

PERSEVERANCE
THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

TEEN SNAPSHOT

Nearly **90%** of After School Matters teens are Black (53%) or Latinx (34%)

82% of our teens live in Chicago's high-poverty community areas

The Lived Experience of Chicago Teens

The year 2020 was unlike any other. The COVID-19 pandemic, alongside increased activism and public attention on systemic racism, changed people's daily lives. In response, After School Matters—the leading provider of out-of-school time programs for Chicago teens—re-envisioned its in-person model to provide more than 500 remote learning programs to nearly 10,000 teens across Chicago in summer 2020. Following the summer, After School Matters partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to better understand teen experience during the pandemic.¹

WHAT WE FOUND

The strength and resolve of teens across the city have been critically tested as they face serious, adult-like challenges from the ongoing crises.

TEEN STRESSORS

Program instructors report teens taking on additional **adult-like responsibilities and stressors** due to the pandemic.

 **76%** Providing childcare during the week

 **57%** Home alone during the week

 **56%** Coping with the loss of loved ones

 **27%** Someone in household infected with COVID-19

FOOD INSECURITY



1 in 3
teens (32%) report experiencing food insecurity

VS



1 in 8
children estimated as food insecure in Cook County²

JOB LOSS

40% of teens reported they or someone in their family had **lost a job or had their hours cut** as a result of the pandemic.

CONNECTIVITY CHALLENGES

57% 

of teens face internet access gaps, which creates barriers for program participation



¹After School Matters served 9,543 teens in the summer 2020 program session. A total of 3,999 teens (42%) participated in this research to share their daily realities and program experiences.

²Gundersen, C., Dewey, A., Engelhard, E., Strayer, M., & Lapinski, L. (2020). *Map the Meal Gap 2020: A report on county and congressional district food insecurity and county food cost in the United States in 2018*. Feeding America. map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/child/illinois/county/cook

Despite the extraordinary circumstances, many teens are rising above the challenges, remaining positive, hopeful, and engaged during programs. Teens develop strong connections with their instructors and peers, which helps them cope with considerable hardships and stress.



90% AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE RATE
Teen participation remains high despite the switch to virtual programming.

78% of teens say they feel more hopeful about their future after participating in their program.

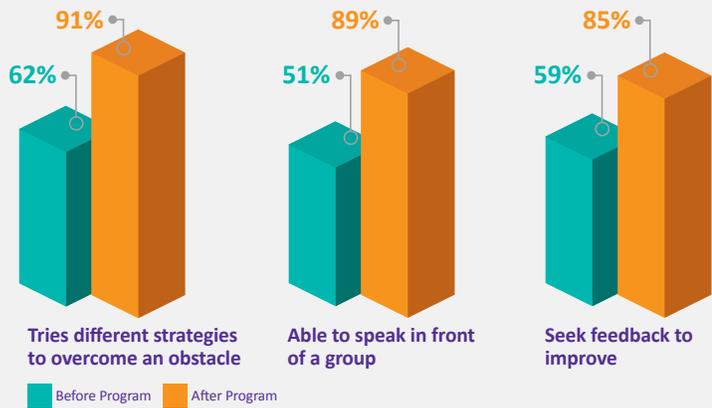


90% of teens report a strong sense of belonging in their program, and teens who feel a greater sense of belonging report significantly lower stress levels.

“Knowing the different options I have in career choices made me feel more hopeful. Also knowing how girls just like me were able to overcome their challenges gives me hope that I can too.”

SKILLS GAINED

Teens report significant gains in their skills, including stronger content skills (e.g., coding, dance) and 21st century skills (e.g., communication, problem-solving) after participating in their program, meaning that remote learning still provides critical opportunities for teens to learn and practice skills.



The Takeaway

While the pandemic has been hard on everyone in many ways, it has negatively and disproportionately impacted teens and communities of color, and Chicago’s recovery from the pandemic requires an equitable response plan. Thus, After School Matters is using these findings and others to inform its efforts to provide targeted supports and services to Chicago teens and our communities as we collectively recover from the pandemic, work to mitigate learning loss, and look ahead to future program innovation.

After School Matters partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for this analysis. View the full report at afterschoolmatters.org/AIRreport.

About After School Matters

After School Matters is a nonprofit organization that provides after-school and summer opportunities to Chicago public high school teens to explore their passions and develop their talents, while gaining critical skills for work, college, and beyond. After School Matters programs are project based, led by industry experts, and provide a pathway to progress in skills development and independence. Teens earn a stipend while participating in programs in the arts, communications and leadership, sports, and STEM. Over the span of nearly three decades, After School Matters has impacted more than 350,000 teens throughout the city of Chicago.