

New England After 3PM



**Spotlight on
Rhode Island**



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New England After 3 PM: Spotlight on Rhode Island

Introduction

Spotlight on Rhode Island is the third installment in the *New England After 3 PM* series. Released in May 2006, the first installment examined afterschool across the region with a special focus on Massachusetts. The second installment, *Spotlight on Connecticut*, explored the need and demand for afterschool in that state, as expressed in surveys of parents and afterschool program providers. (Full reports are available online at http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/NE_3pm.cfm.)

In preparing *Spotlight on Rhode Island*, the Afterschool Alliance worked with the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance to survey mayors and other officials in each of the state's 39 cities and towns. The survey, distributed via the Internet in April 2007, asked municipal leaders about their views on children and older youth in their communities, and the role afterschool programs can play in supporting children and families in and out of the classroom. The Afterschool Alliance received responses from 23 municipal leaders, representing more than half of all municipalities in Rhode Island.

Overall, strong majorities of Rhode Island's municipal leaders expressed powerful support for afterschool in their communities, describing it as a top concern to them. Most expressed the view that their communities need more afterschool programs to meet demand from families and children, and said that the federal and state governments should do more to help fund afterschool.

Municipal Leaders See Afterschool as an 'Absolute Necessity' for Rhode Island

Rhode Island municipal leaders expressed concern about the safety of children and teens in their communities in the after school hours. They said afterschool programs are needed and that it is important or very important to provide resources to programs that provide a safe haven for children to learn and give them positive role models between 3 and 6 pm, while many parents are still at work.

- 🔔 Nine in ten Rhode Island municipal leaders (91 percent) agree that afterschool programs are an **absolute necessity** in their communities. Fifty-seven percent agree strongly with this statement; thirty-five percent somewhat agree. (Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.)

- 🔔 Keeping kids safe and out of trouble is the number one reason municipal leaders cite for their support of afterschool. Nine in ten (91 percent) say safety is an important or very important reason to allocate resources to afterschool programs in their communities.
- 🔔 Three in five Rhode Island municipal leaders (61 percent) rank their concern for children and teens being alone and unsupervised in the hours after school as one of their top three concerns about youth in their communities.

“The success of the young people of the City of Providence depends on their ability to be involved in high-quality after-school programs that will enhance their learning and help them grow and develop into the future leaders that our city, state and country need. As I travel throughout the city and talk to young people, I am more convinced than ever that those who are connected to strong afterschool programs are thriving and those who are not are searching for good places to be.”

-- David N. Cicilline Mavor, City of Providence

Municipal Leaders Agree: Greater Investment in Afterschool is Needed

Although survey respondents say that afterschool programs are needed in their communities, more than three in five are not satisfied with the current level of available programming. More than three in four say the federal and state governments are not doing enough to support local needs and believe people in their communities would like to see increased investment in afterschool.

- 🔔 Nearly two in three municipal leaders (65 percent) agree that there are not enough afterschool programs in their communities.
- 🔔 More than three in four (78 percent) agree that the federal government and state government are not doing all they should to meet the need for afterschool programs in their communities.
- 🔔 More than three in four (77 percent) say that people in their communities would like to see the federal investment in afterschool programs grow.
- 🔔 More than eight in ten (82 percent) say that people in their communities would like to see the state investment in afterschool programs grow.

- 🔔 Nearly seven in eight (86 percent) say they would be concerned or very concerned if existing programs had to close their doors.

Despite federal freezes and cuts to afterschool investment and limited state support, several Rhode Island municipal governments are making investments in afterschool. However, the growth of investments at the local level has been modest.

- 🔔 About six in ten municipalities (61 percent) include spending on afterschool programs in their budgets, according to the survey.
- 🔔 Less than half of municipal leaders (46 percent) say spending on afterschool programs has increased over the past five years in their municipal budgets.

Afterschool Viewed as Key Academic Support

Evidence suggests that the hours after school are a critical time for youth to either engage in positive activities that will guide them toward future success or divert them down a path that could lead to negative outcomes. Quality afterschool programs in Rhode Island and across the country are helping students improve academic and behavioral outcomes in school. Teachers, parents and students report increases in grades, test scores, completed homework, attendance, self-esteem and aspirations for higher education and careers. Municipal leaders in Rhode Island believe academic support is important and support efforts to include afterschool in statewide education reform.

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- 🔔 Seven in eight Rhode Island municipal leaders (87 percent) agree that providing academic support is an important or very important reason to allocate resources to afterschool programs.
- 🔔 Nearly seven in eight (85 percent) agree that “afterschool programs have the potential to positively impact public education by demonstrating that expanded learning time linked to the school day curriculum, designed to engage youth in hands-on learning opportunities, and aligned with community resources contributes significantly to student success.”

- 🔔 Nearly seven in eight respondents (86 percent) strongly or somewhat support the inclusion of afterschool as a component of education funding in the establishment of a Permanent Education Foundation Aid Formula. Currently, a joint legislative committee is exploring ways to revamp Rhode Island's education funding formula. Afterschool programs could be included in the funding equation.

Municipal Leaders Join the Charge to Afterschool for All

Examining the findings from this survey in the context of other research demonstrates that Rhode Island's municipal leaders are right to be concerned about the availability of afterschool programs across the state. According to *America After 3 PM*, the Afterschool Alliance's groundbreaking household survey of Americans' views on afterschool, more than 30,000 Rhode Island youth (17 percent) are responsible for taking care of themselves in the hours after school. Those are regarded as the most dangerous hours for youth, because it is then that they are most likely to be perpetrators or victims of crime or engage in drinking, drug use or sexual activity. Afterschool programs not only keep kids safe from these dangerous activities, but also engage youth in learning opportunities and connect them with caring adults and mentors. That is almost certainly why 82 percent of Rhode Island parents support the creation of afterschool programs and 84 percent say they would utilize such a program for their child if one were available (*Time Well Spent*, Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance, 2004).

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Public support for afterschool programs is overwhelming. According to a November 2006 poll conducted for the Afterschool Alliance, eight in ten Americans believe there should be some type of organized activity or safe place for children and teens to go after the school day that provides opportunities for them to learn. According to *Time Well Spent*, in Rhode Island the support for this idea among parents is nearly universal – 96 percent of parents are in favor of such activities for children and teens. Nationally, more than seven in ten voters want elected officials at all levels -- federal, state and local -- to increase funding for afterschool and Rhode Island parents support both a dedicated state tax (75 percent) and an increase in federal taxes (69 percent) to fund afterschool.

That public backing notwithstanding, the federal investment in afterschool has been eroding for years. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, the only

federal funding stream dedicated to afterschool, has been cut by \$20 million since 2002 and Rhode Island has felt the sting of that cut. In the past four rounds of 21st CCLC grant funding, the Rhode Island Department of Education has been able to fund only half of the requests for 21st CCLC grants. As this survey shows, many Rhode Island municipalities have increased their funding for afterschool, but cities and towns cannot be expected to carry the full burden of funding afterschool.

It is clear that voters, parents and community leaders across Rhode Island want afterschool programs available for all who want and need them. Seventy opinion-leading individuals and organizations from Rhode Island have joined *Afterschool for All: Project 2010*, including Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline, Pawtucket Mayor James E. Doyle, Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian, Woonsocket Mayor Susan D. Menard, the United Way of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance and the YMCA of Greater Rhode Island.

Federal lawmakers in Rhode Island are also showing their support for afterschool. Newly-elected Senator Sheldon Whitehouse recently joined Senator Jack Reed on the Senate Afterschool Caucus – giving Rhode Island full representation in the House and Senate Afterschool Caucuses. Representatives Patrick Kennedy and James Langevin are members of the House Afterschool Caucus.

From this new Afterschool Alliance survey of Rhode Island municipal leaders, it is clear that leaders believe in the value of afterschool and know that their communities want more such programs. The voices of these municipal leaders can be a powerful addition to the chorus of voices, across Rhode Island, the New England region and the country, who are calling for afterschool for all.



Acknowledgments

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