

The Potential Need For and Use of Out-of-School Time Care for School-Age Children in 2012 and 2019

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Introduction

School-age children need safe, supervised places to learn and grow during non-school hours while their parents and caregivers work. Beyond providing safety and supervision, participation in high-quality school-age child care programs offered before or after school, or during the summer, is associated with positive developmental outcomes for young people.^{1,2}

Yet, compared to child care and early education for children ages birth to 5 (and not yet in kindergarten), there has been relatively less nationally representative research on the availability and use of non-parental out-of-school time care for children ages 6 to 12. Based on the current analysis, there were approximately 27.9 million school-aged children in the United States in 2019, representing a substantial group of young people potentially in need of care.

This snapshot describes the potential need for out-of-school time care for school-age children using the 2012 and 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE). Given past research has found differences in out-of-school time activity participation by race and ethnic background and income level,³ the prevalence of out-of-school time care among different demographic groups is also examined.

Although the data for this snapshot are from before the COVID-19 pandemic began, which led to widespread disruptions to families' access to child care, the findings provide useful information about differences and declining trends in use of non-parental out-of-school time care arrangements among some subgroups of children that began prior to the pandemic.

Glossary

School-age children: Children who were, at the time of the survey, ages 6 through 12, or age 5 and enrolled in kindergarten.

Out-of-school time care: Out-of-school time care: Non-parental care (excluding time spent at school during the academic day) provided by a regular care provider in the week prior to the survey. Regular care providers are those who provide care at least five hours per week. This includes center-based care; licensed home-based care; other organizational-based care (such as before- and after-school programming); and care from an individual, such as a family child care home provider, nanny, a non-parent family member, or another paid or unpaid individual.

Households experiencing low incomes: Households in which the annual income is below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Fully-employed households: Households in which all parents were engaged in work-related activities (i.e., any job for pay, schooling, or job training) in the prior week. In one-parent households, one parent was engaged in work-related activities; in two-parent households, both parents were engaged in work-related activities in the prior week.

Key Findings

- Just over a quarter of school-age children were engaged in out-of-school time care in 2019, about the same as in 2012.
- In 2019, there were over 17 million school-age children with fully employed parents, indicating large numbers (almost two-thirds of school-age children) who potentially need supervision and enrichment activities outside of school hours.
- School-age children from households with low incomes (those with incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, or FPL) had lower levels of participation in out-of-school time care arrangements than children from families whose incomes were at or above 200% FPL. More specifically, less than one in four school-age children in households with low incomes were in out-of-school time care, as compared to almost one-third of school-age children in households with incomes of 200% FPL and above.
- The percentage of children in households experiencing low incomes who were in out-of-school time care declined significantly from almost 29% in 2012 to almost 24% in 2019; it appears the income gap in out-of-school time care use widened over time, as about 32% of children in households with higher incomes were in out-of-school time care in both 2012 and 2019.
- The percentage of non-Hispanic Black school-age children in out-of-school time care decreased significantly from 35% in 2012 to 29% in 2019.
- The percentage of Hispanic school-age children in out-of-school time care decreased significantly from about 31% in 2012 to about 25% in 2019.

Data and Methods

Sample

This snapshot draws upon new analyses of the 2012 and 2019 NSECE Household Surveys (see the About the NSECE box for more information about the survey) and focuses on school-age children, who were ages 6 through 12, or age 5 and enrolled in kindergarten, at the time of the survey. The sample for this analysis included 12,092 school-age children in one- or two- parent households in the 2012 NSECE and 7,909 school-age children in one- or two-parent households in the 2019 NSECE. These samples represent 28,363,573 and 27,890,703 children, respectively. Respondents to the survey were the parent or caregiver of a school-age child.

Variables

The person taking the survey (typically a parent) reported the child's age, race and ethnicity, household income, and hours spent in non-parental care and/or school in the week prior to the survey. The child's age and, for five-year-olds only, K-8 school attendance information, were used to identify the sample of

About the NSECE

The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) is a set of four integrated, nationally representative surveys. The NSECE has been fielded twice, in 2012 and again in 2019, and a third wave is scheduled for 2024. In each wave, the NSECE includes these four surveys: 1) households with children under 13 years of age, 2) home-based providers of child care and early education (CCEE), 3) center-based providers of early care and education (ECE), and 4) the center-based provider workforce. Together, they characterize the supply of and demand for CCEE in the United States and allow better understanding of how well families' needs and preferences coordinate with providers' offerings and constraints. The study is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

children who were school-aged at the time of the survey. The child's race and ethnicity was reported in eight categories in the NSECE: American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic; Another race, non-Hispanic; Asian or Asian American, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; Hispanic or Latino of any race; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic; Multi-racial, non-Hispanic;^a and White, non-Hispanic. Household income was recoded into two categories: below 200% of the FPL, and at or above 200% of the FPL. The questions about the hours a child spent in different non-parental care settings—both paid and unpaid—was only asked of survey respondents during the school year. The working status of parents in the household was also reported by the person taking the survey. The data were coded to identify whether a child had any parent attending work in the past week or all parents attending work in the past week.

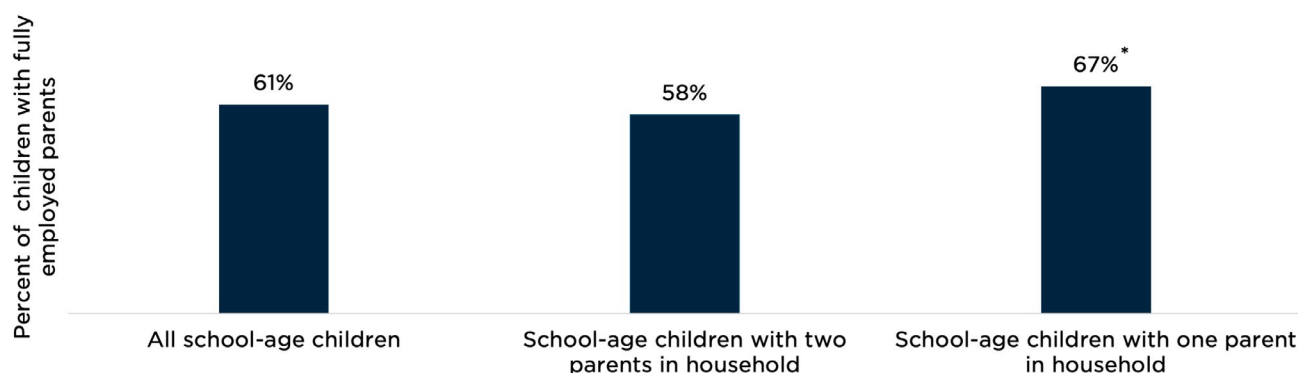
Significance testing

T-tests were conducted to examine changes in the percentage of school-age children with fully employed parents and the percentage of children in out-of-school time care between 2012 and 2019, as well as between a select number of subgroups; the changes reported as significant in this Snapshot were found to be different at $p < .05$.

What Was the Potential Need for Out-of-School Time Care in 2012 and 2019?

One estimate of the potential need for out-of-school time care is the percentage of school-age children in households where parent(s) are fully employed (see Glossary for definition). Overall, 61% of school-age children in 2019 had fully employed parents and could potentially have needed care and programming when they were not in school (see Figure 1), a percentage that did not significantly change from 2012. About 58% of school-age children who lived in a two-parent household had two fully employed parents (see Figure 1); the other 42% had at least one parent who was not working. Two-thirds of school-age children in single-parent households had an employed parent (see Figure 1). This means that in 2019, there were over 17 million school-age children with fully employed parents—including nearly 6.6 million children living with a fully employed single parent—representing a large number of children who potentially needed supervision outside of school hours. These numbers did not change significantly from 2012 to 2019, indicating that the potential need for out-of-school time care has remained consistently high over time.

Figure 1: Percentage of school-age children who lived in fully employed households in 2019, by family



Source: Child Trends analysis of 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education Household Survey.

Note: *indicates significant differences from children with two parents in household ($p < .05$).

^a Estimates for any sub-groups with fewer than 50 observations (i.e., unweighted number of cases) for a specific variable (such as participation in out-of-school time care) were considered unreliable estimates and were not reported in subgroup analyses. For example, fewer than 50 school-age Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children in the sample participated in out-of-school time care, so estimates of out-of-school time care participation among Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander children are not reported in this snapshot.

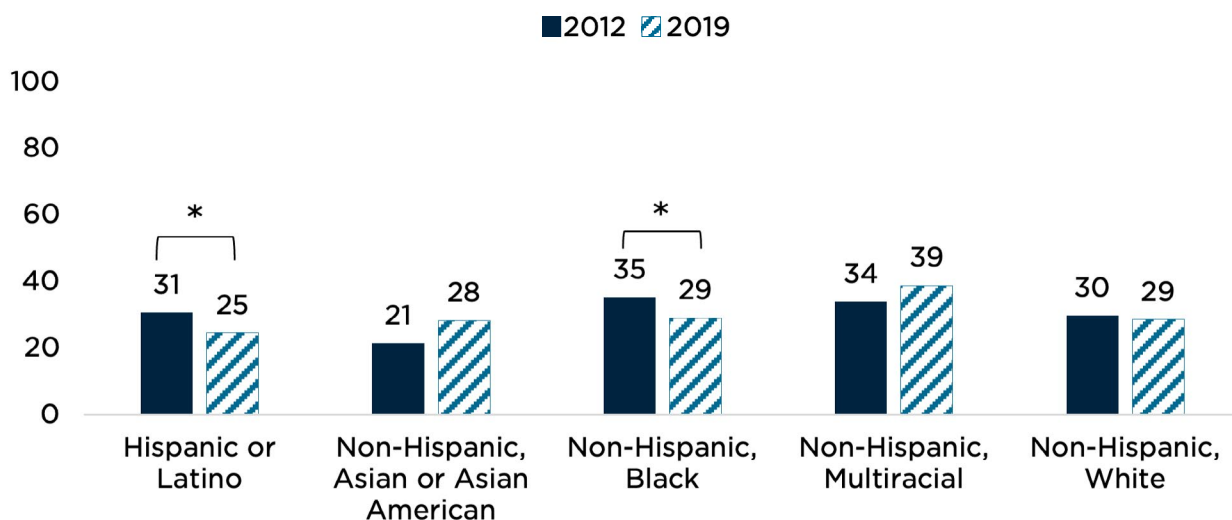
Who Actually Used Out-of-School Time Care in 2012 and 2019?

In 2019, 28% of all school-age children, regardless of their parents' working status, were in out-of-school time care, a similar number as in 2012 (30%). In our analysis, we explored whether there were differences in participation levels by race and ethnic background as well as by income level. Previous research investigating residential and community-level inequities has found that Black children, for instance, have low levels of access to supportive services such as recreational centers and child care facilities.^{4,5} Additionally, variation in rates of maternal employment leads us to expect that there will be varying demands for and participation in out-of-school time care among children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.⁶

Differences by race and ethnicity of the child

There were some significant changes in use of out-of-school time care between 2012 and 2019 (Figure 2). The percentage of non-Hispanic Black children in out-of-school time care decreased from 35% to 29%. Additionally, the percentage of Hispanic children in out-of-school time care decreased from 31% to 25%.

Figure 2. Percentage of children in out-of-school time care in 2012 and 2019, by race and ethnicity



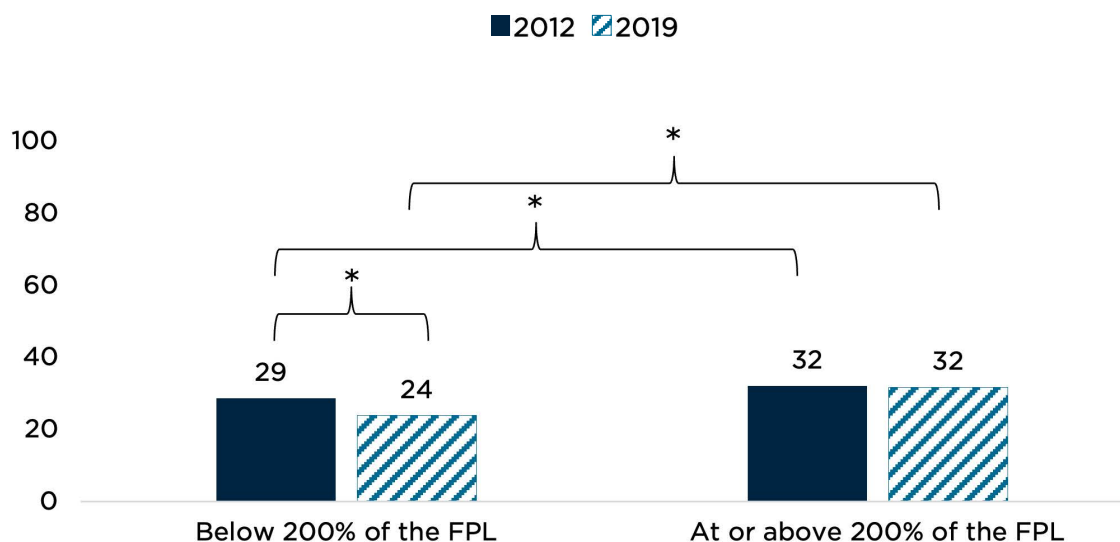
Source: Child Trends analysis of 2012 and 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education Household Survey.

Note: *indicates significant differences between the 2012 and 2019 estimate ($p < .05$). We also tested for significant differences between racial and ethnic groups; these tests are not denoted in the figure. The following significant differences were found in 2012: a smaller percentage of non-Hispanic White than non-Hispanic Black children; a smaller percentage of non-Hispanic Asian children than children of every other racial and ethnic group. The following significant differences were found in 2019: a smaller percentage of Hispanic than non-Hispanic Black children; a smaller percentage of Hispanic children than non-Hispanic Multiracial children.

Differences by household income

In 2019, just under half of school-age children were living in households with incomes falling below 200% of the FPL. In both 2012 and 2019, school-age children in households with incomes that were below 200% of the FPL were less likely to be in out-of-school time care than school-age children in households with incomes at or above 200% of the FPL, and the gap widened in 2019 (see Figure 3). In both years, almost a third (32%) of school-age children in households earning 200% of the FPL or above were in out-of-school time care. Over the same time period, the percentage of school-age children in families earning less than 200% of the FPL who were in out-of-school time care decreased from 29% to 24%.

Figure 3. Percentage of children who were in out-of-school time care, by household income



Source: Child Trends analysis of 2012 and 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education Household Survey.

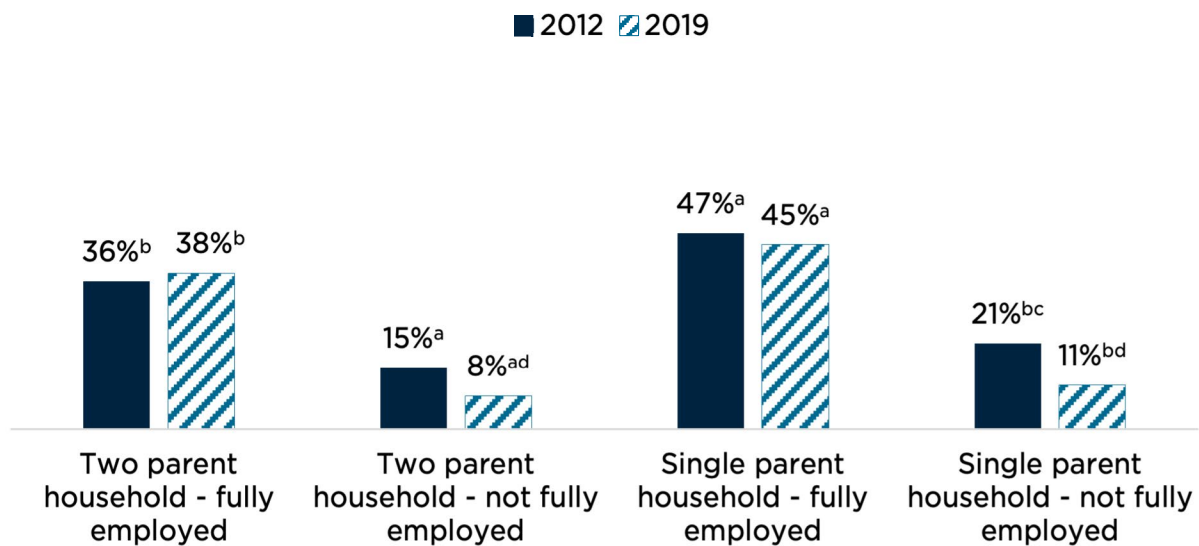
Note: * indicates significant difference between the two estimates ($p < .05$).

Differences by household structure and parental working status

In both 2012 and 2019, a higher percentage of school-age children in single-parent households were in out-of-school time care (33% in 2019) compared with school-age children in two-parent households (25% in 2019).

A much larger percentage of children were in out-of-school time care when all parents in the household were fully employed than when there was at least one parent who wasn't working (Figure 4). In both single parent and two-parent households, there was a decline in the use of non-parental care among households with parents who were not fully employed. The use of non-parental care among households with fully employed parents stayed the same. This meant that gap in use of out-of-school time care between fully employed and not fully employed households grew from 2012 to 2019. In 2012, 15% of school-age children in two-parent households where parents were not fully employed were in out-of-school time care. By 2019, this percentage had dropped to 8%. Similarly, among single parent households where a parent was not fully employed, use of out-of-school time care declined from 21% to 11%.

Figure 4. Percentage of school-age children in out-of-school time care, by household structure and employment status of parents



Source: Child Trends analysis of 2012 and 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education Household Survey.

Note: ^a indicates significant differences from children in two-parent households that are fully employed ($p < .05$)

^b indicates significant differences from children in single parent households that are fully employed ($p < .05$)

^c indicates significant differences from children in two-parent households that were not fully employed ($p < .05$)

^d indicates significant differences from 2012 ($p < .05$)

Estimated gap between potential need and actual use of care

In both 2012 and 2019, there was a sizable gap between the number of school-age children whose parent(s) were fully employed, and therefore potentially needed care, and those who were enrolled in care. About 62% of children in two-parent fully-employed households and 55% of children in one-parent, fully-employed households were *not* in out-of-school time care in 2019 (see Figure 4 for the percentage who *were* in care). This means that there were an estimated 10 million children who were in households with fully employed parent(s) but were not engaged in out-of-school time care (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimated gap in the number of school age children who potentially need regular out-of-school time care and number who are actually using care, 2019

Household type	Estimated number of school-age children with fully employed parents	Estimated number of children in regular out-of-school time care	Estimated number of children who potentially need care who are not actually using care
Two-parent household	10,499,836	3,966,838	6,532,998
One parent household	6,590,141	2,945,435	3,644,706
All children (total)	17,089,977	6,912,273	10,177,704

Source: Child Trends analysis of 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education Household Survey.

Conclusion

This snapshot examines the potential need for and actual use of non-parental out-of-school time care among U.S. families with school-age children in 2012 and 2019. In 2019, there were approximately 27.9 million school-aged children living with at least one parent. Among those children, 17 million had fully employed parents, but only 6.9 million were being cared for by people other than their parents when they weren't in school. Importantly, this snapshot does not examine whether children without out-of-school-time care needed care, or whether they would have used care if it were available. For example, some parents may work part-time so they are available during non-school hours. Additionally, parents in two-parent households may work opposite shifts to avoid using non-parental care. Parents may also work from home while children are present. In the 2020 America After 3PM survey, however, Afterschool Alliance reported that 56% of children in kindergarten through 5th grade who were not in an afterschool program would participate in an afterschool program if one were available to them (according to their parent).⁷

More school-age children in households with higher incomes were in out-of-school time care, compared with children in households with low incomes. A Child Trends analysis of the National Survey of Children's Health similarly found that, in 2012, 66% of children ages 6 to 11 in families with incomes that were 200% of the FPL or higher participated in out-of-school time programs or extracurricular enrichment activities, compared with 38% in families that had incomes below 200% FPL.⁸ The findings in the current snapshot indicate that there have been declines in the participation of children in families with low incomes in out-of-school time care, widening the gap with children in families with higher incomes. Though this snapshot does not explore the causes of the income gap, other research has found that families with lower incomes are more likely than families with higher incomes to report certain barriers to participation in afterschool programs. For example, among households not participating in afterschool programs in 2020, 61% of households with lower incomes (that is, income in the 20th percentile) reported that cost was a reason, compared to 55% of households with higher incomes. Additional barriers that impacted households with lower incomes at a greater rate included a lack of safe transportation, a lack of afterschool programs in the community, hours of operation that do not meet parents' needs, and inconvenient locations of afterschool programs.⁹

There have also been declines in the percentage of non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children in out-of-school time care from 2012 to 2019. The 2020 America After 3PM survey similarly found that participation in afterschool programming declined among Black and Latinx families between 2014 and 2020 (data collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic).¹⁰ The survey also found that, during the same time period, unmet demand for afterschool programming remained high across all racial and ethnic groups, with Black and Hispanic families reporting the highest levels of unmet demand.¹¹ Race/ethnicity and household income are deeply intertwined. The 2020 America After 3PM survey attempted to disentangle the issue by examining families with lower incomes who were not using afterschool programs. Among these families, Black and Hispanic parents were more likely than White parents to report a lack of transportation and inconvenient program locations as reasons for not using care.¹² These results suggest that declines in the use of out-of-school time care among Black and Hispanic families are unlikely to be the result of a declining demand for out-of-school time care; rather, families may not be able to access care that meets their needs.

Future research is needed to better understand the potential reasons for the pre-pandemic declines in use of out-of-school time care among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic children, and households with lower incomes. The NSECE can be used to understand how families' strategies for covering their child care needs when no parents are available have changed, and explore differences by household income and race/ethnicity. For example, in certain demographic groups, are parents in two-parent households increasingly working opposite shifts? Are parents working more part-time jobs or jobs with flexible schedules? Are children unsupervised? However, the NSECE cannot tell us why parents in

fully employed households with non-overlapping schedules are not using non-parental out-of-school time care. In-depth qualitative data (such as interviews and focus groups with families) can be used to understand parents' thought process with regard to out-of-school time care, and what factors – such as cost, quality, location, availability, work schedules – affect their decision to use care. In future years, the 2024 NSECE may also provide insights into whether and how parent work schedules have changed, as well as trends in the use of out-of-school time care, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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