



STRONGER SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT, HEALTHIER KIDS:

The Power of Comprehensive Afterschool Programs

**DENVER
AFTERSCHOOL
ALLIANCE**

*Denver youth who regularly attend
comprehensive afterschool programs...*

*attend school
more consistently*

*have better
social-emotional skills*

*gain new skills and
experiences*



Who is the Denver Afterschool Alliance?

The Denver Afterschool Alliance (DAA) builds the capacity of youth-serving organizations, programs and professionals to provide a variety of high-quality comprehensive afterschool and summer experiences. Housed within the Office of Children’s Affairs, DAA works at the intersection of quality and access to ensure that all Denver youth benefit from equitable, inclusive afterschool programming that keeps them physically and emotionally safe, inspires them to learn, and prepares them for the future. [Learn more about us by visiting www.denvergov.org/afterschoolalliance.](http://www.denvergov.org/afterschoolalliance)

About This Evaluation

DAA leverages data to help afterschool providers meet the needs of the youth they serve.

DAA commissioned this evaluation to learn about youths’ experiences in their comprehensive afterschool programs and its effect on school engagement during the 2022-2023 school year.

This evaluation uses data collected using the nationally acclaimed Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes, as well as data generously provided by Denver Public Schools. The evaluator created a matched control group of students who did not attend comprehensive afterschool programs, but were nearly identical to students who regularly attended comprehensive afterschool programs.*

This included both personal characteristics while also accounting for school characteristics. This methodology allows for careful examination of many kinds of outcomes, where the only difference between groups is their participation in comprehensive afterschool programs. For more information about the methodology, **contact the DAA.**

* Regular attendance at an afterschool program was defined as at least 30 days of attendance during the school year.

What is a Comprehensive Afterschool Program?

Comprehensive afterschool programs typically operate five days a week throughout the school year, providing programming for children in grades K through 12, depending on the location. Programs offer a wide range of activities such as arts, recreation, leadership, academic and other focus areas. Leaders of comprehensive afterschool programs are trained professionals employed by their host organization and work closely with school staff and partner organizations who offer specialty services such as martial arts, coding and theater.

Research has found numerous benefits of regular comprehensive afterschool program participation for children and youth, including **lower dropout rates, reduced achievement gaps, lower levels of risky behavior and increased supervision by adults.**^{1,2}

Operating five days a week enables families to engage in the workforce and ensure Denver youth have a safe, consistent place to spend time while their parents work to support their families.

77%

of parents and caregivers in Denver said that without their afterschool programs, they would have to cut back on work hours or stop working in a recent survey.³



13

organizations

65

locations

5,274

youth included
in the evaluation

“

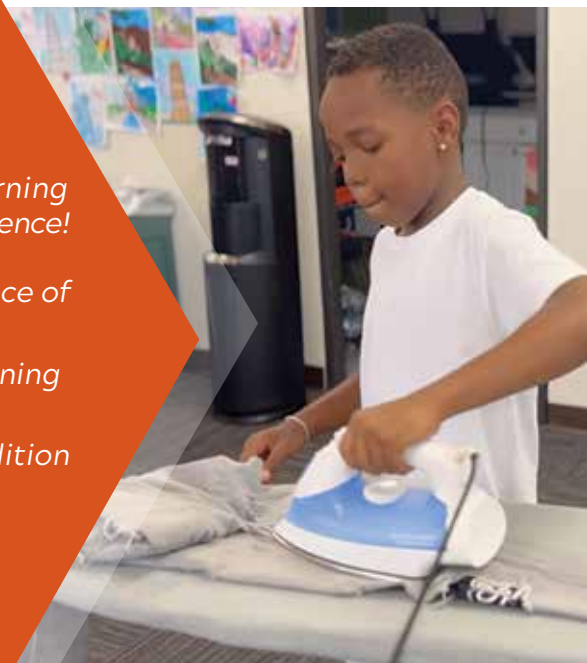
My children grew up doing afterschool activities. They were a little shy and more quiet.

The activities they were able to do at ViVe Wellness afterschool when they were younger, between the ages of 6 and 13, such as learning to swim, nature walks, completing triathlons, gave them a lot of confidence! When they started working at ViVe Wellness as swim teachers and lifeguards, they learned responsibility, leadership and the importance of supporting their community.

I know this had a lot to do with my son doing so well in school and earning a full scholarship to a California university called Pomona College.

My daughter is following in her brother's footsteps and now, in addition to being on the college swim team, continues to support the ViVe Wellness afterschool program and summer camps.

- Parent
ViVe Wellness program participant
* Translated from Spanish



► What We Found

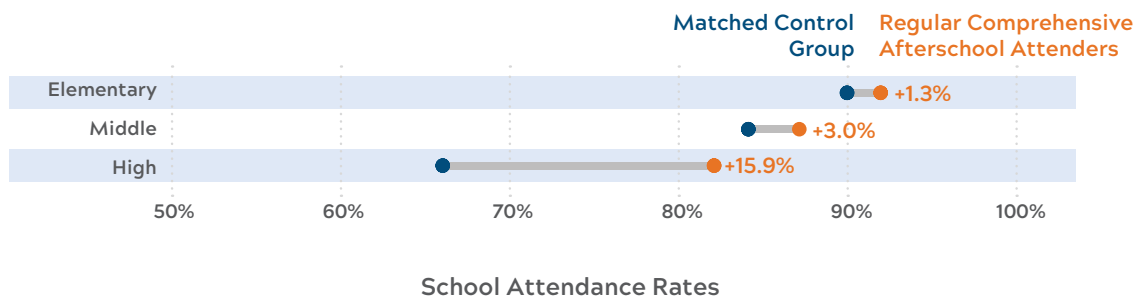
More Frequent School Attendance

Regular participation in afterschool programs had striking and persistent impacts on school attendance. Every day spent in school is an opportunity for youth to learn, make friends and connect with trusted adults.

This evaluation found that Denver youth who regularly participated in afterschool programs **attended school more consistently** than their peers who did not attend an afterschool program. They were also **significantly less likely to be chronically absent**, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year.

While the effect of afterschool participation on elementary school day attendance was significant, it was even more profound for middle and high school students. National research shows that the middle and high school years are when youth are most likely to disengage from school and engage in risky behaviors.⁴ Comprehensive out-of-school-time programs are **a key strategy for reducing dangerous behaviors and preventing violence among youth** by increasing school engagement and ensuring youth have a safe, consistent place to go after school.^{5,6}

- Regular participation in a comprehensive afterschool program was associated with **higher day school attendance rates** for students in elementary through high school. The effects were **most powerful for students in high school** - the time when youth are most likely to disengage from school or engage in risky behaviors.



School Attendance Rates

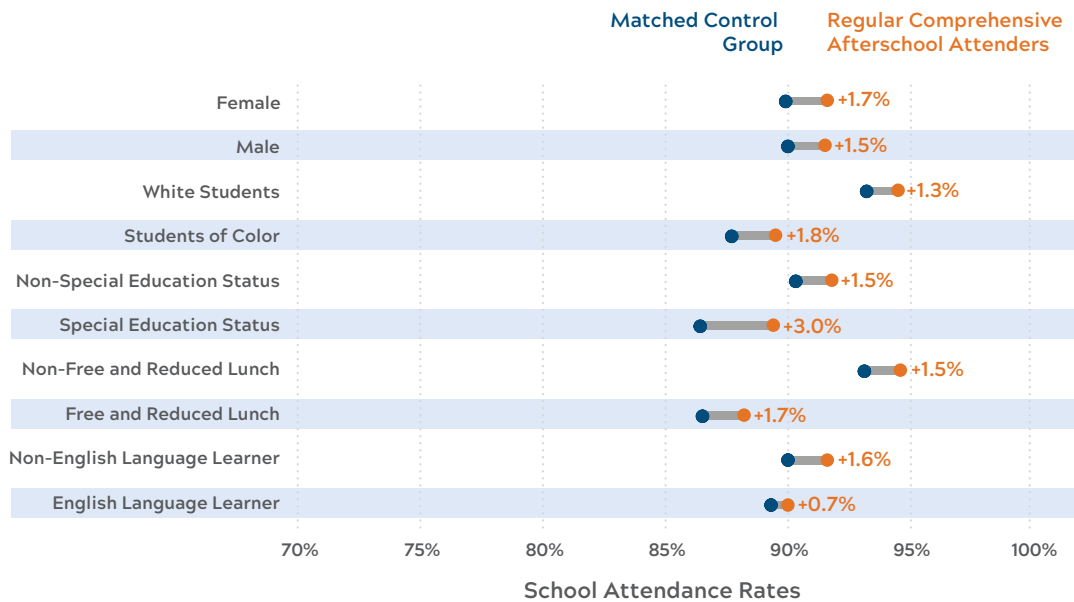


“ I’m currently a senior in high school and group leader at The Sun Valley Youth Center (SVYC). I was first introduced to the SVYC when I was 7 years old. It was quite scary at the time – I was a second grader who only knew his parents and his two brothers. At the time I was quite shy and socially distant. The SVYC was so welcoming and it was the first time in my life I felt a part of a community bigger than my family. The SVYC taught me social skills, professional skills and even how to do things I never thought I’d do like ski and snowboard. Serving the youth of Sun Valley and seeing my presence directly impact a child’s day has been fulfilling.

- Numan Mahamed

Stronger attendance among youth who regularly participated in afterschool programs was consistent across a range of student groups – including those most likely to **face obstacles to educational opportunity**, such as English Language Learners, youth with special education status and youth of color.

► **Across every demographic group, school attendance rates were higher among Denver youth who regularly participated in afterschool programs compared with a group of similar peers who did not attend.**



The differences in day school attendance rates – and the fact that these differences persist across grade levels and a variety of demographic groups – illustrate that out-of-school time opportunities should be considered a **key strategy for driving stronger school engagement**.

“

I like the afterschool program because they help me with a lot of stuff, such as math homework. They also help me not be shy around others and how to open up and learn how to communicate with my friends and peers and they are now my second family and I will always hold them close to my heart.

- Alaiya



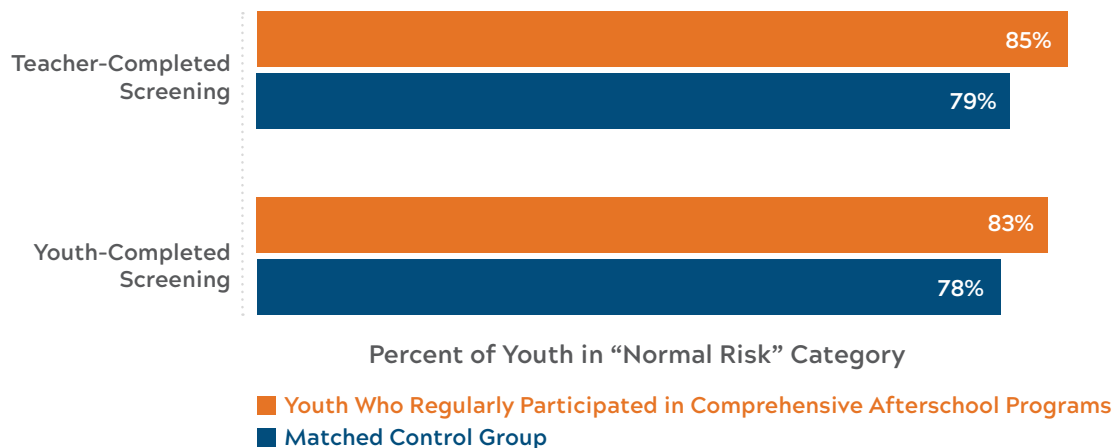
► What We Found

Better Social- Emotional Well-Being

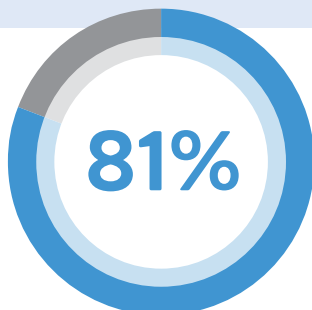
Strong social and emotional skills – such as the ability to create connections with peers or regulate emotions – are critical building blocks that help children and youth navigate adolescence and adulthood.⁷ Comprehensive afterschool programs help youth build these important skills.

Denver Public Schools uses a social and emotional screening questionnaire called the Behavior and Emotional Screening System (BESS). The screening tool is designed to identify students who might need additional social or emotional support. Students and their teachers complete the screening, and scores fall in one of three categories: normal risk, elevated risk and extremely elevated risk. **Denver youth who regularly attended comprehensive afterschool programming were more likely to be in the “normal risk” category than a nearly identical group of peers who did not participate in comprehensive afterschool programming.**

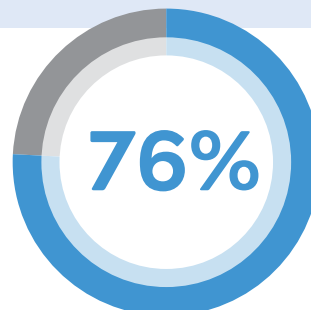
- **Denver youth who regularly participated in comprehensive afterschool programs were more likely than a control group of similar youth to have scores that fell in the “normal risk” category using a social-emotional screening tool.**



- **Using the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes tool*, comprehensive afterschool professionals were asked about youth’s social-emotional competencies. They reported:**



More than **8 in 10** youth actively engaged in program activities and with their peers.



3 in 4 youth in their programs demonstrated problem solving skills.

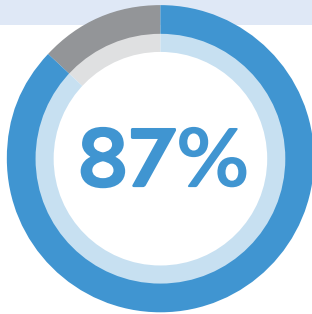
* The Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes is a research-based measurement tool from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time that utilizes surveys taken by youth or staff to measure outcomes related to program experiences, future expectations and sense of competence.

Youth
Empowerment
through Quality
Opportunities

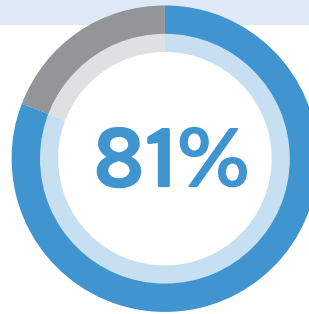
Comprehensive afterschool programs provide quality opportunities that empower youth and help them form trusting relationships with caring adults.

Organizations providing comprehensive afterschool programming **invest deeply in continuous quality improvement** so intentional instruction and relationship-building occur throughout the program. They create structures and practices that include youth-led activities with culturally responsive instruction and cultivating welcoming, supportive and inclusive spaces for youth from all backgrounds. Research from other states indicates that the strong relationships and consistent environments offered by comprehensive afterschool programs have numerous benefits for participating youth, including **reductions in crime and risky behaviors and increased reading and math scores.**⁸

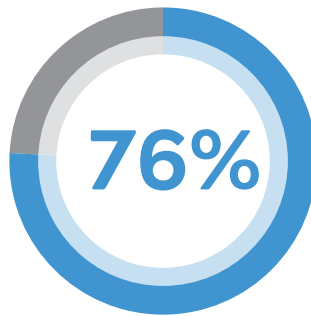
► **When asked about their experiences at their afterschool programs:**



Nearly **9 in 10** youth said they **had a staff member at their afterschool program that they could trust.**



8 in 10 youth said their program provides them with **new and challenging activities.**



3 in 4 youth said their afterschool program **helped them succeed in school.**



“
What happens afterschool is just as important as what happens during the school day. Having a Comprehensive Out-Of-School Time Program at my school has been a key part of our success. Knowing that families have a five-day-a-week option that includes a healthy snack, enrichments that are engaging, and a literacy component that encourages our children to love reading has been instrumental.

- **Joey Denoncourt**
Principal,
College View Elementary



PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver
 Colorado Dream Foundation
 Denver Public Schools Extended Learning and Community Schools

Girls Inc. of Metro Denver
 Heart & Hand Center
 Mile High 360
 Metropolitan State University Denver – Center for Urban Education

Scholars Unlimited
 Sims-Fayola Foundation
 Struggle of Love Foundation
 Sun Valley Youth Center
 ViVe Wellness
 YMCA of Metro Denver

DENVER AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE



Comprehensive afterschool programming is uniquely positioned to support youth development and school engagement. Beyond supporting youth, afterschool programs are trusted resources for parents and families. Together, Denver's afterschool program providers are making a difference in the lives of Denver youth.

Learn more about DAA at www.denvergov.org/afterschoolalliance

¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. (2023). Supporting student success through afterschool programs. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/education/supporting-student-success-through-afterschool-programs#:~:text=Research%20consistently%20demonstrates%20that%20high,and%20social%20and%20emotional%20learning.>

² McCombs, J., Whitaker, A., & Yoo, P. (2017). The value of out-of-school time programs. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from <https://wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/The-Value-of-Out-of-School-Time-Programs.pdf>.

³ Denver Afterschool Alliance. (2023). Denver families need afterschool and summer programs.

⁴ Calderon, V.J. & Yu, D. (2017). Student enthusiasm falls as high school graduation nears. Washington, DC: Gallup Student Poll.

⁵ Patten, P. & Robertson, A.S. (2001). Focus on after-school time for violence prevention. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

⁶ Council for a Strong America. (2019). From risk to opportunity: Afterschool programs keep kids safe when juvenile crime peaks.

⁷ Jones, S.M., et al. (2022). Navigating SEL from the inside out. The Easel Lab at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

⁸ Council for a Strong America. (2019). From risk to opportunity: Afterschool programs keep kids safe when juvenile crime peaks.