

Seven in Ten Voters Want New Congress To Increase Afterschool Funding, Poll Finds

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Voters See Afterschool Programs as Necessity for their Communities

Voters want the new Congress and their newly elected state and local officials to increase funding for afterschool programs, according to a public opinion survey conducted on election eve and election day. Developed by Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, Inc. for the Afterschool Alliance, the poll found that 72 percent of voters agree that “our newly elected public officials in Congress should increase funding for afterschool programs,” and just 24 percent disagree. When asked if they “support increase[d] funding for afterschool programs even if it leads to a tax increase,” 69 percent of voters said they want funding to increase. Seventy-three percent want their newly elected state and local officials to provide more funds for afterschool programs. “Voters know that afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “They voted for change last week, and now they want the officials they elected to invest in the future by making quality afterschool programs available to all children and families.” Despite an agreement embodied in the No Child Left Behind Act for steady increases in afterschool funding, federal support has been slowly eroding for five years. As a result, many states were unable to make new grants to afterschool programs last year. Other findings from the new survey:

• Eighty-two percent of voters agree that there should be some type of organized activity or safe place for children and teens to go after school every day that provides opportunities for them to learn (66 percent strongly agree).

• Support for afterschool crosses party and ideological lines. Eighty-eight percent of Democrats, 84 percent of Independents and 76 percent of Republicans agree on the need for an organized activity or safe place for children and teens, as do 70 percent of conservative men.

• Two in three voters (65 percent) say that afterschool programs “are an absolute necessity” for their community. Seventy-eight percent of Democratic women, 60 percent of Republican women and 96 percent of African American voters agree with that statement.

• When told that kids in afterschool programs are less likely to get involved in criminal activity, use drugs or alcohol, become teen parents and drop out of school, 89 percent of voters “including 85 percent of Republicans, 86 percent of men, 88 percent of people who attend a religious service every week, and 85 percent of Bush voters” say afterschool programs are very (66 percent) or somewhat (23 percent) important.

“Voter support for afterschool programs is broad, deep and enduring,” Grant added. “Americans recognize that these programs provide tremendous benefits. Lawmakers should pay attention. The federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool initiative is badly under-funded and, with the exception of California, few states are doing as much as they could to support afterschool programs. The result is that too many students are alone and unsupervised –” and at risk –” each afternoon when the school day ends. Changing that is a high priority for voters, and it should be a high priority for lawmakers as well.” A web-based survey of afterschool program leaders, released by the Afterschool Alliance in October, found that many programs are fully subscribed but still unable to meet the demand in their communities. Respondents said budget cuts and stagnation are taking a toll on programs and the youth and families they serve. Providers report that future funding is insecure, and many have already been forced to make painful cuts. The program survey also found that afterschool programs are serving a high need population, and serving more children than expected. Some 14.3 million kindergarten through 12th graders in this country take care of themselves after the school day ends, including almost four million middle school students in grades six to eight. The parents of 15.3 million children say their children would participate if an afterschool program were available. The new public opinion telephone survey was conducted on November 7 and 8, 2006, and reached 1,000 registered voters nationwide. Its margin of error is plus or minus 3.1%. The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children have access to quality afterschool programs by 2010. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

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