SAMPLE LETTER TO GOVERNOR- UPDATED JANUARY 2021

This letter provides some sample text and specific asks for Governors to consider in supporting afterschool and summer programs utilizing the opportunities in the federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act.

Be sure to tailor your introduction and opening text to your state climate so that it reflects the current operating climate for afterschool, and your Governor’s top concerns, and reference the work your Governor has been doing including any support afterschool received in 2020.  Additional talking pts on afterschool’s role can be found here: [COVID-19 Talking Points for 50 State Network](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wm721UfPYKm6zKbqcK-f5YpT9-wWr2uhmfDKIKjMbpY/edit?usp=sharing)

*Intro Text*

Thank you for your outstanding leadership during this difficult time. Your quick action to [reference efforts to date] has helped ensure the immediate safety of our youth, families, and communities. As we look ahead, we will again need strong leadership to ensure that we recover fully and quickly—and that includes making sure our youth have the support they need to catch up and re-engage in school and community life. Fortunately, there are a number of steps we can take today to help address learning loss as well support students and families this spring, summer, and fall.  As an organization focused on the healthy development and education of youth, [network] has pulled together a number of resources our state can tap now to help ensure a bright future ahead.

Afterschool and summer learning programs have long provided supplemental education and support to help close academic and opportunity gaps among students most in need. We invite you to review some of the longstanding research on the [impact of these programs here](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/What_Does_the_Research_Say_About_Afterschool.pdf).

During this crisis, afterschool programs are supporting some of the most vulnerable students and families. Where possible, many are providing full-day learning and/or enrichment environments for the children of essential workers and families negatively impacted by conditions exacerbated by the pandemic.

* Learning gaps are likely to widen between demographic groups and special populations. As the research on summer learning loss shows, these gaps are exacerbated by time out of school. The current virtual learning environment is expected to make them even more extreme.
* 87% of programs are concerned about their program's long-term funding and future as a result of COVID-19, according to a fall 2020 survey of the afterschool field conducted by the Afterschool Alliance. Professional afterschool staff that have been supporting students’ academic and social and emotional gains for years may be lost as assets for our youth, as staff are being forced to leave the field.
* As we look toward recovery, it will be critical to help youth re-engage and catch up on hours of lost learning time. Academic content that was not delivered due to school closures can best be supplemented by afterschool and summer programs, which have a demonstrated expertise in how to keep students engaged in learning and supported socially and emotionally.  Students, including those who need the most support, will need teachers and program leaders who have the ability to teach academic content while engaging students through their interests and specialized needs.  Returning to learning, when done well, should feel like a reward to students.
* As parents return to work, they will need afterschool programs. Before the pandemic, parents already relied heavily on afterschool programs to keep their children safe and engaged while they work, with 4 in 5 saying it helped them stay employed. Parents will need those same supports to be able to return to the workforce.

If the state’s education system, economy, and future workforce is to rebound quickly, using federal and state supports to maintain staff, and keep afterschool and summer programs running and serving additional students will be essential. Immediate action can be taken now and will mitigate more costly interventions later. Our recommendations for action are below:

*Immediate Recommendations [edit this list as you feel appropriate for your state situation]*

**Ensure the state is utilizing the supports offered at the federal level to support students, families and staff.**

1. **21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) Grant Flexibility:** Ensure the state is using full federal flexibility to make sure quality afterschool professionals under the Department of Education Title IV B 21st CCLC grants are remaining employed, supporting immediate needs, and preparing to support students fully when in person operations resume, including over the summer and in the upcoming school year**.** [If state has not applied for/received a 21st CCLC “non-school hours” waiver suggest they apply – if state has received a waiver thank them for doing so and encourage utilization of the new flexibility to offer programs during the virtual school day. **Ensure the State Department of Education opted in to the** [**Federal Government Waiver**](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/04/template-covid-fiscal-waiver-19-2020.pdf) **to extend fund availability for Title IV B funds through September 2021**]

**Issue statewide Title IV B guidance that:**

* States can advise grantees to continue to pay staff during the crisis
* Staff can be performing roles such as planning, checking in with families, providing programming through virtual learning environments, providing and connecting participants to academic resources, meals and other supports, developing staff through PD, and working on health and wellness for students and families.
* States can provides flexibility in monitoring, attendance and other grant requirements that grantees would struggle to meet under current conditions, also allowing local grantees to extend unspent grant funds into next year where needed.
* Any students with a co-pay can be waived

2. **COVID Education Relief Funding:** Utilize any unobligated resources in the previous CARES Act Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds; as well as utilize new GEER II and ESSER II funds from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) Act, to strengthen afterschool and summer programs.

* The uses of the funds include specifically: *“Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care.”*

**Ensure that guidance goes from the State Education Agency to Local Education Agencies on the uses of these funds for afterschool and summer programming work.**

* Education Relief funds can be used to support any activity in ESSA, which includes the 21st Century Community Learning Center Funds.
* There are many opportunities to coordinate other uses of these funds with both in school and out of school services, for example funds spent on planning, on professional development, on cleaning spaces, on meal delivery, and technology may be best leveraged by bringing afterschool and summer program educators into the conversations. **Ensure coordination with afterschool partners as funds are spent.**
* In particular, 9.5 percent of the new ESSER II funds can be used “for emergency needs as determined by the state educational agency to address issues responding to coronavirus, including measuring and addressing learning loss, which may be addressed through the use of grants or contracts.” Please consider utilizing these funds immediately to establish an Out-of-School Time Fund with funding to provide relief to afterschool programs and to ensure that summer learning programs are able to open and operate safely to help address learning loss recovery this spring and summer.

3. **Meals supports for Students:** Use flexibility in USDA congregate feeding requirements, provided in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and extended in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) to provide creative solutions to provide meals and other resources to students.

* Where feasible, afterschool programs can continue to act as meal delivery sites
* As possible, afterschool staff can assist in home meal delivery, especially alongside other academically related supplies and resources

4. **Child Care (CCDBG) Funding:** Use the flexibility provided by the Federal Office of Child Care, as well as additional flexibilities and funding provided in the CRRSA, to ensure that childcare centers are safe, educational, and operational where open, and supported and prepared to re-open quickly for families returning to work where closed.

* Ensure the state has a policy to provide program and staff pay based on enrollment rather than attendance as allowed in Federal Flexibility
* Use the CRRSA flexibility to continue to fund programs for despite enrollment numbers and closures to ensure (as the law recommends) that “they are able to remain open or reopen as appropriate.”
* Use HHS and CRRSA flexibility, in combination with state and other funds, to support school-age child care and afterschool providers that may not be licensed but that are registered or regulated to help keep them afloat, including considering allowing school-age license exempt programs to be funded.
* Ensure essential workers’ children are being supported with these funds – including making sure child care workers are themselves designated as essential workers
* Support the ability of the new $10 billion allocation in CCDBG funding or the state’s quality set aside funding to pay for any new programs needed to support children of essential workers, and use the regular allocation to support the programs that would have been serving these children under normal conditions as suggested in the [Office of Child Care FAQs](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-faqs-in-response-to-covid-19)  (Question #9) for these new funds.
* Establish hazard pay for staff working during this time as allowed under [Office of Child Care FAQs](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-faqs-in-response-to-covid-19)  (Question #14)

5. **Business and Non-Profit Funding:** Many providers not supported fully or in part by federal and state funds may be particularly struggling to keep their organizations afloat. These businesses and nonprofit organizations will be critical when people go back to work, and keeping them operational now ensures a more fluid transition for economic recovery**. Encourage state offices in Education, Childcare and Commerce, and other relevant offices to reach out to providers to help connect afterschool and summer program providers with federal and state programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program to help keep their businesses operational and their staff on payroll. Additionally consider using unobligated Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to support program providers impacted by the pandemic.**