

Afterschool Supports Healthy Lifestyles



Increasing children's access to healthy foods and time for physical activity is essential for helping kids grow into healthy, thriving adults. With children spending less than 25% of their time in school¹, afterschool and summer learning programs are critical partners in supporting the health of Georgia's youth by providing access to nutritious foods, keeping kids physically active, and promoting healthy habits.

Are Georgia's Kids Healthy?

Unfortunately, Georgia's youth are struggling to meet basic standards of health and well-being. In 2016-17, 14% of Georgia's youth aged 10 to 17 were overweight and 18.4% were obese, making Georgia 8th in the nation for childhood obesity prevalence.² In addition, obesity among Georgia's children is not equal, with research showing major disparities based on gender and race. For example, 19.7% of males aged 10 to 17 are obese in comparison to 17.1% of females.³ Although other factors, such as behavioral health⁴, have an impact on physical health and well-being, this research brief focuses on how the lack of access to healthy meals and adequate physical activity are impacting Georgia's youth.

Georgia's Kids and Nutrition

Regular access to healthy meals is essential for children to learn and develop at the same rates as their peers. Children who suffer from hunger have been shown to have lower grades, higher rates of absenteeism, and are more likely to repeat a grade. Unfortunately, 523,470 of Georgia's children are food insecure — meaning that they lack reliable and regular access to food.⁵

In addition, lack of adequate consumption of healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, or dairy products, is also a problem for Georgia's youth, with **43% of Georgia's high school youth eating fruits and vegetables less than once a day.**⁶ Lack of adequate consumption of healthy foods is associated with lower grades and higher rates of tardiness and absenteeism.⁷

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GEORGIA STATEWIDE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

Georgia's Kids and Physical Activity

Regular physical activity helps children build strong bones and muscles, improves cardiorespiratory fitness, reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, and decreases the likelihood of serious health conditions as an adult, such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and cancer.⁸ Beyond physical health, regular physical activity has been shown to have a positive impact on academic achievement, classroom behavior, and indicators of cognitive skills, such as concentration, memory, and verbal skills.⁹

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The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that school aged youth participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day.¹⁰ Only 56.1% of Georgia's children aged 6 to 11 and 47.2% aged 12 to 17 were physically active at least 60 minute per day on more than three days a week.¹¹ There are disparities in physical activity based on gender and race. For example, only 11.7% of white children aged 12 to 17 did not exercise at least 60 minutes per day on any day of the week in comparison to 20% of black children.¹²

There are many factors contributing to lack of exercise in Georgia's children. Only 46.1% of middle-school students and 33.6% of high-school students in Georgia attend daily physical education classes in school.¹³ Beyond school, many children do not have access to safe places to play with only 64.1% of Georgia's children living in a neighborhood with a park or playground area, lower than the national average of 76.1%.¹⁴ With a lack of safe places to play, it is not surprising that 35.5% of high school students spend three or more hours a day playing video games or using a computer.¹⁵

Impact of Afterschool Programs

Youth who actively participate in high quality afterschool programs show less prevalence of obesity when compared to their non-participating peers.¹⁶ One study of 18 schools in Georgia operating an afterschool program that used a fitness curriculum developed by the Medical College of Georgia showed a reduction in childhood obesity on a number of different measures, including body fat percentage, bone mass density, and cardiovascular fitness.¹⁷ Afterschool programs also tend to serve children most at risk for being overweight, including minorities and children from families with lower socio-economic status.¹⁸



Afterschool and Healthy Nutrition

Afterschool and summer learning programs often provide healthy meals and/or snacks when kids are out of school that curb hunger and improve nutrition standards. A 2014 survey by the Afterschool Alliance found that 79% of Georgia parents reported that their child's afterschool program offers beverages, snacks, and/or meals.¹⁹

This is particularly critical for low-income children. Most federally funded afterschool programs that prioritize serving low-income kids require their grantees to serve snacks and/or meals, including the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) housed at the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE).²⁰ To serve low-income youth outside the school day, many afterschool and summer learning programs rely on federal nutrition programs, particularly the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Nutrition Programs.

Housed at Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), CACFP is a federal program that reimburses afterschool programs that provide snacks and meals to children who are eligible for free or reduced lunch during the school day. In 2017, 677 organizations operating at 3,940 facilities in 157 of Georgia's 159 counties served a total of 74,971,855 meals through CACFP, with an average daily attendance of 116,328. To qualify for federally reimbursed afterschool snacks and meals, afterschool programs must offer educational and enrichment activities, allowing children to feed their minds and bodies.

During the summer, eligible students can receive meals through the summer nutrition programs: The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) operated by DECAL and the Seamless Summer Option operated through the NSLP at the GaDOE. In 2017, Georgia served an average of 195,233 youth daily through the summer nutrition programs, an increase of 38% from 2016 to 2017. However, this still represents only 22.4% of youth participating in Free or Reduced Lunch during the school year.²¹

Beyond providing healthy meals, many afterschool programs integrate nutrition education into their general programming which help youth develop lifelong skills, such as cooking and gardening.



Afterschool and Physical Activity

Afterschool programs often provide children with opportunities for physical activity during a time of the day that many children would otherwise be sedentary and not likely to participate in physical activity. The 2014 survey by the Afterschool Alliance found that 80% of Georgia parents say that their child's afterschool program offers opportunities for physical activity.²² Afterschool programs help address some of the causes behind lack of physical activity by providing additional time, safe space and materials, structured activities, and adult support.

The greater flexibility of afterschool and summer learning programs allow them to offer a wider breadth of physical activity options that meet the needs and interests of the youth and their families, such as swimming, archery, and dancing. In addition, many programs provide the opportunity for team sports, which, beyond providing opportunities for physical activity, help youth develop conflict resolution skills, decrease stress, and improve communication.²³

Standards for Afterschool and Summer Learning

The Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards

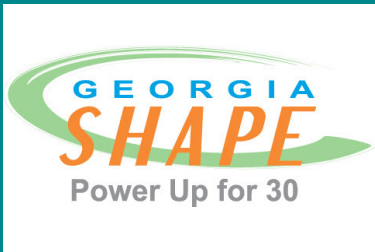
Adopted by the National Afterschool Association in 2011, the National Institute On Out-of-School Time, the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and the YMCA of the USA created a set of standards to support quality improvement and provide a shared framework in the areas of healthy eating and physical activity specifically for the afterschool field. These standards, known as the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards, address the following five content areas: **(1) Content and Quality of the physical activity, food, and beverages, (2) Staff Training, (3) Social Support including staff role modeling, family engagement, and children's social development, (4) Program Support, and (5) Environmental Support.**²⁴

The Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards, address **FIVE** content areas.

Applicable Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards

Endorsed by five state agencies, Georgia's own standards for afterschool programs, known as the Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development (ASYD) Quality Standards, have several standards related to health and well-being, including:

- **STANDARD 5.1** Offers regular opportunities for youth to engage in physical fitness and build health and nutrition knowledge and skills
- **STANDARD 5.2** When suitable to program duration, incorporates nutrition snack and/or meal options, if provided
- **STANDARD 5.3** Communicates with families to ensure that staff are aware of the individualized needs and special health concerns of youth
- **STANDARD 5.4** Seeks to connect families and caregivers with information and community resources to support the well-being of families and youth



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

Georgia SHAPE Power up for 30

Georgia Shape is Governor Nathan Deal's statewide, multi-agency, and multi-dimensional initiative that brings together governmental, philanthropic, academic, and business communities to address childhood obesity in Georgia. Power Up for 30, one component of Georgia Shape, is a statewide initiative supported by the Georgia Departments of Public Health (DPH) and Education to increase physical activity before, during, and after school. Since 2013, HealthMPowers has served as the

training partner for this initiative engaging over 880 schools and impacting more than 467,000 Georgia elementary school students.

In 2015, the Afterschool Care Program, housed at the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), collaborated with the Georgia Department of Public Health to bring Power Up for 30 to their grantees, which serve low-to-moderate income youth throughout the state with high quality out-of-school time programming. HealthMPowers created a Power Up for 30 – Out-of-School Time Statewide Training Series based on the NAA HEPA standards, the USDA Smart Snack Guidelines, and the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program Model promoted by the CDC.

The goal of the Out-of-School Time Statewide Training Series is to empower youth development professionals to help youth develop lifelong healthy habits by increasing access to healthy snacks and beverages and ensuring that every youth has the opportunity to be physically active for 30-60 minutes during their afterschool program. Following two required trainings, participating programs are provided with follow up visits from DFCS to support and monitor their progress in implementing their action plans. Between 2015 and 2017, 49 afterschool providers and over 200 staff members were trained to increase physical activity opportunities and access to healthy foods, reaching over 50,000 youth.

Recommendations

Afterschool and summer learning programs are a key part of the solution in improving the health and well-being of Georgia's youth, particularly among underserved populations. Here are some ways that Georgia can support afterschool and summer learning programs in supporting the healthy lifestyles of Georgia's young people:

- **Increase investment** in afterschool and summer learning programs that support healthy and active lifestyles as a way to reduce Georgia's high prevalence of child obesity.
- **Increase access** to CACFP and Summer Nutrition Programs across Georgia, particularly in rural areas.
- **Strengthen partnerships** at the local, regional, and state level between school districts and community-based organizations, such as food banks and afterschool programs, to support healthy nutrition and physical activity beyond the school day.
- **Increase access** to professional development opportunities, such as Georgia SHAPE, that help afterschool and youth development providers support the physical well-being of the youth they serve.



For more information on afterschool in Georgia, go to www.afterschoolga.org.
For references, go to www.afterschoolga.org/afterschool-issues.