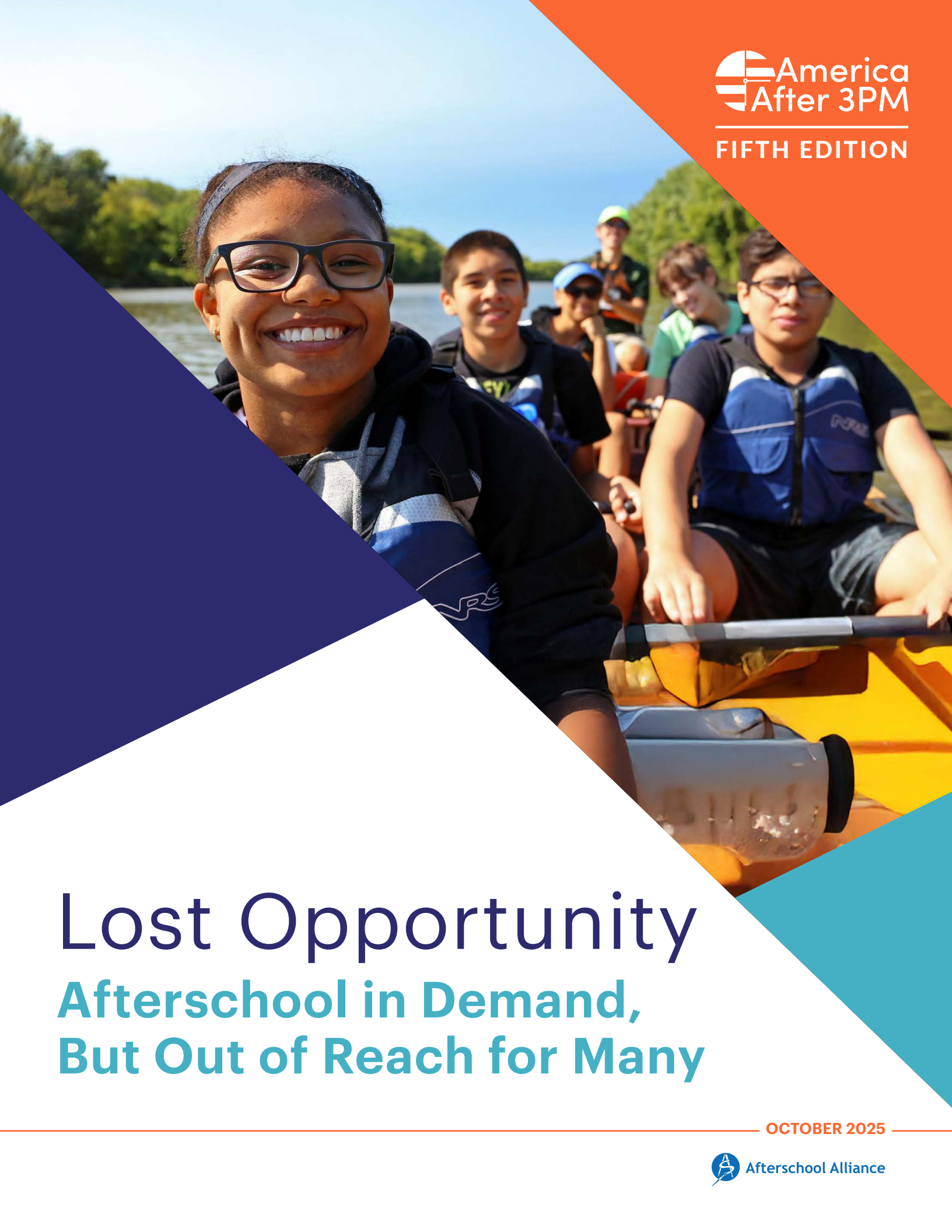




Lost Opportunity

Afterschool in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many

OCTOBER 2025

Acknowledgements

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Beyond the Data: Reflections from Leadership

Afterschool for all. This core tenet has been the driving mission of the Afterschool Alliance since the organization was founded 25 years ago, grounded in a strong belief in the potential of youth, the tremendous learning and growth opportunities during the hours outside of school, and the recognition that parents and guardians don't stop working at 3 p.m.

The afterschool field has made incredible strides over the past 25 years, from growth in federal and state funding for these programs to a deep evidence base demonstrating they provide a strong return on investment and positive outcomes for youth. *America After 3PM*, conducted roughly every five years, helps guide our work and fills a gap in our country's knowledge about how our children and youth spend the hours after school and over the summer. As with previous editions of *America After 3PM*, we anticipate that lawmakers, education and business leaders, philanthropies, advocates, and others will use the latest findings to inform public discourse as well as funding and policy decisions.

The findings from *America After 3PM 2025* offer a strong reminder of the power of afterschool for youth and families—but show clearly that our nation is far from realizing its potential. The data illuminate how afterschool addresses many of society's most stubborn, vexing problems. Programs get youth excited about learning, boost school attendance, provide opportunities for them to connect with peers and mentors, and help develop their skills, including teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership. For parents, these programs provide a lifeline, helping them keep their jobs and lower stress.

When families can't access afterschool programs, we all pay a price. We cannot afford the opportunities lost for youth to realize their potential, for working parents to provide for their families, and for our nation to build a strong workforce. *America After 3PM* finds that three out of four children whose parents want programs don't have them. Middle- and lower-income families alike struggle to access the programs they want. Millions of students are being left behind, costing our country dearly now and dampening our prospects for the future.

This study shows that parents want that to change. More than 4 in 5 parents of school-age children—across all demographics and in every state—value programs and support public funding for them. Families want their children engaged and connected in the hours after school, and satisfaction and quality ratings for programs demonstrate programs are delivering.

The 2025 findings are notable given the enormous shifts and challenges our country has experienced since our last edition of *America After 3PM*, including the closure and reopening of schools and programs, the shuttering of many community organizations, the rise of remote working, the stubbornly persistent learning loss, chronic absenteeism, and youth mental health challenges.

America After 3PM 2025 data deliver a clarion call: Afterschool and summer learning programs play a critical role in supporting youth, their parents, and our economy. It's time—past time—to make programs available to all.



Jodi Grant
Executive Director
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Introduction

Afterschool programs help young people reach their full potential, giving them the skills they need to thrive in the classroom, in the workplace, and in life. And across the country, families continue to recognize programs' value in providing a safe environment with supportive and caring staff members; introducing students to traditional academic subjects in new, fun, and engaging ways; and helping students develop positive connections with one another.

One rural parent explains that the afterschool program "offers activities, homework help, socialization, and recreational sports for our small town's children. There is not much for kids to do here." Another parent writes, "My children are more sociable. I think it helps with their confidence around other children outside of a schooling environment," while another shares that the afterschool program "has become a permanent fixture in his life. It has made life at home a lot more enjoyable because he is finding his purpose and passion."

The support afterschool programs provide for working families is another key benefit. One parent with a child in an afterschool program reports that it "has helped to have more time for our responsibilities as working parents." Another writes that it provides "peace of mind knowing my child [is] safe and taken care of while I [am] working." One single mother shares, "The afterschool program allows me to work just a little bit more so I can make the money we need to do these activities and put food on the table."

These responses are from the fifth edition of *America After 3PM*, a national household survey of parents that provides new insights about children and families during the hours of 3 to 6 p.m., when schools let out and many parents are working. Data from parents across America show afterschool programs remain an urgent priority in 2025, and millions of families who want to participate are missing out.

First conducted in 2004, *America After 3PM* provides a clear picture into how children in the United States are spending the hours directly after school and captures demand for afterschool programs, barriers to program participation, and parents' views on afterschool programs both nationally and across all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

The 2025 *America After 3PM* findings represent the first large-scale reporting on afterschool program demand post-pandemic, since the previous *America After 3PM* survey was conducted in early 2020. As such, in addition to this report comparing and contrasting 2004, 2009, 2014, 2020, and 2025 findings, identifying trends and shifts in patterns, it includes new questions reflecting economic and societal changes, such as the increase in remote and hybrid work options, the effect of inflation on households' after school options, and growing concerns about children's well-being. The constant across more than two decades is that parents need afterschool programs and want them funded.

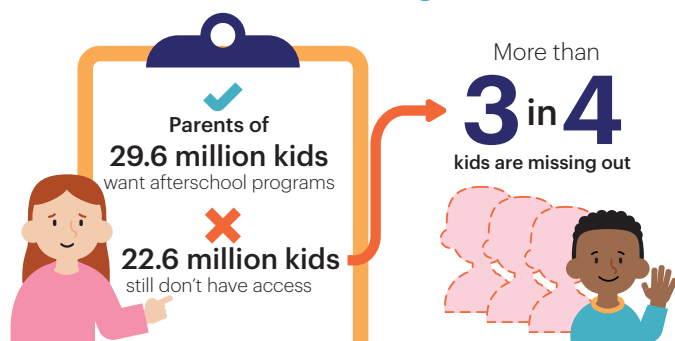
Demand for afterschool programs is enormous

- ▲ Nearly 30 million children are in an afterschool program or would be enrolled if one were available.
- ▲ More than 3 in 4 of the children whose parents want them to be in an afterschool program are not, meaning that 22.6 million children are not participating even though their parents would enroll them if one were available.
- ▲ Both middle- and lower-income families are much less likely than high-income families to have access to the afterschool programs they desire.

Children spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school.¹ This is a time of opportunity for young people when they can find a new passion; learn foundational skills such as how to work in a team and think critically; and develop positive relationships with their peers, mentors, and program staff. The hours after school in particular, when schools let out and before parents typically return home from work, can also be a time of worry for parents who want to know that their child is in a safe, supervised, and supportive environment.

This fifth edition of *America After 3PM* finds that families' desire for afterschool programming for their children remains as strong as ever. Parents of 29.6 million children, more than half the country's school-age youth, want afterschool programs for their children. This includes the approximately 7 million children who are participating in a program and the 22.6 million children who are not, but whose parents would enroll them if one were available.

Overall demand for afterschool programs is high, with more than 3 in 4 children missing out



Concerningly, more than 3 in 4 of the children whose parents want them to be in an afterschool program are not. That means 77% of the overall demand for afterschool programs is not being met, leaving tens of millions of children behind.

TERMINOLOGY

Afterschool programs: The *America After 3PM* survey defined an afterschool program as “a program that a child regularly attends that provides a supervised, enriching environment in the hours after the school day ends (typically around 3 p.m.). These programs are usually offered in schools or community centers and are different from individual activities like sports, special lessons, or hobby clubs and different from child care facilities that provide supervision but not enrichment.”

Overall demand for afterschool programs: Overall demand for afterschool programs represents the universe of children who are enrolled in an afterschool program, as well as the children who are not in an afterschool program, but whose parents would enroll them if one were available.

Unmet demand for afterschool programs: The calculation for unmet demand for afterschool programs uses children who are not enrolled in an afterschool program as the base and represents the percentage of children whose parents report that they would likely enroll them in a program if one were available to them.

Comparing the breakdown of overall demand for afterschool programs by income level, a clear trend appears. The percentage of children being left behind is highest for children in low- and middle-income families (84% and 73%, respectively) and is lowest among children in high-income families (59%).

Comparing overall afterschool program demand across household income levels, children in middle- and low-income families are most likely to be left out



Unmet demand for afterschool programs among children not in a program

Historically, *America After 3PM* has reported on unmet demand for afterschool programs specifically among children who are not participating in a program. The current survey finds that the high level of unmet demand for afterschool programs seen in 2020—a dramatic increase from 2014—persists today (see Figure 1).

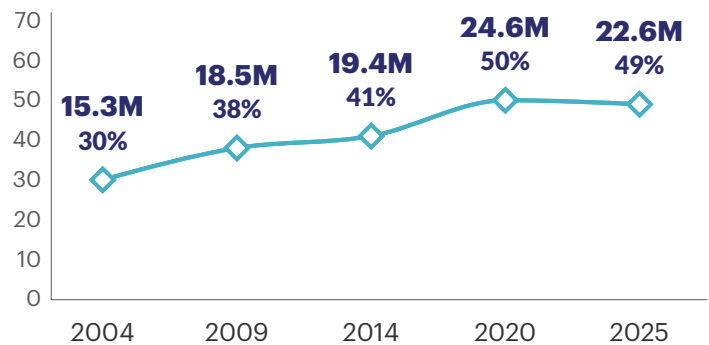
Unmet demand among children who are not participating in afterschool by demographic

The highest levels of unmet demand are among children in low- and middle-income households. Approximately half of children in low- and middle-income families not in an afterschool program would be enrolled if one were available to them (53% and 48%, respectively), compared to 37% of children in high-income families.

By grade level, unmet demand for afterschool programs is highest among elementary school students. However, a large percentage of older youth are also likely afterschool program participants. More than half of elementary schoolers who are not in an afterschool program would be enrolled by their parents if a program were available (58%), while nearly half of middle school students and close to 2 in 5 high school students not in an afterschool program would be enrolled (49% and 38%, respectively) if one were available (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Unmet demand remains at a high level

Percentage of children not in an afterschool program, but would be enrolled if one were available:



Across community types, unmet demand for afterschool programs is highest in urban areas. Nearly two-thirds of children living in an urban community not in an afterschool program would be enrolled in one (65%), compared to 45% of children living in a suburban community and 43% of children living in a rural community.

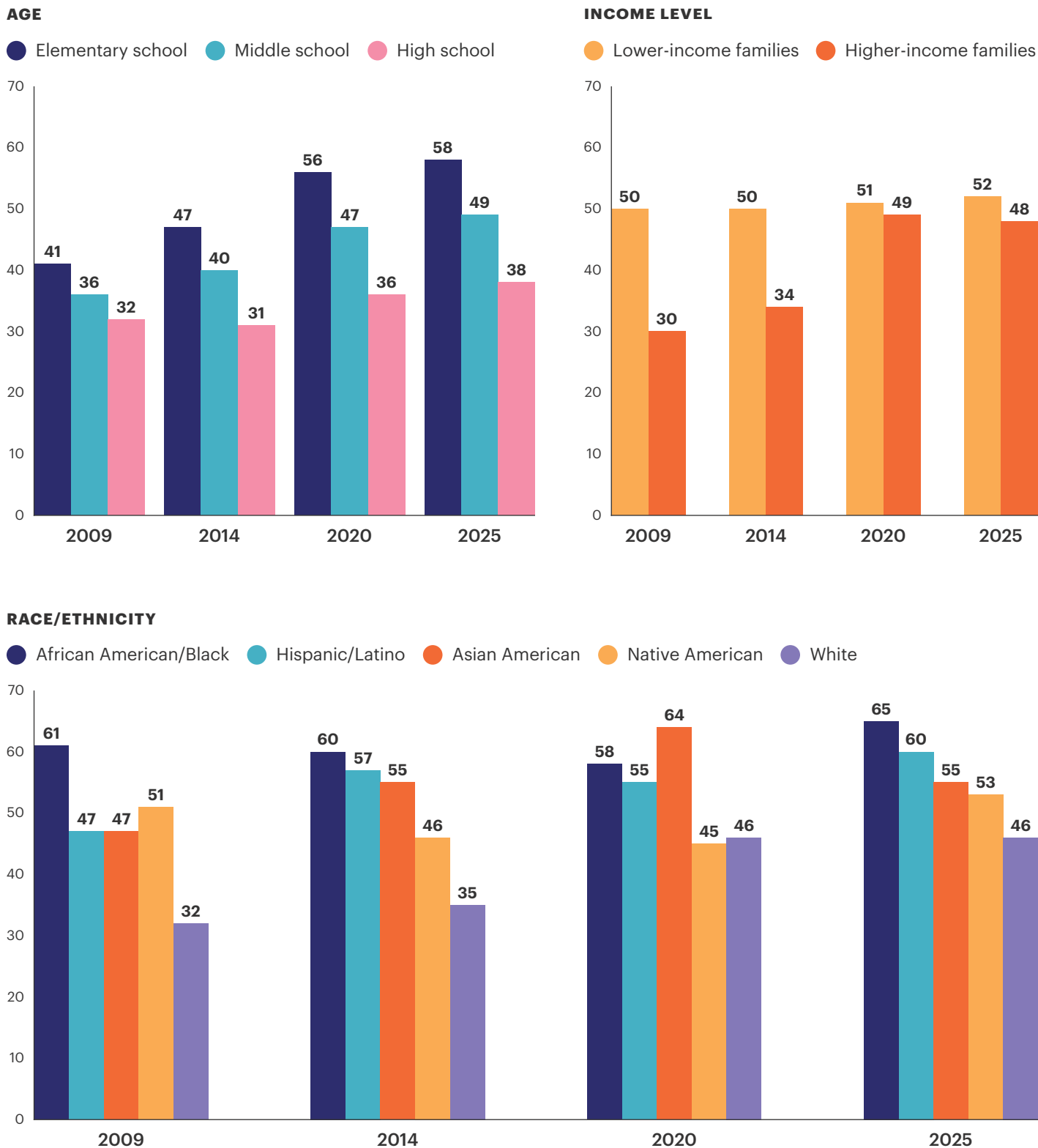
Unmet demand for afterschool programs is highest among children of color and has grown from 2020 to 2025, except for Asian American children (see Figure 2). Black children not in an afterschool program, but whose parents would like them to be enrolled, increased from 58% to 65% over that time period. Unmet demand among Hispanic children grew from 55% to 60%. And for Native American children, it increased from 45% to 53%. Asian American children not in an afterschool program, but whose parents would like them to be enrolled, decreased from 64% in 2020 to 55% in 2025. There was no change among White children (46%, all).

State level demand for afterschool programs

Overall demand for afterschool programs is highest in Washington, D.C., followed by New York, Massachusetts, California, and Florida. States with the highest percentages of unmet demand for afterschool programs include Washington, D.C. (68%), Massachusetts (64%), New York (63%), Maine (58%), and Alaska (57%). However, it is worth noting that in nearly half of states—24 in all—at least 50% of children who are not enrolled in an afterschool program would be if a program were available.

Figure 2. Unmet demand for afterschool programs, demographic comparisons

Percentage of non-participant children likely to participate in an afterschool program by:



Behind the demand: Parents recognize benefits for kids—safety, skills, and school engagement—plus peace of mind for working parents

- ▲ Parents believe afterschool programs address many of their top concerns. For example, a majority of parents agree that afterschool programs support children’s mental health and well-being (79%), keep them safe and out of trouble (78%), and allow them to develop positive relationships with other students (84%) and program staff (76%).
- ▲ More than 9 in 10 parents of afterschool program participants (92%) say that their afterschool program helps them feel less stressed because they know their child is safe, and 82% agree that the program allows them to keep their job or work more hours.
- ▲ Parents with a child in an afterschool program report that their afterschool child care arrangements positively impact their overall well-being (90%), productivity at work (88%), and their stress levels (83%)—19-, 18-, and 15 percentage points higher, respectively, than parents whose children were not in an afterschool program.
- ▲ Parental confidence in their child’s readiness for the next school year is higher among parents with a child in an afterschool program, who are nearly 9 percentage points more likely than parents without a child in an afterschool program to say that they are extremely confident that their child will be well prepared for the next school year: 52% versus 43%.

The high level of demand for afterschool programs leads one to ask, “What is driving the demand for programs?” *America After 3PM* posed a series of questions to parents asking what benefits, if any, children and families gain from participating in afterschool programs, finding that parents have a strong positive view of afterschool programs and say they provide wide-ranging supports.

All parents—those with and without a child in an afterschool program—agree that programs keep kids safe and provide a range of critical supports to children

An overwhelming majority of parents believe that afterschool programs offer supports for children and youth. Among those supports are opportunities to stay active; develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and

leadership; and become more excited about learning (see Figure 3). Parents also view afterschool programs as addressing concerns that are top of mind for them, such as their child’s mental health, safety, and screen time.^{2,3} *America After 3PM* finds that parents agree that children in afterschool programs spend more time taking part in fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens (86%). They also agree that afterschool programs support children’s mental health and well-being (79%), keep them safe and out of trouble (78%), and allow them to develop positive relationships with other students (84%) and meaningful connections with caring staff (76%).

Figure 3. Parents overall agree that afterschool programs support children and families

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to children:	
Opportunities to be physically active	87%
More time for fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	86%
Opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	85%
Allow kids to develop positive relationships with other students	84%
Opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	83%
Support children's mental health and well-being	79%
Keep kids safe and out of trouble	78%
Help children gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	77%
Allow kids to form meaningful connections with caring staff	76%
Reduce the likelihood that youth will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	76%
Get children more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	75%
Provide healthy snacks or meals	70%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:	
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	85%
Help working parents keep their jobs	84%
Help parents build connections to their child's school day education	66%

High-, middle-, and low-income families; rural, suburban, and urban parents; parents of elementary, middle, and high schoolers; working parents; parents with children in public and private schools and who homeschool their children; and parents regardless of race and ethnicity have high levels of agreement on the benefits of afterschool programs (see Figure 4). One example is the widespread recognition that children in afterschool programs have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership. More than 8 in 10 families with high-, middle-, and low-incomes (82%, 84%, and 83%, respectively) and rural, suburban, and urban parents (82%, 82%, and 87%, respectively) agree that afterschool programs are helping children develop their teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership skills—as do parents of elementary, middle, and high schoolers (84%, 82%, and 83%, respectively) and parents across race and ethnicity. Overwhelming majorities of parents with children in public and private school (84% and 85%, respectively) and who homeschool their children (71%) also say that afterschool programs are helping children gain teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership skills.

The percentage of parents reporting positive benefits is largely trending upward over time, particularly in relation to the recognition of afterschool programs' ability to keep kids safe, help young people develop life skills like interacting with peers, and keep young people active (see Figure 5). For example, agreement that afterschool programs keep kids safe and out of trouble grew from 66% in 2014, to 74% in 2020, and is currently at a high of 78%. At the same time, belief that programs provide children opportunities to be physical active increased 12-percentage points from 2014 to 2025, and is now currently at 87%.

Lastly, with 87% of parents agreeing that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs, it is evident that parents value the role that afterschool programs play in the lives of children. Agreement on this point has increased, up from 84% in 2020.

Figure 4. Regardless of where families live, age of child, type of schooling, or race or ethnicity, parents see the value of afterschool programs

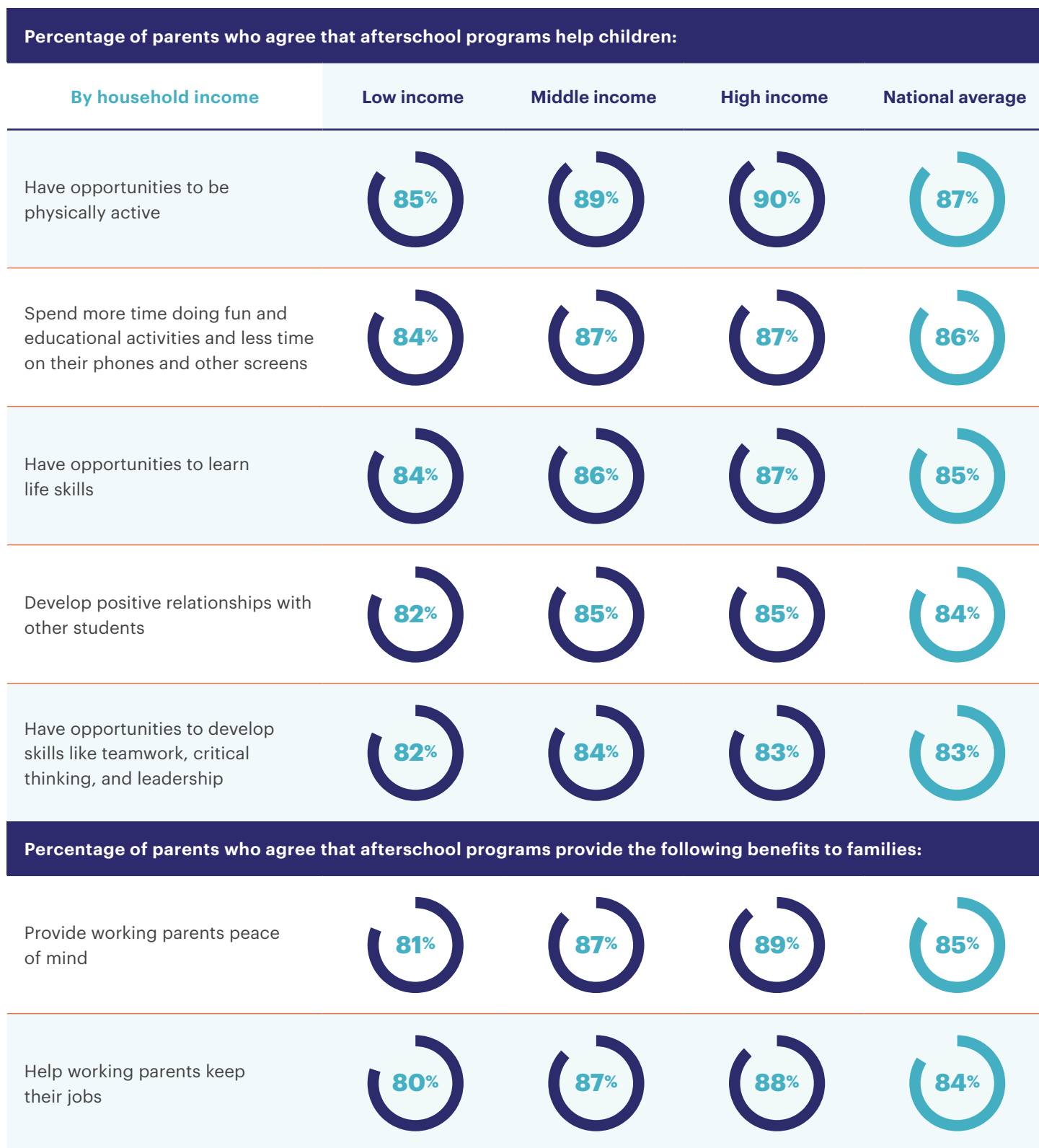


Figure 4. Regardless of where families live, age of child, type of schooling, or race or ethnicity, parents see the value of afterschool programs (continued)

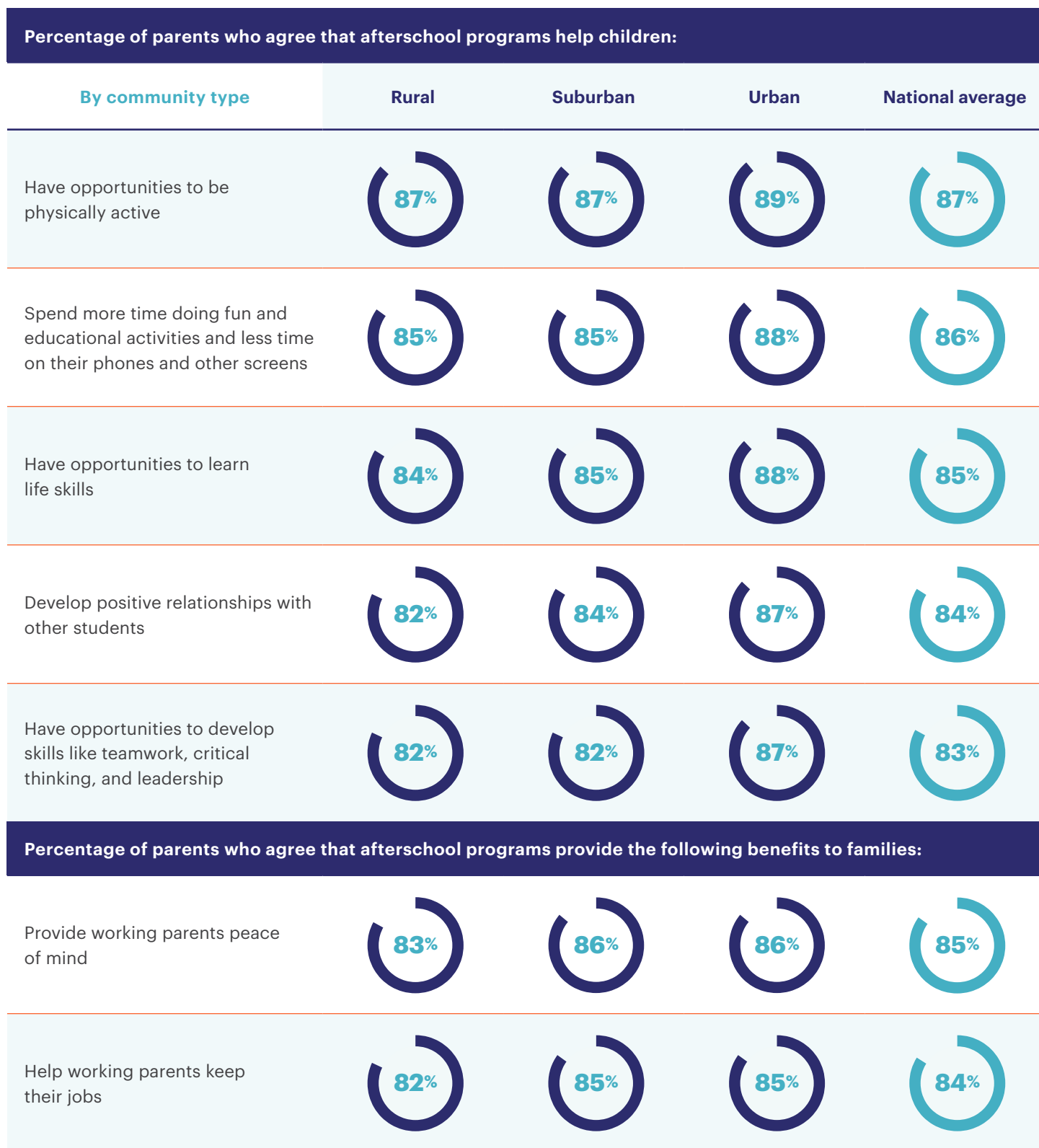


Figure 4. Regardless of where families live, age of child, type of schooling, or race or ethnicity, parents see the value of afterschool programs (continued)

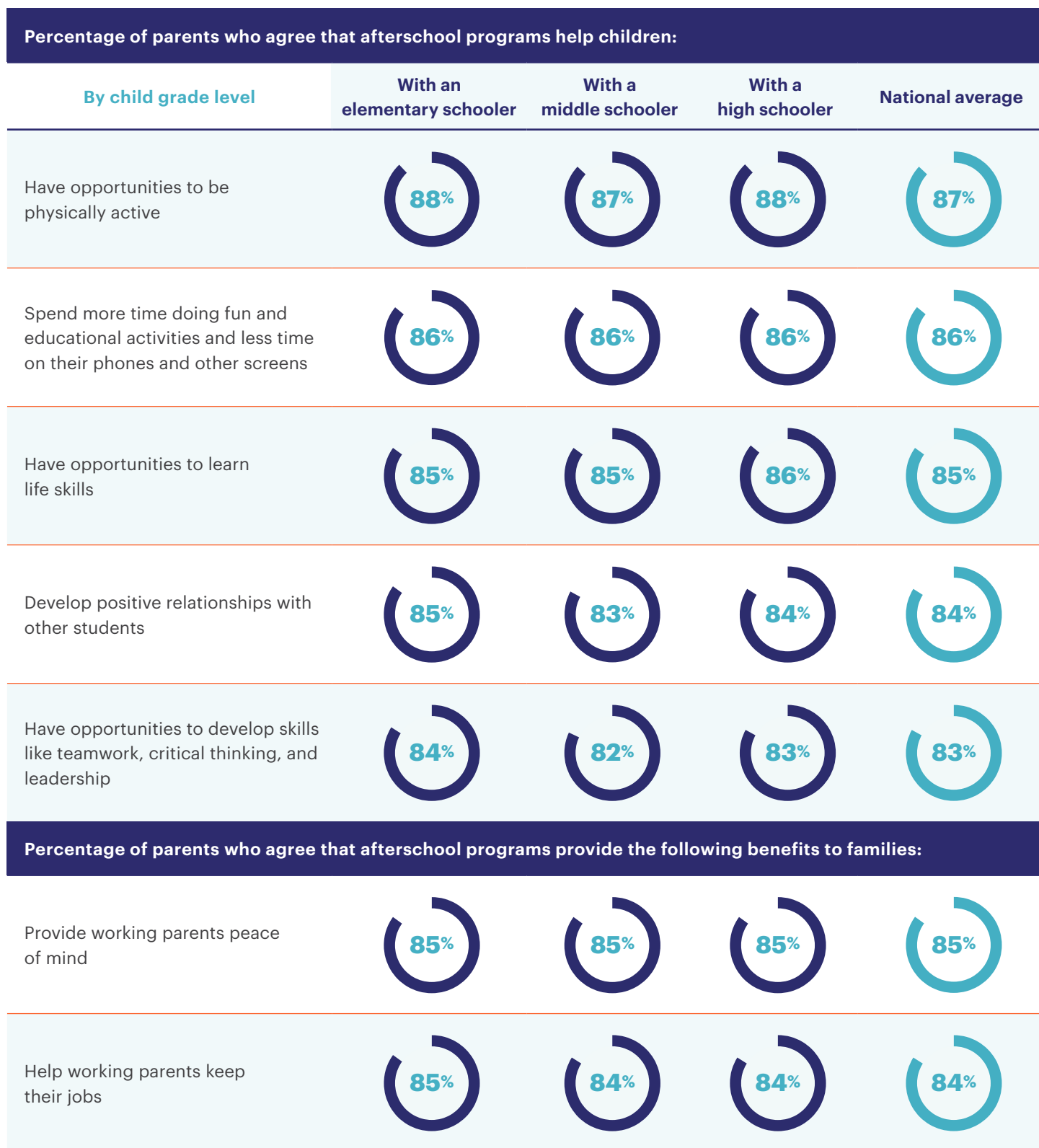


Figure 4. Regardless of where families live, age of child, type of schooling, or race or ethnicity, parents see the value of afterschool programs (continued)

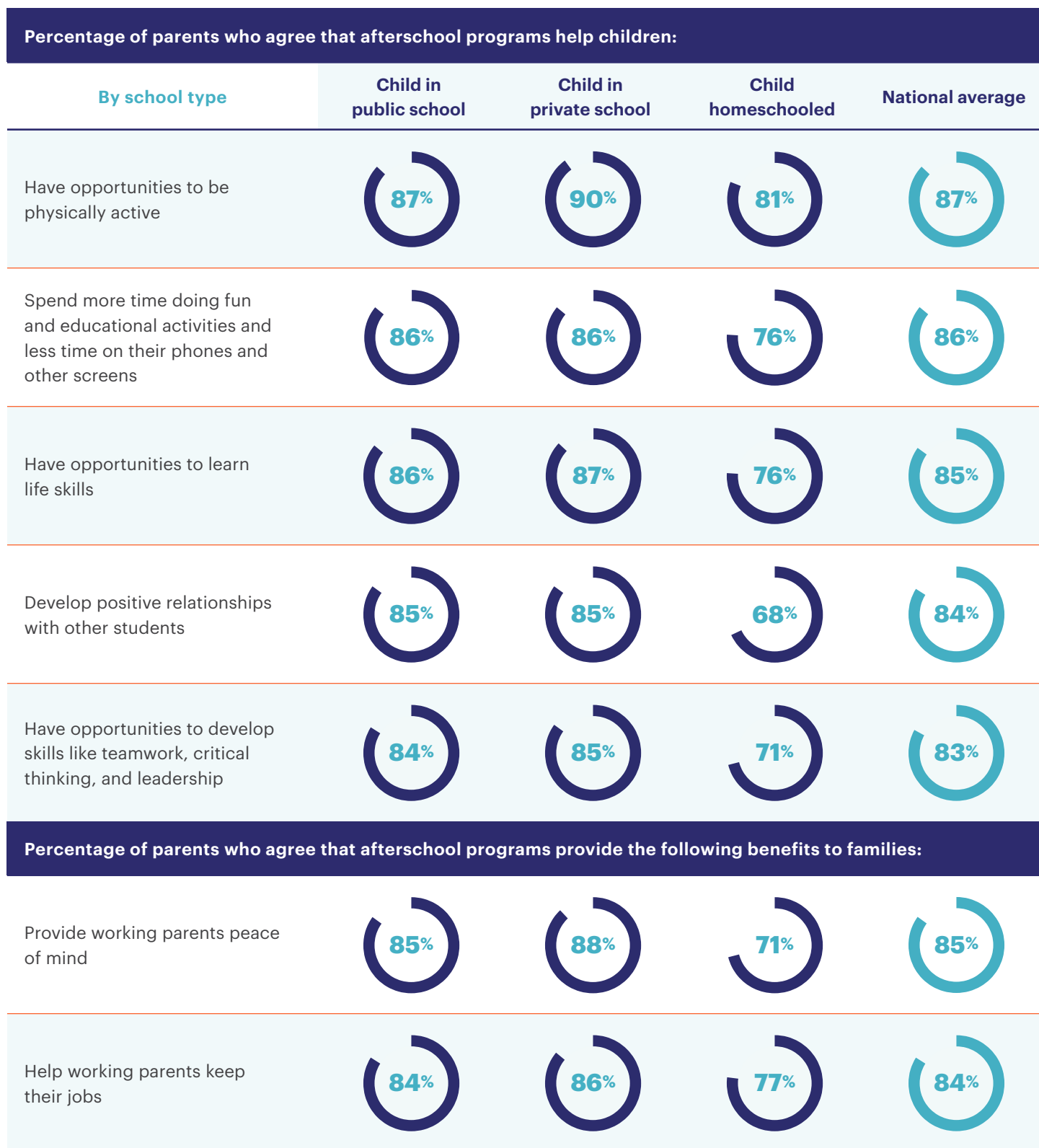


Figure 4. Regardless of where families live, age of child, type of schooling, or race or ethnicity, parents see the value of afterschool programs (continued)



Figure 4. Regardless of where families live, age of child, type of schooling, or race or ethnicity, parents see the value of afterschool programs (continued)



For full list of benefits, see the [Appendix](#).

Afterschool programs help parents keep their jobs, be more productive, and feel less stressed

More than 9 in 10 parents of afterschool program participants (92%) agree that their afterschool program helps them feel less stressed because they know their child is safe, and 82% agree that the program allows them to keep their job or work more hours. Similarly, most parents with a child in an afterschool program say that their child care arrangements after school positively impact their level of stress (83%), productivity at work (88%), and their overall well-being (90%). Parents whose children participate in an afterschool program most regularly (more than 10 hours a week) are even more likely to say that their child care arrangements after school have a positive effect on their stress level (89%), productivity at work (93%), and overall well-being (93%).

Parents also report additional benefits, including the opportunity to connect with other families in their community (74%); build skills through classes and/or workshops designed for families (68%); and access community resources, such as dental clinics, financial planning, mental health services, and food banks (59%).

Parents overall also stand behind the belief that afterschool programs support working families. Among all parents responding to the survey, more than 8 in 10 agree that programs provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised (85%) and help working parents keep their jobs (84%). Moreover, this sentiment is on rise; for instance, parents saying that afterschool programs help working parents keep their jobs grew from 74% in 2014, to 81% in 2020, to 84% in 2025 (see Figure 5).

Parents with a child in an afterschool program are more confident in their children's academic performance and more likely to report well-being and work-related support

The 2025 edition of *America After 3PM* included a new set of questions aimed at understanding how participation in afterschool programs impacts parents' confidence in their child's academic performance and their own feelings of stress, productivity, and well-being. All parents surveyed were asked how confident they are that their child will be well prepared for the next school year. A majority of parents with a child in an afterschool program (52%) say that they were "extremely" confident that their child will be well prepared, nearly 10 percentage points higher than parents who did not have a child in an afterschool program (43%). Confidence was highest among parents with a high school student in an afterschool program, with 57% reporting extreme confidence.

Parents with a child in an afterschool program are significantly more likely to report a positive impact on their productivity at work, their levels of stress, and their overall well-being than parents whose children are not in a program. For example, 90% of parents with a child in an afterschool program report that their afterschool child care arrangements positively impact their overall well-being. And 83% say they positively impact their stress level—19 and 15 percentage points higher than parents whose children are not enrolled (see Figure 6).



Figure 5. Agreement on afterschool programs' value rises on a number of indicators

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide these benefits for children:

● 2014 ● 2020 ● 2025

Opportunities to be physically active



Keep kids safe and out of trouble



Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science



Get healthy snacks or meals



Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens*



Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making**



Allow kids to form meaningful connections with caring staff***



Reduce likelihood that youth will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors



Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school



WORDING USED IN 2020

*Provide children opportunities to engage with their peers and reduce unproductive screentime

**Provide children opportunities to learn life skills, like the ability to communicate and work in teams

***Allow kids to build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors

Figure 5. Agreement on afterschool programs' value rises on a number of indicators (continued)

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits for families:

● 2014 ● 2020 ● 2025

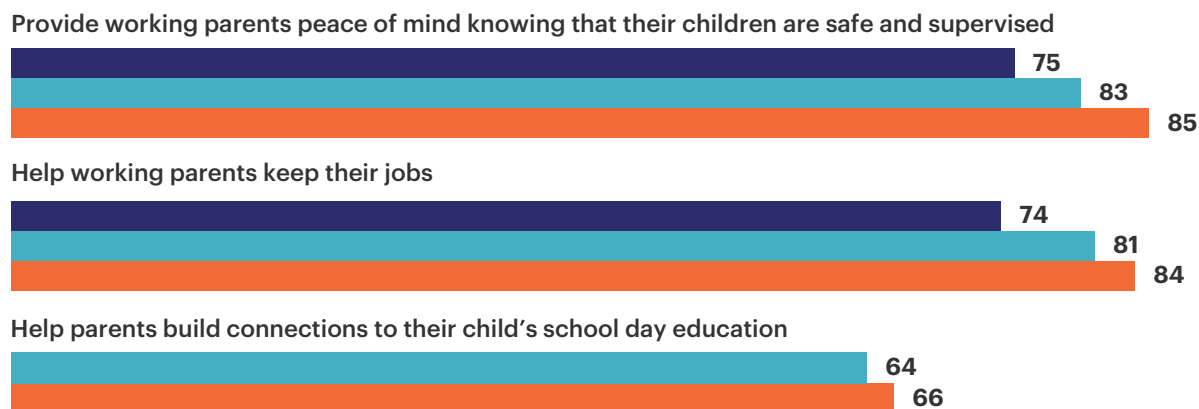


Figure 6. Parents with a child in an afterschool program are more productive, less stressed, and are more positive about their overall well-being

Percentage of parents who report that their after school child care arrangements have a positive impact on their:

● Parents without a child in an afterschool program ● Parents with a child in an afterschool program



Program affordability, accessibility, and availability limit participation, with choice most limited for low- and middle-income families

- ▲ Cost, accessibility, and program availability are top barriers to afterschool program enrollment, with a majority of parents (56%) without a child in an afterschool program reporting that programs are too expensive. Nearly half report that their child does not have a safe way to get to and come home from programs (49%) or that programs' locations are inconvenient (48%). More than 4 in 10 parents say that the hours of operation do not meet their needs (45%) or that programs are not available in their community (42%).
- ▲ Barriers accessing afterschool programs are not only greater for families with low incomes compared to high-income families, but for middle-class families as well. For example, more than half of families with low and middle incomes report a challenge that prevented them from enrolling in an afterschool program is that programs are too expensive (57% and 56%, respectively)—approximately 10 percentage points higher than the percentage of high-income families (45%) who say the same.

Cost, accessibility, and program availability are top barriers to afterschool program enrollment

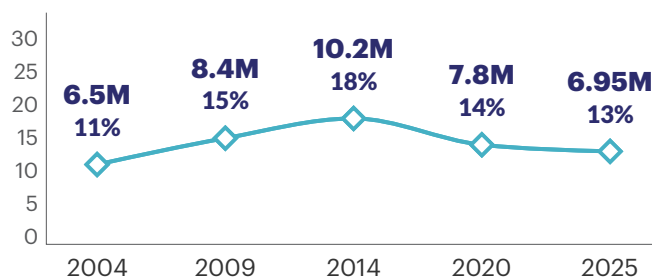
Despite parents' recognition of the valuable role afterschool programs can play in their children's lives, only 6.95 million children (13%) are enrolled in a program (see Figure 7). To understand why, the *America After 3PM* survey asks parents how important a variety of factors are in whether their child participates.[†] A majority of parents who do not have a child in an afterschool program (56%) report that the cost was an important factor. Additionally, in a separate survey question to all parents, a majority (57%) agree that it is difficult to afford programs.

Issues related to access also prevent families from enrolling their child in an afterschool program. Nearly half of parents who do not have a child in a program report that their child does not have a safe way to get to and come home (49%)

or state locations are inconvenient (48%). More than 4 in 10 parents say that the hours of operation do not meet their needs (45%).

Figure 7. After peaking in 2014, the percentage of children in an afterschool program declined in 2020 and remains at a similar level in 2025

Percentage of children in an afterschool program:



[†] The items asked about include both barriers to participation—such as cost and availability—and other factors, such as children preferring other activities or having other commitments, and parents preferring their child be with them or another adult during the hours after school. Only responses related to barriers to participation are included in this section. The full list of options can be found in the survey topline.

Notably, 42% of parents report that an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child is that programs are not available in their community. More than one-third of parents (35%) say that there are no spaces available or the waiting list is too long for their preferred program. Among families overall, 45% agree that it is difficult to find an appropriate afterschool program for their child.

Even for families who were able to enroll their child in an afterschool program, availability was a challenge, with nearly 1 in 4 parents (24%) reporting that their child was on a waitlist prior to enrollment, and among these parents, 63% say that their child was on a waitlist for more than a month.

There were double-digit percentage point increases from 2014 to 2020 in parents reporting that programs are too expensive, there is not a safe way for their children to get to or come home from programs, or programs are not available in their community. Those barriers to participation remain high in 2025, largely unchanged from 2020 (see Figure 8). For example, the percentage of parents reporting that cost is an important reason for not enrolling their child in an afterschool program increased from 43% in 2014 to 57% in 2020 and is currently at 56%.



Figure 8. A majority of parents continue to report that cost is a barrier to afterschool program participation for their family

Percentage of parents who report the following barriers to enrolling their child in afterschool programs:

● 2014 ● 2020 ● 2025

The programs are too expensive



My children do not have a safe way to get to and come home from the programs



The locations are not convenient



The hours of operation do not meet my needs



They are not available in my community



There are no spaces available or the waiting list was too long for the program that I would prefer*



WORDING USED IN 2020

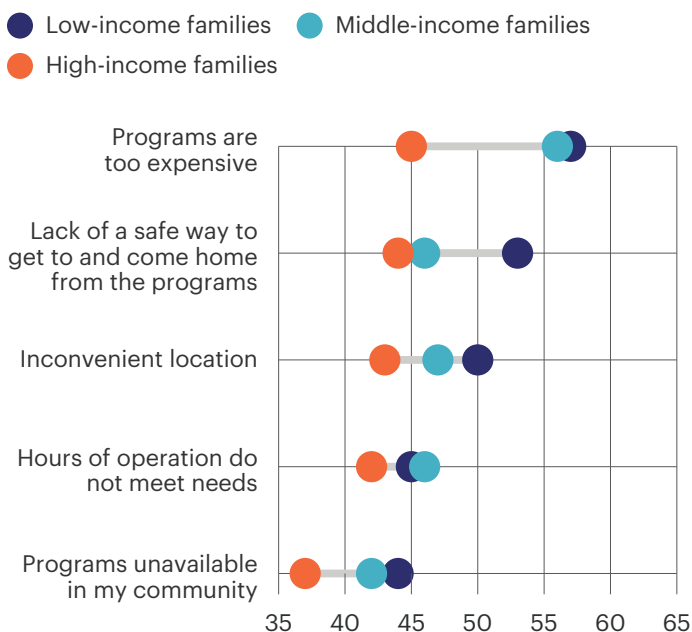
*There are no spaces available in the afterschool program that I would prefer

Low- and middle-income families face the biggest barriers to accessing afterschool programs

Household income plays a major role in determining whether families can access an afterschool program, with stark differences in the experiences of high-, middle-, and low-income families. Perhaps most surprising is that in many cases, middle-class families are experiencing a number of the same challenges as low-income families, such as program affordability and availability (see Figure 9). More than half of families with low and middle incomes say that an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child is that programs are too expensive (57% and 56%, respectively), 12 and 10 percentage points above that of high-income families (45%). Similarly, more than 2 in 5 families with low (44%) and middle incomes (42%) report that afterschool programs are not available in their community, compared to 37% of high-income families.

Figure 9. Low- and middle-income families most likely to face barriers to participation

Percentage of parents who report these factors are important in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program:



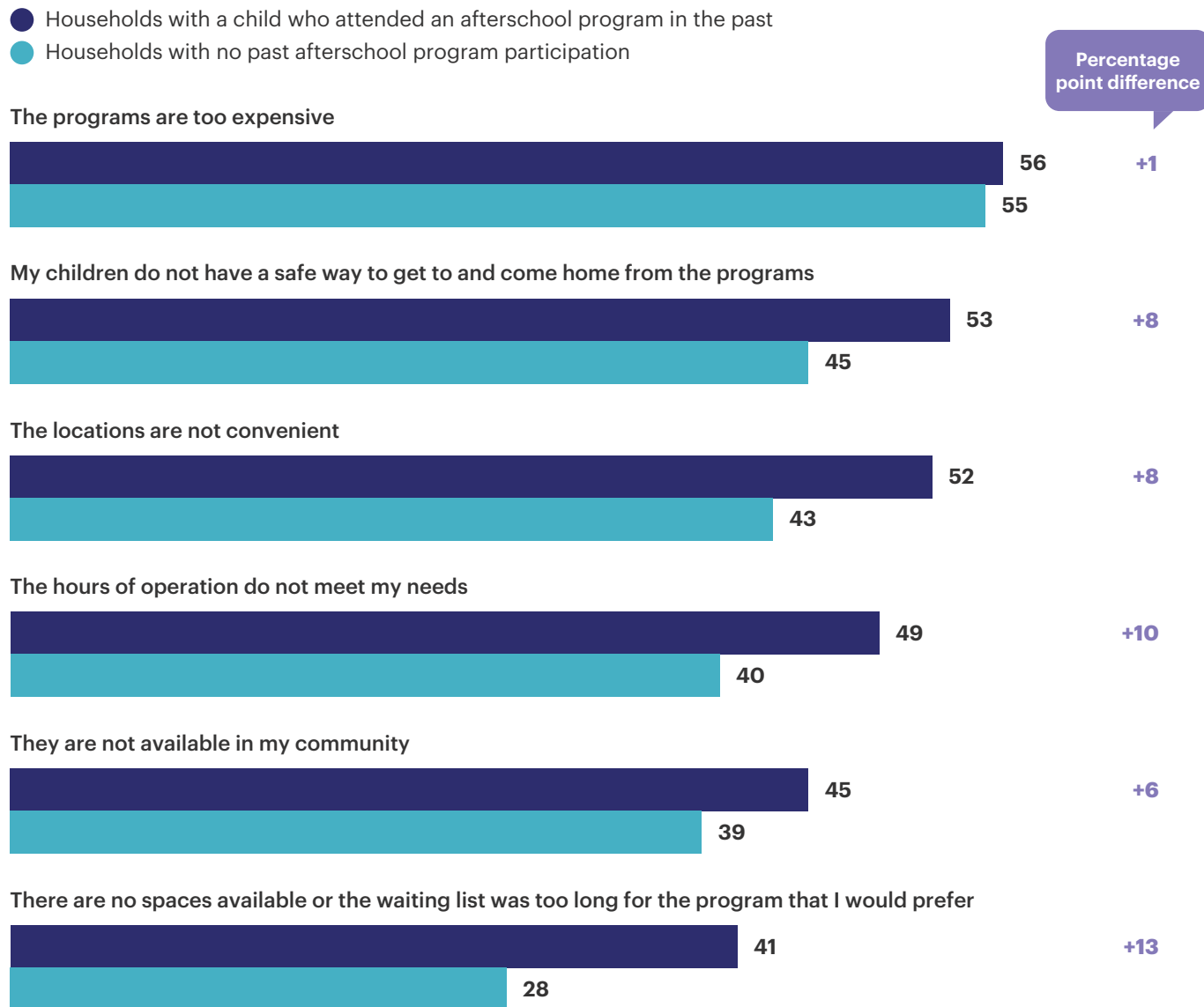
Among families with a child who stopped their afterschool program participation, transportation, location, access, and waiting lists were issues

A new question in the 2025 *America After 3PM* survey asked parents without a child currently enrolled in an afterschool program if their child attended one in the past. More than half of parents (55%) report that at least one child had attended an afterschool program previously. This group of parents is more likely to report facing barriers to enrollment than parents whose children never participated. For example, parents whose child previously attended are 8 percentage points more likely to say that a lack of a safe way to and from programs (53% vs. 45%) and inconvenient locations (52% vs. 43%) are important factors in the decision not to enroll their child (see Figure 10).

These parents are also 13 percentage points more likely to say a barrier to enrolling their child is that no spaces are available or the waiting list is too long for their preferred program (41% vs. 28%), and 45% of this group of parents report that an important reason their child is no longer enrolled is that programs were not available in their community. In response to an open-ended question asking why their child no longer attends an afterschool program, parents' replies include, "My financial situation has changed [and I] can't afford so many hours during the week," "I re-arranged my work schedule so that I could eliminate the need for an afterschool program which allows our family to save quite a bit of money," and "Some don't stay open for easy pickup or the bus doesn't come to our neighborhood." One parent wrote, "We moved to a rural area where those programs are no longer available," while another parent explained, "The afterschool program budget was cut in his school."

Figure 10. Parents with a child who participated in an afterschool program in the past were more likely to report barriers to enrollment than parents whose children never attended a program

Percentage of parents who report particular factors were important in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program:*



*Percentage point differences may not add up due to rounding

HOW ELSE ARE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SPENDING THEIR TIME AFTER SCHOOL?

From 2020 to 2025, the number of children and youth in the care of a parent or guardian increased significantly, from 67% of households reporting that they have a school-aged child in the care of a parent or guardian to 77%. As expected, parental care is highest among households with an elementary school-age child. Other afterschool arrangements remain somewhat steady since 2020, with the next largest shift being a drop in households reporting use of a child care facility, from 10% in 2020 to 6% in 2025.

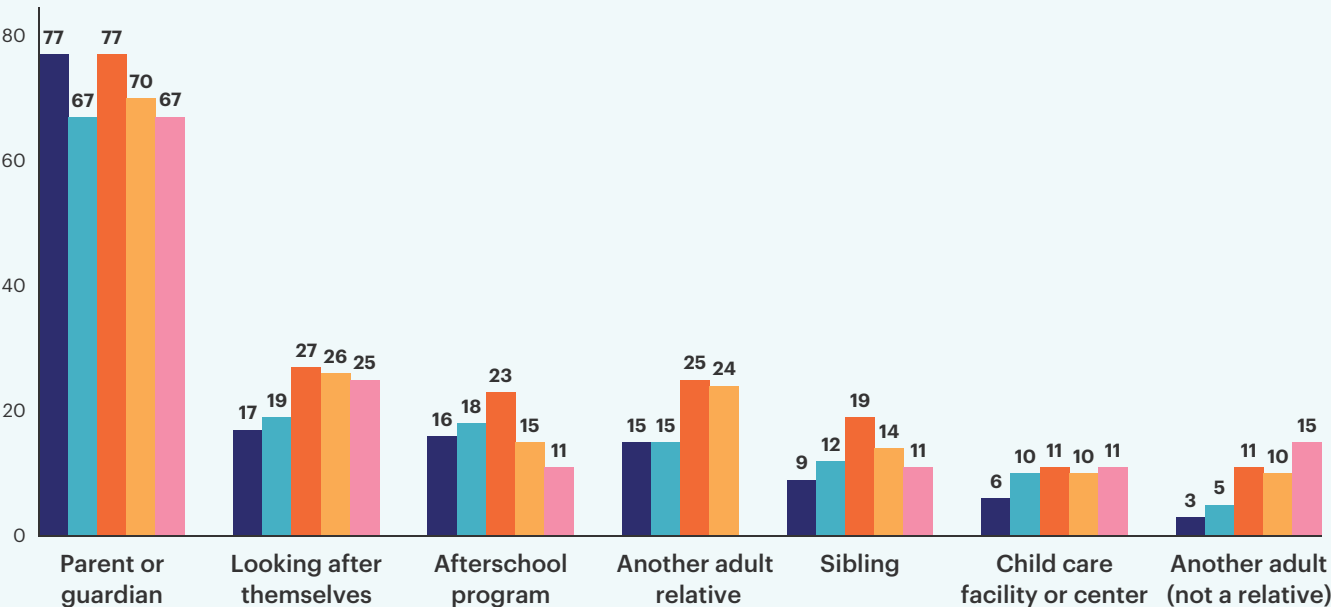
For families without a child in an afterschool program, the *America After 3PM* survey asked parents what factors influenced their decision not to enroll their child in a program. Sixty-five percent of parents cited “my children prefer other activities,” a new addition to the survey and the most common response. Parents who report that their child prefers other activities were asked a follow-up open-ended question about what these activities were. An analysis of the more than 7,400

responses were categorized into five primary categories: formal/informal sports activities, unstructured play and socializing, lessons and clubs, academic and personal responsibilities, and home-based and solitary activities. The two most common categories were sports and unstructured play and socializing. While these types of activities can take place in afterschool programs, programs were defined for parents as providing a supervised environment that children regularly attend, different from child care or individual activities like clubs, sports, or special lessons. It is worth noting that there is significant overlap among families not currently in afterschool who responded that their child prefers other activities (65%) and those who say their child would be in a program if one were available (49%). If more families had access to an afterschool program as defined in the survey, it is possible that their preference for other activities would decrease.

Types of after school care, 2004-2025 (household level)

Percentage of households reporting that they have a child in the following types of care between 3 and 6 p.m.:

2025 2020 2014 2009 2004



Higher-income households are investing more heavily in out-of-school time activities, and spending on these activities increased significantly over the past five years

- ▲ In 2025, families in the highest income bracket are spending approximately nine times as much on out-of-school time activities as families in the lowest income bracket. This is an increase from 2020, when families in the highest income bracket were spending five times as much.
- ▲ Ninety-six percent of families in the highest income bracket say that their child is involved in an activity outside of school, 30 percentage points higher than families in the lowest income bracket (66%).
- ▲ Children in high-income families are more than twice as likely as children in low-income families and 40% more likely than children in middle-income families to participate in an afterschool program (21% vs. 9% and 21% vs. 15%, respectively).
- ▲ While children in both higher- and lower-income families saw a decrease in afterschool program participation between 2014 and 2020, children in higher-income families saw a smaller decrease. In 2025, participation remains constant among higher-income families, while afterschool program participation among children in families with lower incomes continues to fall.

It is not groundbreaking that families' choices for care after school are largely shaped by household income. Yet the growing gap between what families with high incomes are able to spend on their children's out-of-school time activities—as well as the breadth of those activities—compared to children in families with low incomes, and even their middle-class peers, is troubling.

The gap between spending by families with high and low incomes has grown significantly in the last five years

In 2020, *America After 3PM* found that families in the highest income bracket spent more than five times as much on out-of-school time activities[†] for one child annually compared to families in the lowest income bracket.[‡] In 2025, families in the highest income bracket now spend approximately nine times as much on out-of-school time activities as families in the lowest income bracket, \$6,588 compared to \$734.

[†] Out-of-school time activities includes afterschool program participation, as well as involvement in activities after school such as organized sports, special lessons, clubs, scouting, study groups or tutoring, community service, religious activities, and work.

[‡] The analysis reviewed *America After 3PM* respondents by household income percentiles/quintiles, with slightly different income breaks in 2020 and 2025: 20th percentile (under \$25,000/under \$30,000), 40th percentile (\$25,000 to just under \$50,000/\$30,000 to just under \$60,000), 60th percentile (\$50,000 to just under \$75,000/\$60,000 to just under \$95,000), 80th percentile (\$75,000 to just under \$100,000/\$95,000 to just under \$150,000), 90th percentile (\$100,000 to just under \$200,000/\$150,000 to just under \$200,000), 90th+ percentile (\$200,000 or more/\$200,000 or more).

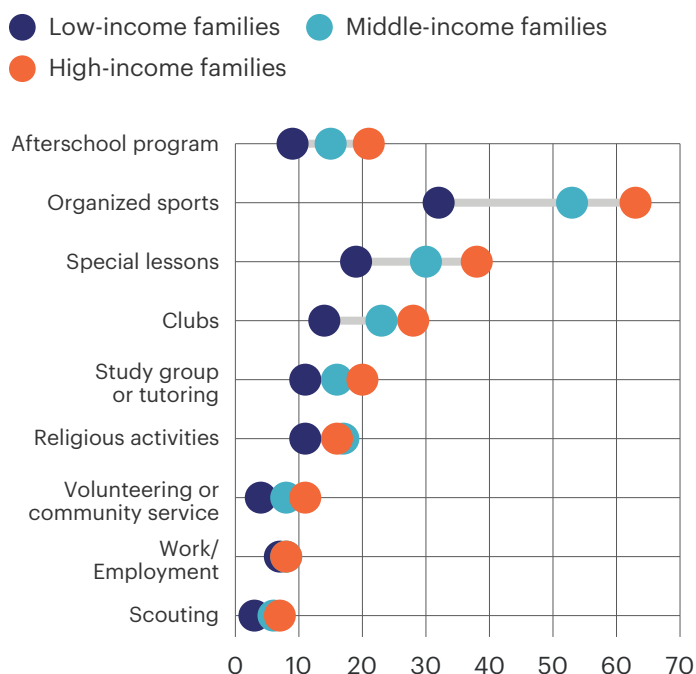
After adjusting for inflation, spending by families in the lowest income bracket decreased, from \$874 to \$734, while spending by families in the highest income bracket grew by more than \$2,000—from \$4,485 to \$6,588.

Children in families with higher incomes are much more likely to take part in some form of structured activity after school

High-income families are also more likely to report that their child takes part in organized activities after school than both families with low- and middle-incomes. Children in high-income families have a higher rate of participation in afterschool programs, and are much more likely to have access to a variety of afterschool opportunities, including organized sports and special lessons, including those in subjects such as art, music, dance, or coding (see Figure 11), than children in low- and middle-income families. The disparity in participation in afterschool activities is evident across income groups. Children in high-income families are more than twice as likely as children in low-income families

Figure 11. For most organized activities after school, children in high-income families are the most likely to take part

Percentage of children who participate in activities, by household income level:



FEDERAL FUNDING FOR AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS REMAINS STATIC

Given the household income gap in access to afterschool programs, the need for increased public funding for programs is palpable. Public investment in afterschool programs, in particular at the federal level, has largely remained stagnant over the past decade, with the exception of the time-limited funding through the American Rescue Plan in response to the pandemic.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding stream that exclusively supports afterschool and summer programs and prioritizes schools and communities with low-performing schools where at least 40% of children live in families with low incomes. Unfortunately, funding for 21st CCLC has remained level funded between 2022 and 2025, even though inflation has increased by approximately 10% over the same period of time. Comparing 21st CCLC funding in 2022 to 2025, investment in the initiative is now \$138 million lower after adjusting for inflation.

and 40% more likely than children in middle-income families to participate in an afterschool program (21% vs. 9% and 21% vs. 15%, respectively). Moreover, children in high-income families are approximately twice as likely to take part in organized sports than children in low-income families (63% vs. 32%), and 10 percentage points more likely to participate than children in middle-income families (63% vs. 53%). For out-of-school time activities overall, 96% of families in the highest income bracket say that their child is involved in an activity outside of school, 30 percentage points higher than families in the lowest income bracket (66%).

Only 5% of high-income families report that their child does not take part in any organized activities after school, including afterschool programs. Middle-class families are more than two-times as likely as high-income families to say that their child does not take part in an afterschool program or other afterschool activity, while low-income families are more than five times as likely to say that their child is not involved in any organized activities after school (11% and 27%, respectively).

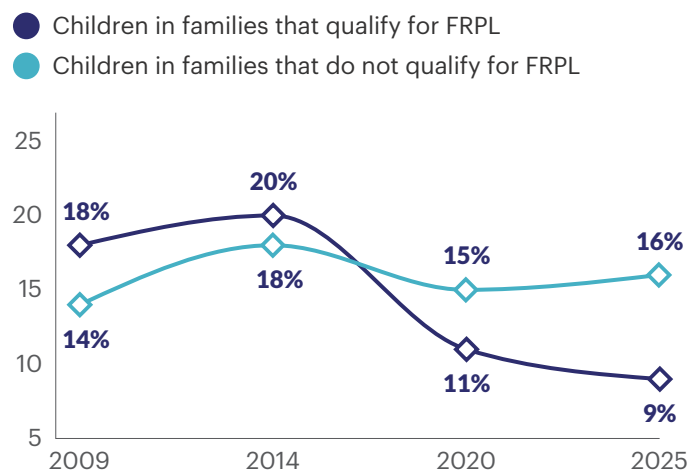
Afterschool program participation remains steady among children in higher-income households

To compare the change in children's afterschool program participation over time by household income level, *America After 3PM* is able to report out by families who qualify for the Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) program, a proxy often used for families with lower incomes and families who do not qualify for the program, or higher income families. While children in all families experienced a decrease in afterschool program participation between 2009 and 2020, the decrease was smaller for children in higher-income families. In 2025, participation remains constant for that group, whereas afterschool program participation among children in families with lower incomes continues to fall (see Figure 12).

This trend suggests that while at the national level, overall afterschool program participation appears to have stabilized, the demographic of young people accessing afterschool programs is shifting to those of children in families with greater economic means.

Figure 12. After a drop in afterschool program participation, children in higher income families see a leveling off

Percentage of children who participate in afterschool programs, by income level:



THE REMOTE WORK EFFECT

Parents with a hybrid or primarily in-person work schedule are more likely to want an afterschool program; however, families with higher incomes, regardless of their work situation, are more likely to be able to enroll their children in a program if that is their preference.

Although families' work situation—which is linked to income level—plays a role in parents' decisions regarding afterschool care options for their child, it is notable that regardless of work situation, a majority of parents who work remotely (53%), have a hybrid schedule (65%), or work primarily in-person (66%) would enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available.* Afterschool program enrollment on the other hand is much higher among parents with a hybrid schedule (31%) or who work in person all or most of the time (23%), compared to parents who work remotely (15%).

Nearly 1 in 4 households with a family member working remotely all or most of the time report that they have needed fewer hours of supervised care after school in the past year (24%); among this subset of parents who report that they needed fewer hours of supervised child care, 36% said it is due to changes to their working environment, and 24% said it was because of changes to their work schedule.

One parent wrote, "We work from home and don't need our kids to be anywhere else after school. They can be home with us." Another parent explained, "My work schedule is flexible enough to take care of them myself."

Looking across income levels and working situations, unmet demand for afterschool programs largely remains very high, reaching 76% among low-income hybrid working households. While working remotely appears to result in lower levels of both unmet demand and participation in afterschool programs, high-income families working remotely have the lowest unmet demand for programs (39%) and have a participation rate of 24%, equal to or greater than participation rates for low- and middle-income families in every category except for middle-income hybrid working households (30%).

Income level	Working in-person			Hybrid work			Working remotely		
	Low	Middle	High	Low	Middle	High	Low	Middle	High
Parents with a child in an afterschool program	18%	24%	35%	24%	30%	40%	11%	14%	24%
Parents who would enroll their child in an afterschool program if a program were available	70%	64%	54%	76%	66%	50%	65%	49%	39%

*While most parents report working in-person most or all of the time (72%), higher-income families are significantly more likely to have the option to work remotely or have a hybrid schedule. For example, 21% of high-income and 14% of middle-income families report a hybrid work situation compared to 6% of low-income families.

Parents with a child in an afterschool program say afterschool programs provide a wide range of benefits

- ▲ Nearly all parents (97%) rate the quality of their child's afterschool program as excellent, very good, or good, with 85% rating it as excellent or very good.
- ▲ More than 9 in 10 parents (95%) are satisfied overall with their child's afterschool program.
- ▲ Out of a list of more than 40 items, parents say that the safe and supportive nature of a program, logistics, helping their child connect with others and build communication skills, getting their child excited about learning, opportunities for physical activities, and supporting their child's overall well-being were most important in the selection of their afterschool program, with a majority of parents reporting satisfaction with these qualities and offerings.

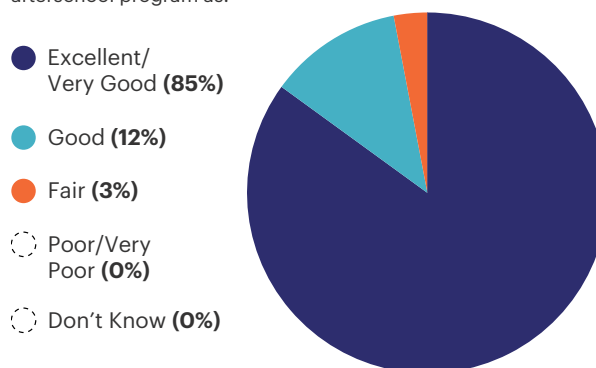
Children participating in afterschool programs are taking part in quality programming, and parents are highly satisfied with most aspects of the program their child attends. More than 8 in 10 parents (85%) rate the quality of their child's afterschool program as "excellent" or "very good." This increases to nearly all parents (97%) when including those who rated the quality of their afterschool program as "good" (see Figure 13). There were no parents surveyed who report that the quality of their child's program is "poor" or "very poor." Correspondingly, 95% of parents say that they are satisfied overall with their child's afterschool program, including 60% who are extremely satisfied. When scored on a scale from 1 to 5, parents' average score for program quality is 4.23 out of 5 and 4.53 for program satisfaction.

Providing a comprehensive set of supports

Parents are happy with the activities and assistance afterschool programs provide, from help with homework to time to experience the outdoors and from keeping students active to providing science, technology, engineering, math, and computer science learning opportunities (see Figure 14). For example, more than 7 in 10 parents are satisfied with their child's opportunities for reading or writing (77%), help with homework (72%), physical activity (85%), and time to experience the outdoors (77%).

Figure 13. Nearly all parents rate the quality of their child's afterschool program as excellent, very good, or good

Percentage of parents who rate the quality of their child's afterschool program as:



Most parents report satisfaction with their afterschool program helping their child to get excited about learning (79%) and offering learning activities not provided during the school day (77%).

Building foundational skills

In addition to afterschool programs keeping students active and supporting their academic growth, programs are helping young people build vital skills that will help them in their day-to-day relationships, to navigate through complex

or difficult situations, and as they move into adulthood. An overwhelming majority of parents are satisfied with the opportunities their child has through their afterschool program to interact with their peers and build their social skills (90%); learn responsible decision making (82%); and work on their communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills (82%) (see Figure 14). Parents also are content with their program providing opportunities for their child to build their confidence (86%), a factor that was extremely important to a majority of parents (61%).

Providing a safe and supportive environment

A safe environment and knowledgeable and caring staff are the primary reasons why parents choose their child's afterschool program, a finding consistent with previous editions of *America After 3PM*. Approximately 7 in 10 parents say that safety of environment (76%) and knowledgeable and caring staff (70%) are extremely important factors in selecting their child's afterschool program, and 9 in 10 parents report satisfaction with each (91% and 90%, respectively). Additionally, more than 8 in 10 parents are pleased with the afterschool program providing a sense of belonging (87%) as well as opportunities for their child to develop positive relationships with other students in the program (88%) and to form meaningful connections with caring adults in the program (81%) (see Figure 14).

Making connections to college, career, and community

Opportunities for young people to think about the future and explore choices for college and career, including work-based learning experiences, is another role that parents say afterschool programs play. Roughly two-thirds of parents of middle and high school students report being satisfied with the college or career exploration opportunities (68%) and work-based learning experiences for their child (64%). Satisfaction is even greater among parents of high schoolers; 77% of parents with a high schooler in an afterschool program are satisfied with the college or career exploration opportunities offered. Seventy-one percent are happy with the work-based learning experiences,

including internships and apprenticeships. Additionally, afterschool programs are helping connect young people to their community by offering service learning or community service opportunities; 67% of parents report satisfaction with the service learning and/or community service experiences offered in their child's program.

AFTERSCHOOL BY THE NUMBERS

3.7 days

Average days per week

- ▲ Elementary schoolers: **3.7 days**
- ▲ Middle schoolers: **3.5 days**
- ▲ High schoolers: **3.6 days**

5.3 hours

Average hours per week

- ▲ Elementary schoolers: **5.9 hours**
- ▲ Middle schoolers: **4.8 hours**
- ▲ High schoolers: **4.5 hours**

\$124.10*

Average cost per week

80%

Parents reporting that their child's afterschool program is located in a public school building

Top 6

Afterschool program providers

1. Run by a public school: **42%**
2. Boys & Girls Club: **21%**
3. Run by a city or town:** **16%**
4. Run by a private school: **15%**
5. Run by a library: **14%**
6. YMCA afterschool program: **13%**

*Among parents who report paying for their child's afterschool program

**e.g., Parks & Recreation department

Figure 14. Parents are highly satisfied with their child's afterschool program's activities and supports

Percentage of parents who report that they are satisfied with the following in their child's afterschool program:

● Extremely Satisfied ● Satisfied Overall

OVERALL



ACTIVITIES

Physical activity opportunities



Variety of activities



Opportunities to experience the outdoors



Opportunities for reading or writing



Snacks/meals including healthy options



Homework help



Programming to reduce risky behaviors*



Organized sports



Music or arts



Opportunities to experience different cultures through cultural celebrations, dance, history, etc.



Tutoring



Wellness activities like yoga, mindfulness exercises, and meditation



STEM



Figure 14. Parents are highly satisfied with their child's afterschool program's activities and supports (continued)

Percentage of parents who report that they are satisfied with the following in their child's afterschool program:

● Extremely Satisfied ● Satisfied Overall

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Opportunities to interact with peers and build social skills



Opportunities to build confidence



Support of my child's mental health and well-being



Opportunities to learn responsible decision making



Opportunities to develop skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship



SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Safety of environment



Knowledgeable and caring staff



Opportunities to develop positive relationships with other kids in the program



Providing a sense of belonging



Opportunities to form meaningful connections with caring adults in the program



COLLEGE, CAREER, COMMUNITY

College or career exploration*



Work-based learning experiences*



Service learning/community service



*Responses are only among parents with a middle or high school student in an afterschool program

Parents are satisfied with programming most important to them

To learn what factored into parents' selection of their child's afterschool program, *America After 3PM* asked parents how important certain characteristics and offerings were in making their decision to enroll their child in a specific program. Out of the list of more than 40 items parents were asked about, the safe and supportive nature of a program, logistics, helping their child connect with others and build communication skills, getting them excited about learning, opportunities for physical activities, and supporting their overall well-being are most important to parents. A majority of parents report satisfaction with these qualities and offerings (see Figure 15).

Parents' satisfaction with their child's afterschool program across demographics

At least 8 in 10 parents in rural, suburban, and urban communities, across income levels, and regardless of race or ethnicity (with the exception of Asian American parents) rate the quality of their child's afterschool program as excellent or very good. Similarly, looking across demographic categories—from a high of 97% of parents living in an urban community to the lowest satisfaction among Asian American parents at 88%, most parents report satisfaction with their child's experience in their afterschool program.

In general, parents are satisfied with various aspects of their child's afterschool program. For example, when asked about knowledgeable and caring staff in the program, overwhelming majorities of rural, suburban, and urban parents (89%, 90%, and 90%, respectively) and Asian American (84%), Black (92%), Hispanic (93%), and White parents (90%) report satisfaction. Overall, parents living in urban areas and Black and Hispanic parents are most likely to report that they are satisfied with the support and activities in their child's afterschool program.



Figure 15. Parents are satisfied with their top priorities in their child's afterschool program

Percentage of parents who report certain factors were "extremely important" in selecting a program and that they are "satisfied" with that offering:

● Extremely Important ● Satisfied

Safe environment



Knowledgeable and caring staff



Support of my child's mental health and well-being



Convenient hours



Opportunities to develop positive relationships with other kids in the program



Opportunities to interact with peers and build social skills



Convenient location



Opportunities to build confidence



Figure 15. Parents are satisfied with their top priorities in their child's afterschool program (continued)

Percentage of parents who report certain factors were "extremely important" in selecting a program and that they are "satisfied" with that offering:

● Extremely Important ● Satisfied

Opportunities to spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens



Opportunities to develop skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship



Opportunities to learn responsible decision making



Opportunities to develop/build a sense of belonging



Exciting my child about learning



Physical activity opportunities



Variety of activities



Programming to reduce risky behaviors



Policy implications and opportunities

Findings in this fifth edition of *America After 3PM* provide a snapshot of families' preferences for the types of care, interactions, and supports during the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., when school is out but before parents typically come home from work. Parents' responses describe the opportunities their children are able to take advantage of and those missed because of economic challenges and a shortage of resources—whether that's a reliable transportation option to and from an afterschool program or available afterschool in the community.

Given the considerable demand for afterschool programs, specifically the fact that three-quarters of this demand is children who are not in a program, but would be enrolled if one were available, there are steps national, state, and local policymakers and others can take to respond to what families across the United States are expressing as an essential need.

Increase funding for afterschool programs

A majority of families without a child in an afterschool program say that cost was an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child, with low- and middle-income families most likely to cite cost as a barrier. Additionally, families with low incomes and middle-class families are more likely to say that an important reason why they chose not to enroll their child in an afterschool program was because one was not available in their community.

Greater investment in afterschool programs from the public and private sectors can help increase program availability and access for more families. For example, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is a federal funding stream that supports afterschool and summer programs, targeting schools and communities where at least 40% of children live in families with low incomes. A 2024 U.S. Department of Education report found that nearly 1.4 million students in nearly 10,000

communities participated in programs supported by 21st CCLC.⁴ Other federal investments that support afterschool programs include the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which can be used for school-age children 5 to 13 and which supports approximately 600,000 school-age children each month, and AmeriCorps grant funding, which can support local afterschool programs by providing trained staff members. In addition to support at the federal level, there is a need for greater state and local funding for afterschool programs.

Support for public funding for afterschool programs is at an all-time high. Nearly 9 in 10 parents (89%) favor public funding for programs that provide afterschool opportunities to students in communities that have few opportunities for children and youth. This is a steady increase from 83% in 2009, 84% in 2014, and 87% in 2020. Groups where support is the highest include Black families (92%), families living in urban communities (92%), households where both parents work (91%), and working moms (90%). Support for public funding is strong across community types, including parents living in rural (87%), suburban (88%), and urban communities (92%), and across political affiliations. Ninety-three percent of parents who are Democrats, 89% of parents who are Independent, and 87% of parents who are Republicans are in favor of public funding for afterschool programs.

Remove barriers that prevent children from participating in afterschool programs

America After 3PM finds that issues surrounding the accessibility of afterschool programs continue to be a barrier facing many families, with nearly half of parents reporting that important factors in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program included that there is not a safe way for their child to get to and from the program (49%) or that programs' locations are inconvenient

(48%). On the other side of the equation, among parents with a child in an afterschool program, 90% said that a convenient location was an important factor in choosing their child's afterschool program, with 61% of parents reporting that it was extremely important.

Funders can help address accessibility through public and private afterschool grants that include transportation as an allowable use, support programs to braid multiple funding streams, and incentivize schools to improve families' access to afterschool programs. Specific strategies, such as shared use agreements for low- or no-cost space and bussing for programs operated by community-based providers, can lower or remove the barriers to participation that many children and families face.

Invest in afterschool program staff

Findings from *America After 3PM* underscore the need to increase access to afterschool programs. Given that a key component of a quality afterschool program is well-prepared staff, providing support to bolster programs' staff recruitment and retention efforts can increase programs' capacity and reduce waitlists, as well as help ensure that the afterschool programs young people participate in are high quality.

Researchers describe staff in programs as "essential contributors to children's learning and development beyond formal schooling."⁵ Staff is incredibly relevant for families as well, with more than 9 in 10 parents (92%) reporting that knowledgeable and caring staff in their child's afterschool program is an important reason why they chose their program, including 70% who said it is "extremely important." After a program's safe environment, staff is the second most important consideration for parents.

While 90% of parents are satisfied with the staff at their child's afterschool program, surveys of afterschool program providers show that most are concerned about their ability to find or retain staff and their ability to pay their staff a livable wage and benefits.⁶ Afterschool program providers need additional help to attract and retain a qualified and caring workforce to serve as role models for students, offer positive and meaningful connections, and create a safe and supportive environment to encourage young people to flourish. Examples of support at the federal, state, and local

levels could include incentivizing livable and competitive wages; promoting and enhancing allowable expenditures for paid professional development and staff planning time; supporting intermediaries at the state and local levels to offer research-based, relevant professional development and quality tools for youth serving professionals; providing free child care for program staff; and establishing or supporting more robust career pathways, from credentials and apprenticeships to leadership positions that would encourage more individuals to enter into and grow within the afterschool field.

Align afterschool programs with parents' priorities

When asked to prioritize the most important offerings when selecting an afterschool program, a program's environment and accessibility, activities that support their child's well-being, building skills such as the ability to work in a team and think critically, getting their child excited about learning, and opportunities for physical activity are most important. Out of the more than 40 items parents were asked about, academic-related items were not in the top tier.

Quality afterschool programs are flexible, enabling them to be responsive to the specific needs and interests of their students and families, including, but not limited to, academic-related support. When creating afterschool program-related policies and programming, policymakers and education and program leaders should consider strategies that are meaningfully centered around students and parents. This could include surveying parents and students, conducting a community needs assessment, including youth in program design, and instituting other steps to best align with the priorities of parents and the needs of young people served.

Build afterschool programs' capacity

The high level of unmet demand for afterschool programs is due in part to their limited availability in communities. *America After 3PM* finds that 42% of parents without a child in an afterschool program say that it was because programs are not available in their area. Among parents who stopped their afterschool program participation, 41% say it was due to no spaces being available or the waitlist was too

long for the program they preferred. The lack of afterschool programs is greater in certain areas—in particular for families living in urban and rural communities compared to their suburban counterparts (49% and 44%, respectively vs. 38%). The diversity in accessibility depending on the community presents an opportunity to address this issue through systems building efforts.

Support for intermediary organizations, such as city and county systems and collaboratives and statewide afterschool networks, can build the capacity of the afterschool field and improve accessibility at the state and local levels. Building capacity of the afterschool field can

include strengthening professional development supports, providing evaluation and research support, helping with programs' sustainability, and providing data collection and analysis support. This could include the mapping of existing afterschool programs in a state to determine where there are communities that either do not have an afterschool program provider or do not have an adequate number of programs to meet the demand from families. Investment in building afterschool programs' capacity can help providers rise to meet the challenge of reducing unmet demand for afterschool programs among families.



Conclusion

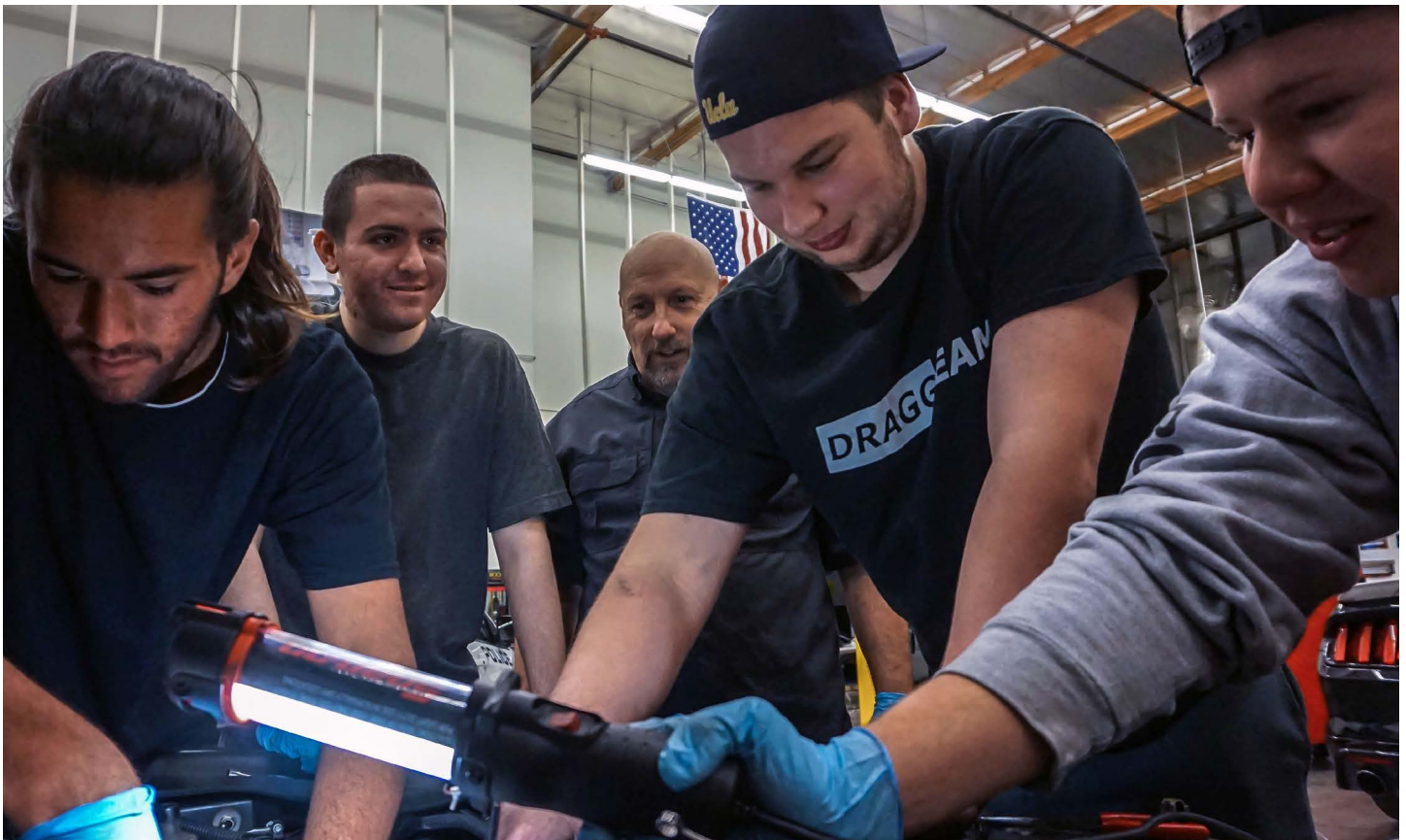
When asked to think about a world without afterschool programs, parents worry about a loss of opportunity. One parent states, “My child would have fewer outside activities to participate in and fewer opportunities to interact with other children.” Another writes, “My son would not have grown in confidence and increased his physical activity.” Yet another says, “My child would be lost. The afterschool program changed his life. He has more friends and social experiences.”

Parents also describe challenges their families would face without afterschool programs. A middle-class parent living in an urban community writes how it would “put a strain on our time and worries about the safety of our children.” A suburban parent writes, “If there wasn’t an afterschool program, it would create challenges for our family, including finding alternative child care, adjusting work schedules, and potentially increasing stress while managing family responsibilities and daily routine.” A rural parent writes, “[It] would be very difficult since both parents work full-time outside the home. Work could be somewhat flexible,

but that would mean making up hours in the evenings/ weekends to compensate.” One parent describes a much more dire situation where “I wouldn’t be able to work enough hours and we wouldn’t be able to pay rent.”

Unfortunately, too many families are currently without an afterschool program. Parents of more than half of all school-age children want afterschool programs, but 3 in 4 children are without the programs their parents desire. That means more than three-quarters of the overall demand is unmet, leaving 22.6 million children without afterschool. The children waiting for an available afterschool program are missing out on help finding a new area of interest, engaging with their peers, connecting with mentors, being active, and building foundational skills like the ability to think critically and work in teams. And the families who want to enroll their child in an afterschool program but are unable to have greater worries about what their child is doing after school and experience greater levels of stress balancing work and parenting.





Over the course of 20 years, *America After 3PM* has revealed the value of afterschool programs for children, families, and communities. It also highlights the disappointing reality that these programs are out of reach for even more families, including millions who are middle class and have low incomes. Looking back, the 2004 *America After 3PM* report stated, “It is clear that the supply of afterschool programs continues to fall short of the demand ... The afterschool community has a tremendous task before it.” While there have been greater investments in the afterschool field at the state and local levels, there remains a growing gap between high-income families and the rest of the country, with funding at the federal level through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers remaining stagnant and in decline when adjusting for inflation.

The 2025 *America After 3PM* data make it clear that the task before the nation is even greater than it was just five years ago. However, we also have a strong foundation to build upon. Parents want afterschool opportunities for their kids. Parents and voters support greater public investment to help make that happen. A growing number of state governments are investing in afterschool activities, and there are strong national, state, and city-level intermediaries that can help build the capacity of afterschool programs to meet the needs of children and families.

To meet the need for afterschool programs that families across the country are calling for will require concerted support from the public and private sectors; the federal, state, and local levels; and the public at large. Our country will be stronger and more successful when all children, regardless of their economic circumstances, can take advantage of all that afterschool programs have to offer—but, sadly, we’re nowhere near reaching that goal today.

Methodology

America After 3PM is a large-scale, national tracking survey conducted every five to six years to examine the state of afterschool demand in the United States. The fifth edition of *America After 3PM* surveyed 30,515 U.S. parents or guardians with a school-age child living in their household, completing at least 200 interviews in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. The survey was conducted using a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. This included mobile-optimized online surveys and supplementary telephone interviews where 200 completed interviews could not be reached using online panels. Survey respondents were recruited using an online, non-probability sample obtained via national opt-in consumer research panels. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish.

Data were collected between January 31 and April 21, 2025, with the online interview taking an average of 12 minutes to complete and the phone interview an average of 21 minutes. All qualifying respondents answered questions

regarding how their child or children are cared for in the hours after school, participation in organized activities, participation in summer experiences, and demographic questions. A subset of 14,663 respondents were asked a series of follow up questions related to afterschool program experiences, barriers to afterschool program participation, and perceptions of afterschool programs. A combination of sources was used to determine quota and weighting targets, including the most recent U.S. Census American Community Survey and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data. Quotas were set and final data were weighted to be representative of parents or guardians of children in kindergarten through 12th grade at the state and national levels by family income and race/ethnicity.

The overall margin of error for the child- and household-level data is +/- < 1%. Projections for child-level data represent school-age children in the United States, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's October 2022 Current Population Survey.

Endnotes

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- 6 Afterschool Alliance. (2025). A Mix of Highs and Lows for Afterschool Program Providers. <https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/A-Mix-of-Highs-and-Lows-Wave-11.pdf>

APPENDIX: Full survey data on afterschool programs' benefits to children and families

Agreement on benefits by household income

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs help children in the following ways:			
	Low income	Middle income	High income
Have opportunities to be physically active	85%	89%	90%
Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	84%	87%	87%
Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	84%	86%	87%
Develop positive relationships with other students	82%	85%	85%
Have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	82%	84%	83%
By supporting their mental health and well-being	77%	80%	81%
Stay safe and out of trouble	74%	80%	83%
Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	77%	77%	80%
Form meaningful connections with caring staff	74%	77%	78%
Reduce likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	74%	77%	79%
Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	75%	75%	74%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:			
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	81%	87%	89%
Help working parents keep their jobs	80%	87%	88%

Agreement on benefits by community type

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs help children in the following ways:			
	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Have opportunities to be physically active	87%	87%	89%
Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	85%	85%	88%
Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	84%	85%	88%
Develop positive relationships with other students	82%	84%	87%
Have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	82%	82%	87%
By supporting their mental health and well-being	77%	76%	84%
Stay safe and out of trouble	72%	79%	82%
Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	75%	75%	83%
Form meaningful connections with caring staff	73%	74%	82%
Reduce likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	72%	75%	81%
Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	72%	72%	82%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:			
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	83%	86%	86%
Help working parents keep their jobs	82%	85%	85%

Agreement on benefits by race/ethnicity

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs help children in the following ways:					
	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	Native American	White
Have opportunities to be physically active	89%	88%	87%	88%	87%
Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	86%	86%	85%	85%	86%
Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	85%	87%	86%	86%	85%
Develop positive relationships with other students	82%	85%	84%	83%	84%
Have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	84%	87%	84%	84%	83%
By supporting their mental health and well-being	77%	82%	81%	78%	78%
Stay safe and out of trouble	79%	79%	78%	76%	78%
Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	81%	81%	80%	80%	76%
Form meaningful connections with caring staff	75%	80%	76%	74%	75%
Reduce likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	75%	79%	79%	76%	75%
Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	76%	81%	79%	77%	73%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:					
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	85%	84%	83%	82%	85%
Help working parents keep their jobs	84%	83%	82%	79%	85%

Agreement on benefits by child grade level

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs help children in the following ways:			
	With an elementary schooler	With a middle schooler	With a high schooler
Have opportunities to be physically active	88%	87%	88%
Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	86%	86%	86%
Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	85%	85%	86%
Develop positive relationships with other students	85%	83%	84%
Have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	84%	82%	83%
By supporting their mental health and well-being	79%	78%	79%
Stay safe and out of trouble	78%	77%	78%
Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	77%	76%	77%
Form meaningful connections with caring staff	77%	74%	76%
Reduce likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	76%	75%	76%
Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	76%	73%	74%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:			
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	85%	85%	85%
Help working parents keep their jobs	85%	84%	84%

Agreement on benefits by school type

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs help children in the following ways:			
	Child in public school	Child in private school	Child homeschooled
Have opportunities to be physically active	87%	90%	81%
Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	86%	86%	76%
Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	86%	87%	76%
Develop positive relationships with other students	85%	85%	68%
Have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	84%	85%	71%
By supporting their mental health and well-being	79%	82%	61%
Stay safe and out of trouble	78%	80%	60%
Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	78%	81%	66%
Form meaningful connections with caring staff	77%	77%	58%
Reduce likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	76%	79%	62%
Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	75%	78%	60%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:			
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	85%	88%	71%
Help working parents keep their jobs	84%	86%	77%

Agreement on benefits by employment status

Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs help children in the following ways:

	Both parents working
Have opportunities to be physically active	89%
Spend more time doing fun and educational activities and less time on their phones and other screens	88%
Have opportunities to learn life skills, like interacting with peers, developing social skills, and responsible decision making	87%
Develop positive relationships with other students	86%
Have opportunities to develop skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership	85%
By supporting their mental health and well-being	81%
Stay safe and out of trouble	81%
Gain interest and skills related to science, technology, engineering, math, or computer science	79%
Form meaningful connections with caring staff	79%
Reduce likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors	79%
Become more excited about learning and interested in school, helping them improve their attendance in and attitude toward school	77%
Percentage of parents who agree that afterschool programs provide the following benefits to families:	
Provide working parents peace of mind knowing that their children are safe and supervised	87%
Help working parents keep their jobs	87%



For more information, visit aa3pm.co

About the Afterschool Alliance

The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children have access to affordable, quality afterschool programs. Learn more at afterschoolalliance.org



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