much greater investments in afterschool and summer learning from government at all levels, businesses, and philanthropy.”

Among other findings from the new survey:

- **Costs to run programs are rising.** Two in five providers (43%) report an increase in their program’s cost per student in the past year. Among those reporting higher costs, 49% say costs have increased

by at least 10%, and 38% say they have increased by 11 – 25%. Driving the increases are costs associated with staffing (cited by 76%), inflation (66%), supplies (59%), and food (50%).

- **Fewer programs report staffing challenges.** Seventy-seven percent of programs are concerned about finding staff to hire or staffing shortages – a smaller number than in past surveys. Not being able to offer competitive salaries, not being able to offer more hours, and staff burnout are the most commonly cited staffing challenges.
- **Students in most communities are unable to access programs.** Eighty-five percent of respondents report that children in their community who need afterschool programs are not able to access them – a higher number than in recent surveys. Intensity of concern (those who are extremely or very concerned) is highest among programs run by community-based groups (cited by 74% of them), those in urban communities (70%), and those serving a high percentage of children of color (69%).
- **Programs are meeting many student needs.** Most are providing academic enrichment (91%), homework help (80%) and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning (78%). Eighty-eight percent are providing snacks and meals, 84% are helping students connect with peers, and 79% are helping them develop communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills.
- **Last year’s federal shutdown caused real harm – and other threats loom.** Three in five providers (62%) say last year’s long federal shutdown affected children and families their program serves. In addition, 86% of providers are concerned about the impact of potential future federal education budget cuts. Rural and urban programs are more concerned about potential budget cuts than programs based in suburban communities (52% and 51% vs. 42% concerned).
- **Similarly, last summer’s freeze on federal afterschool funding caused significant hardship.** Nearly half of providers (46%) say the uncertainty affected them and the families they serve. One in five (21%) say their program tried to help families navigate the uncertainty; 14% had to reduce the number of program staff; 13% had to cut program offerings and/or hours; and 12% reduced the number of students their program served. Nearly one in ten (9%) had to temporarily close at least one program site. The federal afterschool funds were released after several weeks.

Complete findings from the new survey are available here:

<https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Uncertain-Times-for-Afterschool-Programs-Wave-12.pdf>.

This online survey of afterschool providers is the 12th in a series begun in response to the pandemic that has evolved to explore new and ongoing challenges facing the afterschool field. All the surveys in the series were conducted by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance. The first was fielded in the spring of 2020.

#

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.