

# a summer like no other:

Lessons from the Field During COVID-19



national summer  
learning association

NSLA conducted a number of focus groups and in-depth interviews in September 2020 with 21 summer learning leaders representing 15 national award-winning summer learning programs. Our goal was to provide qualitative context to complement survey data from the Afterschool Alliance's report: *Preparing for Back to School and Navigating Summer in the Time of COVID-19*. NSLA set out to better understand the youth experience during the summer of 2020, lessons learned and ways NSLA can best support the out-of-schooltime field in the wake of the current events.



## SUMMARY

Providers made it through the summer, mostly providing virtual programming. While there were definitely silver linings, the summer overall was the type of challenge you don't want to face more than once in life. A lot of providers' success was attributed to unprecedented generosity of stakeholders, above-and-beyond leadership and tireless commitment of frontline staff. The conflating issues of increasing unemployment, structural racism and civil unrest were mentioned by most interviewees. There was no consensus or tangible ideas on how to alleviate these challenges for all young people, but there was a strong acknowledgement that previous stress and trauma are highly exacerbated by the financial insecurity and safety concerns resulting from COVID-19 and by the hyper-focused inequities spotlighted by current social justice movements. Below is a summary of the feedback we received:

## MOST-NEEDED RESOURCES

- > Technology and Internet: Standard issued computers are needed, along with training of software and reliable internet for all students and staff.
- > Specialized Skills: More marketing skills are needed on the core planning team to recruit new participants. Expertise or guidance (best practices) in video production, social media, and television.
- > Racial Healing: Access is needed to more consultants/specialists in Trauma/racial healing curriculum.
- > Guidance on Virtual Learning: A central repository for best practices in virtual learning is needed, along with access to local centralized virtual places for online recruiting and more opportunities for virtual internships with stipends.

## PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS AND ELEMENTS THAT WERE MOST EFFECTIVE

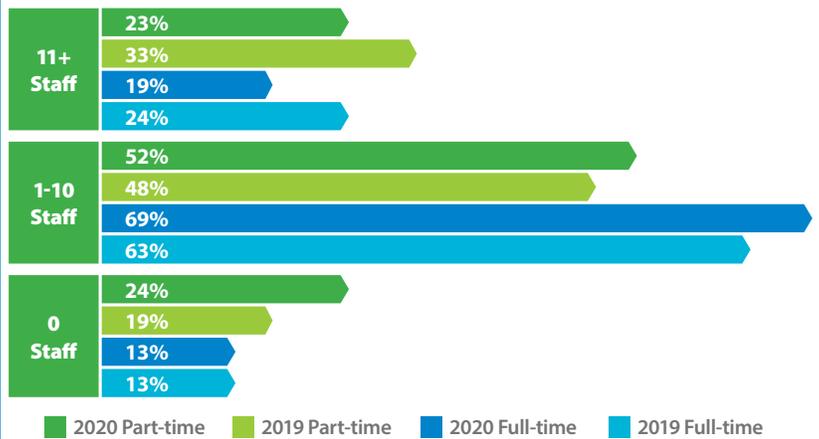
- > Programs that were multi-year and well established in the community had the most success. Teachers/counselors from previous years returned, eliminating the burden of recruitment. Trust and rapport built previously in person were transferred to the virtual environment. Direct contact information for families served was provided.
- > A strong emphasis was placed on whole child/SEL development/wellness practices like responsive classrooms and built-in, one-on-one wellness checks. This included flexibility for staff to relieve the usual pressure related to high-standard academics and assessment metrics to allow time to check in on participants' wellness. Also often included were social workers in every virtual classroom and/or weekly check-ins with social workers.
- > Programming was designed to address racism, oppression and injustice, including racial healing practitioners, youth-led peace circles, and recruitment of Black authors and speakers.
- > Early decision-making, as opposed to keeping program decisions contingent on state/local regulations, helped programs to have some control over their future and prevented confusion and last-minute changes. This was especially important for programs with sites, affiliates, or partners in different cities and states.
- > Activity kits dropped at homes. Most programs dropped activity supplies at each young person's house weekly, biweekly or in a single large bag at the beginning of the summer.
- > Partnerships with school districts, housing authorities, or local government often provided standard technology access.

Between July and August 2020, NSLA partnered with Afterschool Alliance to conduct a COVID-19 Tracking Summer Program Provider Survey<sup>1</sup> of 1,047 afterschool and summer program providers — highlights are below:



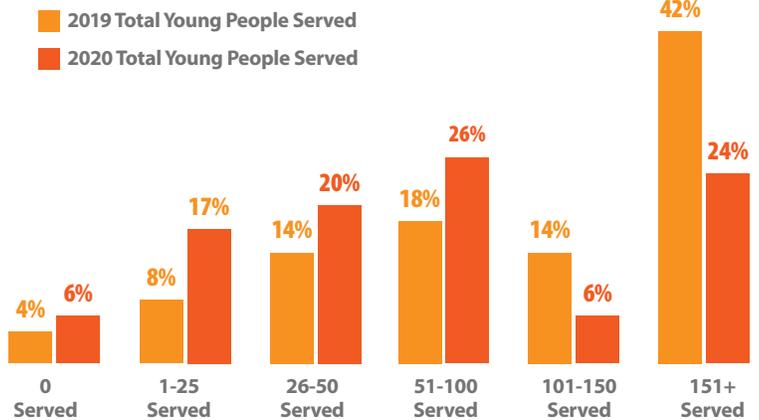
### FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME STAFF EMPLOYED 2019-2020

From 2019 to 2020, fewer programs had 11 or more part-time and full-time staff.



### YOUNG PEOPLE SERVED 2019-2020

Fewer young people were served during the summer of 2020 compared to 2019, virtually or in person. The number of programs that served over 150 young people decreased by more than half (57%).



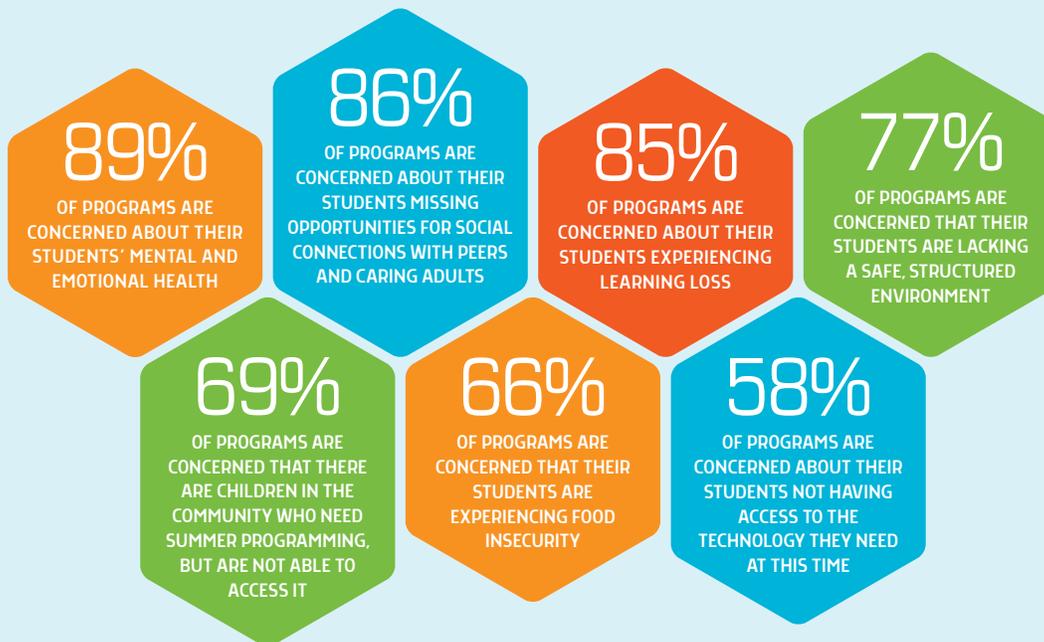
The average number of young people served in 2019 was almost double (49% higher) than the average number of young people served in 2020. The South and West regions were more likely to serve a higher average number of young people virtually than the Northeast or Midwest.

### AVERAGE YOUNG PEOPLE SERVED BY REGION

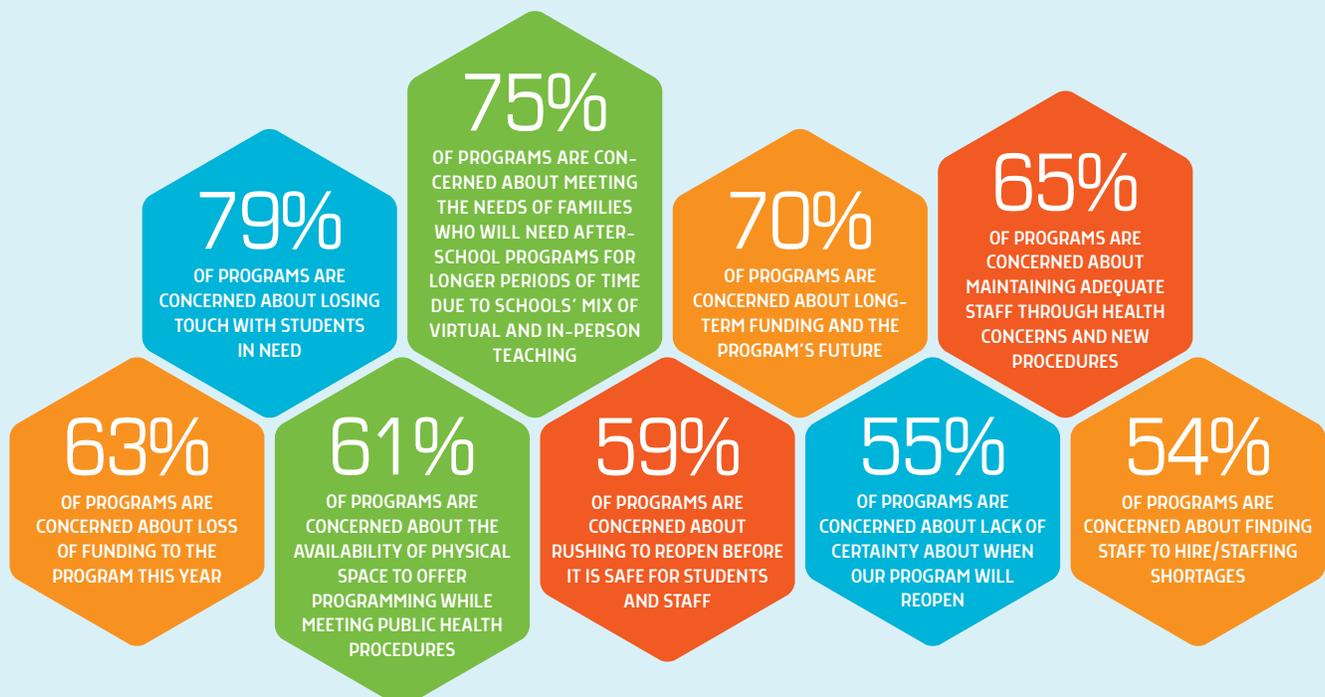
	Total	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Average served 2019	557	312	316	475	1063
Average served 2020	273	177	131	315	334
Average served in person 2020	81	65	71	78	119
Average served virtually 2020	164	89	63	177	176

1. Afterschool Alliance. (2020). *Preparing for Back to School and Navigating Summer in the Time of COVID-19*. <http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-COVID-19-Wave-2-Brief.pdf>

The support our field provides to young people over the summer is more crucial than ever.



Programs were there for students and made sure students knew they were not alone, despite the challenges programs were themselves facing.





## ADDITIONAL SUMMER PROGRAM RESOURCES

### **Early Lessons from Schools and Out-of-Schooltime Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning**

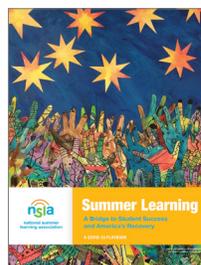
The most comprehensive study of social and emotional learning implementation to date offers early lessons for schools and out-of-schooltime programs on how to carry out high-quality social and emotional learning instruction.



### **Summer Learning: A Bridge to Student Success and America's Recovery, a COVID-19 PLAYBOOK**

It will take all of us—state and local leaders, parents, educators, and community partners—working together to ensure that America's students come out of this crisis stronger.

This playbook provides a long-term, comprehensive, and sustainable framework for planning, collaborating, and executing evidence-based practices and partnerships for high-quality summer and out-of-schooltime experiences. Subscribe to our newsletter for full access to this resource.



## About the National Summer Learning Association

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) is the only national nonprofit exclusively focused on closing the achievement gap by increasing access to high-quality summer learning opportunities. NSLA recognizes and disseminates what works, offers expertise and support for programs and communities, and advocates for summer learning as a solution for equity and excellence in education. NSLA's work is driven by the belief that all children and youth deserve high-quality summer learning experiences that will help them succeed in college, career, and life.



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[www.summerlearning.org](http://www.summerlearning.org)