

# Addressing the Impact of COVID-19



COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and school closures impacted the lives of 10 million Georgians, including Georgia's over 1.7 million students.<sup>1,2</sup> Despite facing challenges to their own sustainability, afterschool and summer programs stepped up and found innovative solutions to provide quality programming to youth, while also playing a greater role than ever in supporting families and communities.

## The Effects of COVID-19

Since the onset of the pandemic, learning has been disrupted and life has looked very different for students across the nation. For much of 2020 and 2021, academic classes, social and extracurricular activities, and essential services were facilitated through virtual or hybrid (a mix of virtual and in-person) models. For many youth, out-of-school time became all the time. **COVID-19 related closures, restrictions and social isolation have impacted learning, as well as the mental, emotional and social health of young people.**

### Impact on Student Learning

By May 2020, 79% of classes in Georgia were being administered through distance learning and using online resources.<sup>3</sup> A study by RedefinED, which focused on Metro Atlanta students, predicted the difficulties with non-traditional learning to cause a decline of crucial learning markers such as **3rd grade reading proficiency to fall 3.5% and 8th grade math proficiency to fall 4.8%**. In addition, about 21,000 fewer students in ELA and 29,000 fewer in math are on track for grade-level proficiency compared to years prior to the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> A recent Georgia State University study measured substantial reduction in average student achievement and recommended implementing extended learning time during the school day and learning opportunities during the summer targeted to student needs.<sup>5</sup> Now more than ever, students require the resources and spaces necessary to aid in crucial learning recovery.

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### Impact on Mental Health

A nationwide survey conducted by Save the Children in 2020 found that among school-aged kids, 27% reported feelings of anxiousness, 23% reported feelings of stress, and 22% reported feelings of unhappiness.<sup>6</sup> The social-emotional impacts of the pandemic have affected Georgia's children, with a reported 24% of adults being in households with children

who felt down, depressed or hopeless for most of the week.<sup>7</sup> An Afterschool Alliance survey reports 77% of program providers are concerned about students' mental and emotional health, in addition to students missing opportunities for social connection.<sup>8</sup>

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### Impact on Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

The average number of students served per program decreased from 933 to 368.

Afterschool and summer program providers are also facing immense challenges due to COVID-19. In 2020, the Georgia Department of Labor's business layoff and closure numbers reported approximately 569 losses from afterschool or childcare programs.<sup>9</sup> The first months of the pandemic were especially hard, with the Afterschool Alliance's Wave 1 survey (May – Jun 2020), reporting 26% of programs being completely closed and 51% being physically closed but offering some form of virtual programming. During this time, survey results also showed the average number of students served per program decreasing from 933 to 368.<sup>10</sup> According to the Wave 5 survey (Jun - July 2021), there is now more normalcy in operation with 83% of programs physically open in some capacity and 81% operating with increased safety precautions.<sup>11</sup>

Even amongst afterschool and summer programs that have managed to open, almost all are operating at a fraction of their normal capacity due to a combination of decrease in demand, social distancing measures, and increased operating costs. **51% of programs are concerned about funding and their long-term future**, which will directly impact young people and communities who rely on their services. Since the pandemic, 43% of programs' cost per child per week has increased by 1%-10% and without additional financial support, 33% of programs will have to raise parent fees and/or find new sources of revenue.<sup>13</sup>

### Exacerbating Inequities

The virus has also disproportionately impacted youth of color and youth from low-income households experiencing more negative impacts through job loss.<sup>15</sup> 56% of Georgia households with children lost some form of employment income since March 2020. This number increases to 62% among Black households and 71% among Hispanic households.<sup>16</sup> When examining access to afterschool and summer programming, these disparities based on race and income level continue to exist. In 2019, 18% of Georgia children attended an afterschool program and 33% of those children came from low-income households.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, 42% of Georgia children are not able to attend a program – a majority of whom come from Hispanic families, low income families, and those with children in elementary school.<sup>18</sup> The Afterschool Alliance Wave 2 survey (Jul – Aug 2020) found 73% of programs serving the majority of children from higher-income families were open, compared to just 38% of programs serving the majority of children from low-income families.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of circumstance, children everywhere need access to afterschool and summer learning programs.

### Afterschool and Summer Programs Have Played a Central Role in Mitigating the Impacts of COVID-19

Summer and afterschool programs have done well in innovating and adapting to challenges created by COVID-19, however, almost all still struggle to meet the demand for their services. The America After 3pm survey shows in Georgia, for every child in an afterschool program, 2 more are waiting to get in, with 238,265 children alone and unsupervised after school.<sup>20</sup> According to the Wave 5 survey (Jun - July 2021), 52% of afterschool and summer programs currently have a waitlist.<sup>21</sup> While the demand for afterschool and summer programming is clear and increasing, so has the appreciation for these opportunities. 3 in 4 parents report the experience of the pandemic has caused a greater appreciation than ever for teachers and afterschool program providers, with working parents showing an even higher likelihood of agreeing.<sup>22</sup> However according to the Wave 5 survey (Jun – July 2021), the major reason that some programs remain closed is due to lack of interest from families stemming from COVID-19 related concerns.

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### Afterschool Supports Virtual/Hybrid Learning

Afterschool programs have stepped up tremendously to aid students learning through fully virtual and hybrid means. By partnering with school officials and other community leaders, many programs retooled their services by **providing childcare for essential workers, offering healthy meals/snacks, and extending programming hours to cover the full day**. Afterschool programs played a critical role in providing a safe and

well-supervised learning environment, with 53% of programs adapting to support students for full-day virtual learning.<sup>23</sup> Georgia programs also reported being open for an additional 15 hours a week on average. The **YMCA of Metro Atlanta** was able to utilize their positive youth development and engaging programming skills to ensure children in their care finished school assignments, participated in STEAM-based enrichment activities and had time for health and physical fitness.<sup>24</sup> However, programs had limited capacity due to health-based restrictions (i.e., social distancing, student to staff ratios, etc.), while facing increased demand. Nearly half of all programs in fully virtual school districts report they had a waitlist, proving an unmet demand for families in need of support.<sup>25</sup>

## Afterschool Provides Social-Emotional Support

With increased social isolation and feelings of anxiousness, it is imperative that students receive social and emotional support during these uncertain times. Afterschool and summer learning programs are uniquely positioned to provide safe places where young people can create, sustain, and rebuild relationships with peers and trusted caring adults through hands-on activities and creative engagement. Staff in these programs are often trained to consider the “whole child” and utilize their youth development skills to build youth confidence, encourage youth to discover their motivating passions, foster problem-solving skills, and aid social development. The stimulating environments afterschool programs provide are filled with positive and supportive relationships, which foster connection and support adolescent brain development and learning.<sup>26</sup> The **Boys and Girls Club of the CSRA** provided support to help youth deal with stress through partnerships with professional counselors. In addition, they have also offered parent resources including guidance on daily routines, family activities, and virtual tutoring.<sup>27</sup> The **Statesboro-Bulloch County Parks and Recreation** has partnered with Georgia Southern University and provides internships to psychology and sociology students to deliver social emotional learning activities to youth.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, **57% of program providers are concerned about being able to hire enough staff** according to the Wave 5 survey (Jun - July 2021).<sup>29</sup> This can impact the specialization staff have for social-emotional support for the youth.

## Afterschool Supports Communities

Countless afterschool programs have started or joined local efforts to address many of the immediate struggles and needs families and communities have been facing throughout the pandemic. According to the Wave 5 survey (Jun - July 2021), 52% of providers are concerned with youth facing food insecurity, with 53% providing some form of meal assistance and 52% connecting families with community resources.<sup>32</sup> Considering a typical program has an average of six partners, afterschool programs are particularly poised to leverage resources and connect both the young people they serve and their families to various food, economic and health supports.<sup>33</sup> In many cases, afterschool programs have simply remained a trusted source of information and support for families as they navigate and confront the many challenges posed by COVID-19.<sup>34</sup>

Afterschool programs have remained a trusted source of information and support for families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **YMCA of Metro Atlanta**, one of Georgia’s largest program providers, was particularly effective in assisting the community with hunger relief and economic support. Utilizing their partnerships with Publix Super Markets, Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation, Atlanta Community Food Bank, Westside Future Fund, Paran North Church, and Atlanta Classical Academy, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta was able to expand their hunger-relief program providing 2,000 meals a day serving 164,053 meals to children and families facing food insecurity by mid-June. They also provided economic support to the community by providing childcare for essential workers. While following CDC guidelines, each center served about 80 children ages 3-12 covering the need for childcare for nearly 2,000 youth with parents working in hospital settings identified through their partners with area hospitals, the Governor’s Office, and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.<sup>37</sup>



The **Boys and Girls Club of the CSRA** provided meals across the CSRA while schools were shut down. Their meal service included door-to-door delivery of breakfast and lunch every day through a partnership with the Richmond County School System. A hotline was provided to families to schedule next day meal delivery. Families were also able to pick up free grab and go evening dinners at five Club sites 7 days a week. The Boys and Girls Club of the CSRA was able to serve over 25,000 meals from March through August of 2020.<sup>38</sup>

The **Statesboro-Bulloch County Parks and Recreation** has partnered with America’s Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia to provide meals to students in at their school based afterschool program sites. Meals are also delivered to the community based program sites. In addition, any extra meals can be sent home for siblings of students that attend the program.



## Afterschool Supports Equity

While COVID-19 has managed to impact communities of color and low-income disparately, afterschool has continued to effectively fill in gaps and pursue equitable solutions. Afterschool Alliance's America After 3pm study found Black and Latinx parents are more likely than their White counterparts to view afterschool programs as complements to children's school-day learning and influential in helping them get excited about education.<sup>41</sup> Parents also directly benefit, with Latinx and Black families reporting at higher rates than White families, their children's program provides classes and workshops related to skill-building and community resources. Families of color are also overwhelmingly satisfied with their programs, reporting 93% and 94% satisfaction among Black and Latinx parents respectively.<sup>42</sup> Afterschool programs have also worked extensively to support low-income families, with 86% of 21st Century Community Learning Center programs offering onsite snacks and meals according to Wave 3 survey results.<sup>43</sup>

93% of Black parents and 94% of Latinx parents are satisfied with their child's afterschool program.

## Summer Programs Mitigate the Impacts of COVID-19

Summer programs have been able to utilize the flexible nature of their programs to adapt and provide targeted support to youth and families during the summers of 2020 and 2021. Most programs that were able to operate modified their program model and/or core function in some way to meet the needs of young people, families, and communities. The Afterschool Alliance Wave 2 survey results showed that after a few months to adjust from initial lockdowns in March, 95% of summer programs were able to open in some capacity. Some summer programs worked to fulfill the basic needs of their youth, such as access to food and technology. Programs like **Breakthrough Atlanta** helped to get young people connected to virtual programming and even provided counseling services for both youth and parents. The National Summer Learning Association reported that many young people who attended summer programs cited positive experiences such as having the opportunity to connect with peers, develop their skills, engage in caring relationships with adult staff, and being provided the room to simply have fun. Summer enrichment programs like **Georgia's Odyssey Inc.** have also long played a role in learning loss recovery, with one study showing a boost of 20-25% of typical annual gains in math and language arts for students who attended voluntary summer learning programs. Wave 4 survey results provide an optimistic outlook on summer collaborations, with 47% of surveyed programs reporting being in conversations with their schools and school districts about how to best support learning this upcoming summer.

95% of summer programs were able to open in some capacity.

## Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has made abundantly clear how essential quality afterschool and summer learning programs are for our youth. They demonstrated ability to quickly adapt and find ways to continue supporting children, families and communities when many have and continue to struggle. As parent appreciation for the field and demand for programs grow, these programs must receive the support they need to thrive.

1. Develop partnerships between school districts and community-based afterschool and summer programs to utilize federal stimulus and recovery funds to combat learning loss. Collaborations can include leveraging different expertise and resources, sharing professional development or staff, districts providing transportation to programs, districts partnering with community programs to provide enrichment in the school building after hours and more.
2. Increase federal and state funding to afterschool and summer learning programs to increase access, strengthen quality, and ensure affordability of care.
3. Allocate state and local federal COVID-19 funds to support the expansion and enhancement of afterschool and summer learning programs.
4. Continue to allow flexibility of funding and within policies to ensure programs are able to adapt to best meet evolving youth and family needs.
5. Make digital devices widely accessible to low-income families and families of color, with a focus on the digital components necessary for virtual learning and out-of-school time programming.
6. Consider broadband as a public utility and build infrastructure to guarantee universal access, regardless of income or location.
7. Identify innovative and successful strategies to reach and educate youth for replication, such as school-community partnerships, utilizing alternative locations for services, virtual programming and connections with older youth and families, and safety measures.



For more information on afterschool in Georgia, go to [www.afterschoolga.org](http://www.afterschoolga.org).  
For references, go to [www.afterschoolga.org/afterschool-issues](http://www.afterschoolga.org/afterschool-issues).