

Uncertain Times 2012—Minnesota Afterschool Programs Still Struggling in Today's Economy

Afterschool programs provide a lifeline for families and communities across the nation, providing a safe and supervised space for kids to engage in creative, educational activities with caring adults and mentors. But a rocky economic climate and tightened budgets at the local, state and federal levels have put these programs at risk.

Uncertain Times 2012, conducted between April 25 and June 8, 2012, is the third installment of the Afterschool Alliance's *Uncertain Times* survey series that assesses the impact of economic conditions on afterschool programs. While many studies have evaluated the impact of programs, *Uncertain Times* is the only research to examine the fiscal health of afterschool programs and their ability to meet the needs of their communities. Based on 1,012 survey responses, the national report finds that afterschool programs are struggling to meet the needs of children and families in their communities, as they face shrinking resources and dismal prospects for new support. Hardest hit are programs serving disadvantaged communities—the very population that has the most to gain from afterschool and summer programs.

In Minnesota, afterschool programs are experiencing the effects of a challenging economy but are faring slightly better than afterschool programs nationally. Based on responses from 59 program providers—of which 70 percent are located in urban communities, 16 percent in suburban communities and 26 percent in rural communities—Minnesota afterschool programs overwhelmingly agree that there are children in their communities that need afterschool programs, but are unable to access them. In addition, Minnesota afterschool programs are serving a high needs population—an average of 80 percent of children served qualify for free or reduced price lunch, 26 percent are Limited English Proficient and 19 percent have special needs or learning differences.

Afterschool programs serve as a safety net for communities that are struggling: helping kids stay away from risky behaviors, keeping kids in school, contributing to students' academic success and providing peace of mind to working families.ⁱ In Minnesota, more than 9 in 10 afterschool providers report that their communities are deeply affected by the tough economic times and close to half say that their budget is inadequate to meet the needs of their communities.

Key data for Minnesota include:ⁱⁱ

CURRENT BUDGET

| | Minnesota | National | Difference |
|--|-----------|----------|------------|
| My program's budget is in worse shape today than it was at the height of the recession | 36% | 39% | ↓3 |
| My program's funding is down a little or a lot from three years ago | 53% | 62% | ↓9 |
| My program's budget is inadequate to meet the needs of the community | 49% | 57% | ↓8 |

PROGRAM SERVICES

| | Minnesota | National | Difference |
|--|-----------|----------|------------|
| Children in the community need afterschool care, but are unable to access it | 95% | 88% | ↑7 |
| My program would need to at least double its capacity to meet the needs of all kids in the community | 35% | 24% | ↑11 |
| Loss of funding caused major cutbacks or shut down sites | 21% | 16% | ↑5 |

Top three changes Minnesota afterschool programs instituted due to a loss of funding or budget stagnation:

1. Staff hours reduced
2. Field trips reduced or eliminated
3. Staff layoffs and reduced number of sites

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

| | Minnesota | National | Difference |
|--|-----------|----------|------------|
| The challenging economic climate is affecting my community | 93% | 97% | ↓4 |
| The community is showing very little signs of recovering from the economic recession | 54% | 55% | ↓1 |

FUTURE OUTLOOK

| | Minnesota | National | Difference |
|--|-----------|----------|------------|
| The challenging economic climate will affect my program during the 2012-2013 school year | 86% | 85% | ↑1 |
| My program's funding for the next 1-2 years is less than secure | 67% | 61% | ↑6 |
| My program's funding for the next 3-5 years is less than secure | 86% | 81% | ↑5 |

ⁱ The Afterschool Alliance. (2012). *Afterschool Essentials: Research and Polling*. Retrieved from http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/2012/Essentials_4_20_12_FINAL.pdf

ⁱⁱ Percentages are based on afterschool program providers who agree with the following statements.