



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



Afterschool Alliance



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# Introduction

A decade ago, 6.5 million children were in an afterschool program.<sup>ii</sup> Today, that number has reached more than 10 million.<sup>ii</sup> Concurrently, afterschool programs have continued to grow in sophistication, increase their offerings and improve quality.<sup>iii</sup> As the role of afterschool programs has evolved from primarily providing a safe and supervised environment to a resource that provides a host of supports for their students, programs have become valuable partners in helping students reach their full potential in school, career and life.

This convergence of factors has resulted in students and their families increasingly taking advantage of the multitude of benefits offered by afterschool programs, such as academic enrichment, hands-on learning, and caring and supportive mentors. Afterschool programs have also become a promising approach to help improve the health and wellness of students, from providing students with access to nutritious foods to promoting healthy habits to keeping students physically fit.<sup>iv</sup>

The focus of this *America After 3PM* special report, “Kids on the Move: Afterschool Programs Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity,” is on the role that afterschool programs are playing to support the health and wellness of their students. More specifically, this report will cover parents’ expectations of afterschool programs to keep their child healthy and active, how satisfied parents are with the food and physical activity provided in their child’s afterschool program, and existing opportunities to improve afterschool programs’ nutritional and physical activity offerings. Given the high number of students in the U.S. who are living in households where consistent access to healthy food is a challenge, who are overweight or obese, or who are not getting the recommended amount of daily physical activity, this report also outlines strategies to help afterschool programs make even greater strides to address the health and wellness needs of their students and help our nation’s children get healthy, stay healthy and lead healthier lives.

## A Closer Look Inside Afterschool

From the ringing of the last school bell until 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, the YMCA of Columbia, located in Columbia, South Carolina, provides close to 600 students in their community—more than 60 percent of whom qualify for federal free or reduced price lunch—with a safe environment and supportive mentors. Students in the program receive healthy snacks, participate in physical activities, receive homework help and take part in STEM learning opportunities including building pinball machines, rockets and balloon-powered cars.

Students’ health and wellness are core concerns for the YMCA of Columbia, with afterschool programs in the area offering a diverse mix of physical activity opportunities, such as yoga, dance, swim, physical fitness games and basketball tournaments that include parent and student teams. In addition to providing a nutritious snack each day, program staff help students learn about nutritional information and developing healthy eating habits, share ideas for healthy snacks and teach the importance of keeping active.

Partnering with the University of South Carolina, the YMCA of Columbia has been working since 2011 to meet the Healthy Eating Physical Activity Standards (HEPA) and an evaluation of the programs shows much progress has been made (see Section 3 to learn more about the HEPA Standards). The evaluation found that from 2012 to 2013, the number of servings of fruits or vegetables at the programs increased from one-tenth of a serving to five servings per week, programs stopped serving candy and sugar-sweetened beverages, and the percentage of students meeting the programs’ physical activity goal increased.

<sup>i</sup> In the *America After 3PM* survey questionnaire, “afterschool program” was defined 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 such as sports, special lessons, or hobby clubs, and different from child care facilities that provide supervision but not enrichment.”





# Key Findings

Afterschool programs continue to make advances when it comes to providing students with nutritious foods, keeping students 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, “Kids on the Move: Afterschool Programs Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity,” is based on survey responses collected for the third edition of *America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand*, which was released in October 2014. *America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand* covers 10 years of data detailing how children and youth spend the hours between 3 and 6 p.m., including determining the number of children who are able to take part in an afterschool program, the number of children who would participate in an afterschool program if one were available to them, and the number of children who are alone and unsupervised in the hours after school.

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 we can take as a nation to help make positive change for students’ overall health.

Section 1 of this special report, “Afterschool Programs Meeting Parents’ Expectations around Healthy Eating and Physical Activity,” investigates parents’ expectations of afterschool programs around healthy eating and physical activity, and discusses how afterschool programs are rising to meet these expectations. Particular attention is paid to low-income families and African-American and Hispanic families, as well as differences between afterschool programs serving older youth versus younger children. Section 2, “Areas of Improvement for the Afterschool Field,” examines parents’ answers covered in the first section, analyzing and highlighting areas where—based on parents’ surveyed—the afterschool field can take steps to expand and make progress on helping keep students healthy and active. The final section, “Recommendations,” proposes ideas to help move the nation toward becoming a healthier and happier society.

The findings in this report are based on survey responses from parents, during which 30,720 households were screened nationally, and 13,709 households completed in-depth interviews 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.<sup>2</sup> Below are key findings and recommendations from the report:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> All comparisons included in the key findings section are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

## 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 (71 percent) agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals. Parents of children in an afterschool program are even more likely to agree (77 percent).
- **Most afterschool programs offer children meals or snacks and overwhelmingly, parents with a child in those programs are satisfied that the food is healthy.** Seventy-two percent of parents with a child in an afterschool programs say that their program offers beverages, snacks and/or meals. Among this group of parents, they overwhelmingly report that their afterschool program serves snacks that include healthy foods (72 percent) and that they are satisfied that the food served is healthy (81 percent). Close to half of these parents (48 percent) are “extremely satisfied,” one-third of parents are “satisfied” and less than 1 in 10 parents (7 percent) report that they are not satisfied.
- **Providing healthy food in an afterschool program 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 also more likely to say that providing healthy food was an important factor when selecting an afterschool program. Seventy-four percent of low-income parents agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals compared to 69 percent of higher-income parents. Among parents who have a child in an afterschool program, 67 percent of low-income parents say that a program offering healthy snacks and/or meals was very important in the selection of their child’s afterschool program, compared to 58 percent of higher-income parents.
- **The availability of healthy foods in afterschool programs is of particular importance to parents of younger children compared with parents of older youth.** While available nutritious food in the hours after school is important to most parents, 76 percent of parents of younger children—children in kindergarten through fifth grade—agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy foods, compared to 65 percent of parents of older youth—students in grades six through 12. Additionally, 65 percent of 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 57 percent of parents of older youth.

Younger children are also more likely than older youth to receive food at their afterschool program. Seventy-eight percent of parents of younger children say that their child’s afterschool program provides food, compared to 62 percent of parents of older youth, a difference of 16 percentage points.







### *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 and 8 in 10 agree that afterschool programs should be a fun experience for children. Parents with a child in an afterschool program are even more likely to agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active (84 percent). While opportunities for physical activity in an afterschool program were not among the top-tier reasons why parents selected an afterschool program, 68 percent of parents report that opportunities for physical activity were very important in their decision to select their child's primary afterschool program.
- **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. In 2009, 76 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreed with the statement, "Afterschool programs offer my children opportunities to be physically active." Parents surveyed also report that they are satisfied with the physical activity at their child's afterschool program. Among parents who answered that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity, 84 percent are satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered and 84 percent are satisfied with the variety of physical activity offered.
- **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. When asked about the intensity of their child's physical activity at the afterschool program, while 88 percent of parents believe that at least some of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous, only 43 percent believe that all or most of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous.
- **Low-income families report that afterschool programs are keeping their children active.** Most low-income parents believe that afterschool programs should contribute to keeping children physically active, with approximately 8 in 10 parents (79 percent) agreeing that afterschool programs should offer children opportunities for physical activity. Seventy-nine percent of low-income parents report that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity, 78 percent are satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered and 79 percent are satisfied with the variety of physical activity offered.
- **Parents of younger children feel more strongly about the role afterschool programs play in keeping students physically active than parents of older youth.** More than 8 in 10 parents of younger children (82 percent) agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active, with more than half (51 percent) completely agreeing. Slightly more than 3 in 4 parents of older youth (77 percent) agree, a five percentage point difference.

## *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 (67 percent) and Hispanic parents (66 percent) say that providing healthy snacks and/or meals during an afterschool program was very important in choosing their child's afterschool program, compared with just over half of white parents (55 percent). When asking parents overall if afterschool programs should provide healthy food options, 77 percent of African-American parents agree, as did 69 percent of Hispanic parents.

Additionally, 7 in 10 African-American parents (71 percent) and Hispanic parents (71 percent) report that physical activity opportunities were very important when selecting their child's afterschool program. More than 8 in 10 African-American parents (82 percent) and Hispanic parents (82 percent) agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active.

## **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.** Although more than half of parents with a child in an afterschool program report that they are aware that there are recommended standards for physical activity (56 percent), as well as standards for the types of food and beverages that are considered healthy and should be served in an afterschool program (64 percent), approximately 4 in 10 parents remain unaware that recommended standards for healthy eating (36 percent) and physical activity (44 percent) exist.

- **More work can be done to increase the healthy food options and physical activity in afterschool programs.** Parent satisfaction with opportunities for physical activity and the nutritious snacks and meals in their child's afterschool program is high; however, there is more work to be done to increase healthy food options and physical activity in afterschool programs. For instance, when taking into account all parents with a child in an afterschool program, slightly more than half (52 percent) say that their child's afterschool program offers snacks that include healthy foods. When asked specific questions about the duration and intensity of their child's physical activity, less than 3 in 10 parents (27 percent) say that while in an afterschool program, their child meets the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity and only 4 in 10 parents (43 percent) say that all or most of the physical activity provided in the program 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 students (20 percent), and 21 percent of parents of older youth say that their afterschool program does not offer physical activity, compared to 12 percent of younger students, a 9 percentage point difference.

- **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.** Overall, parents agree that afterschool programs can provide opportunities for physical activity and access to nutritious food. However, there is room to improve parents' perceptions of programs, especially among parents who do not have a child in a program. For example, while 85 percent of parents of participants agree that afterschool programs offer children opportunities to be physically active, 73 percent of parents of nonparticipants agree, a 12 percentage point difference. When asked about afterschool programs providing children healthy beverages, snacks and meals, while 75 percent of parents of participants agree, 59 percent of parents of nonparticipants agree, a difference of 16 percentage points.

### Section 3: Recommendations

- **Increase awareness of the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards.** Based on parents' answers regarding awareness of existing standards for the food and physical activity in afterschool programs, additional measures should be taken to increase parents' knowledge of the standards. Increasing awareness of the HEPA standards holds the potential to have multiple positive effects. Greater knowledge of the standards can lead to higher parent expectations of afterschool programs, which can in turn lead to afterschool programs taking further steps to improve the quality of their food offerings and opportunities for physical activity. 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 opportunities for physical activity and the healthy snacks and meals offered at many afterschool programs can help parents see afterschool programs as an important part of the solution to keep children healthy and active. Among parents of nonparticipants in particular, this increased awareness holds the potential to positively influence their decision to enroll their child in a program, and therefore have access to the supports that afterschool programs provide.
- **Ensure that afterschool program providers are aware of existing policies and programs that offer support for creating a healthier after school 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 the students in their programs. For example, the At-Risk



Afterschool Meals Program—offered through the Department of Agriculture’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)—provides afterschool programs serving low-income communities with federal funding to serve snacks and meals during the out-of-school-time hours.

- **Increase investment in afterschool programs.** As the number of children in afterschool programs and the demand for afterschool programs continues to grow, increased investments in programs are crucial in order for afterschool programs to meet the rising need for programs, as well as improve their food and physical activity offerings. Federal, state and local entities and the private sector must come together and lend their support to programs through increased investment, partnerships and commitment to help afterschool programs better serve their students when it comes to healthy eating and physical activity. A greater investment in afterschool programs also has the ability to provide vital supports to higher-needs communities, where the demand for programs is greatest.





## Section 1:

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

Over the past 10 years, the U.S. has experienced a significant growth in the overall demand for afterschool programs—both participation in and unmet demand for programs—that provide a safe and supervised environment, academically enriching activities that excite and engage students in learning, opportunities for physical activity, snacks and beverages and peace of mind to working parents. In 2004, the first edition of *America After 3PM* found that 6.5 million children were enrolled in an afterschool program and parents of 15.3 million children would have enrolled their child in a program if one were available to them. Today, more than 10 million children are in an afterschool program and parents of more than 19 million children would sign their child up for a program if there were one available.<sup>vi</sup>

As the demand for afterschool programs rises and the need for additional strategies to address obesity and food insecurity among children persists, there is an enormous opportunity for afterschool programs to implement measures that can support the health and wellness of their students. The 2009 edition of *America After 3PM* asked very few questions pertaining to healthy eating and physical activity. For this iteration of *America After 3PM*, it was important to have a greater focus on healthy eating and physical activity in the face of national concerns surrounding children's health and wellness. The 2014 *America After 3PM* included additional questions about food and physical activity to provide a more in-depth look at the state of healthy eating and physical activity in afterschool programs, as well as what parents want from their afterschool programs.

## Afterschool and Healthy Eating

Access to healthy foods and the consumption of healthy foods are key components of a healthier lifestyle for children. While providing a snack or meal is a part of many afterschool programs, recent research has found that afterschool programs can effectively promote healthfulness among children by offering nutritious beverages and snacks.<sup>vii</sup> To uncover the extent to which afterschool programs overall are helping to provide their students healthy food options, as well as to better understand what parents' expectations are of afterschool programs when it comes to healthy eating, the 2014 edition of *America After 3PM* asked parents a range of questions about the provision of healthy foods in the after school hours.



**Parents look to afterschool programs to provide healthy foods to children during the out-of-school time hours.**

*America After 3PM* found that today, afterschool programs are not only viewed as a safe and supervised environment for children, but parents look to programs to provide a multitude of supports to children in the programs, including access to nutritious food. More than 7 in 10 parents surveyed (71 percent) agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals.

Parents of children in an afterschool program are even more likely to agree that programs should provide healthy food to their students. Among parents with a child in an afterschool program, more than 3 in 4 parents (77 percent) agree that afterschool programs should provide food and beverages that are healthy to children. Furthermore, 62 percent of parents report that access to healthy food and beverages in their child's afterschool program was a very important factor in their selection of the program.

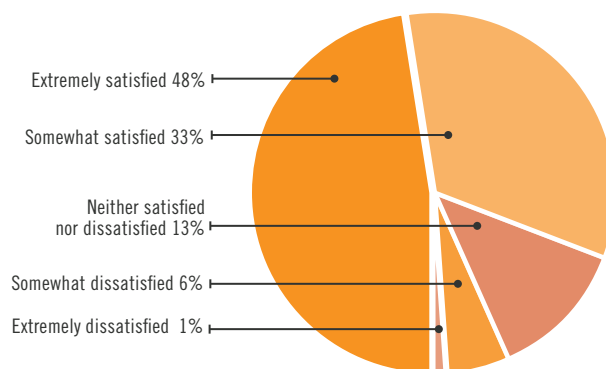
**77% of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals.**

**Most afterschool programs offer children meals or snacks and overwhelmingly, parents with a child in an afterschool program are satisfied that the food is healthy.**

Determining if afterschool programs are offering food to their students and how satisfied parents are that the food is healthy are additional answers the 2014 edition of *America After 3PM* sought to find. When asked if their child's afterschool program offers beverages, snacks and/or meals, 72 percent of parents reported in the affirmative. These parents were asked a follow-up question regarding if the food and beverages served by the afterschool program were healthy, and more than 7 in 10 parents (72 percent) say that their child's afterschool program provides snacks that include healthy foods.<sup>4,5</sup>

How satisfied are you with the snacks and/or meals that are healthy in your child's afterschool program?

(Among respondents whose afterschool program offers beverages, snacks and/or meals)



*America After 3PM* also assessed parent satisfaction with the food and that the food at their child's afterschool program was healthy and found high levels of satisfaction with both. Among parents who answered that their child's afterschool program offers beverages, snacks and/or meals, 84 percent say that they are satisfied with the program's food and 81 percent are satisfied that the snacks and/or meals are healthy. Examining the level of satisfaction with afterschool programs providing food options that are healthy, close to half of parents (48 percent) are "extremely satisfied," one-third of parents are "satisfied" and less than 1 in 10 parents (7 percent) report that they are not satisfied.

<sup>4</sup> Healthy foods are described as "those that are minimally processed foods made with whole grains and heart healthy fats or oils and without added sugar or trans fats; fruits and vegetables; beverages made without added sugar."

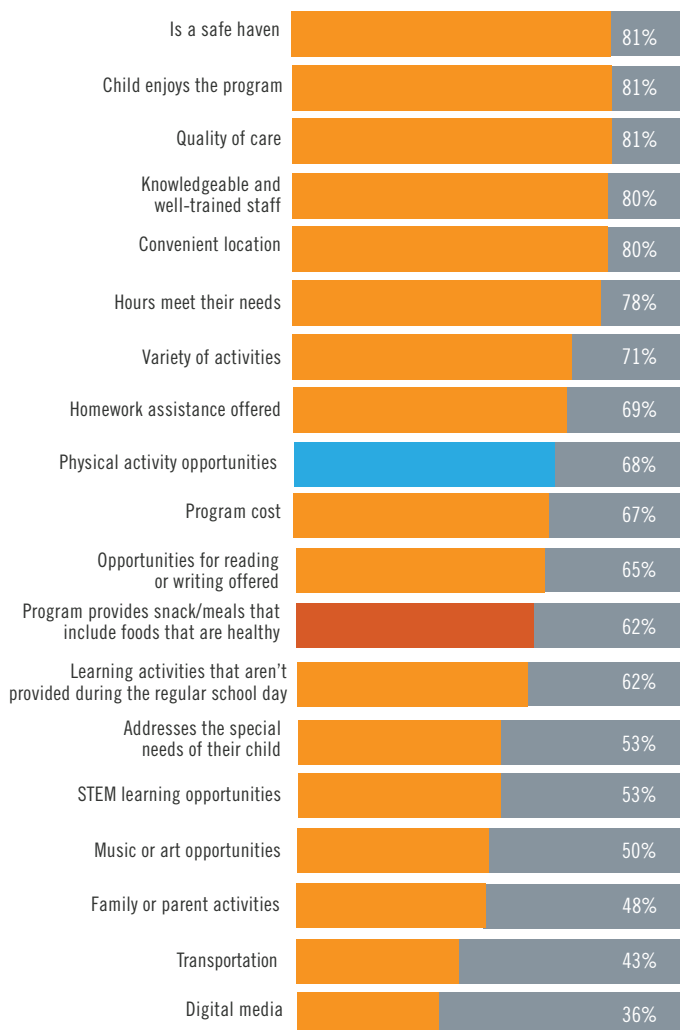
<sup>5</sup> Parents' responses should be interpreted with caution, as they may be parents' perceptions of what takes place in their child's afterschool program, as well as draws on parents' own understanding of what constitutes healthy eating or moderate/intense physical activity.

**Providing healthy food in an afterschool program is especially important to low-income families.**

In 2013, it was estimated that 8.6 million children lived in a household where at least one child did not receive enough nutritious food at some point during the year.<sup>viii</sup> As might be expected, the percentage of households with food-insecure children was higher for lower-income households, specifically those with an income level below 185 percent of the poverty line—22 percent versus 4 percent of households above 185 percent of the poverty line.<sup>ix</sup> Limited access to affordable, nutritious food is another issue families living in low-income communities may face.<sup>x</sup> With close to 10 million children from low-income families that would attend programs if one were available to them, afterschool programs can be an integral partner in the effort to ensure that children in need have access to food, including food that is healthy, during the hours after school.<sup>xi</sup>

When comparing responses from low-income and higher-income parents, the provision of food in an afterschool program, in particular healthy food, is of more importance to low-income parents than higher-income parents. For example, low-income parents are more likely to agree that afterschool programs have a responsibility to provide healthy food to their students. Close to 3 in 4 low-income parents (74 percent) agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals, compared to 69 percent of higher-income parents.<sup>\*\*</sup>

Percentage of parents that answered that these reasons were very important in selecting their child's afterschool program.



**74% of low-income parents agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals.**

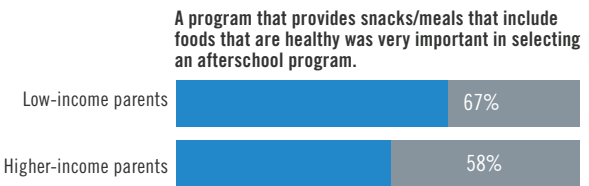
<sup>\*\*</sup> Denotes statistical significance at the 95 percent confidence level.

A lack of healthy food options in an afterschool program is also more of a deterrent for low-income parents than higher-income parents when it comes to enrolling their child in a program. Among parents whose child is not enrolled in an afterschool program, 1 in 3 low-income parents report that afterschool programs offering unhealthy beverages, snacks and/or meals was an important reason why they did not enroll their child in an afterschool program compared to 1 in 4 higher-income parents.\*\*

Looking at parents who have a child in an afterschool program, a program providing food was a more important factor when selecting a program for low-income parents compared to higher-income parents. A program offering snacks and/or meals was very important to 62 percent of low-income parents versus 51 percent of their higher-income counterparts.\*\* When asked about the importance of providing snacks and/or meals that are healthy, more than 2 in 3 low-income parents (67 percent) say that it was very important when selecting their child’s afterschool program, compared to 58 percent of higher-income parents.\*\*

Based on parent responses, afterschool programs are meeting the needs of most low-income families when it comes to providing their children with healthy snacks and/or meals during the after school hours. When asked about the level of satisfaction with their child’s afterschool program’s snacks and/or meals that include foods that are healthy, close to 3 in 4 low-income parents (74 percent) report that they are satisfied.

**The availability of healthy foods in afterschool programs is of particular importance to parents of younger children compared with parents of older youth.**



While available nutritious food in the hours after school is important to most parents, taking a closer look at the responses of parents with a younger child in an afterschool program compared to those of parents with an older child, we find that providing healthy food in an afterschool program is of more importance to parents of younger children than to parents of older youth. More than 3 in 4 parents of younger children (76 percent)—children in kindergarten through fifth grade—agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy foods\*\* and close to 2 in 3 (65 percent) say that a program providing healthy snacks or meals was very important in selecting their child’s afterschool program.\*\* Among parents of older youth—students in grades six through 12—approximately 2 in 3 (65 percent) believe that afterschool programs should provide healthy foods and 3 in 5 (57 percent) say that healthy snacks or meals were very important when selecting their program.

Younger children are also more likely than older youth to receive food at their afterschool program. Close to 8 in 10 parents of younger children (78 percent) say that their child’s afterschool program provides food, compared to just over 6 in 10 parents of older youth (62 percent), a difference of 16 percentage points.\*\* Parents of younger children are also more satisfied with the food, as well as the healthfulness of the food, when comparing their answers to parents of older youth. Most parents of younger children are satisfied with both the food (79 percent)\*\* and the healthfulness of the food (77 percent)\*\* in their child’s afterschool program, more so than parents of older children—69 percent are satisfied with snacks and/or meals and 69 percent are satisfied with snacks and/or meals that include foods that are healthy.



## Afterschool and Physical Activity

Health and wellness initiatives, such as the First Lady’s Let’s Move! campaign<sup>xii</sup> and Voices for Healthy Kids<sup>xiii</sup>, a joint initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association, emphasize physical activity as an integral component of keeping children healthy. Despite the importance of physical activity, the “2014 United States Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth” by the National Physical Activity Plan Alliance gave a “D-” when analyzing the percentage of children taking part in at least 60 minutes of mostly moderate to vigorous physical activity at least five days per week and gave physical activity in schools a “C-.”<sup>6xiv</sup> Children need additional opportunities to play and be active, and afterschool programs can be a source of support in this area. This year, to assess to what extent afterschool programs are keeping kids active, *America After 3PM* asked several questions about opportunities for physical activity in afterschool, the duration and intensity of this physical activity, and parents’ expectations for afterschool programs to provide physical activity opportunities.



### Parents want afterschool programs to help keep their children physically active.

Overwhelmingly, parents agree that afterschool programs should be a place where children can have fun and take part in physical activities. Eight in 10 parents surveyed agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active and 8 in 10 agree that afterschool programs should be a fun experience for children. Additionally, although opportunities for physical activity in an afterschool program were not among the top-tier reasons why parents selected an afterschool program, 68 percent of parents report that opportunities for physical activity were very important in their decision to select their child’s primary afterschool program. An overwhelming majority of parents also agree that afterschool programs have the ability to keep children physically active, where 3 in 4 parents surveyed agree that children can have opportunities for physical activity in afterschool programs.

More than 8 in 10 parents with a child in an afterschool program agree that afterschool programs offer children opportunities to be physically active.



Similar to the findings in the healthy eating section above, a higher percentage of parents with a child in an afterschool program agree that programs can and should play a role to keep children physically active. Among parents with a child in an afterschool program, 84 percent agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active and 85 percent agree that afterschool programs can provide opportunities to be physically active.

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<sup>6</sup> The grade for physical activity in schools is based on high school students participating in physical education classes.

## Parents agree that afterschool programs are keeping kids physically active.

According to parents surveyed with a child in an afterschool program, afterschool programs provide opportunities for physical activity. Moreover, parents today are more likely to agree that afterschool programs keep children active than they did five years ago. When asked if their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity, 80 percent of parents answered in the affirmative. In 2009, 76 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program agreed with the statement, "Afterschool programs offer my children opportunities to be physically active."<sup>7</sup>

Parents are also satisfied with the physical activity at their child's afterschool program. Among parents who answered that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity, 84 percent are satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered and 84 percent are satisfied with the variety of physical activity offered. Half of parents responded that they are "extremely satisfied" with the amount of physical activity offered and close to half (49 percent) are "extremely satisfied" with the variety of physical activity offered.

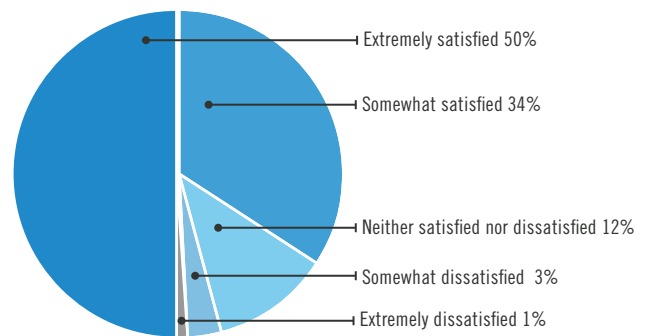
### What does physical activity look like in afterschool programs?

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) developed the "Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans" to convey the importance of physical activity on one's health and to provide guidance on how to stay physically active.<sup>xv</sup> One of the key guidelines from the report is that youth ages 6 to 17 should engage in at least 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous exercise. Based on parents' responses, their children are exercising daily in their afterschool programs, and a fair amount of the exercise is moderate to vigorous. Overall, however, the amount of time spent being physically active and the intensity of that activity within afterschool programs does not meet HHS's recommended daily guidelines.

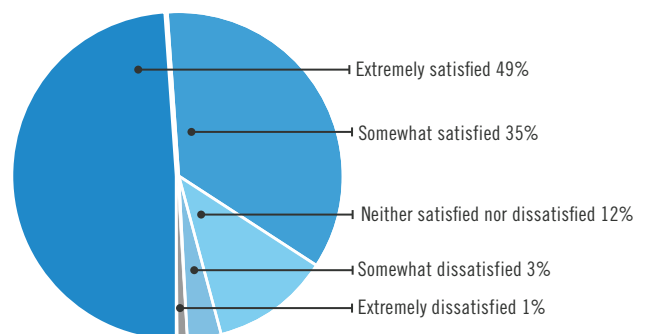
While afterschool programs are just one of the many settings students can be active and take part in activities that will help them reach HHS's recommended daily guidelines, they are a valuable resource in the face of decreasing opportunities for physical activity in other situations. For example, a survey of school administrators found that 44 percent of administrators reported having had to reduce time for physical education in their schools in order to increase time for academics.<sup>xvi</sup>

How satisfied are you with:  
(Among parents whose child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity)

The amount of physical activity



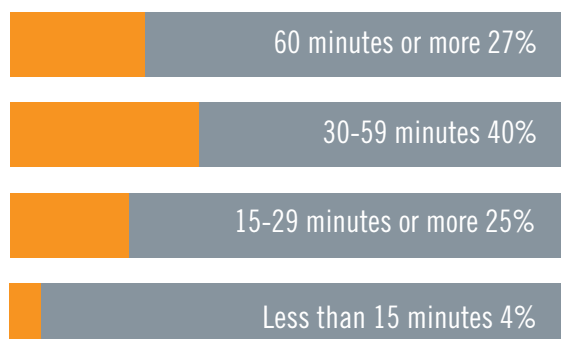
The variety of physical activity offered:



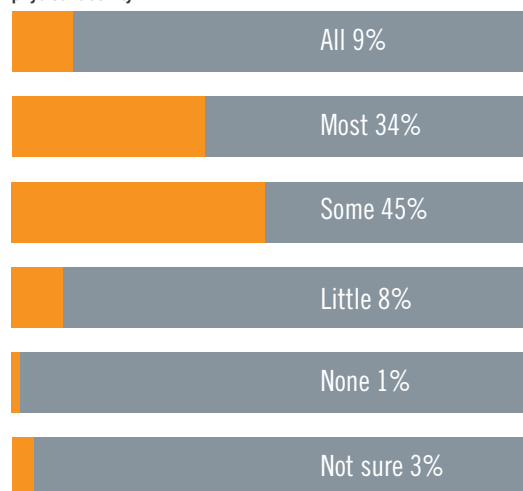
<sup>7</sup> In 2009, the question regarding opportunities for physical activity was asked in a different format from 2014. In 2009, parents with a child in an afterschool program were asked, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding afterschool programs? Afterschool programs offer my children opportunities to be physically active." In 2014, parents with a child in an afterschool program were asked, "Does the afterschool program attended by your child offer...opportunities for physical activity?"

Although more than 2 out of 3 parents (67 percent) believe that their child gets at least 30 minutes of physical activity during a typical afternoon in their afterschool program, only 27 percent of parents report that their child meets the recommended guideline and engages in at least 60 minutes of physical activity while at the program. When asked about the intensity of their child's physical exercise in afterschool, 88 percent of parents believe that at least some of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous and less than 1 in 10 parents (9 percent) report that little to none of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous. Just 43 percent of parents believe that all or most of the physical activity is moderate to vigorous.<sup>8</sup>

On a typical day in their afterschool program, how many minutes of physical activity does your child get?



How much of the physical activity would you say is moderate to vigorous physical activity?



### How are afterschool programs meeting the needs of low-income families when it comes to keeping children active?

Most low-income parents believe that afterschool programs should contribute to keeping children physically active, with approximately 8 in 10 parents (79 percent) agreeing that afterschool programs should offer children opportunities for physical activity. Low-income parents are also more likely than higher-income parents to say that chances for their child to be physically active were extremely important in their selection of an afterschool program (48 percent versus 39 percent).<sup>\*\*</sup> On a similar note, looking at parents whose child is not enrolled in an afterschool program, a lack of opportunities for children to be physically active factored into low-income parents' decision not to enroll their child in a program more so than higher-income parents (35 percent versus 27 percent).<sup>\*\*</sup>

*America After 3PM* finds that afterschool programs are helping keep children from low-income families active and most low-income parents are satisfied with the physical activities provided by programs. Approximately 8 in 10 low-income parents (79 percent) report that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity, 78 percent are satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered and 79 percent are satisfied with the variety of physical activity offered.

<sup>8</sup> Use caution when accounting for parents' answers regarding the amount of time their children are physically active in their afterschool program and the intensity of that physical activity. Parents' sources of information may be their perceptions of what takes place in an afterschool program, their child or what the afterschool program staff relays to them. Additionally, interpretation of the question would draw on parents' own understanding of what constitutes moderate or intense physical activity, as a definition of "moderate" or "intense" was not provided in the survey.



## Physical activity for older youth versus younger children.

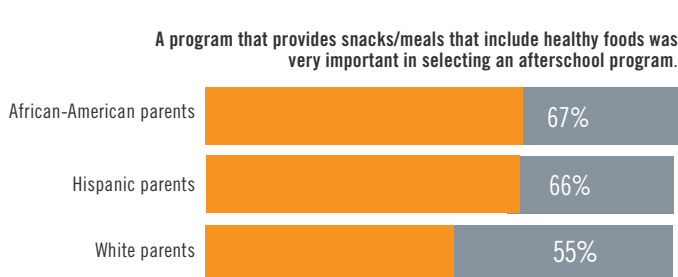
While most parents want afterschool programs to help keep children physically active, parents of younger children feel more strongly about the role of afterschool programs play than parents of older youth. More than 8 in 10 parents of younger children (82 percent) agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active, with more than half (51 percent) completely agreeing, compared with 77 percent of parents of older youth.\*\*

Furthermore, although most children have opportunities for physical activity in their afterschool program, in examining differences by age group, *America After 3PM* finds that younger children are more likely than older youth to have opportunities for physical activity. Approximately 5 in 6 parents (84 percent) of children in kindergarten through fifth grade say that their child has opportunities for physical activity in afterschool, compared to 74 percent of parents of children in sixth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.\*\*

Parents of both younger and older youth are also satisfied with the amount and variety of physical activity offered by the afterschool program. Eight in 10 parents of younger children and 77 percent of parents of older youth say that they are satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered and identical percentages are satisfied with the variety of physical activity provided.



## Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in the African-American and Hispanic Communities



With close to one-third of children (32 percent) obese or overweight in the U.S.,<sup>xvii</sup> finding ways to encourage healthy eating and physical activity among all students is crucial. However, racial disparities exist, with higher rates of overweight or obesity among African-American and Hispanic children compared to white children. A study looking at obesity rates in 2011-2012 found that approximately 4 in 10 Hispanic children (39 percent) and 35 percent of African-American children were either overweight or obese, compared to 29 percent of white children.<sup>xviii</sup>

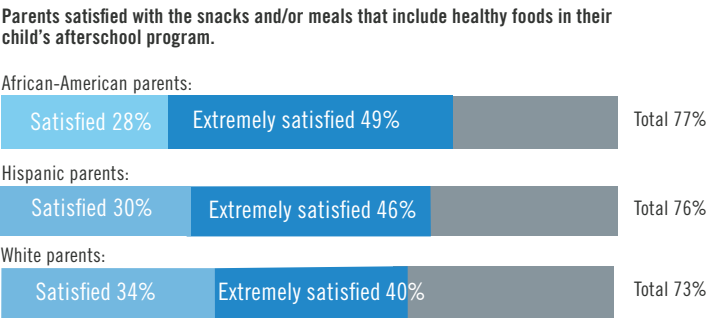
As *America After 3PM* found that approximately 3.8 million Hispanic children and 2.4 million African-American children participate in an afterschool program<sup>xix</sup>, this special report takes a closer look at the African-American and Hispanic communities to better understand African-American and Hispanic parents' outlook regarding nutrition and physical activity in afterschool programs, their expectations of programs and how they feel afterschool programs are meeting the needs of their child when it comes to healthy eating and staying physically active.

**What the attitudes toward afterschool programs providing nutritious food are in the African-American and Hispanic communities.**

Differences in responses arose by race and ethnicity when looking at answers to questions about healthy food asked in *America After 3PM*. For example, although strong agreement is found across the board, African-American parents are more likely than white and Hispanic parents to agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy food and beverage options for children. Seventy-seven percent of African-American parents agree that afterschool programs should provide healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals, with close to half (49 percent) completely agreeing, compared to 72 percent of white parents and 69 percent of Hispanic parents.<sup>\*\*</sup>

Providing healthy food in an afterschool program was also more important to African-American and Hispanic parents when selecting their program provider compared to white parents. Two in 3 African-American (67 percent) and Hispanic parents (66 percent) say that a program providing snacks and/or meals that include healthy foods was very important in choosing their child's afterschool program compared to 55 percent of white parents.<sup>9</sup>

African-American parents were more likely to report that their child's afterschool program offers beverages, snacks and/or meals than white parents (77 percent versus 69 percent),<sup>\*\*</sup> but no differences were found when looking at Hispanic parents (72 percent). Additionally, white and African-American parents were more likely than Hispanic parents to say that their child's afterschool program serves snacks that include healthy foods (75 percent and 72 percent versus 63 percent).<sup>10</sup> However, there was no significant difference by race or ethnicity in regard to satisfaction with the food served by the afterschool program being healthy, with most parents reporting that they are satisfied.



**What does physical activity look like in afterschool programs in the African-American and Hispanic communities?**

*America After 3PM* finds that opportunities to be active in the out-of-school-time hours are of importance in the African-American and Hispanic communities. African-American and Hispanic parents agree that afterschool programs have a role to play when it comes to keeping children active in the hours after school. More than 8 in 10 African-American parents (82 percent) and Hispanic parents (82 percent) agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active. Similar to the finding for parents overall, as well as not ranking among the top factors for selecting an afterschool program, opportunities for physical activity did factor into a majority of African-American and Hispanic parents' decision when selecting their child's program. Approximately 7 in 10 African-American parents

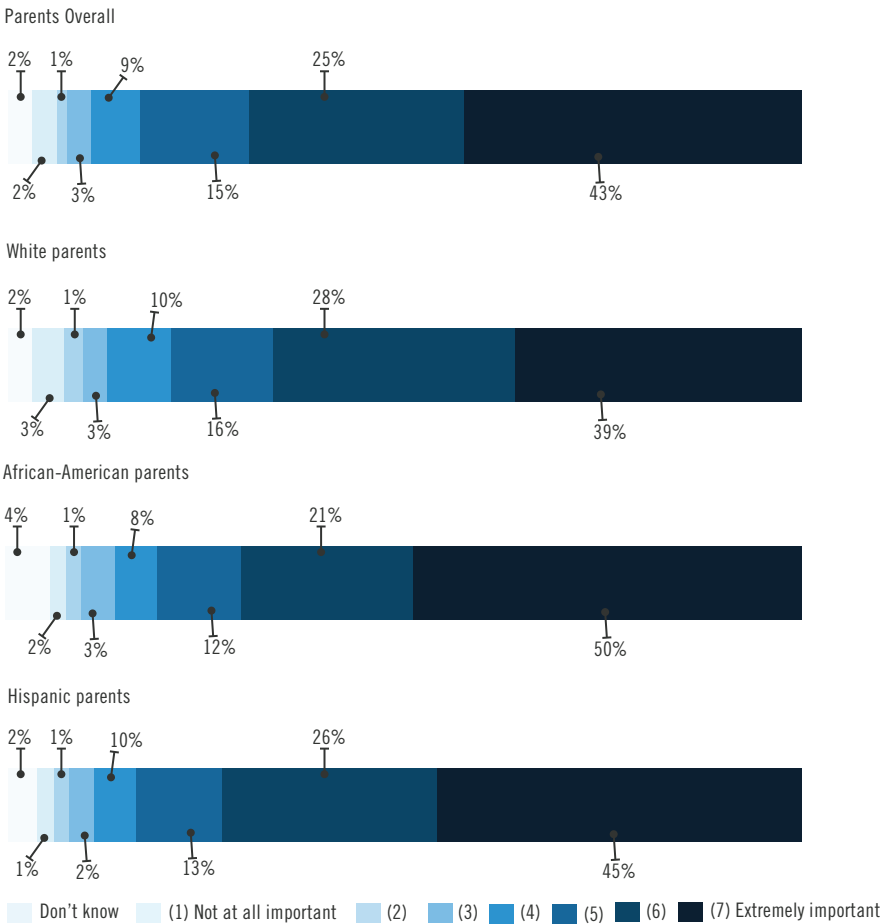
<sup>9</sup> Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level when comparing African-American parents' answers to white parents' answers and when comparing Hispanic parents' answers to white parents' answers.  
<sup>10</sup> Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level when comparing African-American parents' answers to Hispanic parents' answers and when comparing white parents' answers to Hispanic parents' answers.

(71 percent) and Hispanic parents (71 percent) report that physical activity opportunities were very important in their selection of their child's afterschool program. Half of African-American parents and 45 percent of Hispanic parents say that it was extremely important in selecting an afterschool program, compared to 39 percent of white parents.<sup>11</sup>

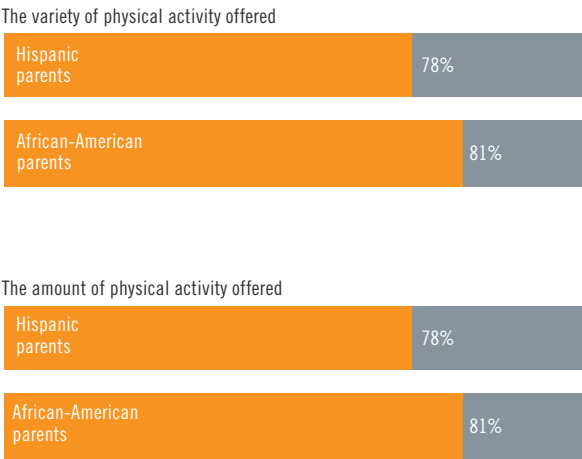
At the same time, when looking at parents who would like to enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available, African-American and Hispanic parents were more likely than white parents to cite a lack of physical activity as a reason that they did not enroll their child in an afterschool program. The lack of opportunities for physical activity was not among the top factors that influenced African-American and Hispanic parents' decision to keep their child out of a program—reasons such as cost, lack of a safe way to get to and come home from school and inconvenient hours were more commonly cited factors. However, close to half of African-American parents (48 percent) and 45 percent of Hispanic parents say that they did not enroll their child in an afterschool program because it did not offer their child enough opportunities to be physically active, compared to 39 percent of white parents.<sup>12</sup>

The survey also asks African-American and Hispanic parents if their child's afterschool program offers physical activity, and an overwhelming majority of African-American (82 percent) and Hispanic parents (84 percent) report that their child's afterschool program does provide such opportunities. Parents are also overwhelmingly satisfied with the amount and variety of physical activity offered by afterschool programs. Eight in 10 African-American parents (81 percent) and 78 percent of Hispanic parents say that they are satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered and say that they are satisfied with the variety of physical activity offered.

How important were physical activity opportunities when selecting your child's primary afterschool program?



Parents satisfied overall with:



<sup>11</sup> Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level when comparing African-American parents' answers to white parents' answers and when comparing Hispanic parents' answers to white parents' answers.

<sup>12</sup> Only statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level when comparing African-American parents' answers to white parents' answers.





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

Questions included in the 2014 edition of *America After 3PM* offer insight into the supports provided by afterschool programs and parent perceptions of afterschool programs. Parent responses to questions such as “Does the afterschool program attended by your child offer opportunities for physical activity?” or “Do you agree or disagree that children can benefit from afterschool programs by receiving healthy beverages, snacks and/or meals?” also help us identify gaps in services offered by programs and areas where afterschool programs can make improvements. The following section explores parent answers to survey questions that call attention to areas that are in need of improvement for the afterschool field.

### **Not all parents are aware that standards for healthy eating and physical activity exist in afterschool programs.<sup>13</sup>**

Over the course of the past few years, the afterschool field has stepped up its focus to improve providing healthy foods in afterschool programs and the quality of physical activity in programs. The formation of the Healthy Out-of-School Time (HOST) Coalition—a partnership of close to 50 organizations whose goal is to advance health and wellness in afterschool programs across the country, and the creation of the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards<sup>xx</sup>—evidence-based standards to promote healthy eating and physical activity in afterschool programs and best practices to support the implementation of each standard—are perfect representations of the work being done in the field.

*America After 3PM* asked parents questions about general nutrition and physical activity standards in afterschool programs to determine awareness of such standards, and, more importantly, to gauge the work that needs to take place to raise parent awareness of standards, which in turn can help to drive the demand for and improve programs’ nutritional quality and physical activity.

The survey found that there is a need to raise parents’ awareness about the existing standards for physical activity and healthy eating in afterschool programs. Although a majority of parents do know that there are recommended standards when it comes to the type of food and beverages that are considered healthy and should be served in an afterschool program and the amount and type of physical activity that should be offered in an afterschool program, many parents are still unaware of such standards.

<sup>13</sup> The survey questions regarding awareness of standards for healthy eating and awareness of standards for physical activity in an afterschool program were only asked of parents with a child in an afterschool program.

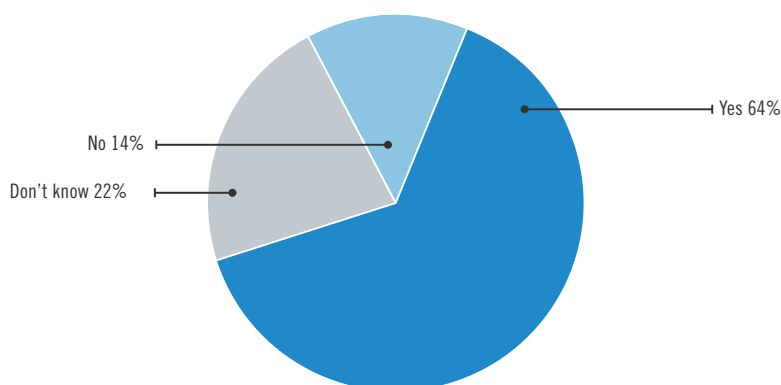


## Awareness of standards for healthy eating in afterschool programs

More than half of parents (64 percent) with a child in an afterschool program report that they are aware that there are recommended standards for the types of food and beverages that are considered healthy and should be served in an afterschool program. A strong majority of low-income parents (73 percent) and parents of younger children (67 percent) say that they are aware of the standards.

However, many parents are either unaware of or do not know the details around the recommended standards for healthy eating. More than 1 in 5 parents (22 percent) say that they do not know if there are recommended standards for the types of foods and beverages, and 14 percent of parents do not think that there are recommended standards for afterschool programs.

To the best of your knowledge, are there recommended standards for what types of foods and beverages are considered healthy and should be served in an afterschool program?



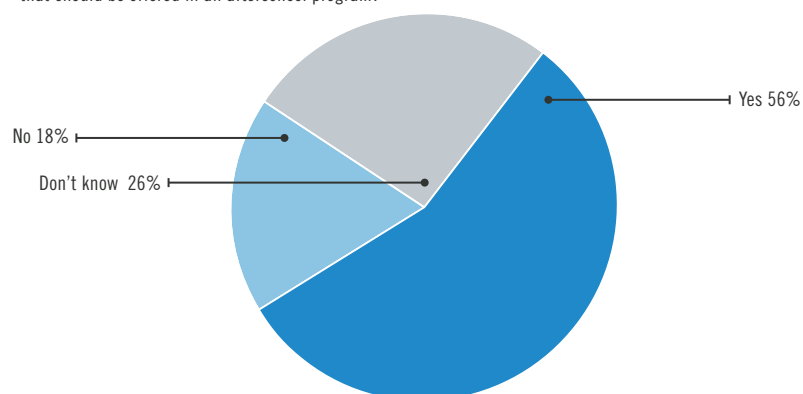
## Awareness of standards for physical activity in afterschool programs

Slightly fewer parents say that they are aware that standards for physical activity exist in afterschool programs. Fifty-six percent of parents say that there are physical activity standards. Again, a strong majority of lower-income parents (65 percent) and parents of younger students (59 percent) report that they know physical activity standards exist.

Despite more than half of parents reporting that they have knowledge of physical activity standards, many parents either do not know if such standards exist (26 percent) or do not think that there are such standards (18 percent).

It is also important to reiterate here that the survey questions about the standards did not specify a particular type or set of standards, therefore when answering the question, parents may have been referencing program, city, state or national standards.

To the best of your knowledge, are there recommended standards for the amount and type of physical activity that should be offered in an afterschool program?



**Improvements can be made in afterschool programs to increase their healthy food options and physical activity.**

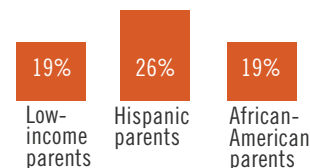
While parental satisfaction with opportunities for physical activity and the nutritious snacks and meals in their child's afterschool program is high, parents' answers regarding the duration and intensity of the physical activity offered and the healthy snacks and meals served show that more work needs to be done to increase healthy food options and physical activity in afterschool programs, especially in afterschool programs serving higher-need students.

## Afterschool programs offering foods that are healthy

Although many parents (72 percent) report that their child's afterschool program offers food and beverages, and most parents (81 percent) with a child whose afterschool program offers snacks and/or meals are satisfied that the food is healthy, there still remain children who do not have access to food or healthy foods in their afterschool program. One out of 4 parents with a child in an afterschool program say that their program does not offer food, and approximately half (52 percent) of all parents with a child in an afterschool program say that their child's afterschool program offers snacks that include healthy foods.

Examining answers provided by low-income parents, close to 1 in 5 (19 percent) report that their afterschool program does not offer food and approximately half (52 percent) say that their child gets healthy snacks at their afterschool program. Among Hispanic and African-American parents, 26 percent of Hispanic parents and 19 percent of African-American parents say that their child's afterschool program does not offer snacks or meals, with 55 percent of African-American parents and 45 percent of Hispanic parents reporting that their program provides healthy snacks.

Percentage of parents whose child's afterschool program does not offer snacks or meals.



## Quality of physical activity in afterschool programs

As discussed earlier in the report, parents with children who attend an afterschool program that offers opportunities for physical activity overwhelmingly report that they are satisfied with the program's variety of physical activity (84 percent) and the amount of physical activity (84 percent). Yet, when asked specific questions about the duration and intensity of their child's physical activity, less than 3 in 10 parents (27 percent) say that their child meets HHS's recommended amount of daily physical activity—engaging in at least 60 minutes of physical activity—while in their afterschool program. Only 4 in 10 parents (43 percent) say that all or most of the physical activity provided at their child's afterschool program is moderate to vigorous and there remain 15 percent of parents who report that their afterschool program does not provide any opportunities for physical activity. Interestingly, parents who report that their child gets at least 30 minutes of physical activity in their program are significantly more likely to be satisfied with the amount of physical activity offered by the program than parents who report that their child gets less than 30 minutes of physical activity (89 percent versus 75 percent).\*\*

Approximately 1 in 3 low-income parents (32 percent) report that their child takes part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily in their afterschool program, and less than half of low-income parents (45 percent) say that all or most of the physical activity at the program is moderate to vigorous. Similarly, although levels of satisfaction with the amount and intensity of physical activity in afterschool programs is high among Hispanic and African-American parents, only 25 percent of Hispanic parents and 28 percent of African-American parents report that their child gets 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity in their afterschool program. Approximately 4 in 10 Hispanic parents (42 percent) and African-American parents (45 percent) say that all or most of the physical activity their child gets in their afterschool program is moderate to vigorous.

## Parents of older youth are less likely than parents of younger children to report that their child is taking part in physical activity or receiving healthy foods.

Physical activity and healthy eating during the out-of-school hours are important for all students, including older youth. A 2013 survey found that fewer than 3 in 10 high school students (27 percent) had at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity in the week prior to the survey.<sup>xxi</sup>

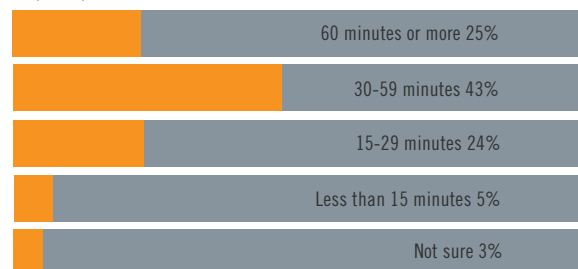
Additionally, a study of obesity rates found that 21 percent of 12-19 year olds were obese, compared to 8 percent of pre-schoolers and 18 percent of 6-11 year olds.<sup>14xxii</sup> Findings from *America After 3PM* suggest that afterschool programs are helping to keep older youth healthy and active, but more can be done to support the health and wellness of this age-group.

As reported in earlier sections, older youth are less likely to receive food and less likely to be physically active in their afterschool program than younger children. One in 3 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 students (20 percent),\*\* and more than 1 in 5 parents of older youth (21 percent) say that their afterschool program does not offer physical activity, compared to approximately 1 in 10 parents (12 percent) of younger students.\*\* Also worthwhile to reference again, parents of older youth are less satisfied with the healthfulness of the food at their child's afterschool program than parents with younger children. Seventy-seven percent of parents of younger children are satisfied with the healthfulness of the snacks and meals at their child's afterschool program, compared to 69 percent of parents of older youth.\*\*

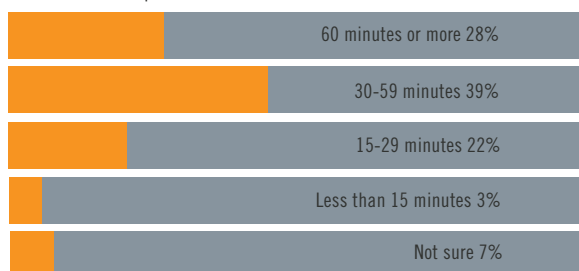
The lower likelihood of older youth taking part in an afterschool program that provides access to foods and offers physical activity compared to younger children may be a result of parents of older youth being less concerned with these factors in afterschool programs than parents of younger youth. For example, 1 in 10 parents of older youth say that an afterschool program providing healthy snacks and meals was not at all important in their decision to select an afterschool program, almost two times as high as parents of younger children (6 percent).\*\* With regard to the role that afterschool programs should play, while still a high percentage, 77 percent of parents of older youth agree that afterschool program should help children be physically active, compared to 82 percent of parents of younger children.\*\*

On a typical day in their afterschool program, how many minutes of physical activity does your child get?

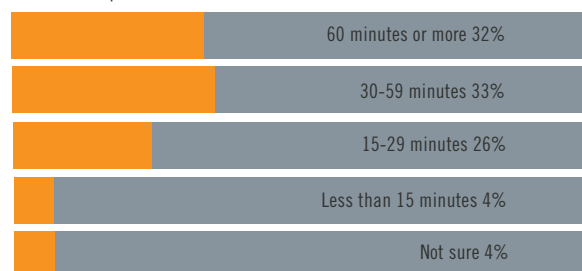
Hispanic parents:



African-American parents:



Low-income parents:



<sup>14</sup> Statistically significant when comparing pre-schoolers to 12-19 year olds, but no difference in prevalence of obesity when comparing 12-19 year olds with 6-11 year olds.

**Parents who do not have a child in an afterschool program are less aware of the positive role programs can play to help keep children healthy and active.**

Overall, an overwhelming percentage of parents agree that afterschool programs can provide opportunities for physical activity and nutritious food. These sentiments are especially strong among parents who have children in an afterschool program and are able to see the benefits first hand. Nevertheless, there is still room for afterschool programs to improve community awareness—especially among parents who have not enrolled their child in an afterschool program—about the benefits they can provide children when it comes to healthy eating and physical activity.



For instance, while 85 percent of parents of participants agree that afterschool programs offer children opportunities to be physically active, 73 percent of parents of nonparticipants agree, a 12 percentage point difference.\*\* When asked about afterschool programs providing children healthy beverages, snacks and meals, while 3 in 4 parents of participants agree, 59 percent of parents of nonparticipants agree, a difference of 16 percentage points.\*\*

As mentioned earlier in the report, although not one of the top reasons why parents choose not to enroll their child in an afterschool program, negative perceptions about the healthfulness of food offered in afterschool programs and the amount of physical activity did factor into some parents' decision making. Among parents who would like to enroll their child in an afterschool program if one were available to them, when asked about factors that led them to ultimately keep their child out of a program, 40 percent answered that afterschool programs offering unhealthy beverages, snacks and/or meals was an important factor in their decision, while 42 percent said that a lack of opportunities for physical activity was an important factor.





## Section 3:

# Recommendations

Afterschool programs have proven that they can be an effective partner in efforts to improve the health and wellness of our nation's children. This special report of *America After 3PM* highlights the positive role afterschool programs are playing in the lives of students who are able to take advantage of the benefits they have to offer—from access to healthy foods to opportunities to take part in a variety of physical activities. Yet, there is much more work to be done. To help ensure that students receive the support they need to reach their full potential and lead healthier lives, it will take a concerted effort by afterschool programs, parents, community partners and policy makers. The following section includes recommendations that can help move the needle to improve the health and wellness of students around the country and make strides toward becoming a healthier nation.

### **Increase awareness of the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards.**

Since the adoption of the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards by the National Afterschool Association (NAA) in 2011, much has been accomplished to grow afterschool programs' awareness and adoption of the HEPA Standards. In addition to webinars, guides and tools developed by NAA to share information about the standards with programs, several major national afterschool program organizations have adopted or adapted the HEPA standards, including the YMCA of the USA in 2011, and the National Recreation and Park Association and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in early 2014. These organizations have committed to implementing the HEPA standards as a part of creating healthy environments for many thousands of children and youth during the out-of-school time.

However, answers provided by parents regarding awareness of existing standards for the food and physical activity in afterschool programs illustrate that additional measures should be taken to increase parents' knowledge of the standards. Increasing awareness of the HEPA standards holds the potential to create a positive domino effect, where greater knowledge of the standards can lead to higher parent expectations of their child's afterschool program, which can in turn lead to afterschool programs taking further steps to improve the quality of their food and physical activity offerings.

An increased awareness of the HEPA standards among parents in general, not only parents with children in an afterschool program, also holds the potential to create a demand for a greater focus on health and wellness in the U.S. A greater knowledge of the guidelines for healthy eating and physical activity can empower parents to become health and wellness advocates.

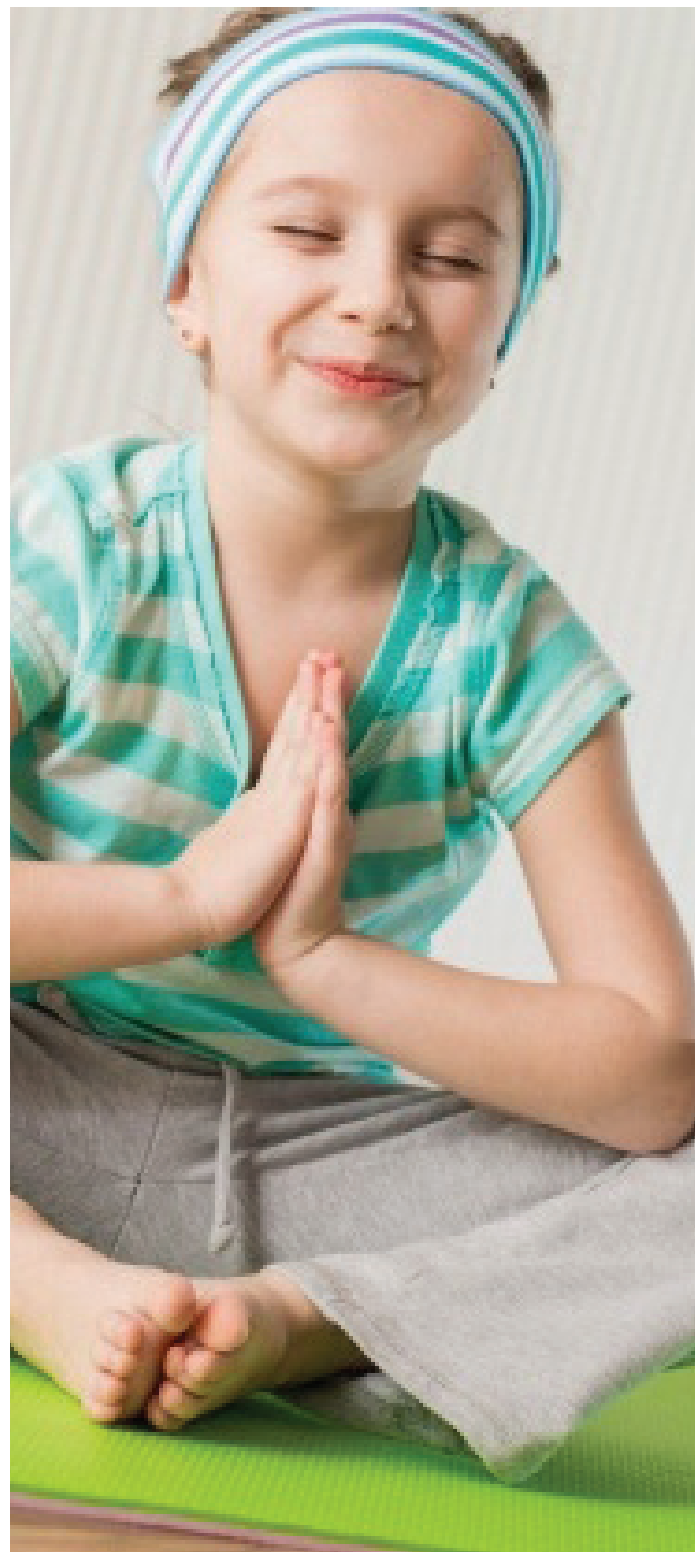
## Highlight the role that afterschool programs can play in promoting students' health and wellness.

Alongside the growing adoption of standards for healthy eating and physical activity in afterschool programs, a number of recent studies have found that afterschool programs can help children reach the recommended daily amount of physical activity, as well as promote healthy eating habits.<sup>xxiii</sup> While most parents agree that afterschool programs can provide children nutritious food and opportunities for physical activity, there is a need for greater outreach to parents informing them of the supports that afterschool programs can deliver.

Greater awareness of the opportunities for physical activity and the healthy snacks and meals offered at many afterschool programs can help parents see afterschool programs as an important part of the solution to keep children healthy and active. For parents of nonparticipants, this increased awareness has the potential to positively influence their decision to enroll their child in a program, and therefore have access to the supports that afterschool programs provide. In the case of parents who do have a child in an afterschool program, similar to the benefits of fostering awareness around the HEPA standards, increased parental expectations for the quality of physical activity and snacks and meals served in their child's afterschool program can help encourage providers to improve upon their offerings in these areas. This is of particular importance for older youth, whose parents agree that afterschool programs should help children be physically active, yet are less likely to have opportunities for physical activity than younger children in afterschool.

## Ensure afterschool program providers are aware of existing policies and programs that offer support for creating a healthier after school environment.

For afterschool program providers interested in offering nutritious snacks and meals to their students or in providing opportunities for physical activity, there are federal, state and local policies and programs that can help. For example, the At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program—offered through the Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)—provides afterschool programs serving low-income communities with federal funding to serve snacks and meals during the out-of-school-time hours. Since 2011, afterschool programs with more than 50 percent of students that qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program are eligible to receive funding to provide snacks and meals.







## A Look at an Innovative Way to Encourage Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in Afterschool Programs

Afterschool programs in California are being encouraged to provide their students foods that are healthy and opportunities to be physically active through a recent piece of legislation passed by the California State Legislature in September 2014. The bill, SB 949, establishes a new certification—the California Distinguished After School Health (DASH) recognition program—which is awarded to afterschool programs that meet healthy eating and physical activity guidelines specified within the bill. Afterschool programs that fulfill the guidelines will receive a DASH certification, as well as be included on an online database of DASH-certified afterschool programs that parents can access on the California Department of Education’s website.<sup>xxvii</sup> The bill’s sponsor, Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson said, “This bill is about rewarding and recognizing after school [sic] programs that are making that extra, vitally important effort to make children’s health a top priority.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

Ongoing efforts are taking place to raise awareness in the afterschool field about existing resources. For instance, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)—a nonprofit organization focused on addressing hunger and food insecurity in the U.S.—has hosted webinars that inform program providers about how to apply for the CACFP. Yet many afterschool program providers remain unaware that such supports exist. A December 2014 Afterschool Alliance online survey of afterschool programs found that among respondents in programs where at least 50 percent of their students qualified for the free or reduced price lunch program, 4 in 10 reported that they had not heard about the CACFP.<sup>xxiv</sup> Greater outreach efforts to the afterschool field are needed 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.

As the number of children in afterschool programs, as well as the demand for afterschool programs, continues to grow, increased public and private investments in programs are needed in order for afterschool programs to meet the growing demand and improve their food and physical activity offerings. With the demand for afterschool programs being greater among low-income households compared to higher-income households and greater among African-American and Hispanic households compared to white households, an increased investment in afterschool programs also has the ability to reach higher-need communities.<sup>xxv</sup>

Professional development, specialized staff, educational materials for students and their families, and food options that are both healthy and accommodate dietary restrictions are just a handful of the aspects that need to be addressed and implemented by programs to align with the best practices outlined in the HEPA standards. While some of the best practices can be implemented at a low cost to programs, there are others that are more costly. A separate Afterschool Alliance survey of afterschool program providers found that cost was the most prevalent challenge providers faced when offering a snack or meal in the program.<sup>xxvi</sup> 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 in order to help afterschool programs better serve their students when it comes to healthy eating and physical activity.

## Endnotes

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