



The Summer Struggle for Everyday Families: Affording the Opportunities Parents Want for Youth

MAY 2026

Acknowledgements

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Find additional national and state *America After 3PM* summer data at aa3pm.co.



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Reflections from Leadership

For youth, the start of summer is one of the most highly anticipated times of the year. But while students count down the days to summer, many parents look to it with concern or even dread. They spend months trying to find, and afford, the summer activities they want for their children: a safe place to learn, grow, explore, and build friendships. Some parents succeed; too many do not.

Expanding affordable, quality summer programs is a core part of the Afterschool Alliance's mission. During the summer, program providers and staff have more concentrated time with youth, which allows them to go deeper, offer more diverse activities, and build in important time for students to connect and have fun.

With this special report on summer, the Afterschool Alliance looked at data from its *America After 3PM* survey of 30,000 households to gauge what summer looks like for kids and families in the United States today, what families want for their children in the summer, and the kinds of opportunities available. What we've learned is that too many families struggle to provide the summer programs that they know will help their children explore, learn, engage, and grow. Parents want experiences that support their children's overall development and well-being. They value providing time for young people to socialize and build positive relationships, to gain confidence and foundational skills like teamwork and critical thinking, and to have fun and be active, with less screen time.

While a large majority of parents recognize programs can deliver these benefits, the data show that millions of young people are being left out of summer learning programs. They're missing out on the chance to practice dance or pick up a new sport, learn to code or about artificial intelligence, visit local science centers, museums, or libraries, connect with mentors and meet new friends, or explore potential career pathways while developing job skills, all while in safe and supportive environments. Sadly, affordability is the primary barrier that keeps kids out of programs. With increased costs for everything from groceries to gas, household budgets are stretched thin.

It's clear that families today need many more affordable summer options for their children. It would be a painful mistake to let another summer go by where parents have to weigh cutting work hours or other family necessities against their children's well-being. The opportunities available over the summer can be life-changing for a young person. Add up the summer months over the course of a young person's life, from kindergarten through high school—that's approximately three full years—a substantial amount of time that a child can spend engaged in an enriching learning environment. Summer holds immense possibilities for young people. Programs have amazing offerings, and families are ready to participate. It's time for lawmakers, businesses, philanthropy, and others to do their part to make sure summer is not a lost opportunity for any of our young people.

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Introduction

A season of longer, brighter days, “summer” brings to mind warmth, possibility, and excitement, associated with exploration, fun, and new experiences. An image search of “summer for kids” fills the screen with pictures of children at the beach or a swimming pool, at camp or playing games outdoors, and smiling while having fun with friends. These visuals embody the types of opportunities parents in the *America After 3PM* study say they want for their children during the summer. Missing from this idyllic picture is the reality that for many families, thoughts of summer bring on stress and worry. Worries about the cost, the availability, and the logistical complexities of piecing together a summer that they want for their children, where their

children are safe, engaged in enriching activities, building positive connections with their peers, and developing critical foundational skills that will benefit them as they navigate their place in the world.

This *America After 3PM* summer special report, “The Summer Struggle for Everyday Families: Affording the Opportunities Parents Want for Youth,” offers an in-depth view of parents’ priorities for their children’s summers and how young people spent the summer of 2024. The data provide insights on how and why for many families there is a clear gap between expectations and reality.



Half of children whose parents want them to be in a structured summer experience are missing out, with affordability placing these experiences further out of reach for everyday families

- ▲ Among children whose parents want them to be in a structured summer experience, half—or 1 in 2—are missing out (51%). This equates to approximately 12.6 million children who are not in a structured summer experience but would be enrolled if one were available.
- ▲ Affordability is the most significant barrier preventing families from enrolling their child in a summer program, particularly for low- and middle-income families.
- ▲ High-income families are more than three times as likely as low-income families to have their child in a summer program and nearly two times as likely as middle-income families.

When the last bell of the school year rings, students head out of classrooms and into approximately three months of open-ended summer days. The fifth edition of the *America After 3PM* study finds that parents of 24.6 million children want structured experiences that provide more than strictly supervision, such as a summer enrichment or sports program, summer camp, summer school, or for older youth, a job or internship. Unfortunately, roughly half of these children whose parents want them to take part in a structured summer experience (51%)—or 1 in 2 children—are being left out. In all, 12,598,498 children did not participate in a structured summer experience in 2024. This is more than the total population of Ohio, the seventh most populous state in the United States.



DOCUMENTING CHILDREN'S SUMMER EXPERIENCES

To capture the range of summer experiences children participate in, the *America After 3PM* survey asks parents about how their child/children are cared for during the summer in two stages. First, parents are asked during a typical week in the 2024 summer, which of the following did they use to care for their child/children during the daytime hours:

- ▲ Parent or guardian
- ▲ Another adult relative (like a grandparent, aunt, or uncle)
- ▲ Sibling (brother/sister)
- ▲ Another adult that is not related (like a neighbor or paid sitter)
- ▲ Childcare facility or family childcare center
- ▲ Child looking after themselves without adult supervision (at home on their own, hanging out with friends, etc.)
- ▲ Regular trips/activities like to the library or park
- ▲ Structured summer experiences different from childcare (e.g., summer school, summer enrichment or sports program, summer camp, job, or internship)
- ▲ None of the above

For parents that select that their child/children took part in a structured summer experience, they are asked if they took part in any of the following types of experiences:

- ▲ Voluntary summer program that provides a variety of learning and enrichment activities
- ▲ Mandatory summer school/school credit recovery program
- ▲ Optional summer school classes for credit or enrichment
- ▲ Work/summer job/internship
- ▲ Specialty camp or program (e.g., arts, sports, drama, religious)
- ▲ College readiness/preparation program
- ▲ STEM camp
- ▲ Counselor in training (CIT) program
- ▲ Other



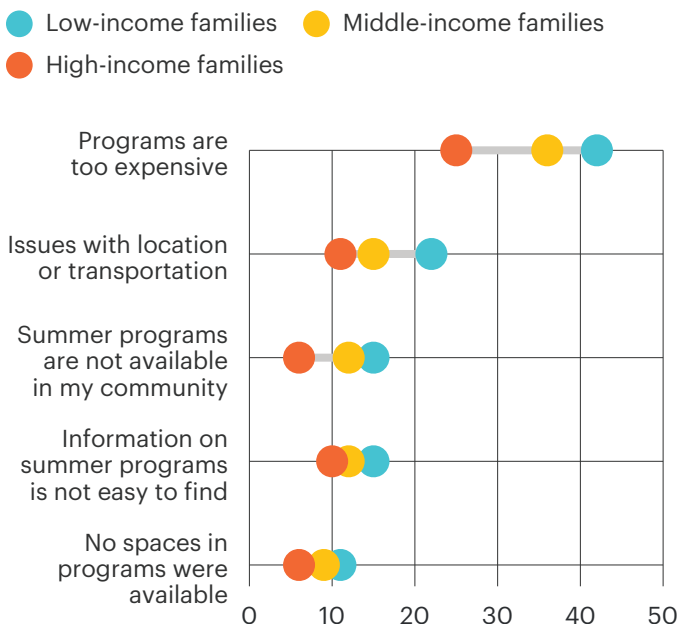
Affordability is the most significant barrier to summer program enrollment, particularly for low- and middle-income families

Among the barriers to summer program enrollment asked about in the *America After 3PM* survey, program cost is the primary challenge families face. Nearly 4 in 10 families (38%) whose children were not in a structured summer experience cite cost as a factor influencing their inability to enroll their child. Other barriers to summer program participation include issues with location or transportation (18%), followed by roughly 1 in 10 parents reporting information on programs is not easy to find (13%), summer programs are not available in their community (13%), program hours did not meet their needs (13%), or there were no spaces available in programs (10%).

Comparing barriers across family income levels, low- and middle-income families are more likely to report challenges to summer program enrollment than families with high incomes (see Figure 1). By double-digit percentage points, low- and middle-income families are more likely to say that cost was a factor in their decision not to enroll their child

Figure 1. Low- and middle-income families are more likely to face barriers to summer program enrollment than high-income families

Percentage of parents reporting that the following factors influenced their decision not to have their child attend a summer program:



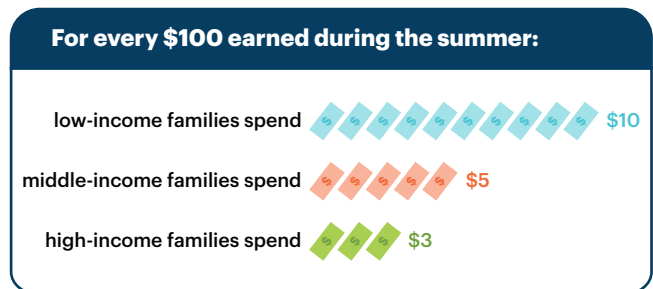
in a program compared to high-income families, with 42% of low-income families and 36% of middle-income families reporting program affordability as an issue, versus 25% of high-income families. Relative to household income over the summer months, low- and middle-income families are spending a greater portion of their wages on summer programs: for every \$100 earned during the summer, low-income families spend \$10 and middle-income families spend about \$5, while high-income families spend less than \$3 for every \$100 earned (see Figure 2).

Low- and middle-income families are also at least twice as likely as high-income families to report that summer programs are not available in their community (15% and 12% vs. 6%). Program accessibility is a greater concern for low-income families; 22% of low-income families say issues with programs' locations or transportation is a challenge, twice as high as families with high incomes (11%).

COST HAS A GREATER INFLUENCE ON SUMMER PROGRAM SELECTION FOR LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME FAMILIES

For low- and middle-income families with a child in a structured summer experience, cost was a greater consideration when selecting what their child did over the summer. Fifty-seven percent of low-income families and nearly half of middle-income families (48%) say that cost was extremely important when selecting what their child did over the summer, compared to 36% of high-income families.

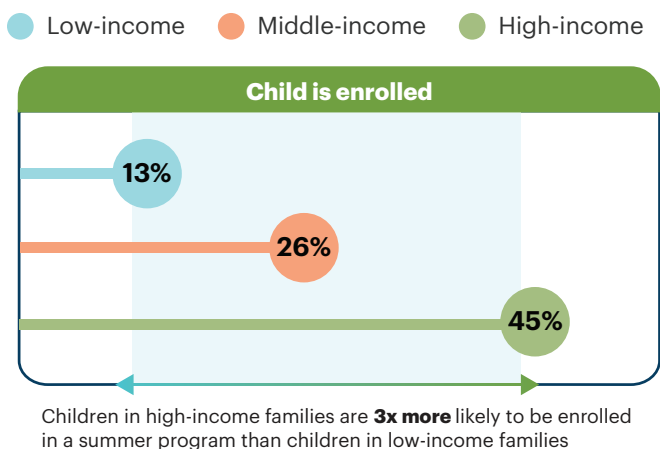
Figure 2. Relative to household income over the summer months, low- and middle-income families are spending a greater portion of their income on summer programs



Structured summer experiences out of reach for many everyday families

Across the U.S., nearly 1 in 4 children (23%)—or approximately 12 million children—took part in a structured summer experience in 2024. However, summers for children in low- and middle-income families look different than those of their higher-income peers. In addition to high-income families being more than three times as likely as low-income families to have their child in a summer program and nearly two times as likely as middle-income families (see Figure 3), a majority of high-income families have their child in more than one structured summer experience, while low- and middle-income families are most likely to enroll their child in a single structured experience over the summer (see Figure 4). Notably, 1 in 4 high-income families (24%) had their child in three or more activities over the summer, compared to less than 1 in 5 low- and middle-income families (14% and 18%, respectively).

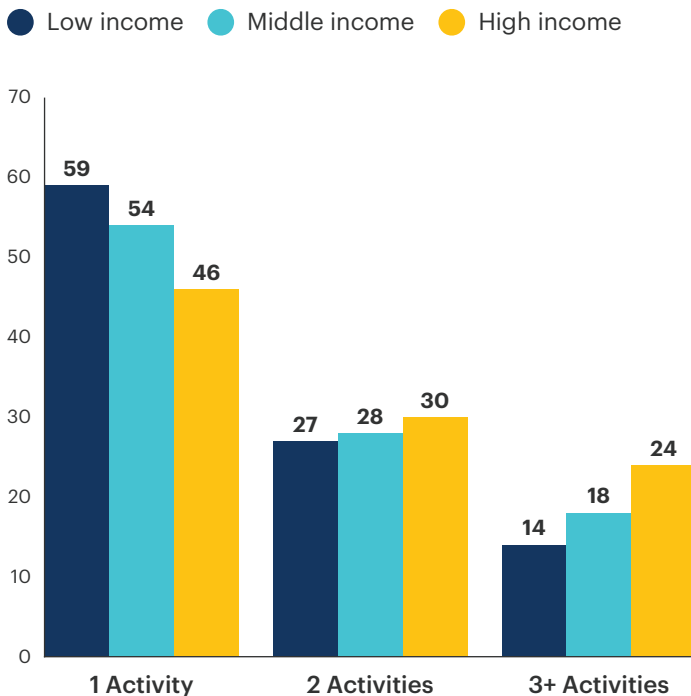
Figure 3. Children in families with high incomes are most likely to be in a summer program



Children in high-income families participate in structured summer experiences at higher rates across the various types of programming asked about in the survey, with differences most pronounced for participation in specialty camps or programs—such as those focused on the arts, drama, sports, or religion; voluntary summer learning and enrichment programs; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) camps. Among high-income children, 26% took part in a specialty camp or program, 19% were in a voluntary learning and enrichment program, and 7% participated in a STEM camp. Participation rates among low- and middle-income children were much lower. Only 6% of low-income children were enrolled in a specialty camp or program or voluntary summer program, with this number dropping to 1% for participation in STEM camps. Participation for middle-income children were 15% in a specialty camp or program, 11% in a voluntary summer program, and 4% in a STEM camp. The smallest differences are participation in mandatory summer school, work or internships, and college readiness or preparation programs. For example, 2% of high-income, 1% of middle-income, and 1% of low-income children took part in mandatory summer school.

Figure 4. High-income families are more likely to have their child enrolled in more than one structured summer experience

Percentage of parents reporting the number of activities their child took part in during the 2024 summer, by income level:



At the same time, unmet demand for summer programs is greater among low- and middle-income parents than high-income parents. Thirty-seven percent of children in low-income families and 27% of children in middle-income families would be enrolled if a program was available, compared to 18% of children in families with high incomes. High-income families are more likely to say that they did not enroll their child in a summer program because their family does other things together over the summer than low- and middle-income families (49% vs. 37% and 43%, respectively).

Participation in structured summer experiences increased for children in higher-income families and decreased for children in lower-income families compared to five years ago

The previous edition of *America After 3PM* found that children in higher-income families, or those that do not qualify for the federal Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) program, were much more likely to take part in structured summer experiences in 2019 than children in families qualifying for FRPL, or lower-income families (27% vs. 14%).* The current survey finds that the participation gap between children in higher- and lower-income families grew from 2019 to 2024, increasing to 29% of children in higher-income families participating in a structured summer experience, while participation by children in lower-income families dropped to 12%

SUMMER PROGRAM PROVIDER PERSPECTIVE

In a late 2025 Edge Research survey, 47% of summer program providers reported a waitlist for their program during the 2025 summer, and a strong majority were concerned about being able to hire enough staff (65%) and meeting the demand from families (62%). Summer program providers also reported the growing costs associated with running a program; 45% of summer program providers said that their program’s cost-per-child per week for in-person services had increased over the past year. Staffing (76%), inflation (67%), supplies (61%), and food (51%) were the most common factors summer program providers attributed to their higher costs.¹

* Families that qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program is a proxy often used for families with lower incomes



Tuscaloosa City Schools

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

At Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS), summer programming is not merely an add-on to the school year; it has become a vital part of the district's strategic plan to ensure every young person has a diverse learning ecosystem that supports their academic growth. Through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, bolstered by time-limited American Rescue Plan funds during the pandemic, TCS has been able to offer a four-and-a-half week, well-rounded summer experience designed to reduce learning loss and keep young people engaged. During the 2025 summer, 1,800 K-12 students participated.

TCS's summer programs strive to make every moment of learning relevant, engaging, and meaningful. Aligned with Alabama's Literacy and Numeracy Acts, certified teachers provide elementary schoolers with daily intensive reading and math support, while older youth have opportunities for credit recovery and advancement, as well as career exploration through internships and community service. High-interest program themes pairing in-class learning with real-world application bring lessons to life for students. For instance, an ocean-themed program took a trip to Alabama's Gulf Coast to explore marine life at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, while a space-themed program visited the U.S. Space & Rocket Center. One parent noted the program's balance of academics and fun "kept students motivated and excited," as well as gave their child "a confident head start for the upcoming school year." Students attending the program for 15 days or more have a 75% chance of experiencing no summer learning loss.

Scientiae

Tallahassee, Florida

In Tallahassee, Florida, Scientiae's five-week summer program immerses K-12 students into the universe of STEM, sparking curiosity, creativity, and confidence through every experience. Each week centers on a distinct STEM subject, designed to expose students to the myriad possibilities within STEM disciplines, while building their foundational knowledge and skills in high-demand fields like engineering design, computer science, and artificial intelligence.

During the first half of each day, students engage in interactive instruction that explores the week's focus area in depth, which has included environmental science, paleontology, digital design, astronomy, and engineering. In the second half of the day, students apply what they've learned through independent or group projects designed to build critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and innovation, while helping students see how STEM concepts connect to real-world careers and community challenges. For example, high school students spent a week exploring health science and biomedical engineering, culminating in a project where they constructed a functioning EKG machine, gaining a deeper understanding of heart anatomy, the body's electrical signals, and a glimpse into health service careers and the technologies supporting patient care. By the end of summer 2025, 90% of students reported increased interest and confidence in STEM, with one student sharing, "Before this camp, I never thought science was for me. Now I want to be a biomedical engineer. The robotics project was the best thing I have ever done in school."

Parents want children to be safe, active, and engaged, with programs offering fun, educational activities; caring and knowledgeable staff; opportunities to develop key skills; and time to be social, active, and off screens

- ▲ Safety of environment and knowledgeable and caring staff are the two factors most important to parents when selecting what their child does over the summer (80% and 73%, respectively).
- ▲ Other top-tier considerations include time for fun and educational activities and less time on screens (67%), opportunities to build confidence (66%), supporting their child's mental health and well-being (65%), interacting with other children to build social skills (65%), developing positive relationships with other kids in the program (63%), physical activities (61%), and building skills such as teamwork and critical thinking (60%).
- ▲ Where parents' top priorities for the summer diverge from those for the school year include opportunities for their child to experience the outdoors, opportunities for physical activity, spending less time on screens, opportunities to build confidence, a variety of activities, and program costs.

Safety and program staff are by far the two most important factors for parents when selecting what their child does over the summer. However, also top of mind for parents are developmental supports for their children and the ability for them to be active, outdoors, and off screens (see Figure 5). Eighty percent of parents say safety is extremely important. Knowledgeable and caring staff is extremely important for 73% of parents. Roughly two-thirds of parents say time for fun and educational activities and less time on screens (67%), opportunities to build confidence (66%), supporting their child's mental health and well-being (65%), and interacting with other children to build social skills (65%) is extremely important, and about 6 in 10 parents report

that developing positive relationships with other kids in the program (63%), physical activities (61%), building skills such as teamwork and critical thinking (60%), and opportunities to develop a sense of belonging (59%) are extremely important when selecting their child's summer activities. Additionally, more than half of parents cite as extremely important programs providing time for their child to learn responsible decision making (57%) and to experience the outdoors (56%), having a variety of activities (56%), and giving them the chance to get excited about learning (52%). Logistical considerations are also in the top tier of importance: a majority of parents say convenient hours or location (59% and 53%, respectively) is extremely important.

Figure 5. A safe environment and staff are most top of mind for parents when selecting their child's summer activities, followed by time for fun and less screentime, youth developmental supports, and opportunities to be active and outdoors

Percentage of parents reporting that the following were extremely important when selecting their child's summer program:	
Safety of environment	80%
Knowledgeable and caring staff	73%
Opportunities to spend more time on fun and educational activities; less time on screens	67%
Opportunities to build confidence	66%
Supporting child's mental health and well-being	65%
Opportunities to interact with peers and build social skills	65%
Opportunities to develop positive relationships with other kids in the program	63%
Physical activity opportunities	61%
Opportunities to develop skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship	60%
Opportunities to develop/build a sense of belonging	59%
Convenient hours	59%
Opportunities to learn responsible decision making	57%
Opportunities to experience the outdoors	56%
Variety of activities	56%
Convenient location	53%
Exciting my child about learning	52%
Program costs	48%
Sharing my family's values	45%
Programming to reduce risky behaviors*	44%
Opportunities to form meaningful connections with caring adults in the program	44%
Preventing losing academic ground over the summer	43%
Snacks/meals including healthy options	42%
Organized sports	41%
Learning activities not provided during the school year	41%
Opportunities for reading or writing	40%
Work-based learning experiences*	37%
Science learning opportunities	37%
College or career exploration*	37%
Opportunities to experience different cultures	36%
Addressing child's special needs	36%
Music or arts	36%
Service learning/community service	36%
Math activities	32%
Wellness activities	32%
Homework help	29%
Parent/family activities	29%
Engineering activities	29%
Technology activities	28%
Tutoring	27%
Computer science activities	27%
The program is the same one child is in during the school year	25%
Transportation provided	25%

*This answer option was only shown to parents with a middle or high school student in a summer program

There are also differences in parents' priorities for the summer, as well as the intensity behind priorities, depending on their child's grade level. Although a safe environment and program staff are the top factors for parents regardless of their child's age, parents of elementary schoolers are more likely to say both are extremely important (83% and 77%, respectively), compared to parents of middle schoolers (76% and 73%, respectively) and high schoolers (78% and 68%, respectively). Parents of elementary school students are also more likely to say that interactions with peers and building social skills (67%); physical activity (64%); a variety of activities (60%); exciting their child about learning (56%); and logistics, such as program hours (64%), location (56%), and cost (53%), are more important considerations than they are for parents of middle and high school students. Skill building and future-oriented supports are more important to parents of high schoolers, in particular, developing communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills (64%); college or career exploration (44%); and work-based learning experiences (44%).

Differences also arise depending on the type of structured summer activity children are in. Although top priorities for parents—such as a safe environment, quality of staff, time to connect with peers, and supporting their child's mental health and well-being—are consistent across the different programs, there are offerings and supports where priorities diverge dependent on the structured activity. In general, parents whose child attended summer school are most likely to say that academic-related supports are important, including double-digit percentage point differences when compared to parents with a child in a specialty camp or program. For example, 55% of parents with a child in summer school say preventing their child from losing academic ground over the summer is extremely important, higher than that of parents with a child in a voluntary learning and enrichment summer program (51%), with the difference growing to 17 percentage points when compared to parents with a child in a specialty camp (38%).

Interestingly, parents with a child in a voluntary learning and enrichment summer program are more likely than parents with a child in a specialty camp or program to say that academic supports are important, as well as more likely than parents with a child in summer school to

say that developmental supports are important. Half of parents whose child took part in a voluntary learning and enrichment program say opportunities for reading and writing is extremely important, compared to 36% of parents with a child in a specialty camp or program. In addition, 71% of parents with a child in a voluntary summer program say that opportunities for their child to spend more time engaged in fun and educational activities and less time on their screens is extremely important, compared to 61% of parents whose child was in summer school.

Across demographic groups, families with low incomes are more likely to say that all items are extremely important than families overall, and families living in urban communities and Black and Hispanic families are more likely to say that most items are extremely important than families overall, similar to what was found when comparing factors important to families choosing an afterschool program.² For example, nationally, while opportunities to develop communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills is extremely important to 60% of parents in deciding what their child does over the summer, this is extremely important to a greater percentage of Black families (75%), Hispanic families (67%), families with low incomes (67%), and families in urban communities (66%).



Parents want different things for their children over the summer versus the school year. Time outdoors, being active, less time on screens, and opportunities to build confidence and participate in a variety of activities are higher on the summer list of priorities.

Whether selecting their child’s summer activities or afterschool program, safety of environment and staff are the two most important factors for parents. Youth developmental supports, such as supporting their child’s mental health and well-being and helping their child interact with their peers and build positive relationships, are also shared priorities across both time periods (see Figure 6).

However, parents’ primary considerations for the summer diverge from priorities during the school year in a number of areas (see Figure 7). The largest difference is opportunities to experience the outdoors; 56% of parents report that this is extremely important when choosing what their child does over the summer, compared to 43% of parents who say it is extremely important when selecting their child’s afterschool program, a 14 percentage point difference. Other factors

more important to parents for the summer are opportunities for physical activity (61% vs. 54%), spending less time on screens (67% vs. 58%), opportunities to build confidence (66% vs. 61%), a variety of activities (56% vs. 51%), and program costs (48% vs. 43%).

On the other end of the spectrum, largely academic-related supports and offerings are less important to parents when deciding on what their child does over the summer compared to choosing what afterschool program they attend (see Figure 7). For instance, parents are 10 percentage points less likely to say that tutoring is extremely important in choosing what their child does over the summer compared to selecting their child’s afterschool program (27% vs. 37%) and 5 percentage points less likely to say math activities are extremely important (32% vs. 37%). Other items of less importance to parents for their child’s summer experience compared to selecting an afterschool program include a conveniently located program (53% vs. 61%), college or career exploration (37% vs. 44%), and programs that reduce risky behaviors (44% vs. 50%).

Figure 6. Top 10 factors for parents when selecting their child's summer program vs. their child's afterschool program

Percentage of parents reporting the following are extremely important:

SUMMER PROGRAM

1	Safety of environment	80%
2	Knowledgeable and caring staff	73%
3	More time for fun and educational activities; less time on screens	67%
4	Opportunities to build confidence	66%
5	Supporting my child’s mental health and well-being	65%
6	Interacting with peers and building social skills	65%
7	Developing positive relationships with other kids in the program	63%
8	Physical activity	61%
9	Opportunities to develop skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship	60%
10	Opportunities to develop a sense of belonging	59%

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

1	Safety of environment	76%
2	Knowledgeable and caring staff	70%
3	Supporting my child’s mental health and well-being	65%
4	Convenient hours	63%
5	Developing positive relationships with other kids in the program	61%
6	Interacting with peers and building social skills	61%
7	Convenient location	61%
8	Opportunities to build confidence	61%
9	More time for fun and educational activities; less time on screens	58%
10	Opportunities to develop skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship	57%

Figure 7. Parents value factors such as time outdoors, fun, and physical activity more for their child's summer experience, whereas academic supports are more important when selecting what their child does after school

Percentage of parents reporting the following factors were extremely important when selecting what their child does over the summer and their afterschool program**

● Summer ● Afterschool

HIGHER PRIORITIES FOR PARENTS DURING THE SUMMER

Opportunities to experience the outdoors



Opportunities to spend more time on fun and educational activities; less time on screens



Physical activity



Opportunities to build confidence



Program cost



Variety of activities



*Among parents with a middle or high school student in a summer program

**Percentage point differences may not add up due to rounding

OFFERINGS OF LESSEr PRIORITY FOR PARENTS DURING THE SUMMER

Homework help



Tutoring



Convenient location



College or career exploration*



Opportunities for reading or writing



Programming to reduce risky behaviors*



Math activities



Transportation is provided



Families fortunate enough to have their child in a summer program rate it highly

- ▲ Fully 96% of parents with a child in a summer program in 2024 were satisfied, including 63% who were extremely satisfied with that experience.
- ▲ Parents with a child in a summer program are more likely to say that they are extremely confident in their child's readiness for the next school year compared to parents whose children are not in a program (50% vs. 43%).
- ▲ Specialty camps and programs, such as those that focus on the arts, sports, or STEM, and voluntary summer programs that include learning and enrichment were the most common type of summer experience for young people in 2024.
- ▲ Summer programming is a community-wide effort, with programs taking place at community-based organizations, schools, city or town facilities, museums or science centers, libraries, colleges or universities, and religious organizations.

Parents of the 12 million children taking part in a summer program in 2024 report being pleased with their child's experience and have greater confidence in their child being prepared for the next school year. Ninety-six percent of parents report that they were satisfied with their child's summer program overall, with a strong majority expressing extreme satisfaction (63%).



Adjusting satisfaction ratings to a score on a scale from 1 to 5, parents' average score for program satisfaction is 4.57. Summer programs continue to be a positive experience for families, with satisfaction levels remaining similar to the summer of 2019 when 95% of parents reported being

happy with their child's summer program. The high overall satisfaction score reflects parents' positive outlook across the various types of summer programming, including parents with a child in a specialty camp or program (97%), a voluntary learning and enrichment summer program (96%), and summer school (95%).

Regardless of where families reside, in rural or urban communities, in the West or Midwest, more than 9 in 10 report that they were happy with the summer experience their child participated in. Parents in rural (96%), suburban (96%), and urban communities (96%); and those in the Northeast (97%), Midwest (97%), South (96%), and West (95%) report satisfaction. Similarly, satisfaction is high when looking across race and ethnicity and income levels. More than 9 in 10 Asian American (94%), Black (95%), Hispanic (96%), and White parents (97%) report satisfaction, as do 98% of high-income, 96% of middle-income, and 95% of low-income families.

America After 3PM also finds that half of parents with a child in a summer program say that they are extremely confident that their child will be well prepared for the upcoming school year. Parents with a child in a summer program are more likely than parents whose child is not in a program to say that they are extremely confident in their child's readiness for the next school year (50% vs. 43%).

A variety of community partners offer structured summer experiences. Children are most likely to participate in specialty camps or programs and voluntary learning and enrichment summer programs.

The types of structured summer experiences explored in the *America After 3PM* survey varied widely, as did the settings in which they were offered. Examples of structured summer experiences included voluntary summer programs that provide a mix of learning and enrichment activities, STEM camps and drama programs, as well as internships and mandatory summer school. Specialty camps or programs, including arts, drama, sports, religious, or STEM camps or programs, and voluntary learning and enrichment summer programs, are the most commonly reported activities children took part in during the summer of 2024, while optional summer school, work or an internship, a college readiness or preparation program, mandatory summer school, and counselor-in-training programs were less common (see Figure 8).

Although specialty camps or programs and voluntary learning and enrichment summer programs are the most common activities for students across grade levels, compared to students overall, elementary schoolers are more likely to take part in voluntary summer programs and middle school students are more likely to take part in specialty camps or programs. High schoolers are more likely to have a job or internship, take optional summer school classes, or be in a college prep program (see Figure 9).

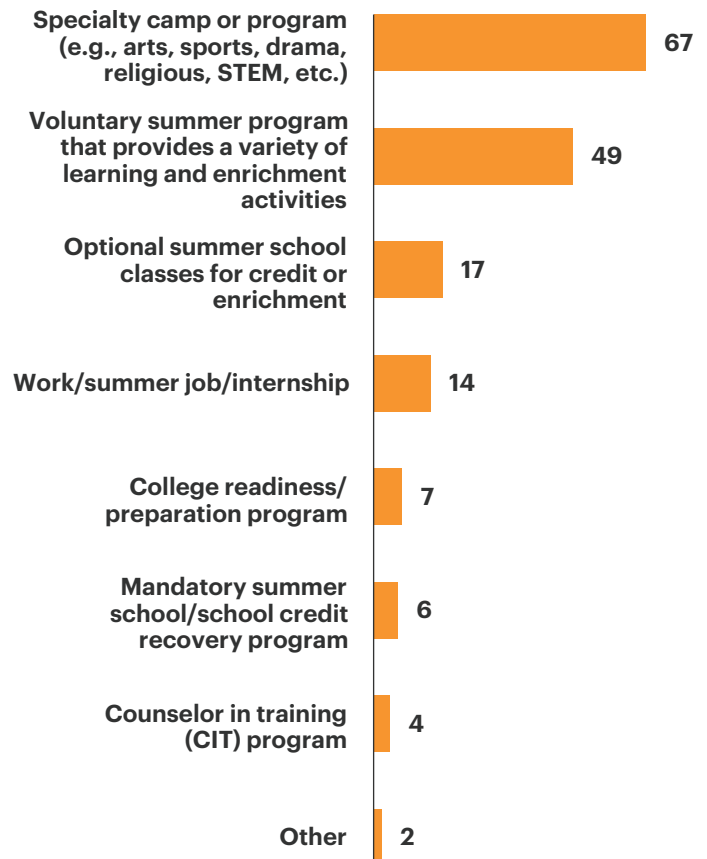
Based on parents’ responses, of the summer experiences asked about, young people spent the most time at work or in internships, at specialty camps, or at voluntary learning and enrichment summer programs. During the 2024 summer, young people spent an average of 6.5 weeks and 5.2 hours per day at work or an internship, 4 weeks and 6 hours per day in specialty camps or programs, and 4.5 weeks and 5.4 hours per day in voluntary summer programs. Mandatory and optional summer school had similarly reported dosage, averaging 3.8 and 3.9 weeks, respectively, and mandatory summer school averaging 4.4 hours a day and optional summer school 4.2 hours a day.

In addition to the range of summer experiences young people take part in, they also occur across a variety of

community settings, showcasing the extensive and diverse nature of summer programming. Programming takes place at community-based organizations, schools, city or town facilities, museums or science centers, libraries, colleges or universities, and religious organizations. In the summer of 2024, the most common locations for voluntary learning and enrichment summer programs include community-based organizations (34%), city or town facilities (32%), and schools (32%). Specialty camps or programs are most likely to be held at city or town facilities (28%), community-based organizations (28%), and schools (24%), and while summer school is most commonly in a school building (64%), parents also report that their child’s summer school classes took place at community-based organizations (24%), city or town facilities (18%), and libraries (17%).

Figure 8. Specialty camps or programs were the most commonly reported summer experience, followed by voluntary summer programs

Percentage of parents with a child in a structured summer experience reporting that their child takes part in a:



SUMMER PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



LEAP for Education

Salem and Lynn, Massachusetts

LEAP for Education—which stands for Learn, Explore, Aspire, Pursue—offers a Summer Work Program that provides 60 high school students in Salem and Lynn, Massachusetts, with a six-week paid opportunity to jumpstart their futures. Through networking and mentorship, career-readiness training, and project-based learning, the program delivers a variety of career-connected experiences to equip young people with the essential skills needed to succeed in their steps beyond high school.

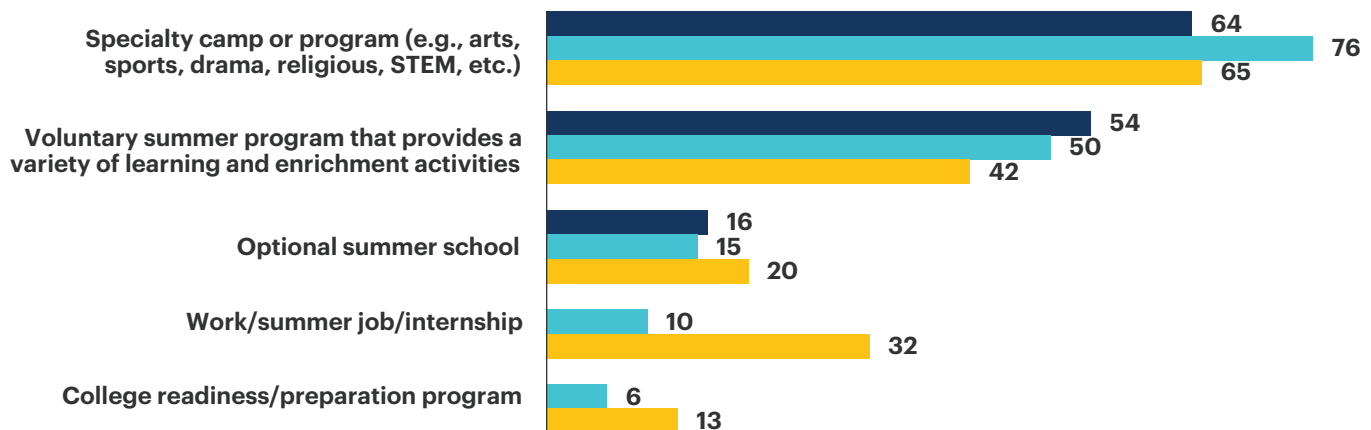
Each day, students engage in professional development designed to build core workplace habits and executive functioning skills. This includes building their ability to manage time, communicate effectively, navigate team dynamics, problem-solve, and take initiative—skills that translate across any career path. Students also choose from a catalog of enrichment labs led by

community professionals spanning fields from creative arts to STEM, with the goal of deepening their knowledge of their career interests and exposing them to paths they haven’t considered. Along with daily enrichment, the program connects each student with a volunteer mentor in their field of interest, who provides weekly guidance and collaborates with them on a capstone career project, which they present at the program’s end-of-summer showcase. The results are as creative and varied as the students themselves, with past projects including handcrafted bows and arrows, video game prototypes, original music, and a school curriculum. As one mentor shared about his mentee, “I’ve had the privilege of witnessing his growth—not just in maturity, but in his creativity and willingness to think outside the box when it comes to his passions. His confidence in pursuing his interests has genuinely inspired me to do the same.” The program is made possible through LEAP’s long-standing relationships with local school districts and other community partners invested in young people’s success.

Figure 9. Across grade levels, specialty camps or programs and voluntary summer programs are most common, however likelihood of certain activities depends on age

Percentage of parents with a child in a structured summer experience reporting that their child takes part in a:

● K-5th grader ● 6th-8th grader ● 9th-12th grader



The importance of meals in summer programs

For millions of children, summer is when access to the breakfasts and lunches they receive during the school year closes down for what can feel like a relentless period of time. The Food Research & Action Center reports that, on average, during the 2023-2024 school year, 21.1 million children received a free or reduced-price lunch.³ Just a fraction of that number of children participated in summer nutrition programs, serving slightly more than 2.8 million children in the summer of 2023.⁴ The summer nutrition programs are two federal programs, the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option and the Summer Food Service Program, which provide funding to sites to serve snacks and meals during the summer break. Students experiencing food insecurity is a concern shared by most summer program providers.

In a survey of afterschool and summer program providers, 89% of providers who offer summer programs report that they are concerned that their students are experiencing food insecurity, including two-thirds who are extremely or very concerned.⁵

Access to healthy snacks and meals is significantly more important to families with low incomes (85%), parents living in urban communities (85%), Black parents (85%), Hispanic parents (83%), and parents living in the South (77%) when choosing what their child does during the summer, compared to parents overall (75%). Additionally, majorities of Black parents (59%), families with low incomes (54%), Hispanic parents (53%), and those living in urban communities (51%) say their children having snacks and meals in their summer experience is extremely important.



In a survey of afterschool and summer program providers, 89% of providers who offer summer programs report that they are concerned that their students are experiencing food insecurity, including two-thirds who are extremely or very concerned.

Parents of every background want summer opportunities for all children and support public funding for programs

- ▲ Eighty-seven percent of parents agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs.
- ▲ Nearly 9 in 10 parents (89%) are in favor of public funding for summer learning opportunities—an all-time high for the *America After 3PM* survey.

Results from the *America After 3PM* survey make evident that parents are in full support of summer opportunities for young people. Eighty-seven percent of parents agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs, including overwhelming majorities of parents across political parties, communities, regions, and race and ethnicity. At least 5 in 6 parents who identify as Democrat (92%), Independent (85%), or Republican (85%); living in rural (85%), suburban (88%), or urban communities (88%); or in the Northeast (90%), Midwest

(87%), South (87%), or West (87%) agree with this statement. Nearly 9 in 10 Asian American (88%), Black (88%), Hispanic (88%), and White parents (87%) also believe that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programs, as do 86% of Native American parents. Additionally, 88% of parents with children in public school and 87% of parents with children in private school agree. While agreement is lower among parents who homeschool their children, still three-quarters agree.



Photo credit: Tuscaloosa City Schools

Moreover, support of public funding for summer learning opportunities is at an all-time high. Eighty-nine percent of parents are in favor of public funding for summer programs, including a majority (55%) who are strongly in favor. Support has continued to trend upward, increasing from 83% in 2009, to 85% in 2014, to 88% in 2020, and now reaching 89%. Similar to support for public funding of afterschool programs, parents in favor of public funding for summer learning opportunities remains strong across demographics (see Figure 10). For example, 87% of parents in rural communities, 89% of parents in suburban communities, and 93% of parents in urban communities support public funding for summer programs, and funding for summer programs has bipartisan support, with 94% of Democrat, 89% of Independent, and 87% of Republican parents in favor.



Figure 10. Substantial parent support of public funding for summer learning opportunities

Percentage of parents reporting that they are in favor of public funding for summer learning opportunities	
NATIONAL AVERAGE	89%
COMMUNITY TYPE	
Rural	87%
Suburban	89%
Urban	93%
REGION	
Northeast	90%
Midwest	88%
South	90%
West	89%
RACE/ETHNICITY	
Asian American	90%
Black	93%
Hispanic	90%
Native American	91%
White	89%
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	
Democrat	94%
Independent	89%
Republican	87%



The Choctaw Nation Partnership of Summer School Education (POSSE)

Southeast Oklahoma



The Choctaw Nation Partnership of Summer School Education (POSSE) is a 23-day summer learning program offered at 70 public schools throughout the predominantly rural Choctaw Tribal Nation of southeast Oklahoma. The summer program serves 3,700 kindergarten through third grade students who could benefit from additional reading or math support, to promote grade-level comprehension by third grade. Every day, teachers provide targeted reading and math instruction, complemented by afternoon enrichment – from science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) projects and opportunities for physical activity, to field trips that spark real-world connections.

While the program spans 70 schools, no two POSSE sites are the same. Small class sizes averaging an 11:1 student-teacher ratio ensure that instruction is responsive to student needs, allowing individualized attention tailored to each student's reading and math goals. At the same time, sites

are unified through summer themes set by POSSE, with aligned books, activities, and field trips. The program's "Superheroes in Training" theme, for example, encouraged schools to provide reading instruction through thematic books and to take local field trips to meet everyday heroes, such as firefighters. Staff see offering the combination of targeted academic instruction with enrichment activities as helping to improve student engagement and attendance in the program. Additionally, woven throughout every summer is POSSE's commitment to uplifting Choctaw culture. Through books that follow Indigenous characters, lessons on Choctaw language and traditions, and field trips to the Choctaw Cultural Center, students connect their learning to their heritage and community. Over the past 10 years, POSSE has reached more than 21,000 students, and evaluations find that participants improve their reading and math proficiency, school-day attendance, and high school graduation rates.

Summer for children in rural communities

Bordering Upper Lake St. Croix, Solon Springs is a small, rural village in Wisconsin with fewer than 700 residents. While the town is known for its beautiful scenery, vast forests, and fun outdoor and water activities—making it a popular destination for nature lovers and summer vacationers alike—for caregivers living there year-round, who often commute 45 minutes to work in the port cities of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin, summertime poses significant childcare and transportation challenges for their families.

This aligns with findings from *America After 3PM*, where data reveal that children in rural communities are less likely to be in a summer program than their peers in urban and suburban communities (15% vs. 26% and 25%). Similar to parents nationally, cost, program availability, and accessibility challenges are the barriers rural parents are most likely to report. One in 3 rural families without a child in a summer program (34%) say cost is an issue, followed by summer programs not being available in their community (20%), issues with location or transportation (19%), and information on summer programs not being easy to find (15%).

While there is very little difference regarding unmet demand for summer programs among children in rural (31%), suburban (30%), and urban communities (32%), program availability is a greater issue for rural families. Rural families are roughly twice as likely as families in suburban and urban communities to say that summer programs are not available in their community (20% vs. 9% and 11%).

In Solon Springs, the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) is the only site offering afterschool and summer programs in the area, filling a major gap in access to structured summer experiences. With six weeks of programming, Solon Springs' 21st CCLC provides transportation and a robust set of summertime activities for

PK-12th graders, carefully balancing learning with outdoor fun. Each week kicks off with academics, with teachers providing targeted reading and math support for K-5th graders, while older youth focus on credit recovery. The rest of the week is dedicated to connecting students with the natural resources the area offers. With activities including field trips to Duluth's Great Lakes Aquarium, swimming at the Superior YMCA, fishing and boating on Upper Lake St. Croix, blueberry picking in the sand barrens, visiting the local library, and outdoor grilling at the local park, each moment is vibrant, exciting, and keeps kids coming back every summer. As a result of the program, 84% of afterschool and summer participants improved their willingness to try new things during the school year. Working parents are particularly thankful for the program, with one expressing, "We really struggle to find child care for our three kids. This program helps our family so much, and our kids enjoy it."

In *America After 3PM*, rural families say that safety of environment (83%) and knowledgeable and caring staff (77%) are extremely important, as is time for fun and educational activities and less time on screens (70%); supporting their child's mental health and well-being (67%); building foundational skills, such as time to interact with peers (67%); developing positive relationships with other kids in the program (65%); and working on communication, teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship skills (61%).

Similar to Solon Springs' 21st CCLC program parents, rural parents in *America After 3PM* were happy with their child's experience. More than 9 in 10 (96%) report being satisfied, including two-thirds who were extremely satisfied. Additionally, rural parents are supportive of summer programs. Nearly 9 in 10 rural families (87%) are in favor of public funding for summer learning opportunities.

Policy recommendations and opportunities

Today in the United States, the summer months are a time when too many young people are missing out on the transformative experiences summer programs provide—to explore, be creative, form long-term friendships, and build their confidence. Fortunately, there are several policies that would help more young people to maximize their potential to learn and grow during their summers.

Increase investment in summer programs

With 1 in 2—or 12.6 million—children whose parents want them to be in a structured summer experience missing out, it is clear that communities across the country need additional resources to create more quality, affordable summer programs. Both parents and programs are experiencing an affordability squeeze: *America After 3PM* finds that 38% of families report that cost is an important reason they did not enroll their child in a summer program, and in a 2025 survey, 45% of summer providers said that their program’s cost-per-child per week rose over the past year, citing staffing, inflation, and the cost of supplies and food as primary contributors for the increase.⁶

The affordability challenge that both families and summer programs are grappling with underscores the urgent need for greater public and private investments in summer programs at the national, state, and local levels. There are examples of this work already taking place, one of which is Tuscaloosa City Schools, where staff were able to leverage a mix of federal funds, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers, with city funds to scale up their summer learning programs, doubling the number of students they served in the summers of 2022 and 2023 and allowing more than 40% of their kindergarten through fourth graders to participate in a summer program.⁷ Since then, while funding has decreased and they have had to adapt their funding model to include paid parent options, Tuscaloosa City Schools continues to host a robust summer program, serving 1,800 students across 14 programs.

Proposals, such as the Summer for All Act at the federal level, and state-level investments, including Oregon’s Summer Learning Grants, are examples of policy proposals designed to increase participation in summer programs for everyday families through targeted investments. For example, the Summer for All Act would create a new competitive grant program for quality summer enrichment programming, prioritizing programs that serve rural and underserved communities; those that reach at-risk students, including children who are chronically absent; and those that provide services and transportation free of charge to children from families with low incomes.⁸ In Oregon, the legislature has

21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding stream dedicated exclusively to before school, afterschool, and summer learning programs. Every state and Washington, D.C., receives funding based on its share of funding for students from low-income families and supports programs serving students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools. According to the most recent Department of Education annual report on 21st CCLC programs, nearly 200,000 students in grades K-12 participated in 21st CCLC summer programming and more than 37,000 family members were served.⁹

Students attending 21st CCLC summer programs made gains in their math and reading and language arts assessments, and teachers reported students improved their engagement in learning.

Funding for 21st CCLC has largely remained flat over the past decade. After adjusting for inflation, the current funding level is more than \$234 million below the 2015 level.



United Way Summer Discovery

Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland Counties, Southeast Michigan



Summer Discovery is an initiative providing free summer programs offering learning and enrichment to nearly 30,000 kindergarten through 10th-grade students across 169 sites in Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties of Southeast Michigan. Schools and community-based organizations can apply for funding to be a Summer Discovery site, which must provide at least 20 days of programming and at least three hours of reading and math instruction per day. The remainder of the day is dedicated to helping students explore their interests through a variety of fun, hands-on projects and activities that vary by site. Enrichment offerings have included physical activity through sports such as karate, basketball, soccer, and figure skating, as well as workshops on cooking, arts and crafts, robotics, and digital literacy. Students also have the opportunity to

engage in their communities through field trips, career exploration, volunteering, and tending to their school gardens. Designed to support the whole child, the program intentionally incorporates life skills development through activities that foster team-building, communication, and resilience, as well as a love for learning through exploration.

Led by the United Way for Southeastern Michigan and funded by the Ballmer Group, Summer Discovery has supported the academic and social growth of thousands of students in Southeast Michigan since 2024. According to the program's summer 2025 pre- and post-reading and math assessments, English language arts proficiency scores more than tripled, while math proficiency scores more than doubled. And 84% of families felt that Summer Discovery enhanced their child's personal development.

passed bills allocating state funding to summer learning initiatives in the form of competitive grants to increase the availability of programs. The state gives priority points in specific areas, including programs serving students experiencing poverty and those in rural communities, with allowable uses, including but not limited to transportation, nutritious snacks and meals, providing incentives, and removing barriers to participation, in addition to traditional expense allowances such as facility costs, programming supplies, curriculum, and staff.¹⁰

Target barriers to participation

Reducing barriers that prevent young people from participating in summer programs is a complex challenge shaped by family circumstances, including where they live, income, work hours, transportation options, and the time and resources available to search for summer options. Families may experience an absence or shortage of summer programs in the community, challenges regarding distance to programs, lack of transportation options to access programs, or not knowing where to go to find information on programs.

There are a number of steps communities can take to improve access to summer programs depending on the needs of their families. For example, if families struggle to find a safe way for their child to get to and home from a summer program, grants that cover transportation costs or grants specifically for transportation can help programs decrease access challenges for families. If families have difficulty locating information on summer programs, schools, community partners, and local leaders can collaborate to create and promote resources that make that information more readily available to families. In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the county's Department of Children's Initiatives created an out-of-school time dashboard listing every afterschool, summer, and year-round program in the county.¹¹ Programs are displayed on a clickable map, where selecting a site shows the program's location, hours of operation, ages served, and if available, notes on program fees, if meals are provided, capacity, and transportation. Users can also filter by program type, program name, and school district. Nationally, the National Summer Learning Association has run the Discover Summer campaign, which included digital billboards and a nationwide radio public service announcement directing families to visit a portal featuring more than 30,000 sites in 4,000 cities, created to help families find summer programs and summer learning resources in their community.¹²

Create more summer programs that align with parents' and young people's priorities

Based on findings from *America After 3PM*, programs are delivering strong results, with strong parent support and satisfaction. Parents unequivocally want a summer experience where their child will become more confident, connect with peers, be active, and develop foundational skills such as the ability to communicate, work in teams, think critically, be a leader, and make responsible decisions. They want their children to be safe, in the care of knowledgeable staff, and having fun while learning and being off screens. Similarly, researchers studying young people's

NATIONAL ACADEMIES REPORT OFFERS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SUMMER

A National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Consensus Study Report on summertime experiences for young people was charged with investigating and reporting out on the research base surrounding various dimensions of well-being during the summer in order to address the availability and effectiveness of summer programs, as well as to offer recommendations to address gaps. While many of the recommendations align with those in this report, there are several that go beyond the scope of *America After 3PM* but are relevant when considering improving summertime experiences for young people. For instance, the philanthropic sector helping promote promising and effective practices within summertime experiences, local governments establishing a quality management system, and governors and mayors convening public and private employers to encourage the business community to provide summer employment for young people, as well as offer flexible policies for parents during the summer months. In the report, there is also the recommendation that government agencies and nongovernmental organizations sponsor surveys and collect data on how young people spend the summer months.¹³

perspectives on their summer experience recommended, “keeping summer activities fun, enjoyable, and low-pressure” as well as “...understanding and targeting the interests, needs, goals, and priorities of youth and their families.”¹⁴

Summer is a time when children can explore areas of interest, work on passion projects, and learn new skills, practice a new sport, and make new friends. Public and private entities can design funding opportunities to align with what parents and young people want in their summer program, ensuring that summer programming is comprehensive and that young people’s summers are spent engaged, excited, and having fun while learning and growing.

Lower barriers to including snacks and meals at comprehensive summer programs

During the summer months, millions of children lose access to the breakfasts and lunches they receive at school during the school year.¹⁵ Additionally, 3 in 4 parents report that access to healthy snacks or meals is important when selecting what their child does during the summer. Increasing access to snacks and meals through summer programs offers a threefold benefit: addressing the summer hunger problem, helping summer programs provide valuable sustenance to their students that helps their energy and concentration, and adding another incentive for families to enroll their child in a summer program.

However, summer programs face multiple challenges to providing snacks and meals, including lack of resources and bureaucratic hurdles. In addition to increasing investment in summer programs, which would help program providers deal with rising food costs, reducing duplicative paperwork and expanding the number of meals that programs can provide may encourage more summer program providers to apply for funding to provide snacks and meals. For example, year-round program providers may serve meals through the Summer Food Service Program during the summer and serve afterschool meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program during the school year. While programs are often serving the same children, instead of the ability to apply for a single year-round program, they must apply for and run each food assistance program separately. Another example is that under Summer Food Service Program guidance, most sites can only provide one or two reimbursable meals each day.¹⁶ Yet, during the school year, students rely on schools for breakfasts and lunches and their afterschool program for supper. Limiting most sites to only be reimbursed for one to two meals may create a food insecure situation for some young people during the summer.



Photo credit: POSSE

Conclusion

The fifth edition of *America After 3PM* shines a light on the reality that, while families want a summer where their children can have fun, be engaged in learning and off screens, be active, connect with peers, build their confidence and ability to work in teams, and grow critical thinking and leadership skills, 12.6 million young people are missing out. The three-month stretch of summer is a time of possibility and potential for children. Highlighted in this report are examples of students learning to code, getting connected to mentors in a career field of interest to them, visiting museums and science centers to bring lessons to

life, and engaging in projects designed to spark curiosity and new interests. At the same time, barriers preventing more young people from accessing the broad range of summer experiences available to them means missed opportunities and unrealized potential. Public support for funding summer programs is overwhelming because parents want the nation's young people to have access to quality summer programs. It is evident that public will is behind helping more young people take part in enriching, engaging structured opportunities during the summer. Now it's time to make that wish our nation's reality.



Photo credit: Solon Springs, Wisconsin

Resources on summer programs

Whether your interest in summer programs is from a program provider, educator, parent, or policy perspective, there is a growing body of resources available to meet your needs. Below is a curated selection of resources—ranging from a toolkit to help plan and implement programming to a searchable database to find a program—developed by foundations, intermediaries, and researchers to help increase access to quality summer programs.

For those interested in providing summer programming:

Summer Learning Toolkit

Find tools to help plan and manage a summer program, sample job descriptions and staffing agreements, ideas for curriculum, best practices for student recruitment, and more in this toolkit that has over 50 resources to help create a quality summer program.

[View Resource ↗](#)

How Districts Plan for Successful Summer Programs

This brief spotlights three school districts' summer programs, examining key components of the strategic planning behind designing, implementing, and sustaining quality summer programs.

[View Resource ↗](#)

NSLA Summer Planning Bootcamp

In the spring, the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) hosts its annual webinar providing best practices, ideas, and tools to help those interested in providing summer programming. Topics in the most recent bootcamp included lessons from NSLA's Summer Excellence Award winners, literacy, career-connected STEM, leveraging research and data for funding, and powerful partnerships for summer impact.

[View Resource ↗](#)

Michigan Afterschool Partnership's Summer Learning Toolkit

Detailing key elements of quality summer programs and strategies to spread the word about summer programming, this toolkit also includes state specific standards of quality and funding streams available for summer.

[View Resource ↗](#)

How Community Partnerships Strengthen Summer Learning in Rural Districts

Rural school districts face unique challenges, but also have unique opportunities available in their communities. The brief explores how four rural school districts have leveraged close-knit relationships to expand and enhance their summer programs.

[View Resource ↗](#)

Building, Sustaining and Improving: Using Federal Funds for Summer Learning and Afterschool

This guide identifies more than a dozen federal funding streams and provides an easy-to-use table to compare allowable uses of funding streams to support the elements of a summer program, from program delivery to strategic partnerships.

[View Resource ↗](#)

Resources on summer programs

For parents looking for resources and supports over the summer:

NSLA's Summer Learning Ideas at Home and in Your Community

Looking for easy projects for your child to stay active and learning over the summer? This fact sheet offers a variety of free and low-cost options to create a summer of fun.

[View Resource ↗](#)

No Kid Hungry's Summer Food Resources

Families may need additional supports during the summer months to help fill the gap left when school is out and access to school breakfast and lunch pauses. This website provides resources to address summer food insecurity, including how to find a free summer meals site in your community.

[View Resource ↗](#)

American Camp Association's Summer Camp Finder

Search American Camp Association's database of nearly 4,000 camps to find a camp or program that is right for your child. You can find camps based on location, activities offered, organizational affiliation, and more.

[View Resource ↗](#)

Discover Summer

Find summer programs available in your community through this online searchable database.

[View Resource ↗](#)



Resources on summer programs

For those interested in addressing policies that support summer programs and improve access to these programs:

Consensus Study Report on Shaping Summertime Experiences

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consensus study report, “Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth,” examines the effectiveness of summer programs and provides recommendations that stretch across the local, state, and federal levels that can help improve implementation of programs, availability of and access to programs, and data collection and research on the summer months. One local level recommendation from the report is, “Local governments (e.g., county, city) should establish a quality management system (QMS) to identify and provide positive development summertime experiences for children and youth,” while a recommendation at state and federal level is, “Federal and state government agencies should review existing policies and regulations for programs and services for children and youth to enable the continuation during the summer months of school-year funding and resources for effective physical activity, nutrition, obesity prevention, and enrichment programs, particularly those that serve children and youth in poor and underserved communities.”

View Resource ↗

For anyone interested in advocating for summer programs:

National Summer Learning Week

Join a nationwide celebration held in July that shines a spotlight on the valuable role of quality summer programs.

View Resource ↗

Afterschool Alliance Policy Updates

Stay up-to-date on the latest afterschool and summer-related policy news by signing up for the Afterschool Alliance’s policy updates.

View Resource ↗

Methodology

America After 3PM is a large-scale, national tracking survey conducted every five to six years to examine the state of demand for afterschool and summer programs in the United States. The fifth edition of *America After 3PM*—which included at least 200 interviews in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., with U.S. parents or guardians with a school-age child living in their household—was conducted using a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. This included mobile-optimized online surveys and supplementary telephone interviews where 200 completed interviews could not be reached using online panels.

Survey respondents were recruited using an online, non-probability sample obtained via national opt-in consumer research panels. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish. Data were collected between January 31 and April 21, 2025. A total of 30,515 households were surveyed, and in addition to questions on participation in summer experiences, parents were asked how their

child or children are cared for in the hours after school, participation in organized activities, and demographic questions. A subset of 11,561 respondents were asked a series of follow-up questions related to summer experiences, interest in summer programs, and barriers to summer program participation. A combination of sources was used to determine quota and weighting targets, including the most recent U.S. Census American Community Survey and National Center for Education Statistics data. Quotas were set and final data were weighted to be representative of parents or guardians of children in kindergarten through 12th grade at the state and national levels by family income and race/ethnicity.

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

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Unmet demand for summer programs

Unmet demand for summer programs within:

GRADE LEVEL	
Elementary school	35%
Middle school	33%
High school	23%
RACE/ETHNICITY	
Asian American	34%
Black	37%
Hispanic	35%
Native American	37%
White	29%
COMMUNITY TYPE	
Rural communities	31%
Suburban communities	30%
Urban communities	32%

Composition of children who were not in a structured summer experience, but whose parents would have enrolled them if a program were available, by:

GRADE LEVEL	
Elementary school	52%
Middle school	25%
High school	23%
RACE/ETHNICITY	
Asian American	5%
Black	17%
Hispanic	24%
Native American	3%
White	71%
COMMUNITY TYPE	
Rural communities	29%
Suburban communities	43%
Urban communities	26%

Appendix A. Participation in summer programs

Participation in a structured summer experience within:

GRADE LEVEL	
Elementary school	24%
Middle school	24%
High school	20%
RACE/ETHNICITY	
Asian American	32%
Black	22%
Hispanic	17%
Native American	22%
White	23%
COMMUNITY TYPE	
Rural communities	15%
Suburban communities	26%
Urban communities	25%

Composition of participants in a structured summer experience by:

GRADE LEVEL	
Elementary school	48%
Middle school	24%
High school	28%
RACE/ETHNICITY	
Asian American	7%
Black	14%
Hispanic	15%
Native American	3%
White	75%
COMMUNITY TYPE	
Rural communities	17%
Suburban communities	54%
Urban communities	29%

Appendix B. Structured summer experiences in 2024

SPECIALTY CAMPS AND PROGRAMS	
Average number of weeks	4
Average hours per day	6
Average weekly cost	\$328.40*
Top 3 locations	
Community-based organization	28%
City or town	28%
Public or private school	24%

WORK/INTERNSHIPS	
Average number of weeks	6.5
Average hours per day	5.2
Average weekly cost	N/A
Top 3 locations	
Other	39%
City or town	25%
Community-based organization	24%

MANDATORY SUMMER SCHOOL	
Average number of weeks	3.8
Average hours per day	4.4
Average weekly cost	N/A
Top 3 locations	
Public or private school	70%
Community-based organization	22%
Library	21%

VOLUNTARY LEARNING AND ENRICHMENT SUMMER PROGRAMS	
Average number of weeks	4.5
Average hours per day	5.4
Average weekly cost	\$257.80*
Top 3 locations	
Community-based organization	34%
City or town	32%
Public or private school	32%

OPTIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL	
Average number of weeks	3.9
Average hours per day	4.2
Average weekly cost	\$229.00*
Top 3 locations	
Public or private school	61%
Community-based organization	24%
City or town	19%

*Among parents who report paying a fee

Endnotes

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- ¹⁴ Allen, P. J. & Noam, G. G. (2022). Youth Perspectives on Engagement and Resilient: A Representative Study on Summer Learning. Institute for the Study of Resilience in Youth and the National Summer Learning Association. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62bb6a4b377d0b67fa4e54c1/t/636154b34c1ce546f3f83c67/1667323063622/ISRY-Harvard-Youth+Perspectives+on+Summer_finalv1_10212022.pdf
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About the Afterschool Alliance

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

