



# Executive Summary



Afterschool Alliance

## Kids on the Move: Afterschool Programs Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Afterschool programs continue to make advances when it comes to providing students with nutritious foods, keeping them physically fit and promoting health. Such programs have great potential to help prevent obesity and instill lifelong healthy habits, serving more than 10 million children and youth across America, with more than 19 million more who would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them.<sup>1</sup> This *America After 3PM* special report, “Moving Toward a Healthier Nation: Afterschool Programs Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Among Our Nation’s Youth,” is based on survey responses collected for the third edition of *America After 3PM*, which covers data from the past decade that detail how children and youth spend the hours between 3 and 6 p.m.

This special report concentrates on parents’ reports of efforts made by afterschool programs to help improve the health and physical fitness of children and youth around the country. It also describes areas where afterschool programs can better meet the needs of students and families when it comes to health and wellness and outlines steps afterschool programs can take to help make positive change for students’ overall health.

The findings in this report are based on survey responses from parents in 2014, during which 30,720 households were screened nationally and 13,709 households completed in-depth interviews. Below are key findings and recommendations from the report:<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Surveys were completed through an online survey using a blend of national consumer panels. All survey participants live in the U.S. and are guardians of a school-age child living in their household. *America After 3PM* was first conducted in 2004, with follow-up surveys in 2009 and 2014. All findings included in the executive summary are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. A detailed description of *America After 3PM*’s survey methodology can be found in *America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand*, available at: [http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM\\_National\\_Report.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM_National_Report.pdf).

## Section 1: Afterschool Programs Meeting Parents' Expectations Around Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

### Healthy Eating Findings:

- **Parents look to afterschool programs to provide healthy foods to children during the out-of-school time hours.** More than 7 in 10 parents surveyed agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals.
- **Most afterschool programs offer children meals or snacks and overwhelmingly, parents with a child in those afterschool programs are satisfied that the food is healthy.** Seventy-two percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program say that their program offers beverages, snacks and/or meals. This group of parents overwhelmingly reports that they are satisfied that their program's food is healthy.
- **Providing healthy food during afterschool programs is especially important to low-income families.** Compared with higher-income parents, low-income parents are more likely to agree that afterschool programs have a responsibility to provide healthy food to their students and are more likely to say that providing healthy food was an important factor when selecting an afterschool program.



- **The availability of healthy foods in afterschool programs is of particular importance to parents of younger children compared with parents of older youth.** Approximately 2 in 3 parents of younger children say that providing healthy snacks or meals in an afterschool program was very important in selecting their child's afterschool program, compared with fewer than 6 in 10 parents of older youth.

### Physical Activity Findings:

- **Parents want afterschool programs to help keep their children physically active.** Eight in 10 parents surveyed agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active.
- **Today, more parents agree that afterschool programs keep kids physically active compared to five years ago.** Eighty percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program say that their afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity and most parents report satisfaction with the opportunities for physical activity. In 2009, 76 percent of parents agreed that, "Afterschool programs offer my children opportunities to be physically active."
- **Parents report that the duration and intensity of the physical activity their children receive in afterschool programs varies.** Sixty-seven percent of parents say that their child gets at least 30 minutes of physical activity during a typical day in their afterschool program and 27 percent report that their child engages in at



least 60 minutes. Eighty-eight percent of parents believe that at least some of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous, but only 43 percent believe that all or most of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous.

- **Parents of younger children feel more strongly about the role afterschool programs play in keeping children physically active than parents of older youth.** More than 8 in 10 parents of younger children agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active, compared with approximately 3 in 4 parents of older youth.

### *Perspectives from African-American and Hispanic Parents:*

- **The availability of food that is healthy and opportunities for physical activity are especially important to African-American and Hispanic parents.** Two out of 3 African-American parents and Hispanic parents say that providing healthy food during an afterschool program was very important in choosing their child's afterschool program, compared with just over half of white parents. When asked about opportunities for physical activity, 7 in 10 African-American parents and Hispanic parents report that it was very important when selecting their child's afterschool program.



### *Section 2: Areas of Improvement for the Afterschool Field*

- **Many parents are unaware that standards for healthy eating and physical activity exist in afterschool programs.** Approximately 4 in 10 parents remain unaware that recommended standards for healthy eating and physical activity exist.
- **More work can be done to increase the healthy food options and physical activity in afterschool programs.** Taking into account all parents with a child in an afterschool program, slightly more than half say that their child's afterschool program offers snacks that include healthy foods. When asked about the duration and intensity of their child's physical activity, less than 3 in 10 parents report their child meets the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity while in an afterschool program and 4 in 10 parents say that all or most of that physical activity is moderate to vigorous.
- **Older youth are less likely than younger children to receive food in their afterschool program, and they are also less likely to be physically active in their program.** One-third of parents of older youth report that their child does not receive snacks or meals at their afterschool program, 13 percentage points higher than parents of younger children, and 21 percent of parents of older youth say that their afterschool program does not offer physical activity, compared to 12 percent of younger children.

- **When parents do not have a child in an afterschool program, they are less aware of the positive role programs can play to help keep children healthy and active.** There is room to improve perceptions of programs among parents who do not have a child in a program. For example, while 75 percent of parents of participants agree that afterschool programs provide children healthy foods, only 59 percent of parents of nonparticipants agree.

### Section 3: Recommendations

- **Increase awareness of the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards.** Greater awareness of the HEPA standards can increase parent expectations of afterschool programs, leading in turn to programs further improving the quality of their food and physical activity offerings. An increased awareness of the standards also has the ability to empower parents to become health and wellness advocates.
- **Highlight the role that afterschool programs can play in promoting students' health and wellness.** Cultivating awareness of the variety of supports that afterschool programs offer can help parents see programs as an important part of the solution to keep students healthy and active. Among parents who do not have a child in a program, this increased awareness can positively influence their decision regarding enrollment and accessing the services that afterschool programs provide.
- **Ensure afterschool program providers are aware of existing policies and programs that offer support for creating a healthier afterschool environment.** Increased outreach efforts to the afterschool field are necessary to ensure that all program providers are aware of the available supports that may help them better serve students in their programs.
- **Increase investment in afterschool programs.** Federal, state and local entities, as well as the private sector, will need to come together and lend their support to programs through increased investment, partnerships and commitment to help afterschool programs meet the growing demand for services and better serve their students—in particular reaching students living in higher-need communities—when it comes to healthy eating and physical activity.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs.  
More information is available at [afterschoolalliance.org](http://afterschoolalliance.org)