



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

DASH Initiative:

Enhancing the Quality of Care in Texas Out-of-School Time Programs



About the Texas State Alliance of YMCAs

The Texas State Alliance of YMCAs is an association representing the interests and concerns of the 26 independent YMCAs across Texas to build capacity and leadership in the areas of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. The YMCAs in Texas are a collection of nonprofit organizations that are grassroots-driven and volunteer-led, serving over 1.4 million Texans through strategic partnerships and collaborations with school districts, higher education institutions, hospitals, local and state government. The Alliance functions to advocate on behalf of local YMCAs to promote our three areas of focus while fostering statewide communication and collaboration in over 200 urban, suburban and rural communities.

Collectively, YMCAs serve more than 1.4 million Texans; together, we can inspire change by addressing local issues and deliver our cause by strengthening communities. Through strategic partnerships and collaborations with school districts, higher education institutions, hospitals, local and state governments, we work diligently to achieve our mission of building healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

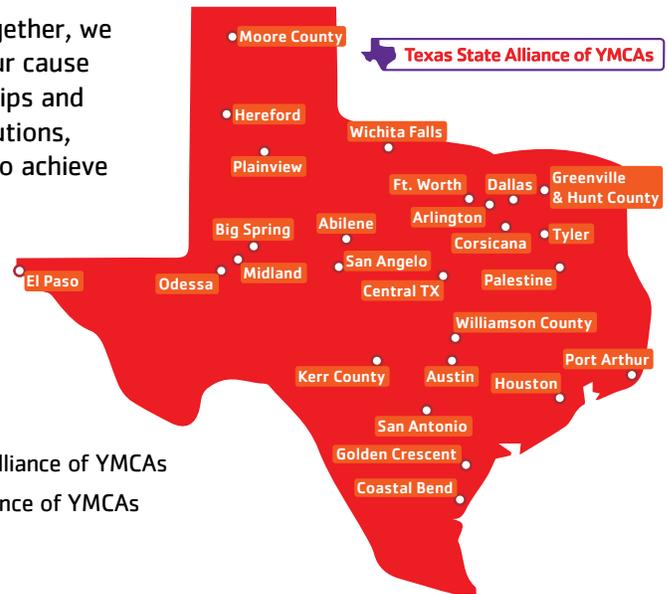
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Executive Summary

The *DASH Initiative* was born out of a desire to understand the current out-of-school time (OST) landscape in Texas and identify strategies to enhance the quality of care for Texas youth. Based on academic research, stakeholder input and expert advice from a 15-member advisory council, a survey was developed and distributed to licensed childcare providers across the state of Texas. The responses received not only demonstrated that OST providers are committed to positively influencing children's health, but also showed that there were areas that OST providers could grow and improve. In addition, based on survey responses, an overwhelming percentage of providers expressed interest in participating in a program that would allow them to be recognized for what they were already doing as well as challenge them to improve in other areas related to healthy eating and physical activity.

OF LICENSED PROGRAM RESPONDENTS*



98%
provide daily
physical activity



99%
serve fruits
and/or vegetables



89% believe that parents would be interested in highlighting health and nutrition in their child's before/after school program



84% expressed interest in participating in a voluntary health recognition program

*Percentage based on 378 respondents to a statewide survey for licensed before/afterschool providers serving K-12.

Based on the survey data and information collected throughout the research process, three recommendations were identified in order to improve children’s health, increase program transparency and position Texas as a pioneer in enhancing the quality of care in OST programs.

- ▶ **Create a tiered, voluntary distinction for licensed OST providers** who are going above and beyond minimum state standards to further promote an enhanced quality of care and program transparency.
- ▶ **Update and maintain the state’s database of licensed childcare providers** in order to provide accurate information to parents as they are searching for a childcare provider and decrease the amount of errors housed on the database.
- ▶ **Explore opportunities, in partnership with the Expanded Learning Opportunities Council, to encourage healthy initiatives** in out-of-school time programs and continue to enhance the quality of care in out-of-school time programs.

By adopting the recommendations outlined above, Texas has the opportunity to set a national example on the importance of engaging the OST community in the positive development of youth and supporting parents as they raise the next generation of Texas leaders.



Overview

In the past, YMCAs in Texas have collaborated with policymakers, community leaders, independent school districts as well as public and private organizations to advance work within our movement. In 2015, the Texas State Alliance of YMCAs collectively identified youth development as an area of focus in our [strategic plan](#). In the area of youth development, Texas YMCAs decided to address ways to integrate and sustain our commitment to national standards around nutrition and physical activity through out-of-school time (OST) programs. In Texas, over 880,000¹ youth participate in OST programs and stakeholders were interested in learning about strategies providers use to enhance the quality of care for youth. Recognizing that OST providers in Texas are uniquely diverse and can play a significant role in addressing chronic diseases in youth, the Texas State Alliance embarked on a statewide research project to assess and highlight efforts around physical activity and nutrition in licensed before and after-school programs serving youth in grades K-12.



OUR UNDERTAKING

Over the years the battleground for public health has shifted from infectious diseases to chronic diseases that are interwoven in places where we live, work and play. Texas ranks 7th in the area of overweight and obese youth.² Factors that contribute to unhealthy lifestyles include the environment, economic disparities and/or a lack of education around the importance of wellness. Key entities such as parents, school districts and OST providers can have a great influence on how youth learn and internalize concepts of healthy living. Schools, while their primary focus is core competencies and college readiness, have historically played a tremendous role in equipping youth with the fundamentals around physical and health education. Working in tandem with school districts to support youth development, OST providers can help curtail the rise in childhood chronic diseases by fostering high quality of care by promoting principles of healthy eating and physical activity. Moreover, parents should have the opportunity to make informed decisions for their family as it relates to choosing the OST provider that best meets their needs. Through this undertaking, Texas parents will have the ability to easily identify providers that best suit the needs of their family. In addition, by encouraging OST providers to implement healthy eating and physical activity practices, Texas has the potential to be proactive in teaching healthy behaviors rather than attempting to reverse the effects and costs of unhealthy lifestyles later down the road.

This ground-breaking research project allowed us to:

- Curate a more accurate list of licensed OST providers licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.
- Establish an Advisory Council composed of 15 experts and stakeholders committed to the strategic purpose of youth development as well as enhancing connections in the OST community.
- Identify licensed OST providers that offer services to underserved youth in grades K-12th.
- Research and publish a data-driven statewide report outlining the current landscape of statewide licensed OST providers that offer programs serving youth in grades K-12th.
- Recommend to the 85th Texas Legislature the establishment of a voluntary recognition program for licensed OST providers that implement national physical activity and nutrition standards in their programs.

¹ Afterschool Alliance. America After 3pm Survey: Afterschool in Texas. Web. Apr. 2016.
http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateFacts.cfm?state_abbr=TX

² "F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future 2012." Trust for America's Health. Sept. 2012. Web. Apr. 2016.
<http://healthyamericans.org/report/100/>

OUR ASPIRATIONS

Based in part on research from the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH), University of Massachusetts at Boston, [National Institute of Out-of-School Time](#) and the [Healthy Out-of-School Time Coalition](#), stakeholders and experts in the OST arena developed evidence-based recommendations on healthy eating and physical activity outcomes for youth kindergarten through 12th grade attending OST programs. The national standards identify six multifaceted components focusing on:



NATIONAL STANDARDS

- **At least one staff member must be trained on the standards.**
- **Provide opportunities to participate in at least 30-60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity.**
- **Limit screen time to up to 30 minutes in a half-day program or up to 60 minutes in a full-day program, not including use in connection with educational experiences.**
- **Make available healthy foods to program attendees during meals or snacks.**
- **Serve water, low-fat or nonfat milk, nonfat flavored milk or 100 % fruit juice.**
- **Incorporate components of parental engagement.**

The research suggests that program providers are well-positioned to reinforce healthy behaviors for youth by implementing these standards in their programs.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services has [Minimum Standards for School-Age and Before or After-School Programs](#) that licensed providers must follow. These standards include some guidance on nutrition and use of TV/video, computer or video games. The national standards outlined above support Texas' existing minimum standards and have the potential to further enhance the quality of care children are receiving in OST programs while recognizing providers who are going above and beyond the minimum standards of care in the areas of nutrition and physical activity.

This report is the first phase of capacity building for policies that support implementation of healthy eating and physical activity standards in OST settings. Across the nation, multiple organizations have already made the commitment to adhere to national nutrition and physical activity standards in their OST programs such as the [Boys and Girls Clubs of America](#) and the [National Recreation and Park Association](#). As demonstrated through the survey data, many licensed providers in Texas are already implementing components of these national standards and should be recognized as trailblazers in their efforts to support healthy living among youth.

Our Learnings

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The Texas State Alliance of YMCAs developed the survey instrument in conjunction with the DASH Initiative Advisory Council and other key experts in OST program delivery. The goal of the survey was to assess the current landscape of physical activity and nutrition in licensed Texas before/afterschool programs serving grades K-12. The survey instrument focused on the following topics: availability of fruits and/or vegetables, consumption of artificially sweetened beverages, parental engagement strategies, opportunities for physical activity and screen time practices. For a full version of the survey instrument, email christianna.burwell@austinyymca.org or [click here](#).

In addition to the quantitative data collected through the survey instrument, qualitative interviews were conducted with a small sample of licensed providers to gain a better understanding of their program delivery.

Licensed Provider Survey:

Alliance staff attempted to distribute the survey instrument to 9,461 licensed providers in Texas. The providers were identified from the licensure list available on the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) website. Unfortunately, the database available on the DFPS website had incomplete contact information for the licensed childcare providers in Texas. When the database was originally accessed on April 14, 2016, only 5,585 of the 9,461 licensed providers had email addresses listed. Through the work of Alliance staff and volunteers, the original 3,876 providers without email addresses were whittled down to 1,709 by calling individual providers and accessing contact information on websites and/or social media sites. From the 1,709 with no email addresses, paper surveys (in both English and Spanish), along with stamped envelopes to return the survey, were mailed to 330 providers without accessible email addresses located throughout [the thirty-two border counties identified by the Office of Border Health](#). This left approximately 1,379 licensed childcare providers who were unable to be invited to participate in the survey. The survey responses were submitted through the online software program Survey Gizmo. Initially, providers received a link to the survey in an email and subsequently received targeted email follow-ups by Alliance staff and Advisory Council members. Participation was voluntary and incentives were offered to randomly selected respondents with completed surveys.

Qualitative Provider Interviews:

One-on-one interviews with a select number of providers were conducted to gain a better understanding of their program delivery. Providers were identified based on the following factors: geographic location, unique responses to open-ended survey questions and ages served.

As with all self-reported data, the accuracy of responses cannot be guaranteed.

SURVEY RESPONSES AND DATA

The OST community in Texas is multifaceted and unique in nature. Texas is home to multiple classifications of childcare providers including licensed childcare centers, listed family homes, registered child care homes and licensed child care homes. For the purposes of this report, we focused solely on the licensed childcare centers in Texas. A total of 393 providers responded to the survey, representing 1,003 before and/or afterschool sites throughout the state. Based on the provider capacity listed on the DFPS electronic database, the survey responses potentially represent over 93,000 Texas children. While there were 393 submitted responses, fifteen of the respondents were “disqualified” from completing due to indicating that their program was not licensed by DFPS. In addition, not all of the providers answered each question; therefore, the total number of respondents varies



slightly for each question. It should be noted that the fifteen who indicated they were not licensed were listed on the DFPS database of licensed providers when originally accessed. Separate from the 393 submitted responses, Alliance staff received emails replies from an additional fifteen providers indicating that they do not provide a before and/or afterschool program for the K-12 grade range.

From the survey data and qualitative interviews, we hope to share information about the good work licensed providers are currently doing to support youth development and healthy living. Concurrently, while providers are working hard to address many elements of youth development there are still a myriad of opportunities to support transformative work in this sector as the youth they serve begin to learn and adopt lifelong behaviors.

MAJOR FINDINGS: THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

GOOD

- ▶ **97.9%** of respondents **provide opportunities** for at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- ▶ **86.4%** of respondents **do not serve** artificially sweetened beverages to program participants.
- ▶ **83.7%** of respondents indicated that they **would be interested** in participating in a voluntary state recognition program for licensed before/ afterschool providers in order to provide parents with more information on the quality of care available when choosing a before/afterschool program for their child.
- ▶ **89.2%** of respondents indicated that the parents/guardians of program participants **would be interested** in having physical activity and nutrition initiatives implemented and highlighted in their child's before/afterschool program.

BAD

- ▶ **Incomplete, inaccurate database** of licensed childcare centers on the Department of Family and Protective Services' electronic database. When the database was originally accessed on April 14, 2016, only 5,585 of the 9,461 licensed providers had email addresses listed.
- ▶ In addition, 388 of the emails that were listed on the state's database **were inaccurate and deemed "undeliverable"** by the email server.

UGLY

- ▶ Forty-one of the 330 paper surveys **were returned** by the United States Postal Service from the 32 border counties due to "no physical address found, invalid physical address, no forwarding addresses, no mail receptacles or not deliverable".
 - The mailing addresses were based on the information housed on the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services website of licensed childcare centers.

Contact Information, Provider Categorization and Grades Served:

In addition to basic contact information, providers were asked if they were completing the survey on behalf of multiple program sites, how they classified their program (nonprofit, school district, private proprietor or other) and what grades were served by the before/after-school program. Some providers operate multiple before/after-school program sites and while there are individual program staff at each site, there is often one individual at the administrative level that is responsible for all program sites. Due to this, providers were asked if they were completing the survey on behalf of multiple sites and if so, they were directed to an additional question asking them to list the names of the individual sites. Roughly 21% of providers indicated that they were completing the survey on behalf of multiple sites. By analyzing the individual responses, it was determined that the respondents with submitted surveys represented 1,003 individual before/after-school sites. Providers were also asked to list the ZIP codes that their programs served. Based on the ZIP codes provided, 519 unique ZIP codes were represented and were mapped to demonstrate the statewide responses [see Figure 1].

Due to the variety of providers in Texas, respondents were asked if the before/after-school program was operated by a school district, nonprofit or a private proprietor. Fifty-one percent identified as a private proprietor along with 39% who identified as a nonprofit organization [see Figure 2]. Respondents were also given an “other” option asking them to specify. Of the 17 “other” responses, providers identified themselves as a corporation, faith-based, community college and/or university based childcare or a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC).

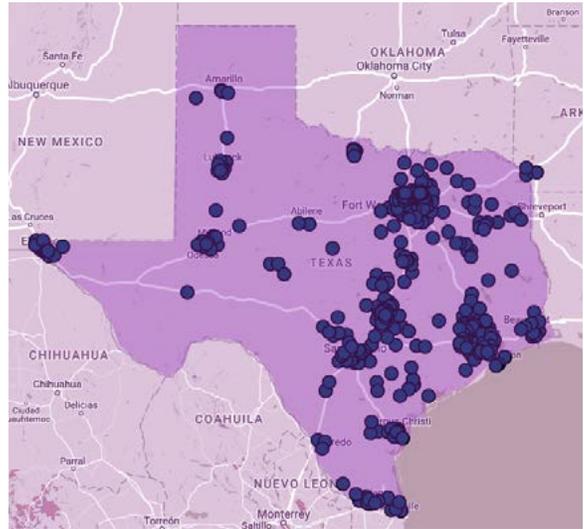
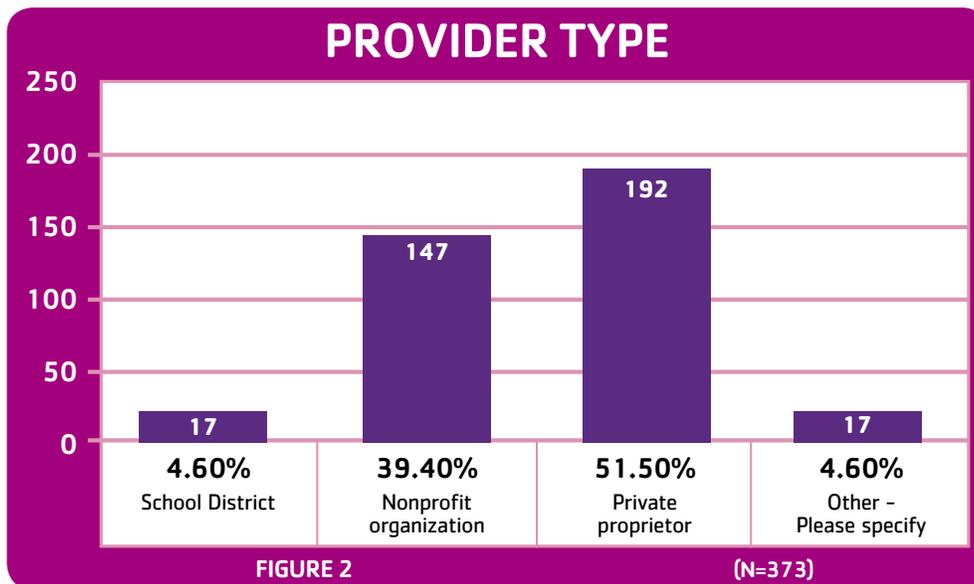
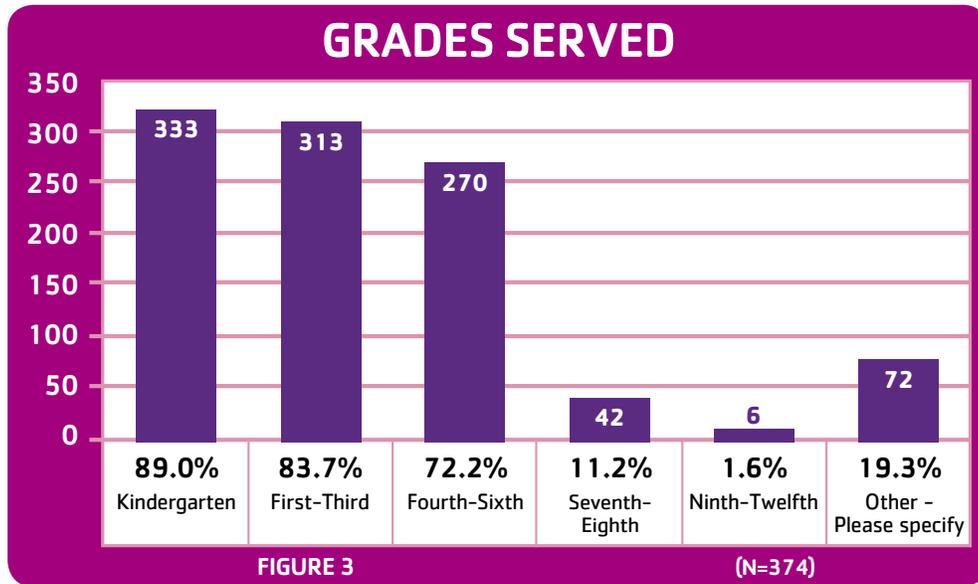


Figure 1: Map of program sites represented by survey responses



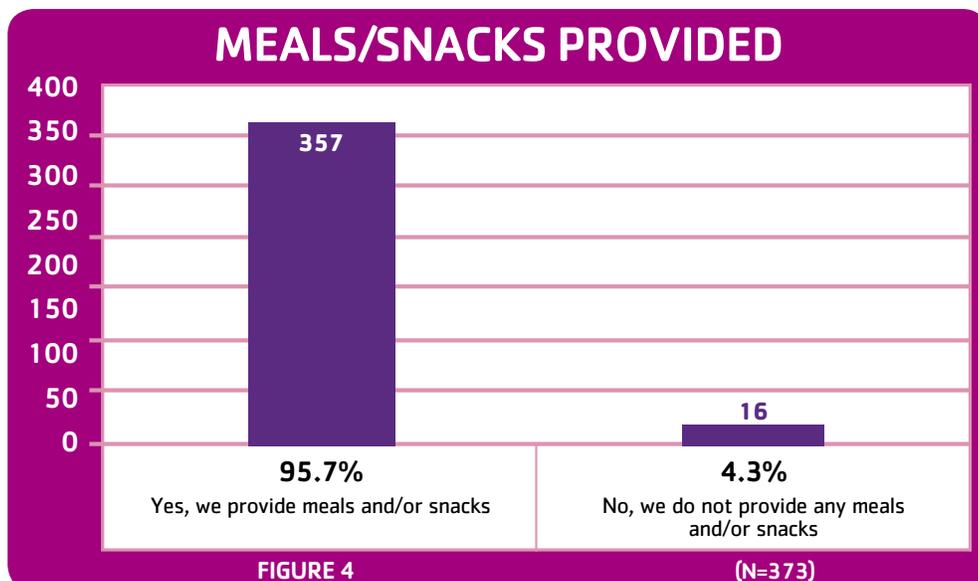
The intended survey recipients were licensed before/after-school programs serving grades K-12. The majority of respondents indicated that they served either kindergarten, first-third, fourth-sixth or some combination of those choices [see Figure 3]. Of the 72 “other” responses, the majority included some variation of the listed options, usually with a variation such as kindergarten-fifth grade or respondents listed ages served rather than grades (5-12 years old).



Meals/Snacks Served, Vegetables/Fruits Available and Artificially Sweetened Beverages:

As indicated in the data below, 95.7% of respondents serve meals and/or snacks to program participants [see Figure 4]. If respondents answered “yes” to serving meals and/or snacks to program participants, they were then directed to a question asking if they served fruits and/or vegetables at every meal/snack. The large majority of respondents indicated that they provided fruits and/or vegetables at every meal and/or snack, with only 20% indicating that they did not provide either at every meal and/or snack [see Figure 5]. For those that indicated they did not provide fruits and/or vegetables at every meal and/or snack, they were directed to a question asking about barriers. Most commonly cited barriers were cost and storage of food. However, it’s important to note that within those open-ended responses, many providers indicated that they did provide fruits and/or vegetables at some meals and/or snacks each week, just not every meal and/or snack. For example, one provider indicated that fruits and/or vegetables were provided three times a week. In addition, 87% of respondents indicated that they did not serve any artificially sweetened beverages. Only five respondents indicated that they served artificially sweetened beverages regularly [see Figure 6].

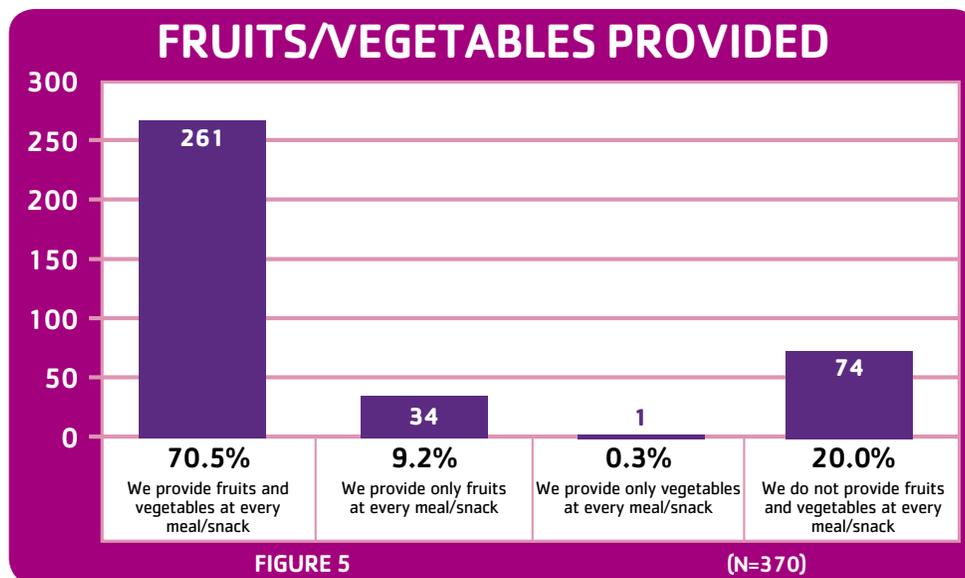
Does the licensed before/afterschool program provide meals and/or snacks to program participants?



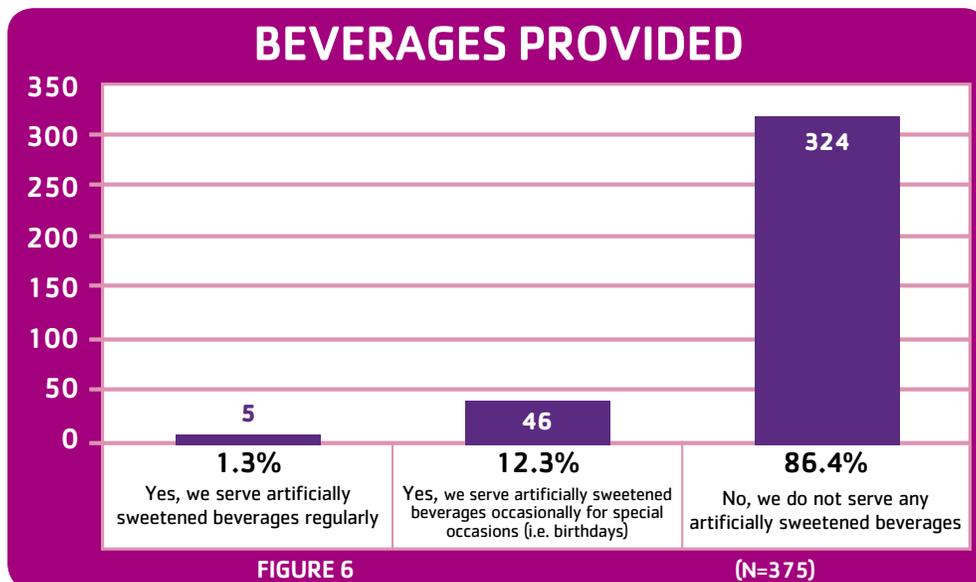


A nonprofit afterschool program serving “at-risk” children in the Third Ward of Houston provides care for children up to the tenth grade. The program serves fruits and vegetables at every meal/snack. This is made possible through a private grant that the organization applies for annually. The program prioritizes feeding students healthy food and even if the grant funding was unavailable one year, program staff stated that they would do their best to still ensure fruits and vegetables were available. Part of the reason why the program prioritizes providing healthy food is that many of the children and families who participate in their program may not have daily access to fruits and vegetables. In addition to providing healthy snacks, the program also emphasizes parental and family engagement by partnering with another community organization to host 2 hour workshops focused on nutrition, finances, stress management and other important life topics. The program reports that the workshops are always well-attended and it’s a great learning opportunity for parents who may or may not have been brought up to understand the importance of healthy eating and physical activity.

Does the licensed before/afterschool program serve fruits and/or vegetables (canned, dried, fresh and frozen) at every meal/snack?



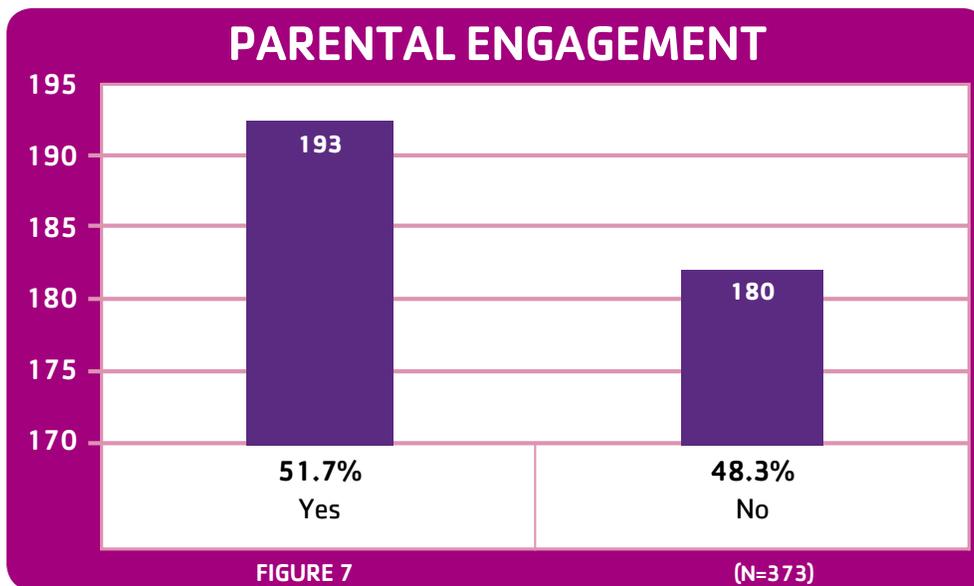
Does the licensed before/afterschool program serve artificially sweetened beverages (i.e. soda, juice with added sugar, CapriSun, etc.)?



Parental Engagement:

Providers were asked if they utilized family/parental engagement strategies to encourage healthy habits at home. The responses were almost evenly split with roughly 52% answering “yes” and about 48% answering “no” [see Figure 7]. For the respondents that indicated that they did utilize parental engagement strategies, they were also asked to specify exactly what was used. Common responses included newsletters with nutrition information, healthy recipes, cooking classes, flyers and health-focused articles. Often, parents are the first role models for children. By engaging parents in what physical activity and nutrition is being offered and taught in before/after-school programs, it allows for healthy habits to be mutually reinforced so that children have consistency and balance.

Does the licensed before/after-school program utilize family/parental engagement practices to encourage healthy habits at home (recipe cards, health recommendations, etc.)?



Physical Activity & Screen Time Practices:

Today, many youth are increasingly sedentary and lack opportunities to be physically active for a variety of reasons. In addition to providing enrichment activities, before/after-school programs have a unique opportunity to provide physical activity opportunities to program participants. In fact, 98% of respondents indicated that their programs provided opportunities for at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day [see Figure 8]. That astonishingly high percentage serves as an encouragement that while physical activity opportunities in some Texas schools may be decreasing due to a lack of state support and funding, before/after-school programs recognize the importance and prioritize physical activity in their daily schedules.

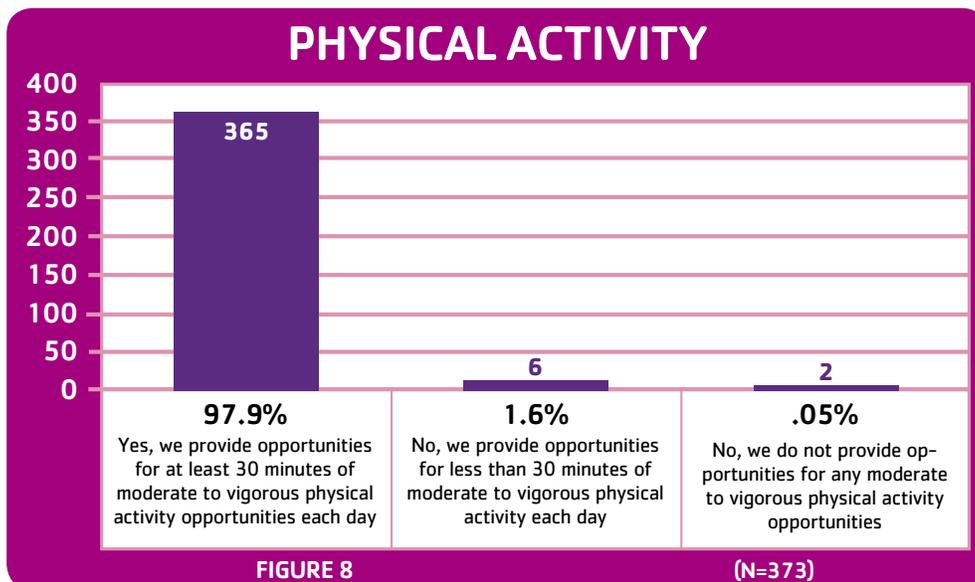
When used effectively, technology can be a learning tool and useful when encouraging children to be active. It’s important to find a balance between using technology to complement an activity and not using technology to simply keep kids busy on their own. About 41% of respondents indicated that they limited screen time to less than 30 minutes (not including time used for homework purposes and inclement weather days) and almost 18% indicated that they only used screen time for homework purposes and not recreationally [see Figure 9]. A little over 27% of respondents chose the “other” option to specify their practices. Popular responses included not allowing screen time at all, allowing screen time for a certain amount of minutes per week or allowing screen time only on Fridays.



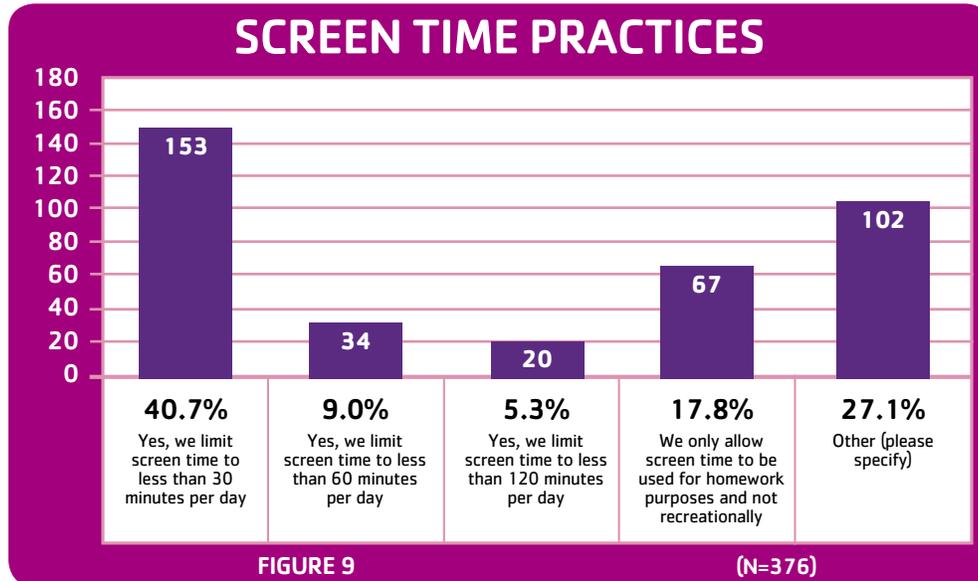
A nonprofit afterschool program serving 24 ZIP codes in the San Antonio area provides care for students up to the eighth grade. Half of their program sites receive fruits and/or vegetables daily through a partnership with the school district. Through this partnership, the school district is responsible for providing the meals/snacks while the afterschool programs delivers the activities and curriculum. For the other half of their sites, the afterschool program serves fruits and/or vegetables at least 2-3 times a week by purchasing the food items out of their own budget. The program identified refrigerated storage space and the cost of produce as being the main barriers to serving fruits and/or vegetables on a daily basis. The program is continually looking for ways to increase the amount of fruits and/or vegetables provided and overcome the above-identified barriers. The program staff utilizes the CATCH curriculum to engage students in at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on a daily basis and attributes the level of student engagement to the level of staff engagement. This further emphasizes the importance of staff role modeling the behaviors and activities being taught to program participants.



Does the licensed before/afterschool program provide opportunities for at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (indoor and/or outdoor) each day? [Click here for examples.](#)



With the exception of occasional inclement weather days and/or for homework purposes, does the licensed before/after school program limit screen time (tablets, computers, cell phones, etc.) to a time frame of 30-120 minutes per day?



Opinion Questions:

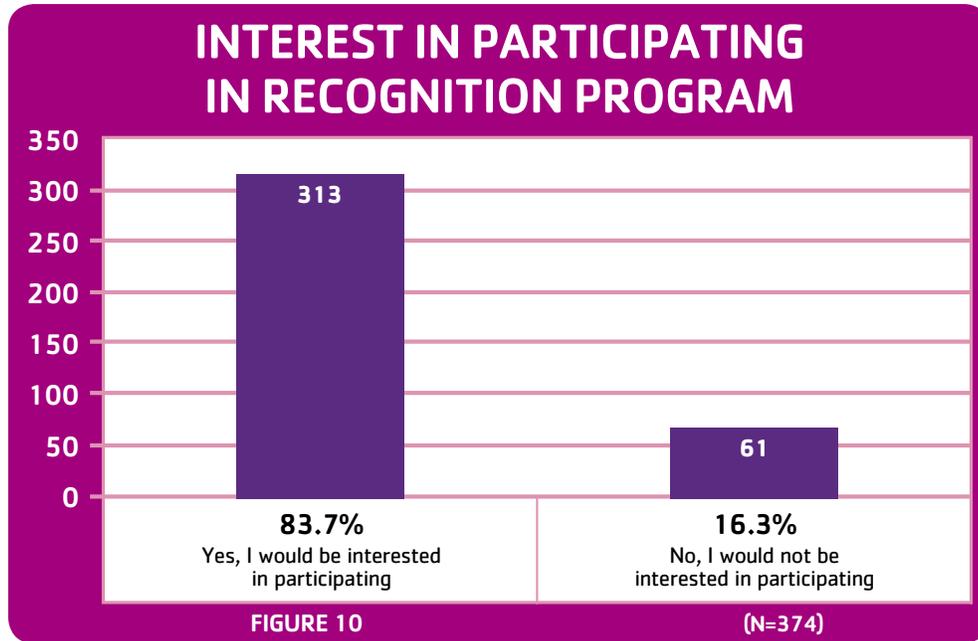
In order to measure interest of both providers and parents/guardians in a voluntary, state recognition program, two opinion questions were asked of each respondent. As indicated below, 83.7% of respondents indicated that they would be interested in participating in such a program if the state were to establish one [see Figure 10]. When asked if providers thought that the parents/guardians of their program participants would be interested in having physical activity and nutrition initiatives highlighted, 89.2% indicated that they thought parents would be interested [see Figure 11]. Based on those responses, there seems to be an overwhelming interest in participating in a voluntary program as well as having physical activity and nutrition initiatives highlighted in before/after school programs. By recognizing providers that are going above and beyond the minimum state standards and providing the tools for programs to improve, Texas has the opportunity to provide additional transparency to parents regarding the quality of care a before/after school program can provide.

"Parents want to know that their children are in a program that is doing a good job. Just like they may put a bumper sticker on their car if their child is an honor roll student, they want to know that the afterschool care their child is receiving is high quality and setting their child up for success."

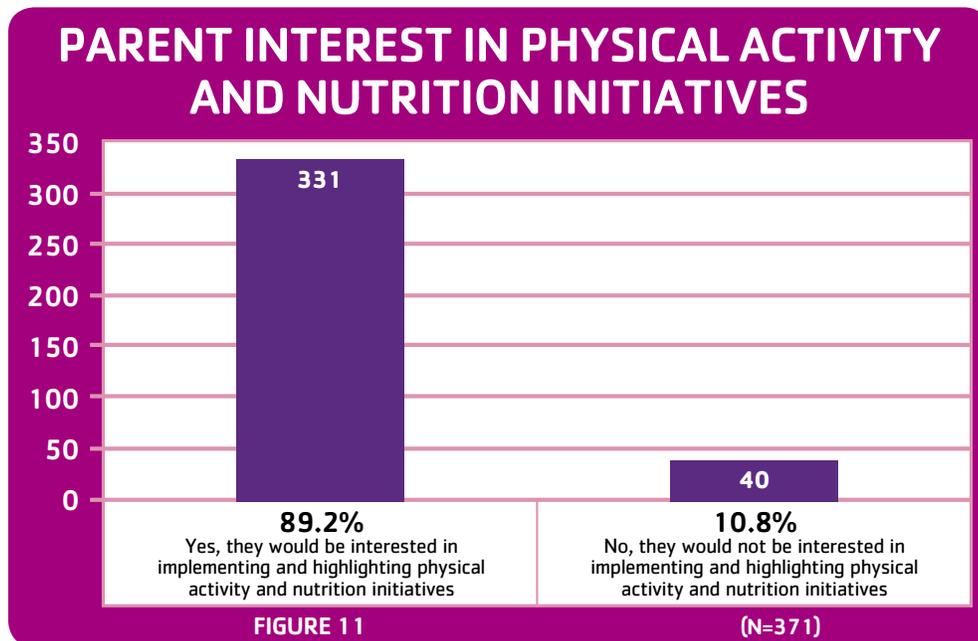
– San Antonio Afterschool Program



If the state were to establish a voluntary recognition program for licensed before/ afterschool providers in order to provide parents with more information on the quality of care available when choosing a before/afterschool program for their child(ren), would your program be interested in participating?



In your opinion, would the parents/guardians of the before/afterschool participants be interested in having physical activity and nutrition initiatives implemented and highlighted in their child's before/afterschool program?



Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the academic research, survey data and case studies, the Texas State Alliance of YMCAs plans to build upon the research efforts of the DASH Initiative by educating decision makers, garnering support from program providers and engaging parents and stakeholders in the importance of advocating for quality OST programs. Over time, the DASH Initiative can yield a great return on engagement and has the proclivity to combat the rise of chronic diseases in Texas youth.

Create a Tiered, Voluntary Distinction for Licensed OST Providers

During the 2015–2016 Session, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Healthy Out-of-School Time (HOST) Recognition Program designed to recognize providers who were meeting the National Institute on Out-of-School Time Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards.³ This program has the potential to positively impact the almost 235,500 youth⁴ currently enrolled in North Carolina OST programs.

Texas has the opportunity to be a pioneer in OST practices and policies by creating a tiered, voluntary distinction for OST providers. The distinction would differentiate providers that are committed to supporting quality of care and research driven guidelines while providing parents with the information needed to make the best choice for their child. Furthermore, a distinction program could also increase awareness around national quality standards for OST providers, distribute resources and incentives that encourage participation among providers and help curtail the rise in childhood chronic diseases by fostering lifelong principles of healthy eating and physical activity.

Upon establishment of this recognition program, Texas would be the first southern state to prioritize children's health and development in this manner. This commitment to youth development has the potential to reverberate around the state and nation and can serve as the impetus of widespread adoption of healthy eating and physical activity standards that ensures a healthier future for the next generation.

Update and Maintain the State's Database of Licensed Childcare Providers

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services works to protect the health and safety of Texas youth enrolled in various facets of childcare. This agency also houses data for child care licensing and is responsible for regulating operations, permitting and monitoring compliance, informing parents and the public about specific child care operations and providing resources around meeting licensing standards, laws and regulations. Through our research on this initiative, we found numerous flaws and discrepancies in the database of licensed childcare providers maintained by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Examples include inaccuracies of contact information for licensed providers, incorrect mailing addresses and unknown email addresses for program administrators. These discrepancies can make it difficult for parents to make informed decisions as they are choosing a provider.

Explore Opportunities with the Expanded Learning Opportunities Council to Encourage Healthy Initiatives in Out-of-School Time Programs

The 83rd Texas Legislature established the Expanded Learning Opportunities Council (ELOC) for the study of issues that relate to expanding learning opportunities and reviewing programs outside of the regular school day.⁵ The ELOC recommends eight factors that contribute to program quality. Some of those standards include family engagement and community partnerships, administration, organization and staff development, as well as programming sustainability, evaluation and awareness. These best practices echo the sentiments of the DASH Initiative and have the propensity to positively impact Texas youth in a myriad of ways.

³2016 Appropriations Act, H1030, Session Law 2016–94. North Carolina General Assembly. Web. Sept 2016. <http://www.ncleg.net/sessions/2015/bills/house/html/h1030v8.html>

⁴Afterschool Alliance. America After 3pm Survey: Afterschool in North Carolina. Web. Sept 2016. http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateFacts.cfm?state_abbr=NC

⁵Texas Education Agency. "After- or Extended-School Programs." Web. Aug 2016. <http://tea.texas.gov/index2.aspx?id=4695>

Additional Resources and Partners

[Afterschool Alliance](#)

[Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#)

[Boys and Girls Clubs of America](#)

[CATCH Global Foundation](#)

[Healthy Out-of-School Time \(HOST\) Coalition](#)

[It's Time Texas](#)

[National AfterSchool Association](#)

[National Institute on Out-of-School Time](#)

[National Recreation and Park Association](#)

[Partnership for a Healthy Texas](#)

[Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](#)

[Texas Hunger Initiative](#)

[Texas Partnership for Out of School Time](#)

[YMCA of the USA](#)

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