



America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand

The past decade has seen much progress in the number of children who are able to take advantage of the opportunities and activities afterschool programs have to offer, transforming the hours between 3 and 6 p.m. from a time of concern for working parents to a time of learning and advancement for students. The 2014 *America After 3PM* edition—which spans a decade of data chronicling how children spend the hours between 3 and 6 p.m.—has found that overall participation in afterschool programs has increased by nearly 60 percent from 2004 to 2014, with nearly 4 million more children in afterschool programs today. In addition to more children participating in afterschool programs, parents' satisfaction with specific aspects of afterschool programs—such as the quality of care, staff and program activities—has significantly increased over the last five years.

Although sizeable gains have been made in afterschool program quality and participation, the unmet demand for afterschool programs continues to rise. In 2004, the parents of 15.3 million children said they would enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available; today that number stands at 19.4 million children. And, while the number of children alone and unsupervised after school has decreased over the last 10 years, there are still 11.3 million children headed for an unsupervised environment after the last school bell rings.

The data in this report show that parents are increasingly turning to afterschool programs to meet their own and their children's needs in the hours after school. The combined demand for afterschool, both met and unmet, exceeds 50 percent of school-age children in the United States. Parents who are fortunate enough to have access to afterschool programs are highly satisfied with those programs and are increasingly satisfied with aspects of the programs that are linked to quality.

Increased federal, state, local and private investments are essential to ensure that quality afterschool programs are available, accessible and affordable to all children, regardless of income level or geographic area. Public support for federal funding of afterschool programs is strong, with a high-level of support across political party identification and geographic region. Yet federal investment in the primary funding stream for afterschool programs has

remained relatively flat over the past five years—growing less than 2 percent, from \$1.13 billion in 2009 to \$1.15 billion in 2014. Despite the growing call for afterschool programs, \$4 billion in local grant requests have been denied due to insufficient federal funds and an increasing number of requests over the course of 10 years.¹

Taken together, the 2004, 2009 and 2014 editions of *America After 3PM* illustrate how much progress has been made in the afterschool hours, but at the same time, they make clear that as a nation, we have much more work ahead of us to ensure that all children are afforded the supports and opportunities afterschool programs have to offer. It will take a united effort to increase the availability of quality afterschool programs that help children reach their full potential and succeed in school, college, career and beyond. To help families and the approximately 19.4 million children across the United States who would participate in an afterschool program if one were available to them, it will take a concerted effort by the public and private sectors—as well as educators, families and communities—to tackle the challenge of meeting the demand for afterschool programs.

KEY FINDINGS

Participation in afterschool programs has consistently increased over the past 10 years, rising by nearly 2 million children in the last five years alone. Today, 10.2 million children (18 percent) participate in an afterschool program, an increase from 2009 (8.4 million; 15 percent) and 2004 (6.5 million; 11 percent).² Nearly 1 in 4 families (23 percent) currently has a child enrolled in an afterschool program.

However, the number of children unsupervised in the hours after school, while on the decline, remains high. In communities across the United States, 11.3 million children are without supervision between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m. That number is down from 15.1 million in 2009 and 14.3 million in 2004, but 1 in 5 children still do not have someone to care for them after school.

While participation in afterschool programs has increased, the unmet demand for afterschool programs continues to rise. In 2014, approximately 19.4 million children (41 percent) not currently in an afterschool program would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them, according to their parents. By comparison, in 2009, parents of 18.5 million children (38 percent) said they would enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available, up from parents of 15.3 million children (30 percent) in 2004.

Together, the rates of participation and unmet demand show that more than half of all school-age children in 2014 have some measure of demand (either met or unmet) for afterschool programs. In fact, for every child in an afterschool program, approximately two more children would be enrolled if a program were available to them.

As the economy continues to recover, afterschool programs are an essential source of support for working parents—giving them peace of mind when at work and helping them to keep their jobs. More than 8 in 10 parents (83 percent) of children in afterschool programs agree that afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs. Overall, 3 in 4 parents agree that afterschool programs help give working parents peace of mind about their children when they are at work, and among parents with children in an afterschool program, agreement jumps to 85 percent.

There are distinct differences in afterschool program participation and demand across income levels and ethnicity. Participation in and demand for afterschool programs are much higher among children from low-income households compared to higher-income households, as well as higher among African-American and Hispanic children than Caucasian children. Children from low-income households are more likely than their higher-income peers to participate in an afterschool program (20 percent versus 18 percent) and the demand for afterschool programs is much higher among low-income families than families that do not qualify for the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (50 percent versus 34 percent).



Similarly, Hispanic and African-American children are at least two times more likely to participate in an afterschool program than Caucasian children. Twenty-nine percent of Hispanic children are in programs, as are 24 percent of African-American children and 12 percent of Caucasian children. At the same time, unmet demand for afterschool programs is also higher among African-American and Hispanic children (60 percent and 57 percent, respectively) compared to Caucasian children (35 percent), according to their parents.

Cost and lack of a safe way for their children to get to and come home from afterschool programs are among the barriers that low-income households, African-American families and Hispanic families report keep them from enrolling their children in an afterschool program. Among parents who would enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available to them, obstacles to enrollment differed by income and by race and ethnicity. The lack of a safe way for their child to get to and come home from an afterschool program was cited as barrier to enrolling their child in a program by 55 percent of African-American parents, 53 percent of Hispanic parents and 54 percent of low-income households, compared to 48 percent of higher-income households and half of Caucasian parents. Fifty-six percent of low-income households report that the cost of afterschool programs was a factor in their decision not to enroll their child in a program, compared to 48 percent of higher-income households. And, close to half of Hispanic parents (48 percent) and 46 percent of African-American parents report that a very important factor in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program is that afterschool programs are not available in their community, compared to 38 percent of Caucasian parents.

Parents' overall satisfaction with their child's afterschool program remains high; in fact, parents today are much more satisfied than in the past with specific aspects of afterschool programs and hold stronger positive feelings regarding the benefits of afterschool programs. Nine in 10 parents (89 percent) are satisfied with their afterschool program, similar to parents' responses in 2009 (89 percent) and in 2004 (91 percent). However, satisfaction with specific afterschool program qualities has significantly increased. For instance, satisfaction with the quality of care increased nine points, from 79 percent in 2009 to 88 percent in 2014; satisfaction with homework assistance increased 16 points, from 64 percent in 2009 to 80 percent in 2014; and satisfaction with workforce skill development—such as teamwork, leadership and critical thinking—increased 14 points, from 57 percent in 2009 to 71 percent in 2014.

Parents view afterschool programs as more than just a safe environment for children. They recognize that programs provide a wide range of activities and enriching learning opportunities for children. Four in 5 parents say that their child’s afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity, 72 percent of parents say their child has opportunities for reading or writing, and 69 percent of parents say that their afterschool program offers a STEM learning opportunity. Nine in 10 parents (88 percent) with a child in an afterschool program agree that programs can help children develop social skills through interaction with their peers and 83 percent agree that afterschool programs can help reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in risky behaviors, such as commit a crime or use drugs, or become a teen parent.

Many afterschool programs extend beyond the traditional school year and provide valuable summer learning programs as well. Public funding for summer learning programs is strongly supported by parents and participation in summer learning programs is on the rise. One-third of families report at least one child participated in a summer learning program in 2013, up from the 25 percent of families in the 2009 survey. More than half of families (51 percent) wanted their child to participate in a summer learning program in 2014. Additionally, 85 percent of parents indicate support for public funding for summer learning programs, an increase of two percentage points over the already very strong support registered in 2009.

Support for public funding of afterschool programs remains strong and broad-based. Overall, 84 percent of parents report that they favor public funding for afterschool opportunities in communities that have few opportunities for children and youth, a slight increase from 83 percent in 2009. More than 9 in 10 parents who identify as Democrats (91 percent), 86 percent of parents who self-identify as Independents and 80 percent of parents identifying as Republicans report that they favor public funding for afterschool programs.



For more information about the national and state-specific *America After 3PM* survey findings, visit <http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM>.

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.

1. O’Donnell, P. and Ford, J. (2013). *The Continuing Demand for 21st Century Community Learning Centers across America: More than four billion dollars of unmet need*; Peterson, T., Fowler, S. and Dunham, T.F. (2013). “Creating the Recent Force Field: A Growing Infrastructure for Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Opportunities.” *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*. Washington, D.C.: Collaborative Communications Group.

2. Due to the change in survey collection, the projected numbers and percentages reported on this year for participation in afterschool programs, children in self-care, and children not in an afterschool program but whose parent would enroll them if one were available, is based on child level data rather than household level data that was reported on in previous years. The household level percentages are included in the topline questionnaire.