

Out of School Time Workforce Challenges and Solutions: Policy Implications and Opportunities

- This school-year, afterschool programs face daunting and well-documented challenges in recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff.
- Many of these challenges are not unique to the afterschool field and are being experienced in a wide range of fields. Challenges include low wages, lack of child care, lack of advancement opportunities, and potentially unemployment benefits that could act as a deterrent to employment. In addition to afterschool program staff.
- A barrier for many programs is background checks. Federal and state law pertaining to federal child care funding and other funding streams requires program staff to undergo background checks. Many localities have significant delays and backlogs for background checks, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is aware of this challenge and a federal interagency task force is developing recommendations that could help alleviate this challenge in part.
- Vaccine and/or mask mandates and mask mandate prohibitions in some states and localities have also arisen as a barrier to staff recruitment or retention. The federal Department of Education and HHS are developing guidance and resources to help programs and schools navigate these requirements.
- One potential short term remedy is offering increased pay to new and existing program staff, and recent federal legislation can help programs cover that cost. The American Rescue Plan (ARP), signed into law in March 2021, as well as previous federal COVID-relief bills like the Coronavirus Aid Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), all provide robust federal funding that can be used to provide premium pay to help recruit and maintain qualified afterschool and summer learning) program staff.

Federal policy opportunities to support increased staff pay

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund was established through the CARES Act that passed in March 2020 and initially included \$13.2 billion for public schools, known as ESSER I funds. It was added to through the CRRSA signed into law in December 2020 that provided an additional \$54.3 billion for ESSER II; as well as through the ARP Act that passed in March 2021 and included \$122 billion for the ARP ESSER (ESSER III) Fund. Funds are primarily provided to State educational agencies and school districts to help safely reopen and sustain the safe operation of schools and address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Nation's students. All three ESSER funds can be used to provide premium staff pay to a wide range of educators and education related staff. [A Frequently Asked Questions guidance](#) document released in May 2021 specified that premium pay must be reasonable and necessary and consistent with [federal code](#) and part of an established plan which could be established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and consistent with applicable collective bargaining agreements and other relevant policies and requirements. Programs should keep an eye out for potential state competitions for ESSER funds and also talk with local school districts about funding that is available at the local level. [Tools to help reach out to LEAs around this funding are available.](#)

State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Premium Pay

Through the [State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund](#) the ARP provides \$350 billion to help states, counties, cities, and tribal governments cover increased expenditures, replenish lost revenue, and mitigate economic harm from the COVID-19 pandemic. State and local governments have a variety of emergency measures they can take to address economic need, including through aid to households, small businesses, nonprofits, and specific industries such as tourism and hospitality. Among these provisions, city, county, town, and state government funds can provide premium pay to essential employees or grants to their employers. [Child care workers, including providers of school-age afterschool or summer programs, are specifically included as eligible employees](#). Premium pay cannot exceed \$13 per hour or \$25,000 per worker. [State](#), [county](#), and [city](#) allocations are all available and programs should contact state, county or local government officials to learn more.

Child Care Stabilization Grants

The ARP established a new Child Care Stabilization Grant Program, where each state will provide payments directly to providers. State child care agencies in each state are now setting up this process and criteria, however [HHS guidance encourages](#) the prioritization of using these funds for raising the wages of child care staff, including school-age afterschool program staff, enhancing benefits, and providing a wide array of personnel measures, including increasing compensation for any staff in a child care center (including afterschool programs); health, dental, and vision insurance; paid sick or family leave; retirement contributions; professional development or training; premium or hazard pay; staff bonuses; employee transportation costs to or from work; recruitment and retention of existing and former child care workers; and supports for staff to access COVID-19 vaccines, including paid time off for and transportation to vaccine appointments. About 14 states have set up this new grant program with applications now available while the remaining states are expected to make these funds available soon. Programs should check out the [map of state child care stabilization grant funding opportunities to find out how to apply in your state](#).

Child Care Subsidy Payments

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the federal funding stream that supports state child care subsidy programs. CCDBG supports working parents by providing child care grants, contracts, and vouchers for children and youth ages 0-13. Under CCDBG increases in the American Rescue Plan, states have significant flexibility in how funds can be spent to support working families and providers, and [recent federal guidance](#) encourages the use of these funds for staff salaries and wages. During periods of decreased enrollment or closures due to COVID-19, funds may be used to pay the portion of the child care provider's costs that are ordinarily paid through family copayments.. While states have flexibility in allocating these funds, the federal Department of Health and Human Services has emphasized that school age afterschool programs, including those that are licensed exempt, are eligible for funds. Contact your [state lead child care agency](#) to determine eligibility in your state.

AmeriCorps

The American Rescue Plan contains more than \$1 billion for AmeriCorps programs to expand national service programming into new communities, stabilize existing programs, and increase living allowances. Approximately 300,000 AmeriCorps & Senior Corps members serve across 50,000 locations in all 50 states. Approximately 1/3 of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA positions are working at youth serving out of school time settings like afterschool and summer learning programs throughout the country in a wide variety of capacities. Programs should contact their [state service commission](#) or [the Corporation for National and Community Service \(CNCS\)](#) to learn more about the program and how to apply to be a sponsor.