

# Share Our Strength Afterschool Meals Survey



July 2013

**APCO**  
insight®

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Background & Objectives

Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry® campaigns in cities and states across the country are working to connect kids to the USDA's At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program Afterschool meals program. While its campaigns have been finding success in recruiting new sites and sponsors to the program, there is little data and research available about the need and utilization of the program by families.

Share Our Strength engaged APCO Insight to conduct research to better understand families' need, awareness and interest in the program.

Specifically, the research objectives include:

- Understand current afterschool program participation and food/meal behaviors
- Measure awareness and understanding of the Afterschool Meals Program
- Gauge interest in the Afterschool Meals Program
- Validate real and perceived barriers to participation
- Evaluate importance and influence of specific program initiatives (food, safe supervision, activities, etc.)
- Assess value and willingness to participate
- Identify the best communication channels and messengers for outreach

# Methodology

APCO Insight, the opinion research division of APCO Worldwide, designed and conducted the 2013 Afterschool Meals Program Survey. The research surveyed low-income parents in the United States.

Quotas were placed during interviewing and data have been weighted to ensure a representative balance by region, income level and child age according to available census data for this population.

Eligibility	Poverty Income Ratio (PIR) $\leq$ 185% At least one child between 5 and 18 living in their household Household decision makers
Sample Size & Margin of Error	1000 national interviews
Margin of Error	( $\pm$ 3.1% at 95% confidence interval)
Data Collection	Computer Aided Web Interviewing (CAWI) Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
Average Length of Interview	Approximately 14-20 minutes
Field Dates	June 14-25, 2013

*\*Pulaski, Benton, Crawford, Faulkner, Garland, Lonoke, Saline, Washington*

# Key Findings

## AFTERSCHOOL BEHAVIORS & HARDSHIPS

- The vast majority of low-income children are going home afterschool where they are usually provided with a snack to hold them over until dinner.
- Dinners are eaten at home most week nights as well, though parents admit they are not always healthy meals.
- Many low-income families report facing hardships afterschool. A majority say tight budgets can make providing afterschool food to their children challenging. Additionally, nutrition is a concern for many.

## AWARENESS, PARTICIPATION & INTEREST

- Many are unaware of free or affordable afterschool programs in their communities and even more do not know of programs or locations where food is provided for children.
- Current participation is low, even among those who say they are aware of a program; still, the majority of those who are aware and have not participated express high interest in such a program.
- A strong majority express interest in a free or affordable afterschool program.
- Providing food, particularly healthy food, only further increases interest.
- Almost all see an afterschool snacks or meals program as being helpful for their families.
- The most vulnerable (e.g., food insecure, participating in food assistance programs, lower PIR) express the highest interest.

# Key Findings (continued)

## PROGRAM INCENTIVES AND BARRIERS

- Parents welcome afterschool food; a plurality say they would prefer that both snacks and meals be served to their children as part of the program.
- While activities, a safe location, and food are all seen as draws, the first two items are viewed as the biggest incentives. Parents would like to see a variety of activities, but when forced to make a choice most commonly select tutoring.
- The minority who say they aren't interested report simply not seeing a personal need for an afterschool meals program. They prefer that their child comes home afterschool and feel they can provide food.
- For those who show strong interest, they express most concern over whether they may qualify to participate.
- There is some sentiment that families want to eat dinner together as a family, but even many of these families say they see afterschool meals as an addition to dinner, not a replacement.

## MESSENGERS AND CHANNELS

- Parents are open to a variety of messengers, most notably schools; they also prefer direct communication in the form of mail, flyers and email.
- Food assistance participants also welcome information from their local office or site.

# Implications & Recommendations

- There is a clear opportunity for afterschool snacks or meals programs to fill a need among low-income families. Parents say they face hardships and that an afterschool program would be helpful.
- Most parents aren't concerned that an afterschool snacks or meals program will ruin their family dinners; children are home, so competing time commitments also do not appear to be an issue. Raising awareness and communicating that all children are eligible will help overcome the biggest apparent barriers.
- Educational and physical activities, safe supervision, and nutritious food are seen as major incentives and focusing outreach around these areas is recommended.
- Since parents welcome food – whether a snack, meal or both – having a preference for serving meals may best address afterschool hardships. About half agree that their children often need more than a snack to make it to dinner, more than a third already say their children are eating meals between lunch and dinner, and the most vulnerable (who also express greatest interest) say they'd prefer more than a lone snack.
- Parents expect to learn about afterschool programs from their children's schools. To the extent possible, schools should attempt to lead outreach, contacting parents directly in the form of mail and email as well as by sending flyers home with students. Where possible, partnerships should also be forged with local food assistance offices and sites.

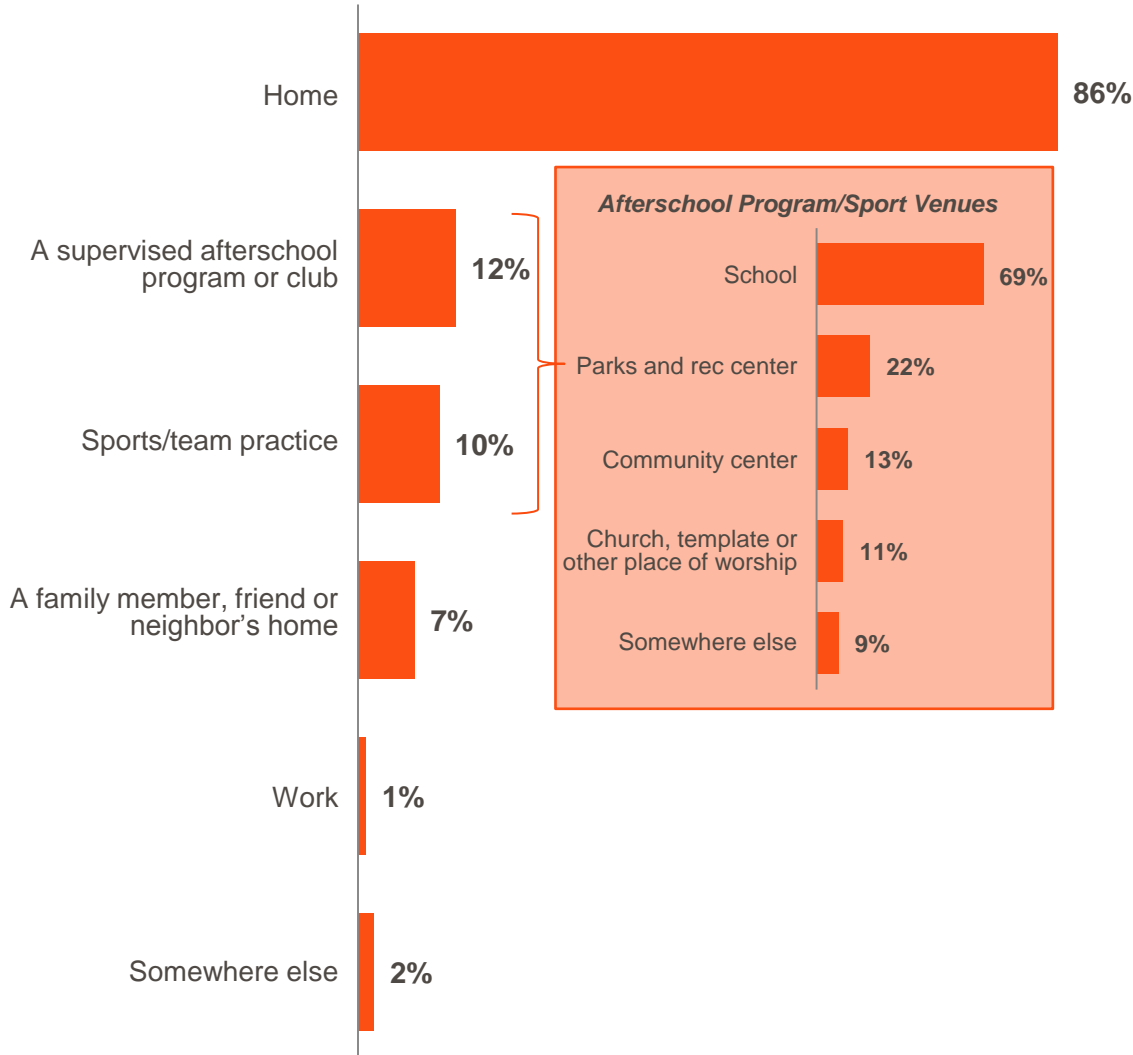




# DETAILED FINDINGS: AFTERSCHOOL BEHAVIORS & HARDSHIPS

# Low-income children are spending their afternoons at home

*Where Children Go Afterschool*



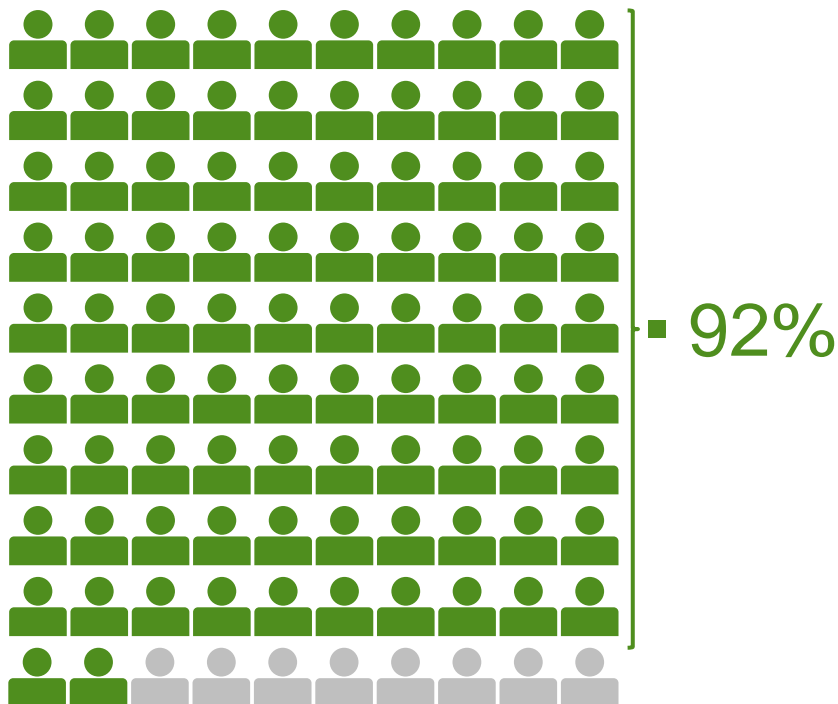
- By and large, parents report that their children go home at the end of the school day.
- If children are attending an afterschool program, club or practice, it most likely takes place at their school.
- Across all assessed subgroups, at least 3 in 4 parents say their children are home after school.

Q1. Once school has finished for the day, where does your child usually go?  
 Q5. [IF Q1= an afterschool program or sports practice] Where is the afterschool program, club or practice held? (n=194)

# Almost all children eat between school lunch and dinner

- Across all subgroups, at least 85 percent say their children usually eat in the afternoon.

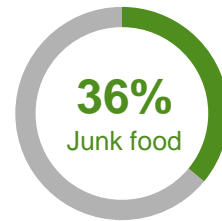
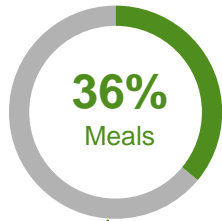
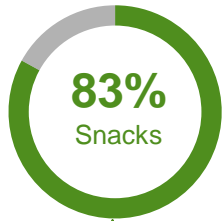
*Children Who Usually Eat  
Between Lunch and Dinner*



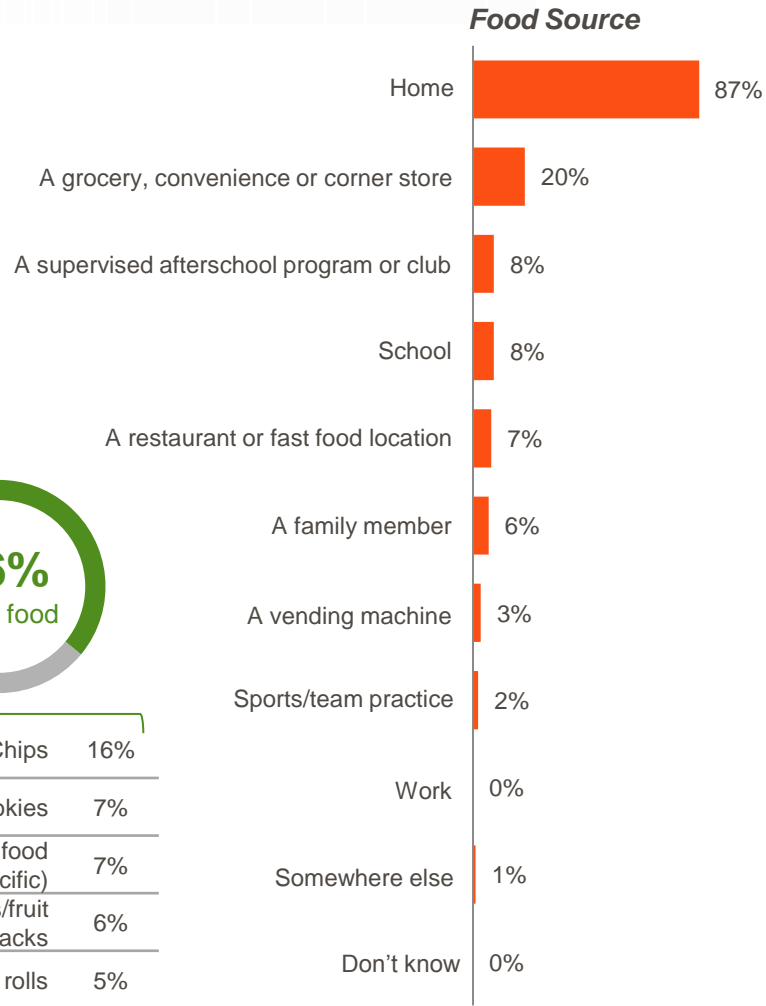
# Afterschool food comes from home and is usually a snack

- Younger kids (under 13) are more likely to have fruits and snacks.
- As communities become more populated, likelihood to eat junk food increases.
- Younger parents (18-24) are most likely to serve food from home, but they also report the highest usage of sources outside the home such as grocery, convenience, corner stores (42%), schools(30%) or vending machines (16%).

## What they are eating...



Fruits	44%	Sandwich	22%	Fruit (non-specific)	44%	Chips	16%
Snack (non-specific)	18%	Meal/leftovers (non-specific)	8%	Vegetables (non-specific)	10%	Cookies	7%
Chips	16%	Ramen/Pasta	6%	Apples/applesauce	8%	Fast food/junk food (non-specific)	7%
Crackers/graham /peanut butter	14%	Pizza	5%	Juice	5%	Candy/gummies/fruit snacks	6%
Vegetables	10%	Chicken Tenders/Nuggets	2%	Banana	2%	Pizza/pizza rolls	5%



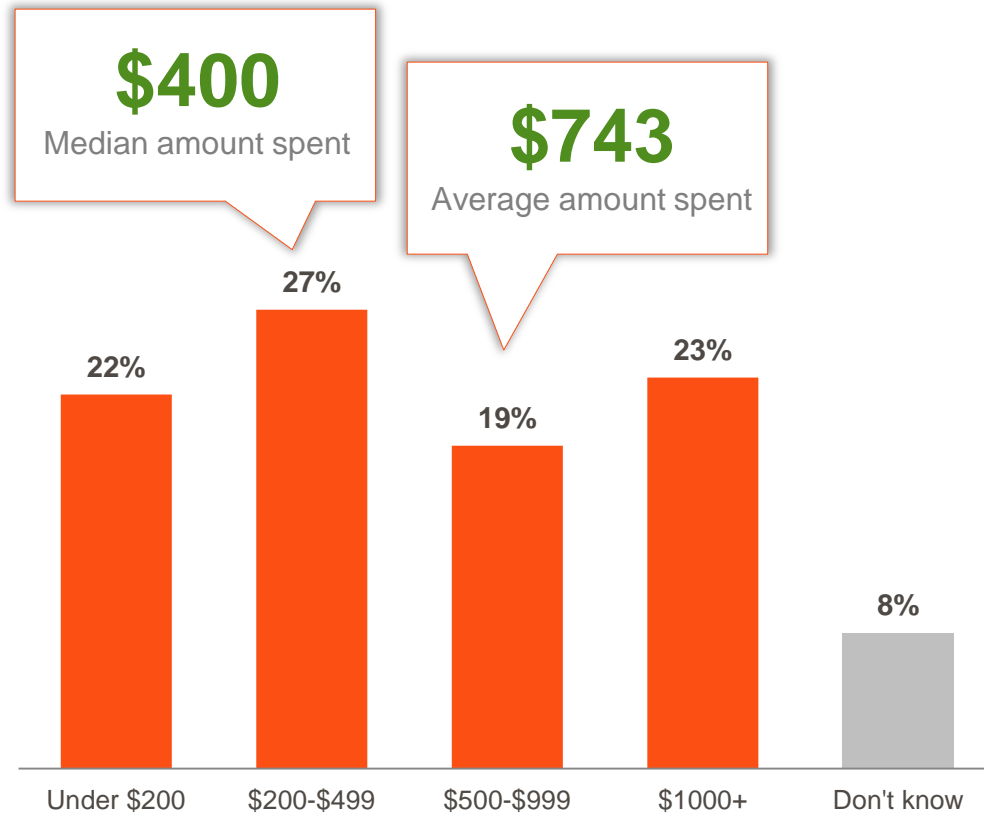
(n=916)  
 CODED OPEN ENDS  
 MULTIPLE RESPONSE  
 TOP 5 RESPONSES SHOWN FROM EACH CATEGORY

(n=916)  
 MULTIPLE RESPONSE

Q15B. [IF Q15=yes] And what [is he/she, are they] usually eating between school lunch and dinner?  
 Q15C. [IF Q15=yes] And does this food come from...

# Low-income families are spending significant amounts on afterschool food

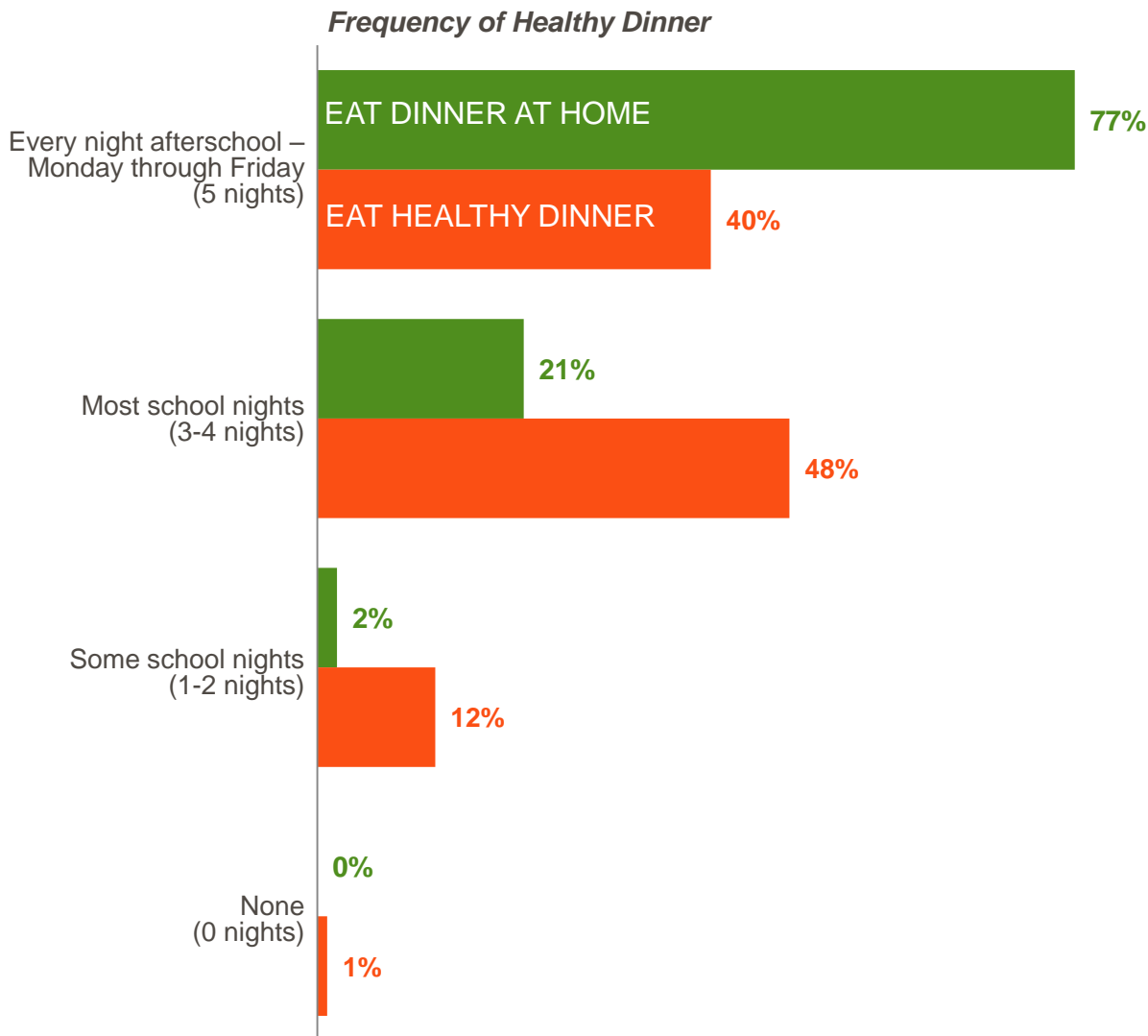
*Amount Spent on Afterschool Food*



- All assessed subgroups report spending at least an average of \$500 this past school year.

Q15D. How much would you estimate that your family spent on afterschool food (that is, food eaten between lunch and dinner) for your child(ren) this past school year? (n=916)

# During the week, children usually eat dinner at home; parents admit they are not always healthy meals

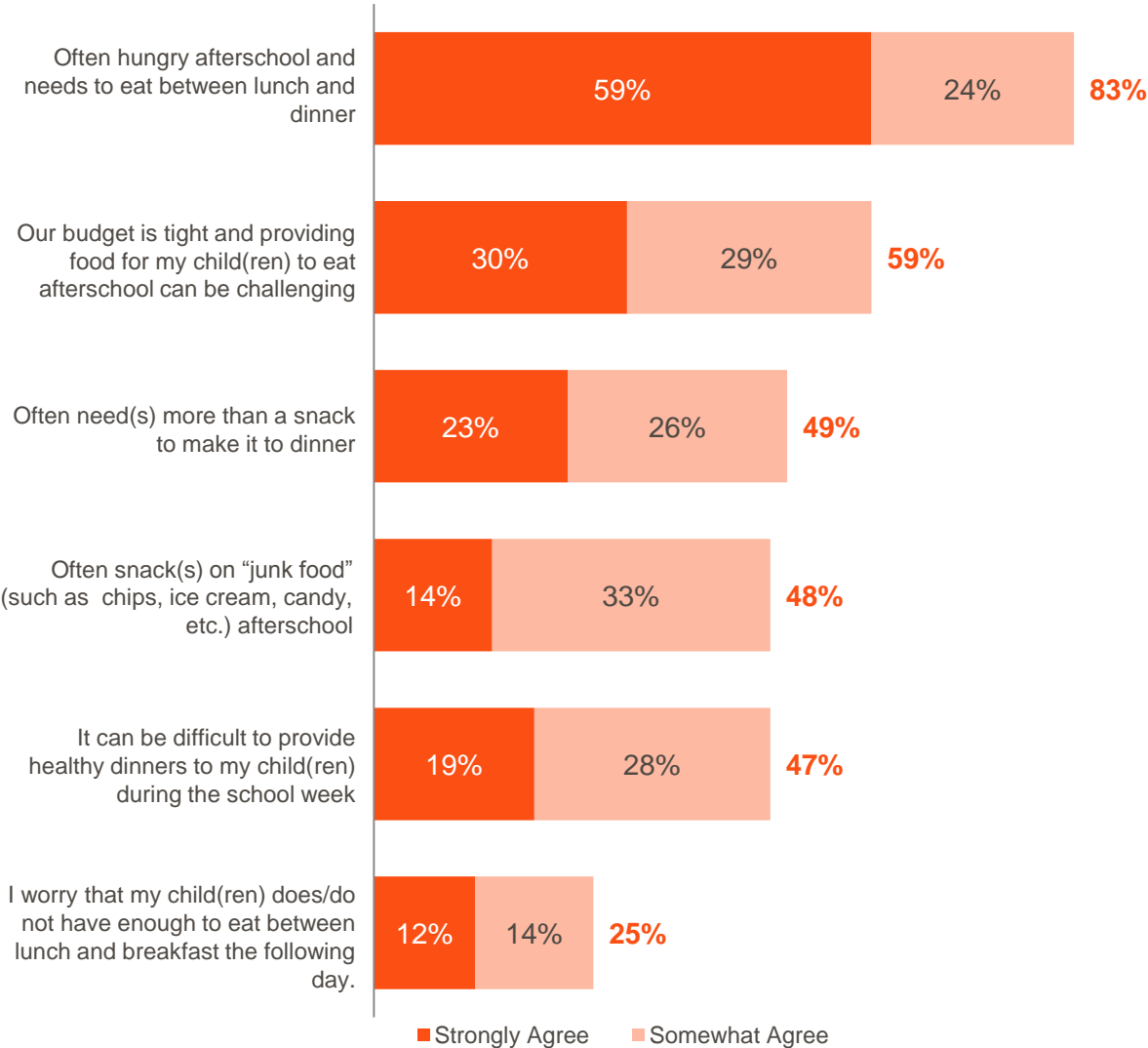


- 3 in 4 parents say their children eat dinner at home Monday through Friday.
- Much fewer (almost half as many) report eating healthy dinners as often.

Q25. Thinking about a typical school week, how many nights would you say your child(ren) is/are eating dinner at home?  
Q30. Thinking about a typical school week, how many nights would you say your child(ren) is/are eating a healthy dinner that includes foods like vegetables, fruits, low-fat or fat free milk products, whole grains, lean meats and water, but not a lot of extra salt, sugar or fat?

# Many low-income families face afterschool hardships

## Afterschool Hardships



- A majority of parents admit that tight budgets can make providing afterschool food to their children challenging.
- Nutrition is also a concern.
  - Half say their children often snack on junk food afterschool.
  - Half also say it can be difficult to provide healthy dinners during the school week.
- 1 in 4 express concern that their children do not have enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the next day.
- Food security and hardships have an inverse relationship.
- Again, junk food appears to be more common in urban areas (21% strongly agree).

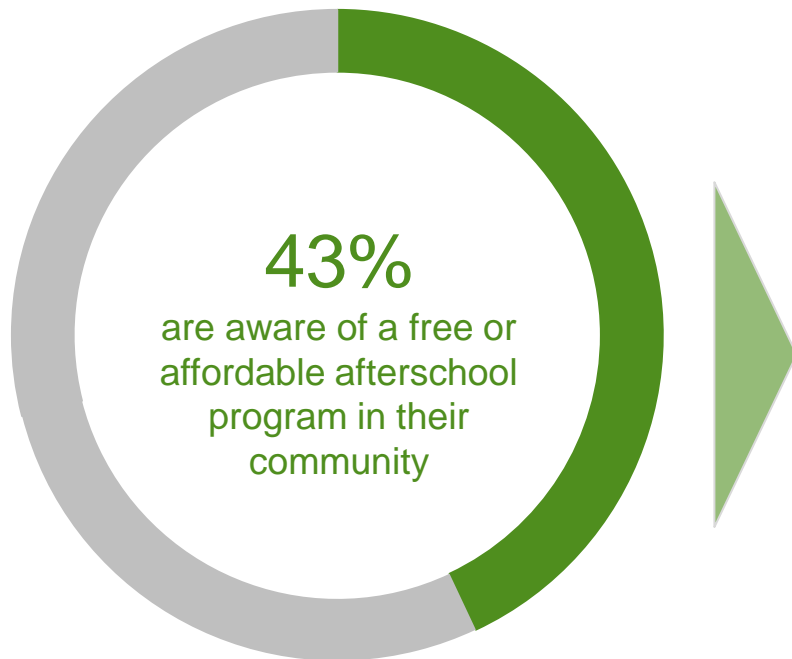


# DETAILED FINDINGS: AWARENESS & PARTICIPATION

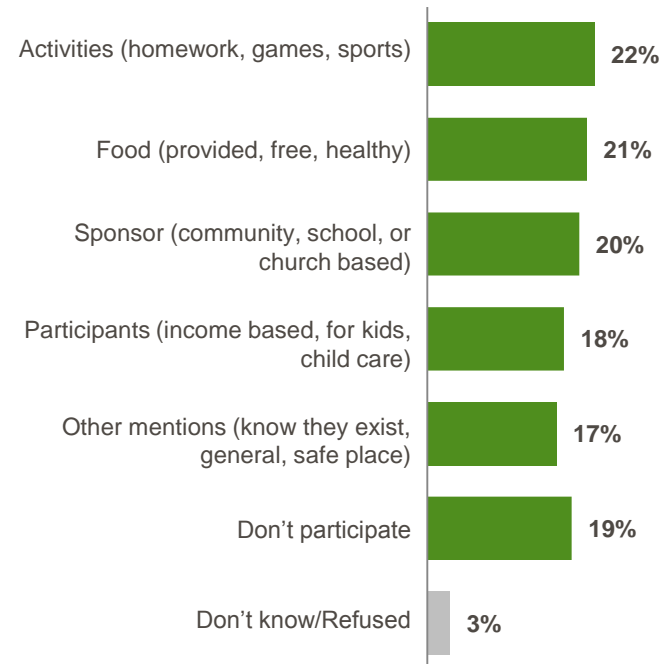


# 2 in 5 parents report knowing of a free or affordable afterschool program in their communities

- Unaided, parents say these programs have activities and a few (1 in 5 of those who are aware of a program) mention that the programs provide food.

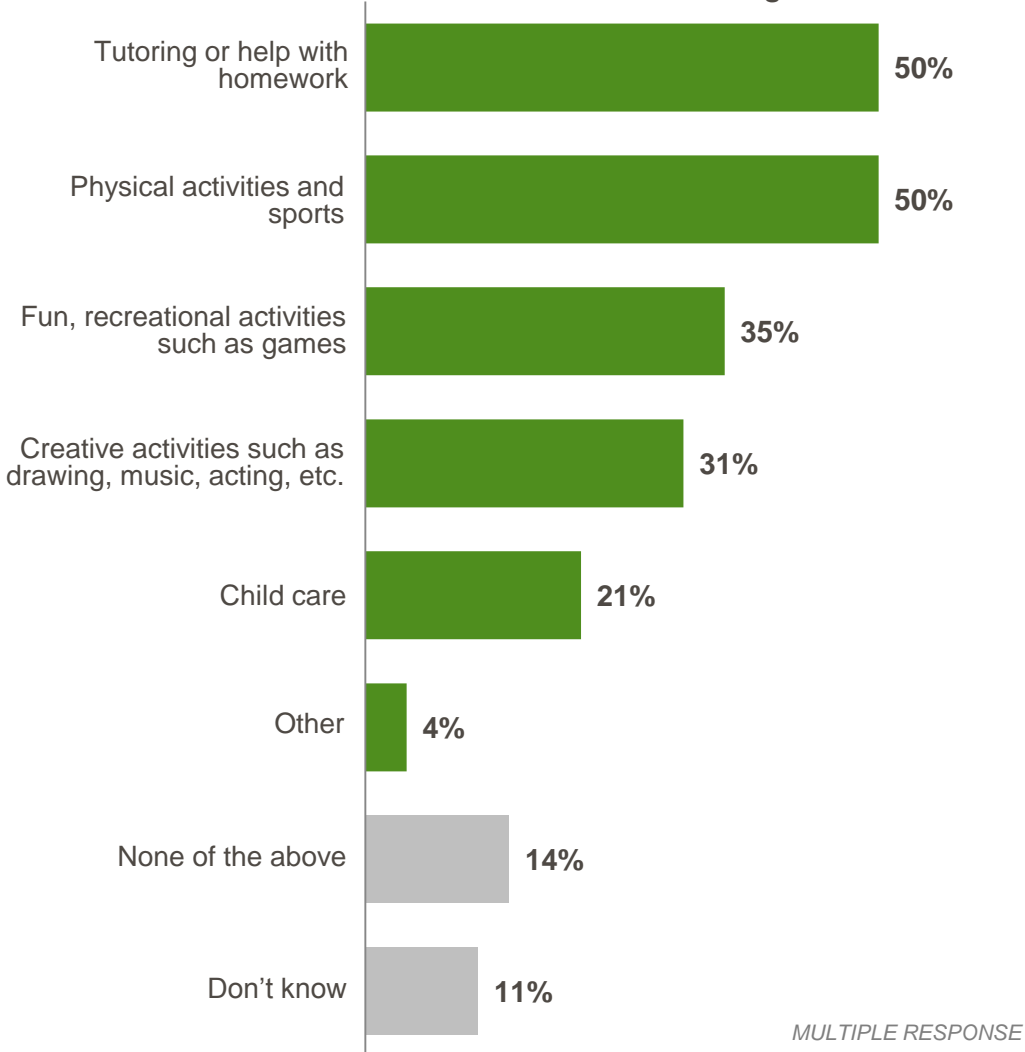


## Unaided Awareness



# 3 in 4 parents know of available afterschool activities at their children's schools

*Afterschool Activities or Programs*

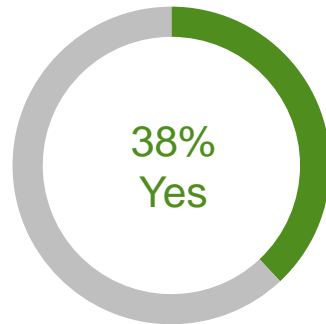


- Tutoring and physical activities are most common.

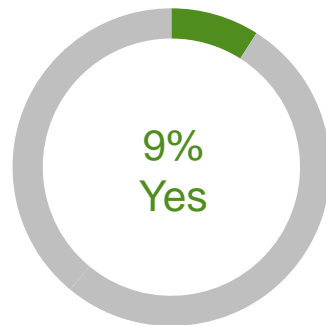
# Awareness of available afterschool food is around 1 in 3; 1 in 5 say they have participated

- 34 percent of low-income parents say they are aware of an afterschool program that provides food or of a local site where children can go afterschool to receive free food.
- Participation among those who are aware of a program is 39 percent.
- As income decreases and participation in food assistance programs increases, past participation also increases.
- Participation is most common in urban areas (27%).

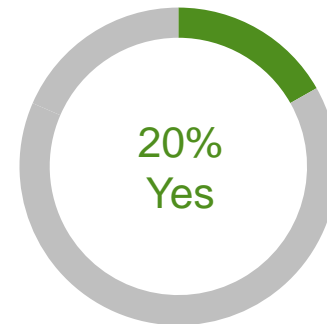
There is an afterschool program in my community or at my child's school that provides food to the children who attend.



There is a local school, church, parks and recreation center, or community center where children can go afterschool to receive free food.



I have a child who received free food afterschool from a program or local organization like a school, church, parks and recreation center or community center.



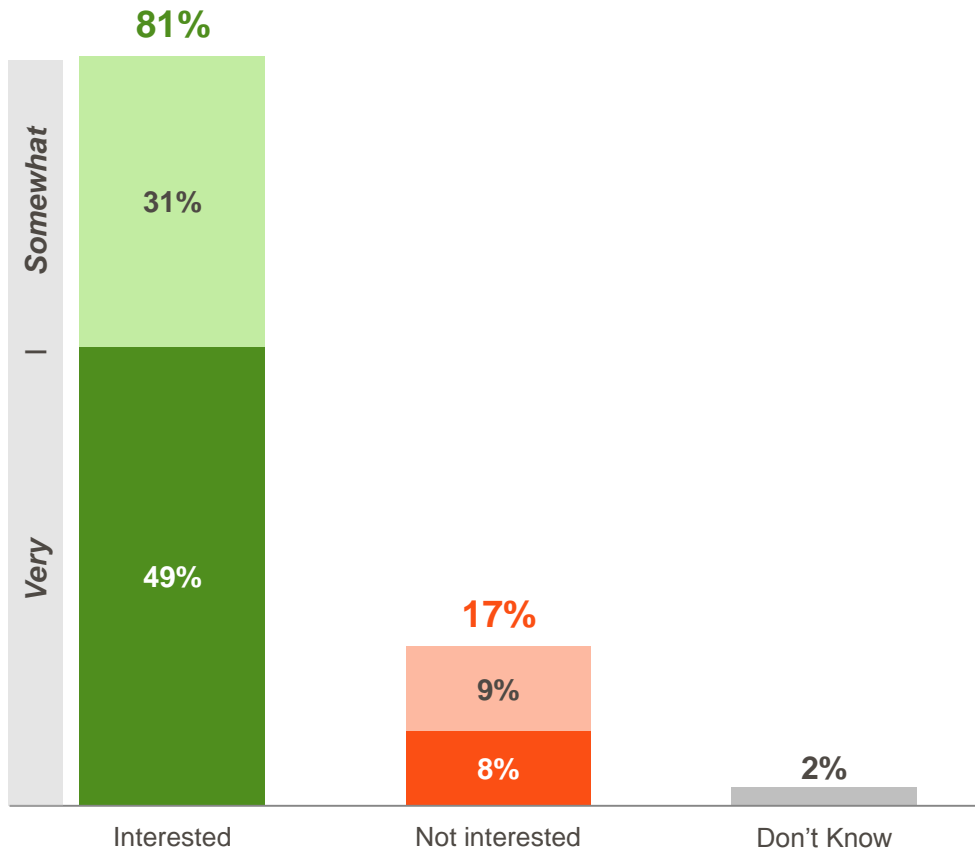
Q40C. [IF Q40A=Yes OR Q41≠don't know or none of the above] To the best of your knowledge, do any of these afterschool programs provide food to the children who attend? (n=809)  
Q45. [IF Q40A=No OR Don't know] To the best of your knowledge, is there a local school, church, parks and recreation center, or community center where children can go afterschool to receive free food? (n=567)  
Q50. This past school year, did you have a child who received free food afterschool from a program or local organization like a school, church, parks and recreation center or community center?



# DETAILED FINDINGS: INTEREST

# There is very strong initial interest in free and affordable afterschool programs

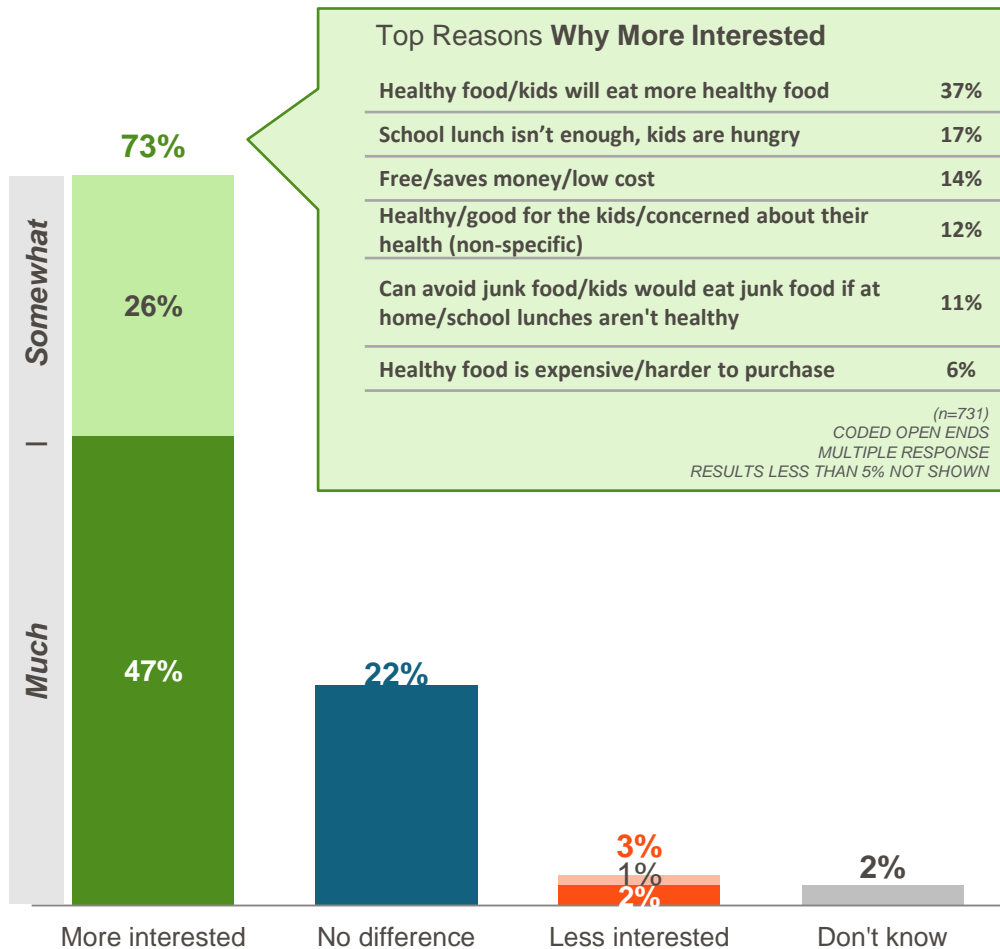
*Interest in Afterschool Program*



- Even before details that food would be provided, 1 in 2 parents say they are *very interested*.
- At least 3 in 5 parents in all assessed subgroups show interest.
- The most vulnerable populations show greatest interest – as food insecurity and participation in assistance programs increases, so does interest (67 percent of parents who identify as having very low food security say they are *very interested*).
- Younger moms (under 34) and parents of younger children (under 12) are also more likely to show interest.

# Providing free, healthy food only further increases interest

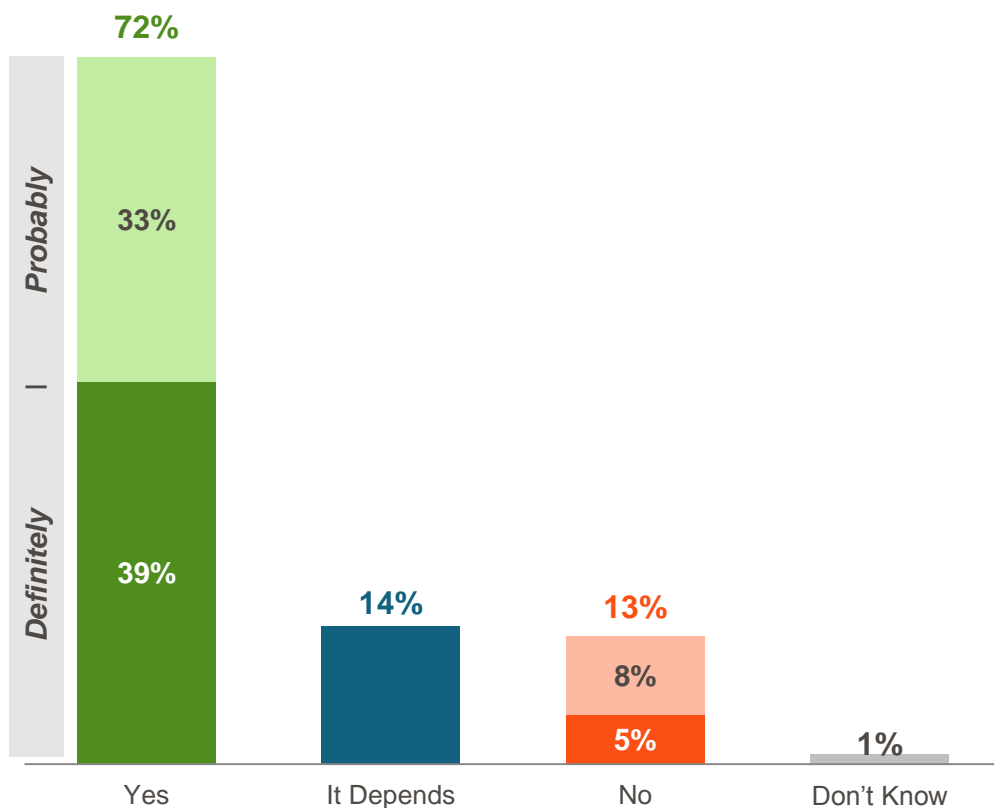
## Impact of Free Healthy Food on Interest



- Upon review of unaided explanations, nutrition appears to be a bigger motivator than costs.
- Very few say food is a deterrent.
- Again, the most vulnerable see the greatest benefits – as food insecurity and participation in assistance programs increases, so does interest.

# Asked more directly, interest in an afterschool program that provides food is again very high

Interest in Afterschool School Meals Program



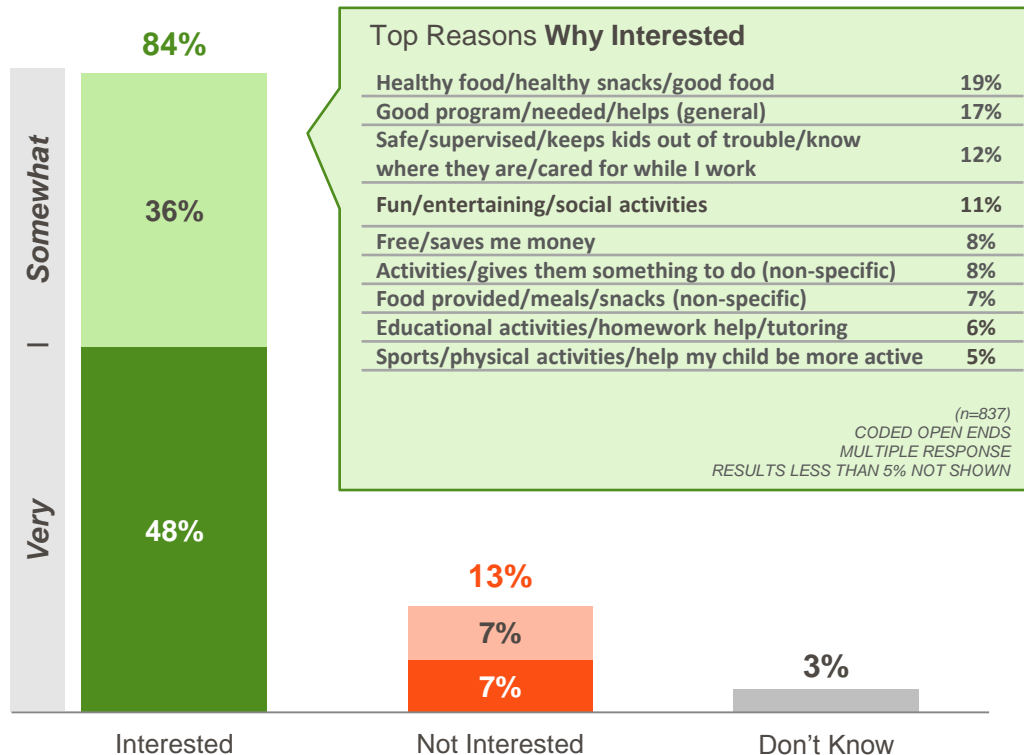
- 7 in 10 say they are likely to have their children participate.
- 4 in 10 say they would *definitely* have their children participate.
- At least 6 in 10 of all assessed subgroups say they would probably or definitely have their children participate.
- Interest increases as income and food security decreases.
- Even those who are aware of a program, but did not participate express high interest (67%).

# With more information on the program, interest increases

## Informed Interest

During the school year, the afterschool meals program helps students get the nutritious meals they need in a safe, supervised location after the school day ends. The meals are served at afterschool programs that offer educational, recreational and social activities. Programs are held at safe local places like schools, churches, parks and recreation centers, and community centers.

- Interest increases three percentage points; non-interest decreases 4 percentage points.
- Food and activities are both seen as big draws – 28 and 26 percent, respectively, cite these as motivators.
- Subgroup analysis follows similar trends to initial interest.



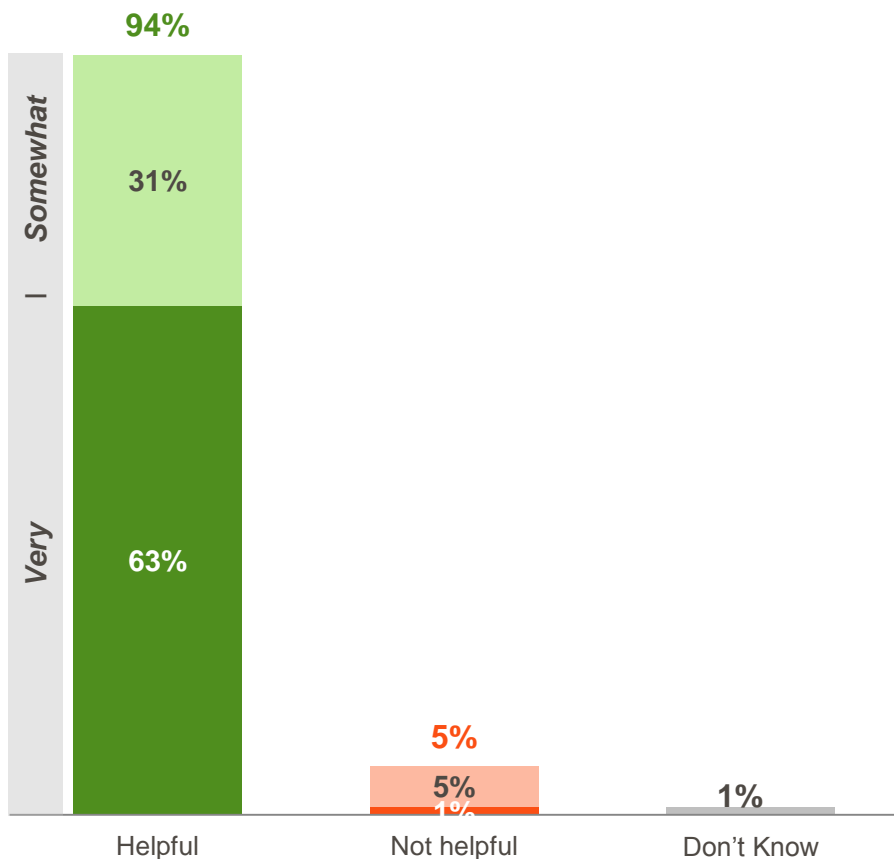
Q75. Here is some more information about an afterschool program that serves foods like those just mentioned. This program may be available in your community. Now that you have learned a bit more about the program, how interested would you be in having your child(ren) participate?

Q80. Why do you say you are interested?



# Of those interested, almost all believe an afterschool snacks or meals program would be helpful for their family

*Helpfulness of Afterschool Meals Program*



- 6 in 10 say it would be *very helpful*.
- By and large, all assessed subgroups see such a program as helpful, most notably among vulnerable populations, including the food insecure, the very poor, those on food assistance and single parents.



# PROGRAM INCENTIVES

# A plurality of parents say they would want both afterschool meals and snacks served

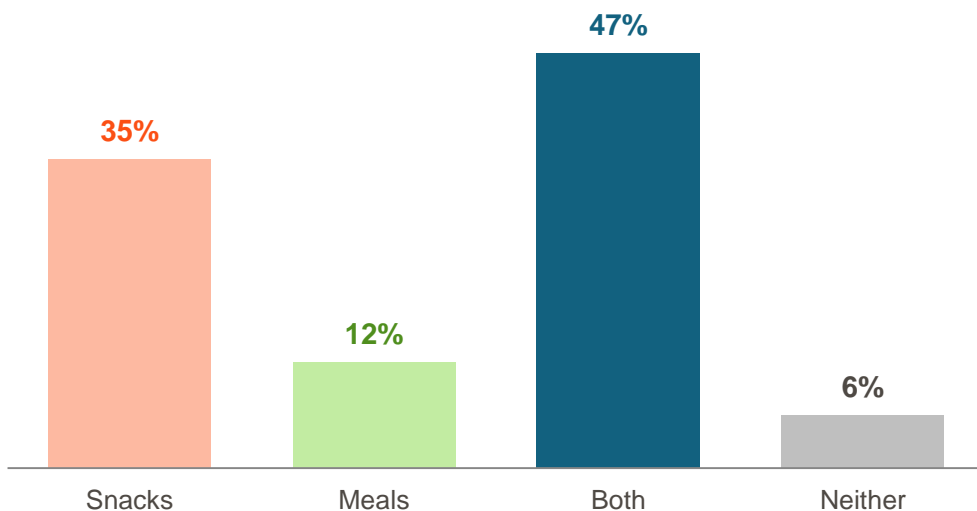
## Afterschool Food Preference for Children

### Afterschool Snacks

- A small helping of macaroni and cheese and water
- Yogurt with graham crackers and water

### Afterschool Meals

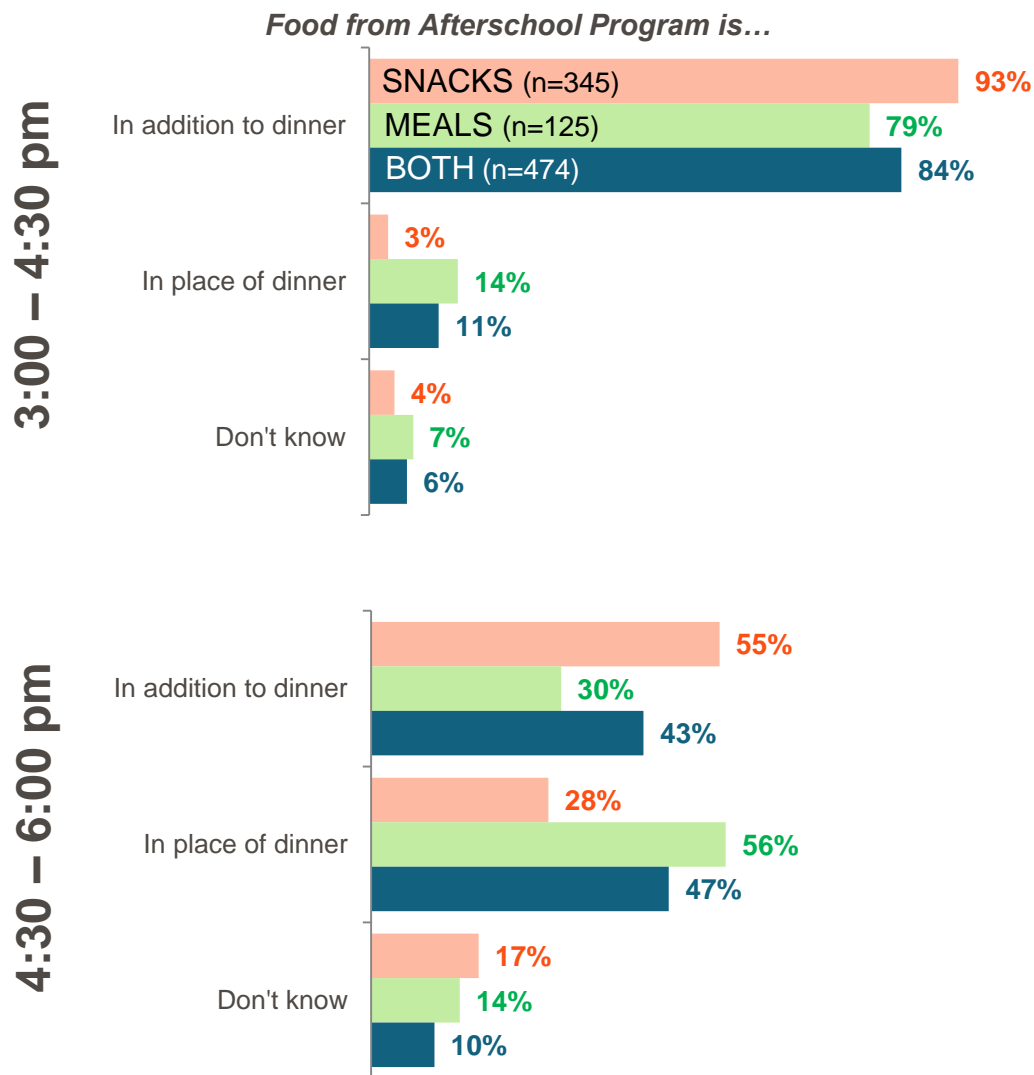
- A chicken salad sandwich with salad, pineapple and milk
- A hamburger with sweet potato fries, apple slices and milk



- Head-to-head, snacks are preferred over meals.
- Here, interest in food is on par with interest in the program (fewer say they don't want food served than say they are not interested in an afterschool snack or meal program).
- The most vulnerable populations (and those who express greatest interest in the program) prefer more than a lone snack.

Q70A. Here are some examples of the types of food that might be served at one of these afterschool programs: Based on these examples, if your child(ren) attended an afterschool program that served foods like these, would you prefer for your child(ren) to be served an afterschool snack, meal, both or neither?

# Some parents can see meals as a replacement for dinner, but only if served in the late afternoon

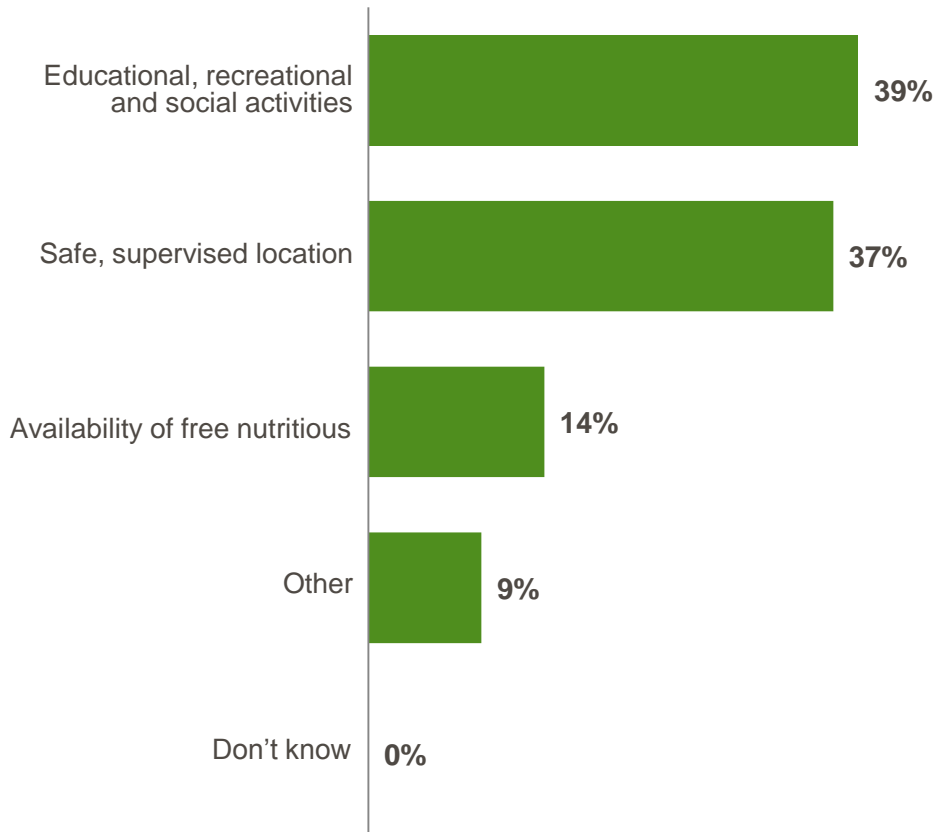


- Snacks are not seen as a replacement for dinner, no matter what time served.
- Fewer, but still a substantial number of parents say they would still plan to serve dinner, even if a meal were served in late afternoon (driven in large part by families that report higher food security).

Q70B. And if your child(ren) attended an afterschool program that served [INSERT ANSWER FROM Q70A] at the following times, would they eat them in place of dinner or in addition to dinner at home?

# Aided, parents say they are drawn to both the activities and safe, supervised locales of afterschool programs

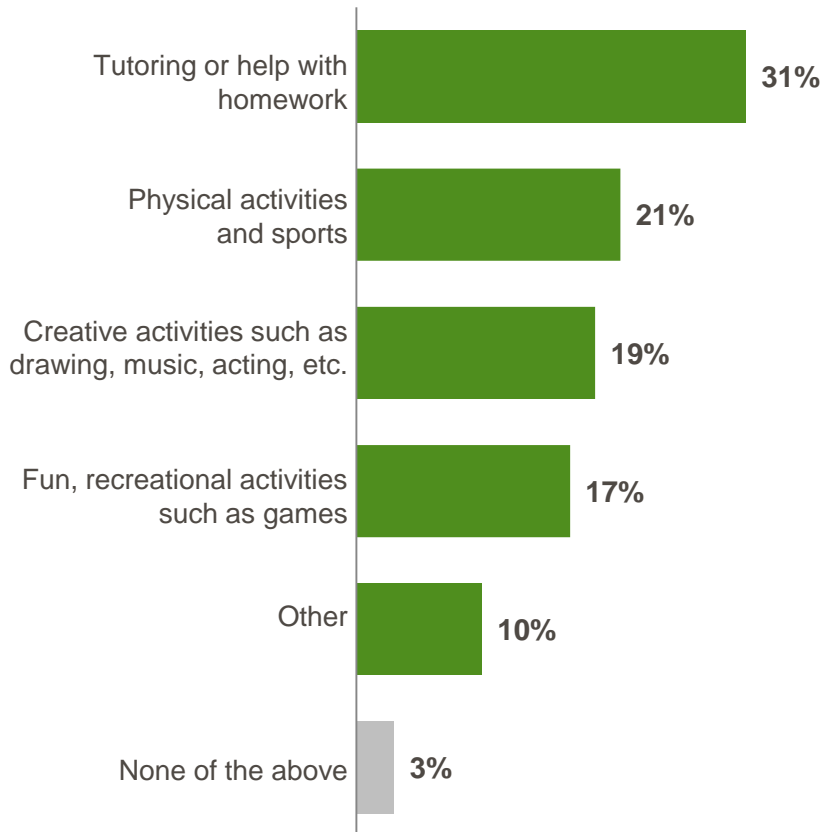
**Most Interesting Element of Afterschool Meals Programs**



- Those who express the strongest interest seem most drawn to safe, supervised locations – 40 percent of those who say they are *very interested* say it's what interests them most about the program.

# Preferred activities vary; tutoring is of most interest

*Most Interesting Activities*



- Physical, creative and fun/recreational activities follow closely behind tutoring.
- With the exception of Caucasian and NE parents, who are more evenly divided across tutoring, sports and creative activities, a plurality of all subgroups choose tutoring as the preferred activity when in a forced choice exercise.
- Parents in the South are especially motivated by tutoring (40%).
- Parents who are aware of programs but have not participated are also most motivated by tutoring (40%).

When asked to list other influencers, parents further emphasize physical and educational activities

*Other Types of Activities, Programs or Details*





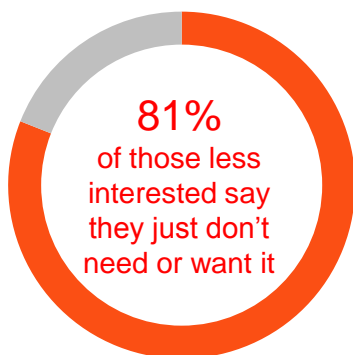
# BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATE



# Those who aren't interested say they simply don't need an afterschool meals program

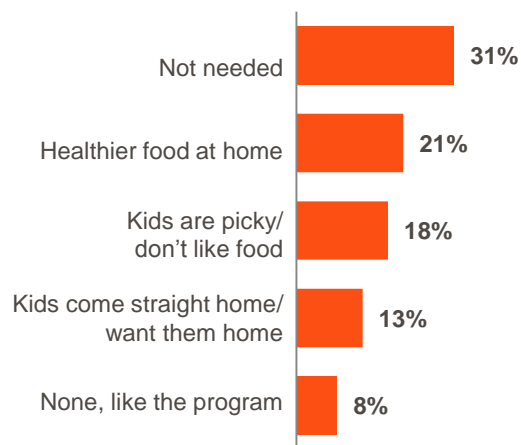
- Some parents simply want their child at home afterschool and/or feel they can provide food and activities themselves.

**Why Less Interested if Healthy Food Served?**



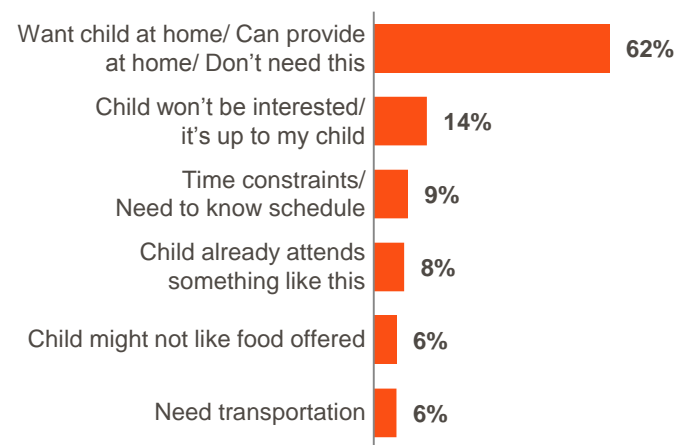
(n=30)\*  
CODED OPEN ENDS  
MULTIPLE RESPONSE  
\*SMALL BASE SIZE

**Why Do You Not Want Your Child(ren) Served A Snack Or A Meal?**



(n=56)\*  
CODED OPEN ENDS  
MULTIPLE RESPONSE  
RESULTS LESS THAN 5% NOT SHOWN  
\*SMALL BASE SIZE

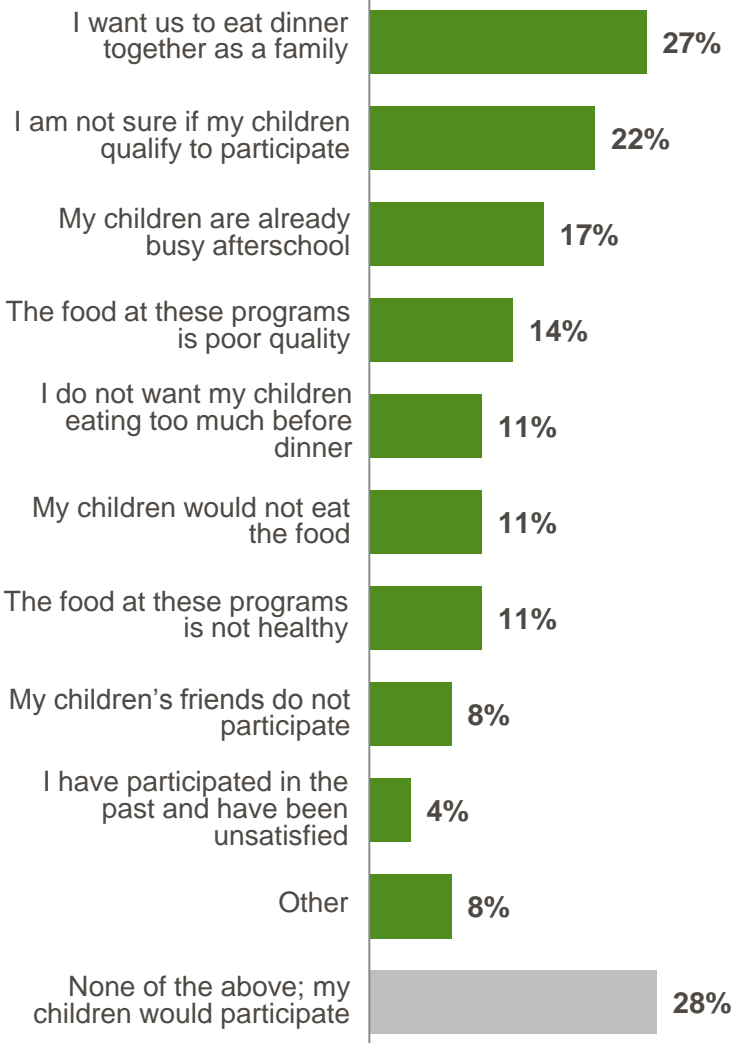
**Why Not Interested?**



Q66L. Why do you say providing free healthy food would make you less interested?  
Q70C. Please use the space below to explain why you would not want your child(ren) to be served an afterschool snack or meal.  
Q80. Why do you say you are not interested?

# When asking about obstacles to participate, parents echo that they want their children at home – at least for dinner

**Reasons for Not Participating**



MULTIPLE RESPONSE

- Those who are *very interested* are most concerned that their children may not qualify to participate (22%).
- 44 percent of parents who say they are not interested report that their children are already busy afterschool.
- Those who are aware, but have not participated in the past also cite eating dinner as a family as the leading obstacle (27%). They are also more likely to say they do not want their children eating too much before dinner (17%), their children wouldn't eat the food (15%), and/or they have participated in the past and been unsatisfied (7%).
- Among parents that say wanting to eat dinner together as a family might keep them from participating, 38 percent say that a meal served between 4:30 and 6 pm would be in addition to dinner, not a replacement.

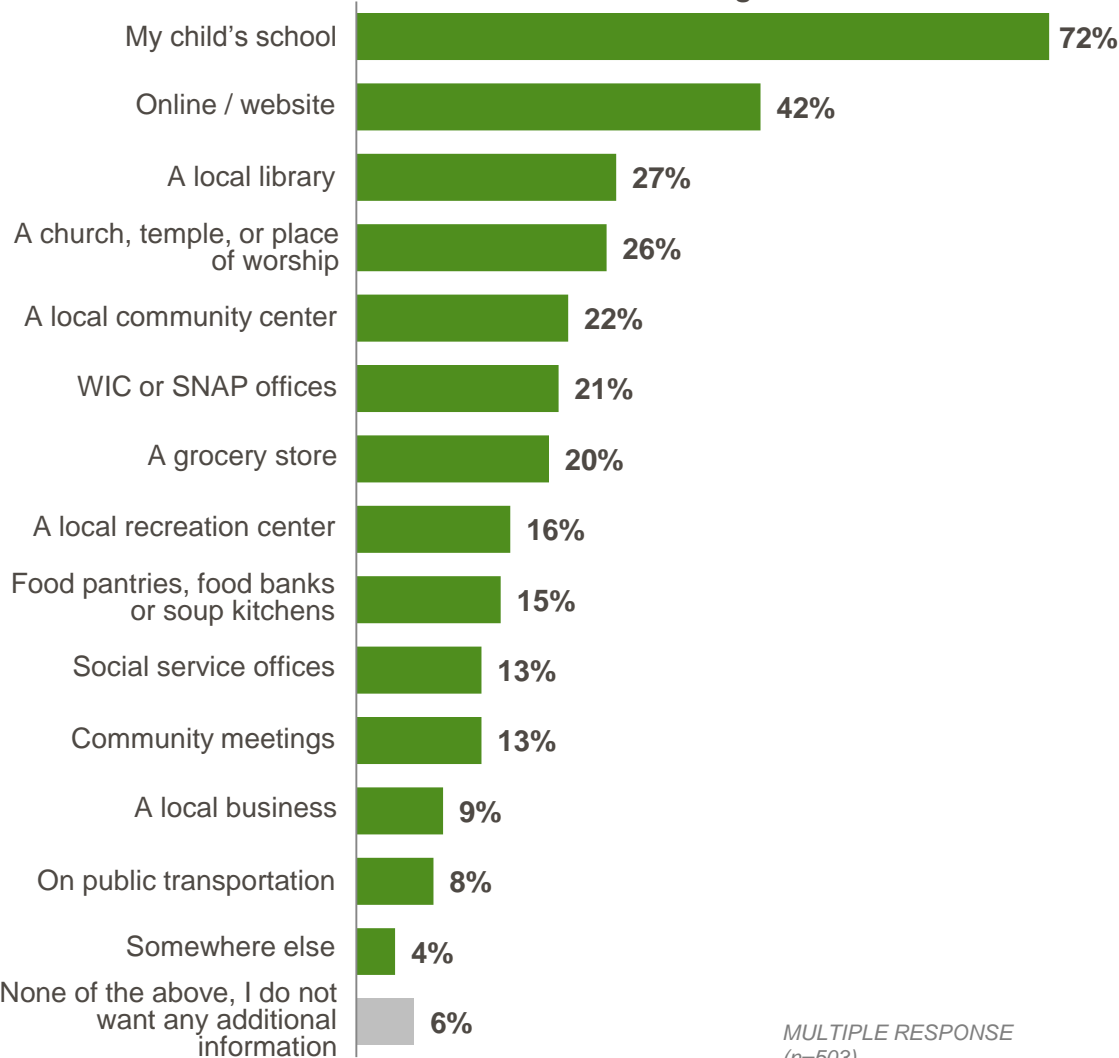
Q90. Below are a few reasons some parents have given for why they would not have their children participate in an afterschool program that provides free snacks or meals. Do you see the following as reasons that would prevent your family from participating?



# DETAILED FINDINGS: INFORMATION SOURCES

# Parents are open to a variety of messengers, most notably schools

**Preferred Channels for Program Information**



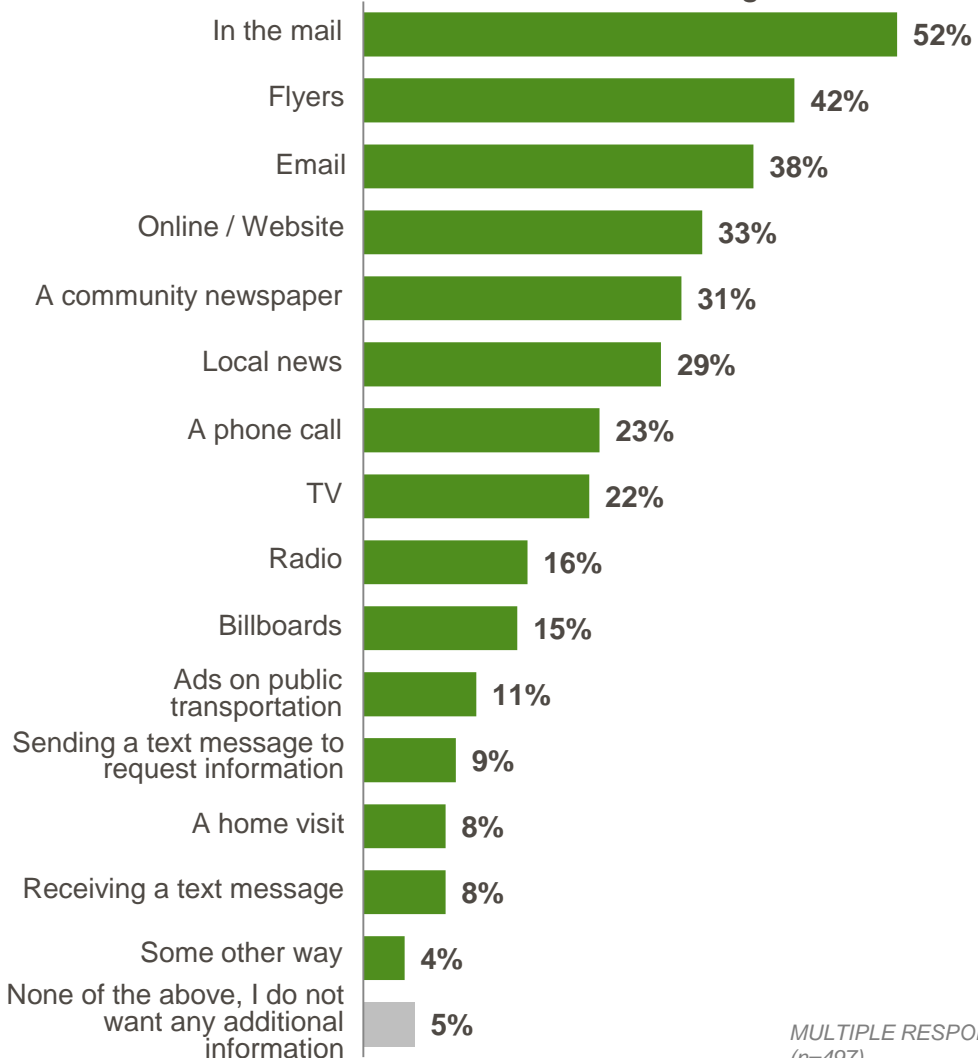
MULTIPLE RESPONSE  
(n=503)

- Only 6 percent say they do not want additional information.
- Food assistance participants welcome the information from their local office or site – WIC participants want to hear from their WIC offices (54%), food bank users want to learn from their local pantry (43%), and many SNAP participants welcome the info from their local SNAP office (31%).

Q95. [SPLIT SAMPLE A] Let's say that the afterschool meals program wanted to get information about its program to you. Where would you want to learn about afterschool meals programs?

# Direct communication in the form of mail, flyers and email are preferred channels

**Preferred Channels for Program Information**



MULTIPLE RESPONSE  
(n=497)

- Only 5 percent say they do not want additional information.
- Those expressing strong interest in the program are more receptive to even some of the less popular channels such as phone (32%), TV (28%), text messages (14%) and home visits (12%).

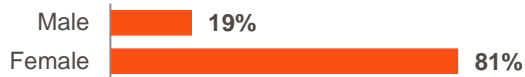
Q96. [SPLIT SAMPLE B] Let's say that the afterschool meals program wanted to get information about its program to you. Would you want to learn about afterschool meals programs from each of the following?



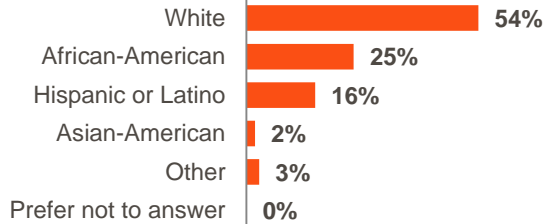
# APPENDIX

# DEMOGRAPHICS (NATIONAL)

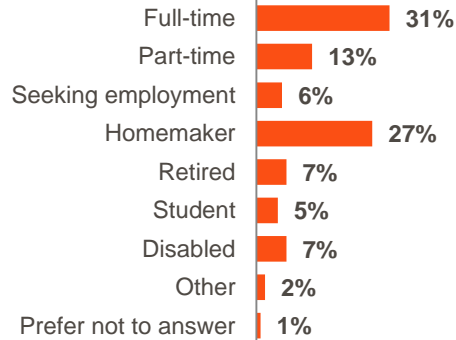
## GENDER



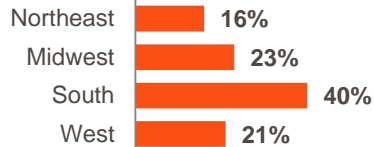
## ETHNICITY



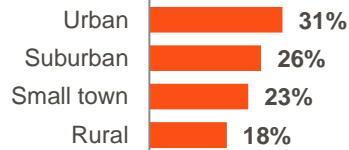
## EMPLOYMENT



## REGION



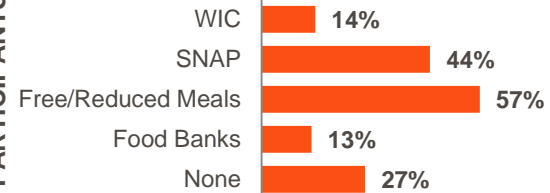
## COMMUNITY TYPE



## POVERTY INCOME RATIO



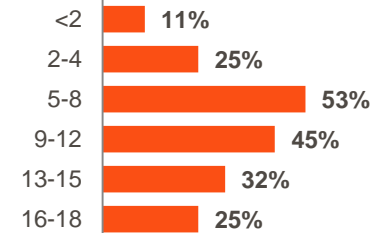
## FOOD ASSISTANCE PARTICIPANTS



## FOOD SECURITY



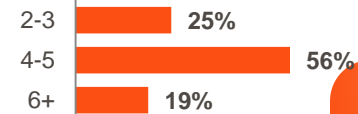
## CHILD'S AGE



## # OF KIDS

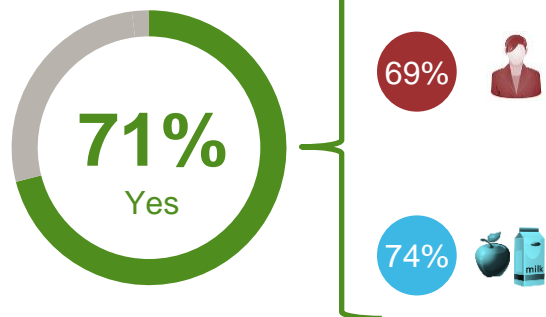


## # IN HH

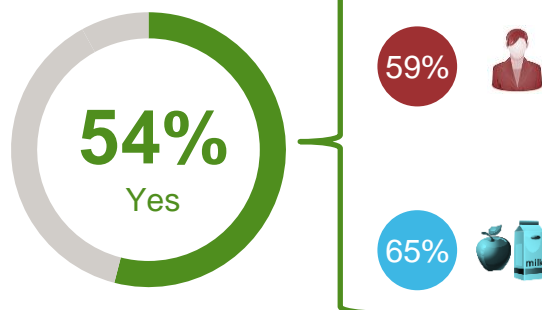


# (2013 Teachers Report) About half of enrichment programs provide afterschool food; 4 in 10 principals say they are reimbursed

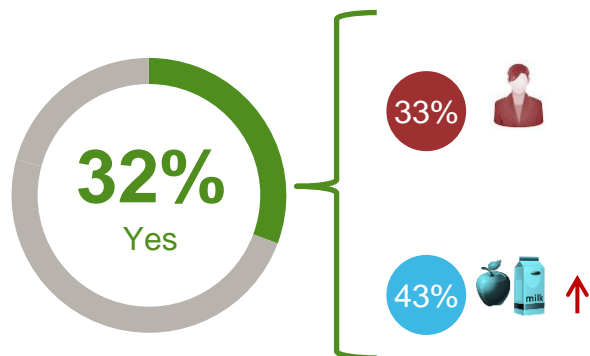
Does Your School Offer Afterschool Enrichment Programs?



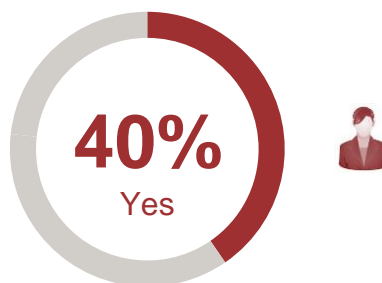
Is Food Offered As Part of Enrichment Program?



Does Your School Offer Afterschool Snacks or Meals?



Are Snacks/Meals Federally Reimbursed?



- 7 in 10 report having an afterschool enrichment program at their school.
- Of those who have an enrichment program, 4 in 10 educators say the programs do not offer snacks or meals.
- 3 in 10 report offering afterschool snacks or meals.
- Of those principals who have food as part of their enrichment program or have an afterschool snack/meal program, 6 in 10 say they do not receive federal reimbursement for afterschool snacks or meals served at their schools.

↑↓ Arrows indicate significant difference

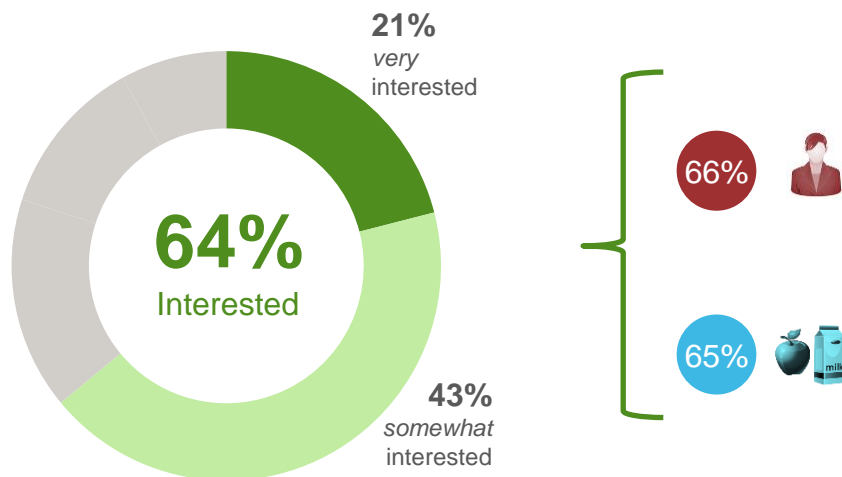
S4a. Are the following programs in place at your school?  
 Q40. (ASK IF SCHOOL HAS AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM) Are snacks or meals offered as part of your school's afterschool enrichment activities?  
 Q41. (ASK IF PRINCIPAL AND HAVE AFTERSCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM) Does your school receive federal reimbursement for snacks or meals served during afterschool programs?



# (2013 Teachers Report) There is great interest in learning more about afterschool meals

- 2 in 3 educators say they would be interested in having their schools learn more about how to offer free meals to students afterschool.
- Schools in low-income districts and with high proportions of minorities show strongest interest.
- Teachers under 35 years of age and/or have been teaching for fewer than 5 years also express stronger interest than their counterparts.

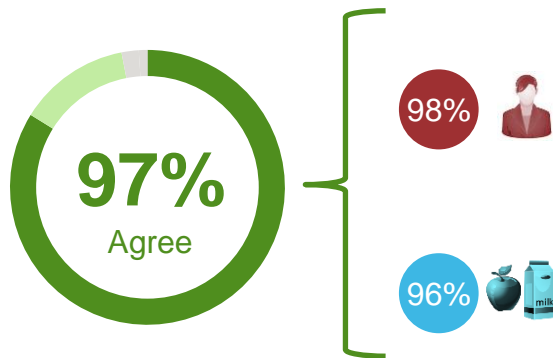
## *Interest in Schools Learning More About Afterschool Meals*



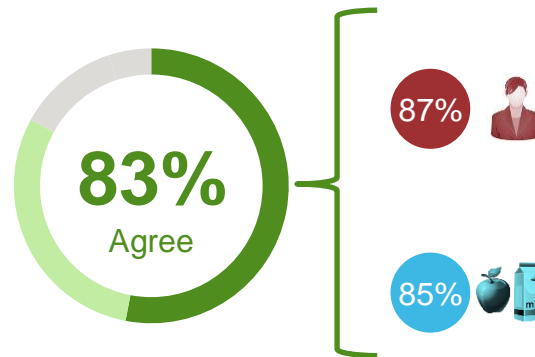
# (2013 Teachers Report) Educators agree that low-income kids should have access to free, healthy meals outside of school hours

- While free school breakfasts receive the strongest support, there is also very strong agreement (at least 1 in 2 say they *strongly agree*) that students should have access to free, healthy meals afterschool and in summer months.
- BIC educators are more likely to *strongly* support free, healthy meals afterschool (59%) and during summer months (59%).
- As the level of low-income students increases, so does support for meal programs.

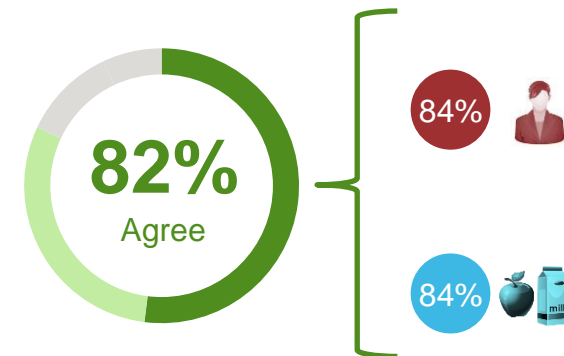
## Should low-income kids have access to free, healthy meals...?



At breakfast during the school year



Afterschool during the school year



During the summer months