

So, What Are the Kids Doing After School?



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So, What Are the Kids Doing After School?

Toronto, ON – The results of an Ipsos-Reid/RBC Financial Group poll suggest that Canadian kids are rarely idle after the bell goes at school and before they get home.

Eighty-five percent of parents report that their children participate in some sort of activity or program after school. Six in ten (59%) say that their children participate in extra-curricular activities such as piano lessons or a sport, one-quarter (26%) say that their children are currently enrolled in a formal after-school program that includes a range of structured activities supervised by professionals or an organization, and fourteen percent of parents have a non-formal custodial arrangement for their children after school such as going over to a neighbour's or having some other adult watch over them.

Other things that parents say that their children are involved with after school include "doing homework" (6%), "they just come home" (5%) or "watching television" (3%). While 38 per cent of parents think that doing homework is the best way for their children to spend the hours between the end of the school day and dinnertime, only six per cent say that's what their kids are actually doing.

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/RBC Financial Group poll conducted between September 27th, 2002 and October 8th, 2002. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 500 Canadian parents of children ages 6 to 17 years living in centres with a population of 50,000 or greater. Respondents were selected from Ipsos-Reid's Canadian Household panel of over 80,000 households. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire Canadian population of parents with children 6 to 17 years

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of age in communities of this size been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

The results show that children are involved in different activities after school during the week and not limited to a specific format. For example, some children spend part of the week in a formal after-school program, other afternoons doing extra-curricular activities and other days being looked after by other adult.

In fact, of the 59% of parents whose children participate in extra-curricular activities after school, 29% say their children also spend time in a formal after-school program, while 15% say their children spend time being looked after in a non-formal custodial arrangement such as going over to a neighbour's or having another adult watch over them in addition to their extra-curricular activities.

Of the 26% of parents whose children are currently enrolled in a formal after-school program, two-thirds (64%) say they also participate in extra-curricular activities throughout the school week and 17% also spend time being looked after in a non-formal arrangement.

Of the 14% of parents whose children spend at least part of the week being looked after in a non-formal custodial arrangement such as going over to a neighbour's or having another adult watch over them, 62% also participate in extra-curricular activities and 31% spend time in a formal-after school program.

Extra-Curricular Activities...

Six in ten (59%) parents say their children are involved in non-formal "extra-curricular activities" after school such as piano lessons or a sport.



On average, children who participate in extra-curricular activities do so 2 to 3 times per week after school. The types of extra-curricular activities vary widely and include piano lessons (16%), swimming (16%), soccer (15%), hockey (13%), basketball (9%), sports (unspecified) (9%), music lessons (9%), dancing (8%), football (8%), other sports (7%), volleyball (6%), track and field (6%), martial arts (6%), other arts/music (6%), scouts/guides (5%), band (5%), baseball (4%), gymnastics (4%), drama/theatre (4%), other clubs and community groups (4%), and choir (3%).

Formal After-School Programs...

One-quarter (26%) of parents of children between the ages of 6 and 17 say that their children are currently enrolled in a formal after-school program that includes a range of structured activities supervised by professionals or an organization.

While children who are currently enrolled in a formal after-school program, as defined above, participate an average of 2 to 3 sessions per week, younger children between the ages of 6 to 8 spend an average of 3 afternoons per week in a formal after-school program. One-quarter (24%) of parents of children currently enrolled in a formal after-school program say that their children attend a formal after-school program 4 or 5 times per week. This is higher among parents of children between the ages of 6 to 11 whose children are currently enrolled in a formal after-school program. One-third (33%) of these parents say their children attend 4 or 5 times per week.

Over half (55%) of the formal after-school programs children currently attend are operated by a school, 23 percent are operated by a community organization, and the remainder are



operated by a daycare (5%) or “other” program (14%). The types of formal after-school programs children attend vary widely, the most common involving sports (13%), general daycare (11%), community groups (6%), basketball (6%), dancing (6%), martial arts (5%), homework or study club (5%), drama/theatre (5%) or choir (4%).

Reasons for Enrolling Children in a Formal After-School Program...

The primary reason parents say that they enrolled their children in a formal after-school program this year is that the “children were interested” (44%). Fewer parents indicated that they chose to enroll their children in an after-school program out of a childcare necessity because they are “at work” (15%), “to keep them busy “ (15%), to give them an opportunity to “socialize and spend time with friends” (14%), “it’s good for them/keeps them fit” (9%), or “help with school curriculum” (5%).

- Parents with children between the ages of 12 and 17 were more likely to enroll their children in a formal after-school program because “they were interested” compared to parents of children between the ages of 6 and 11 (58% versus 29%).
- Parents of children between the ages of 6 and 11 were more likely to enroll their children in a formal after-school program for “childcare/parents are at work” (21% versus 3%).

Difficulty Finding a Suitable Formal After-School Program...

Only twelve percent of parents whose children are currently enrolled in a formal after-school program say that it was difficult to find a formal after-school program that has structured activities and is supervised by professionals or a community organization suitable for their children in their area (4% “very difficult” and 8% “somewhat difficult”). An additional 16%



say that it was “not very difficult” to find a suitable program in their area. Seven in ten (69%) say that it was “not at all difficult” to find a suitable formal after-school program in their area.

- Parents living in British Columbia whose children are in a formal after-school program are most likely to say that it was difficult to find a suitable formal after-school program in their area. Half (50%) of these parents from British Columbia say that it was difficult (20%) or not very difficult (30%) finding a suitable formal after-school program in their area.

The Most Important Factors in Choosing Formal After-School Programs...

Parents who have chosen a formal after-school program say that providing a “safe environment” (71% “very important”) and “helping their children gain confidence and self-esteem” (71% “very important”) were the most important factors when they decided to enroll them in a formal after-school program. Following these two factors are “reinforcing basic social skills such as cooperation, team building and conflict resolution to help youth begin to develop workplace competencies” (63% “very important”), “skill development in sports, arts and culture or languages” (61% “very important”), “keeping them from hanging out with a bad crowd or getting into trouble” (61% “very important”), “participating in structured, organized activities” (54% “very important”), “not being home alone” (48% “very important”), “within my budget” (46% “very important”), “improving their academic achievement through tutoring and homework assistance” (39% “very important”) and “computer use and instruction” (21% “very important”) which are deemed to be important.



- Parents of children between the ages of 6 and 11 are more likely to say that not being home alone was a “very important” factor in their decision to enroll their children in a formal after-school program compared to parents to children between the ages of 12 to 17 (56% versus 34%).
- A higher proportion of mothers (84%) indicate that “providing a safe environment” was a “very important” factor when they decided to enroll their child in a formal after-school program, with structured activities and supervised by professionals or a community organization, compared to fathers (62%).

Canadian Parents Give Good Marks for Formal After-School Programs...

Sixty percent of parents with children currently enrolled in a formal after-school program say that they are “very satisfied” with the program their child attends, with an additional four in ten (37%) are “somewhat satisfied.”

When researching their children’s after-school program, these parents placed the highest priority on programs that have “screened and qualified staff” (79% “high priority”), “provide a learning environment” (68% “high priority”), “are in a convenient location” (58% “high priority”), “have the number of staff to supervise the number of children” (53% “high priority”), “have flexible hours” (34% “high priority”), and provide “a nutritious snack after-school” (31% “high priority”).

- Single working parents place a greater priority on flexible hours (88% a “priority”) than two working parent households (60% a “priority”).



Accessibility of After-School Programs...

A significant majority (87%) of all parents surveyed believe it is important that parents have access to a formal after-school program in their area, and nearly half (47%) feel that this is “very important.” However, just three in ten (30%) believe that these programs are “very accessible” in their area, whereas four in ten (40%) believe that these programs are only “somewhat accessible.” Almost one-quarter (22%) indicate that formal after-school programs are “not very accessible” and 3% say they are “not at all accessible.” Four percent say that they “don’t know.”

- Parents with household incomes between \$60K and \$80K (36%) are slightly more likely to say that formal after-school programs are “very accessible” in their area than parents with household incomes of less than \$60K (26%).¹
- Single working parents are slightly more likely to indicate that it is “very important” that parents have access to formal after-school programs in their area compared those from two working parent households (57% versus 48%).

¹ The difference is not statistically significant at the .05 level (95% of the time), but it is at the lower confidence level of .01 (90% of the time).



Determining What's Important in a Formal After-School Program For Those Without Children Currently Enrolled (74%)...

Parents who do not currently have their children enrolled in a formal after-school program (74%) were asked to rate how important a series of factors would be in their decision to enroll their children. Similar to those with children currently enrolled in a formal after-school program, “providing a safe environment” (83% “very important”) was ranked the most important. The next most important factors, in rank order, were “keeping them from hanging around a bad crowd or getting into trouble” (72% “very important”), “helping them gain confidence and self esteem” (66% “very important”), “not being home alone” (57% “very important”), “reinforcing basic social skills” (57% “very important”), “the cost is within my budget” (54% “very important”), “improving academic achievement” (51% “very important”), “skill development in sports, arts and culture or language” (43% “very important”), “participate in structured organized activities” (33% “very important”) and “computer use or instruction” (25% “very important”).

Compared with those in a formal after-school program, the factors which are important don't really differ – except that parents who do not have children currently enrolled in a formal after-school programs place a greater importance on “keeping their children from hanging out with a bad crowd or getting into trouble” (72% versus 61%).

- Single working parents whose children are not currently enrolled in a formal after-school program place slightly greater importance on having the “cost within my budget” (43% “very important”) compared to equivalent parents from two working parent households (33% “very important”).



Non-Formal Custodial Arrangement...

Fourteen percent of parents of children between the ages of 6 and 17 say that have a non-formal custodial arrangement such as going over to a neighbour's or having an adult watch over them from after school to dinnertime.

- 24% of parents of children ages 6 to 8 have a non-formal custodial arrangement for their children after school.
- 15% of parents of children ages 9 to 11 have a non-formal custodial arrangement for their children after school.
- 11% of parents of children ages 12 to 14 have a non-formal custodial arrangement for their children after school.
- 7% of parents of children 15 to 17 have a non-formal custodial arrangement for their children after school.

On average, parents who have arranged for someone else to watch over their children say that this occurs 2 to 3 times per week. Of those you have a non-formal custodial arrangement, the most common arrangements are with a friend or neighbour (34%), grandparents (14%), daycare (11%), spouse (11%), myself (8%), parents (8%), babysitter (7%), older sibling (6%), or relative (3%).

What Are Parents' Top Concerns With Respect to Their Children...?

In order to provide some context to the survey findings, parents were asked to rate the level of concern they have with respect to their children in a number of different areas. Seven in ten (72%) parents say that they are "very concerned" with "their safety." Six in ten (62%) are "very concerned" about their children "hanging out with a bad crowd or getting into



trouble,” and equally as many are “very concerned” about their children “dropping out of school or not going to university or college” (61%). In addition to safety and staying in school, half of parents surveyed (50%) say that they are “very concerned” about their children “having fun,” and just less than half (46%) are “very concerned” that their children are “not getting the academic help that they need.” “Being home alone” (34%), “maintaining a balance between structured and free time” (32%) and “being by themselves too much - not interacting with other kids” (30%) are attributes that three in ten parents say that they are “very concerned” about. Half as many (15%) parents are “very concerned” about their children “not doing structured activities in their free time.”

- Parents who have children currently enrolled in a formal after-school program are more likely to indicate being “very concerned” about their children “having fun” compared to parents whose children are not enrolled in a formal after-school program (58% versus 35%).
- Parents who have children currently enrolled in a formal after-school program are more likely to indicate being “very concerned” about their children “maintaining a balance between structured and free time” compared to parents whose children are not enrolled in a formal after-school program (40% versus 21%).
- Parents who have children currently enrolled in a formal after-school program are more likely to indicate being “very concerned” about their children “not doing structured activities in their free time” compared to parents whose children are not enrolled in a formal after-school program (25% versus 10%).



What Do Parents Believe Are the Most Important Issues Facing Children and Youth These Days...?

Parents were asked for their top of mind thoughts on issues facing children and youth in Canada these days. The quality of education is a top issue for parents with four in ten (41%) indicating this, with the next most frequent mentioned issues being drugs/alcohol (18%), crime/violence (11%), and economy/jobs (11%), peer pressure (9%), family stability (divorce, single parents) (7%), poverty (7%) and safety and security (5%).

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