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To: Sheleen Dumas, Department PRA Clearance Officer, Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Commerce Department

From: Jodi Grant, Afterschool Alliance

Subject: FR Doc. 2023-15685, Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; National Survey of Children's Health Longitudinal Cohort

The Afterschool Alliance applauds the leadership and initiative of the Department of Commerce to assess the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, youth, and their families through the National Survey of Children's Health Longitudinal Cohort data collection efforts. The Afterschool Alliance is a 23-year-old non-profit organization that works to ensure that all children have access to quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities. Our network of more than 25,000 afterschool partners is expanding learning opportunities for students nationwide and tapping community partners to provide engaging, hands-on activities that promote student well-being, and raise school attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates. In total, afterschool programs are serving nearly 8 million children and their families around the nation, yet nearly 25 million more youth, including 11.2 million low-income youth, would participate if more programs were available.

A strong body of evidence exists regarding positive outcomes for children and youth associated with participation in quality afterschool and summer programs, including benefits that last over time. For example, a longitudinal survey following nearly 1,000 children found that participation in organized activities in elementary school contributes to better academic grades and a more rigorous course load taken in high school, leading to greater adult educational and occupational attainment. In addition, students who consistently participated in afterschool activities in elementary school reported less impulsivity and less police contact at age 26.¹

Moreover, an afterschool and summer program provider tracking survey conducted through the pandemic reinforced that programs are providing integral learning experiences for their students, including academic enrichment, time to interact with their peers and develop social skills, activities where they can work in teams and build critical thinking skills, STEM learning opportunities, and chances to take on leadership roles. The tracking survey also found that programs are connecting family to community resources, such as health or dental clinics, financial planning services, and mental health supports.

In addition to fully commending the inclusion of questions to learn more about children and young people's after school experiences, we respectfully submit the following recommendations of possible questions to include in the survey. We believe these would add to the existing knowledge base about the opportunities available to children and youth after school and the impact of these experiences on their health and well-being.

Since 2004, our organization has conducted a nationwide survey approximately every five years of parents of school-aged children to determine the types of out-of-school time experiences available—with the most recent survey, conducted in early 2020, of more than 31,000 households—that informs the recommendations below:

1. Discerning the different types of after school experiences—in particular after school activities—children and young people are taking part in.

As mentioned above, the Afterschool Alliance has conducted America After 3PM, a national household survey of parents of school-age children, since 2004 to document how America’s children spend their afternoons. The survey asks parents about the types of after school care they might use for their children during a typical week during the school year, such as in the care of a parent or guardian, a sibling, another adult relative, another adult who is not a relative, in a childcare facility, or looking after themselves.

The survey also asks about the wide range of activities and programming offered during the hours outside of school that children might take part in. Comprehensive afterschool programs, organized team sports, private lessons in subjects such as dance or music, religious activities, scouting, volunteering, work obligations, and tutoring are a sampling of the different types of options available after school. We recommend adding a question in the National Survey of Children’s Health Longitudinal Cohort that will allow for a deeper analysis of the various ways in which children and youth are spending their after school hours will provide a snapshot of the variety of learning opportunities taking place after school (See Table 1).

Table 1. During the typical week of the current school year during the hours after school (approximately 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.), please estimate how many hours your child spends in the following types of care. Please type in 0 if an option does not apply.

	# of hours
Parent or guardian	
Sibling (brother/sister)	
Another adult relative (such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle)	
Another adult (<u>not</u> a relative, such as a neighbor or paid sitter)	
Childcare facility or family childcare center	
Self-care	
A comprehensive afterschool program that combines academics and enrichment activities, and often provides a snack or a meal. It is usually offered in a school or a community center and provides more than only supervision.	
Organized team sports	
Special lessons like art, music or dance lessons	
Work obligations	
Volunteering	
Study group or tutoring	

Clubs that meet occasionally and have a specific focus on a subject, skill or hobby, such as computer coding, leadership, chess, etc.	
Religious activities	
Scouting	
Other	

Additionally, a series of follow up questions for children and youth who are participating in an afterschool program that inquires about the types of skills they are gaining and experiences they are being exposed to would provide the Department additional information about the ways in which afterschool programs are directly supporting children and young people's health and well-being. This could include questions regarding the types of relationships children and youth are able to build in programs, such as programs helping them to make new friends or having adults to talk to in the program; the skills being developed in programs, such as understanding what goal setting is, working on responsible decision-making, or the ability to learn something new; or engagement and well-being, such as feeling like they belong in the program, that they matter in the program, they feel more self-confident, or feel more motivated to learn. As recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey data have documented the rise in young people experiencing anxiety, depression, stress, and aggression, and U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy raising the alarm about the health risks of loneliness and isolation, the aforementioned questions are key indicators of the healthy development of a child. There are a number of existing continuous quality improvement surveys to draw questions from, such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) by the Weikart Center/Forum for Youth Investment and the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA).

2. Questions that will help to determine the supply and demand for afterschool programs

The National Survey of Children's Health Longitudinal Cohort also has the opportunity to determine, from the perspective of children and youth, if they are not currently in an afterschool program, would they have liked to participate if one were available to them. A question of this nature can add to the public dialogue about the opportunity gap and examine who are the children and youth who are not able to take part in afterschool programming despite their desire to participate.

3. Determining the amount of time children and young people are spending in their after school experiences

Studies have found that regular participation in afterschool and summer programs leads to greater gains. For example, a RAND study of summer programs found that students with higher attendance levels performed better than their nonparticipating peers in math after one year, and after two years in the summer program, high attenders performed better in both math and language arts and received higher social-emotional skill ratings. The inclusion of questions in the survey regarding time spent in the various after school experiences will provide helpful information to identify if there are differences in the physical and emotional health of children and youth that are correlated with the amount of time they are engaged in activities after school.

4. Include questions about children and young people's summer experiences.

The summer months can be a time of opportunity—where children and youth can take part in summer camps, summer learning programs, summer classes, and family vacations, but it can also be a time when students who rely on school breakfasts and lunches lose access to those meals, where students miss out on structured learning experiences, or a time without positive developmental activities, such as engaging with peers and connecting with supportive and caring adults and mentors. The addition of summer related questions in the National Survey of Children's Health Longitudinal Cohort can address multiple recommendations in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's consensus study report, "Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth," such as, "A systematic community needs assessment that is inclusive of parents and youth to assess summertime programming and services," to determine how young people are spending their summers and what affect that has on their health and well-being.¹

Afterschool and summer learning programs are providing life-changing opportunities for children and youth, where they are able to engage in hands-on learning, collaborate with their peers, find their passions, and explore new interest areas that can lead to future careers. The more data we are able to collect on the afterschool and summer opportunities children and youth are participating in, as well as the opportunities they would have liked to take part in if they were available, the better informed policies can be at the local, state, and federal levels to best support the health and development of our young people.

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17226/25546>