



INVESTMENTS IN STUDENT RECOVERY

A Review of School Districts' Use of American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Afterschool and Summer Opportunities



Afterschool Alliance

AfterschoolAlliance.org

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Introduction

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, enacted in March 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has been a lifeline for communities across the nation. The ARP Act included \$122 billion to support schools through the ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund, with a minimum of \$22 billion (or 20 percent) to be spent on learning recovery strategies that respond to students' social, emotional, and academic needs, such as afterschool and summer enrichment.¹ In this brief, the Afterschool Alliance shares findings from our analysis of more than 6,300 school districts' ARP ESSER spending plans from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, examining how ARP ESSER funds were budgeted for afterschool and summer enrichment opportunities.

This is the first accounting of ARP ESSER funds for afterschool and summer programming that disaggregates investments by the specific type of programming taking place, differentiating out-of-school time activities that are singularly academic-focused from those that include both academics and enrichment. Alongside interviews with school district leaders and afterschool and summer program providers, this report reveals strategies districts are using to support afterschool and summer offerings and provides recommendations for maximizing use of remaining ARP ESSER funds, as well as future investments, to support students' recovery.

The positive impact of ARP ESSER funds for schools, students, and families is evident. A June 2023 survey of superintendents found that these funds have helped districts increase instructional time and investments in teacher planning and professional development. They also hold enormous potential to bring comprehensive afterschool and summer programs that provide both academic and enrichment supports to many more young people. Research has found that students in comprehensive afterschool and summer programs see improvements in academics and engagement in learning, form friendships and gain self-confidence, and have a safe and welcoming space where they feel that they belong. With many choices before them, this report documents how much school districts used ARP ESSER funds to invest in afterschool and summer learning programs in their efforts to help young people learn, be healthy, and thrive.



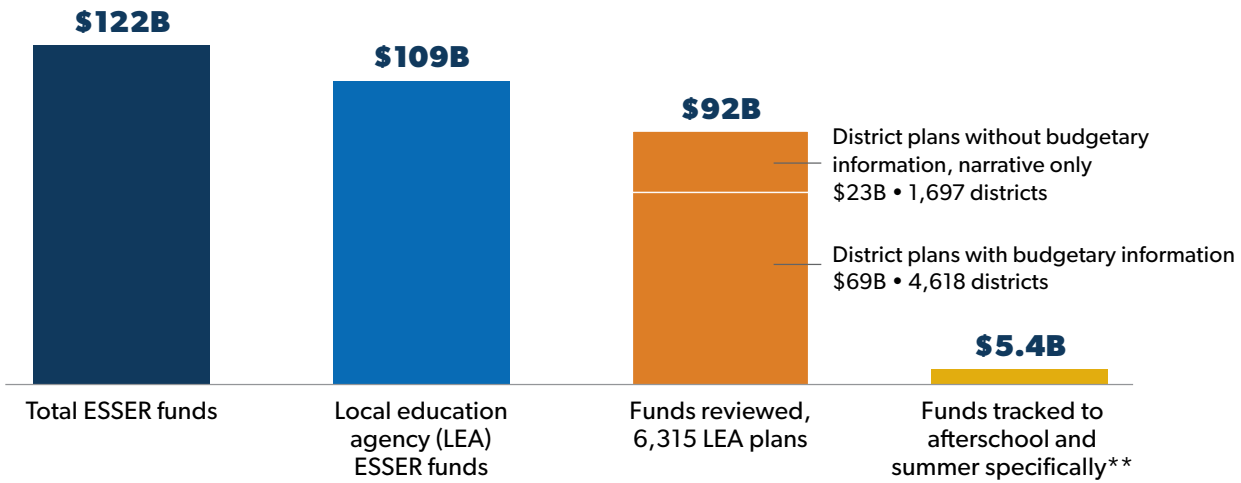
Afterschool programs cross every sector and when you put funding toward afterschool and summer programming, you're supporting students' education, you're supporting the workforce, because families have a place for their kids to be, and you're supporting the future workforce, because kids are learning tech skills and all types of workforce development skills."

—SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF, NORTHEAST

¹ ARP ESSER funds represent the third round of ESSER funds provided to school districts. The funds were distributed based on state Title I funding allocations. This brief focuses on the \$109 billion in ARP ESSER funds that went to local education agencies and does not include the separate \$8.45 billion in funding that went to state education agencies (SEAs), except in instances where SEAs gave their set-aside directly to school districts and it was not possible to separate out these funds based on publicly available information.

Figure 1. A review of 6,315 school district plans finds that most mention afterschool and summer opportunities. However, among plans with budget information, a small slice is going toward these supports.

The charts below illustrate the nature of out-of-school time programming funded. Mentions reflect the total times afterschool or summer programming was included in each plan reviewed. The spending data reflects the plans that included budget details for afterschool and/or summer programming.*

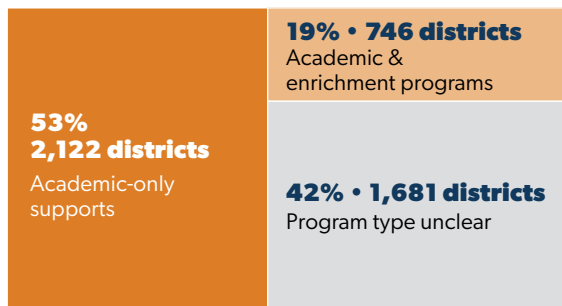


* Totals may not add up due to rounding.



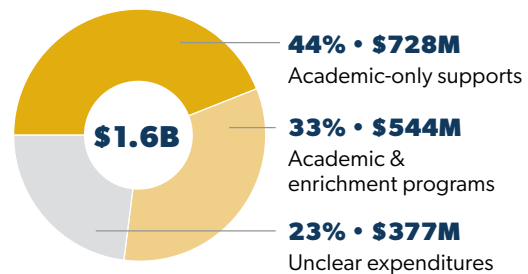
Afterschool Mentions in District Plans

Among the 3,988 plans that mention afterschool:



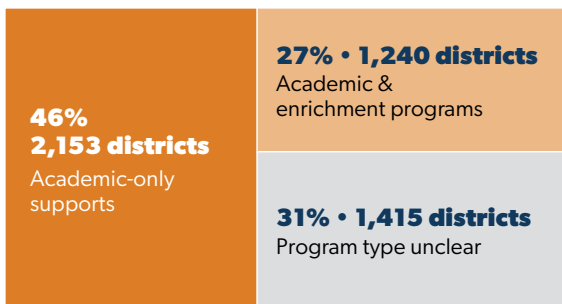
Afterschool Spending***

Among the 4,618 districts with budgetary information



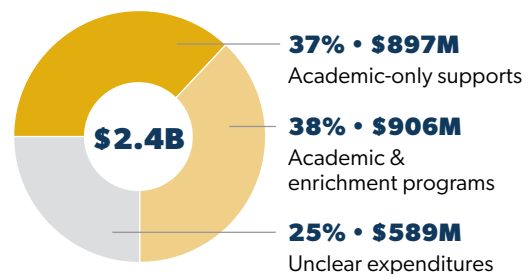
Summer Mentions in District Plans

Among the 4,632 plans that mention summer:



Summer Spending***

Among the 4,618 districts with budgetary information



** Not included in this total is \$3.5 billion in funding that blended in-school activities with afterschool activities, summer activities, or both, and funds could not be disaggregated.

*** The pie charts do not include the \$1.3 billion in funding where district plans blended afterschool and summer budgets together. Refer to Figure 2 for the full breakdown of the \$5.4 billion in afterschool and summer funding.

A quick guide to how afterschool and summer funds were categorized

The review of school district ARP ESSER plans found a wide range of activities and supports planned for the out-of-school time hours. Below is a brief overview of the categorization of plans when analyzing district spending on afterschool and summer programming. A more in-depth explanation is included in the methodology section at the end of this brief.

Afterschool

EXAMPLES FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANS

Tutoring/academic only: Before or after school tutoring programming, salaries, and benefits for staff teaching tutoring programs; Saturday academies to support students falling behind in their academics; and extended school days to support students identified as needing additional curriculum support are funded activities captured in this category.

“Home-School coordinator to run a tutoring program after school and to communicate with parents about students accessing tutoring services.”

“ARP ESSER funds will be used to host Extended Day programs for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024 school years. The extended day programs will include reading and mathematics. The extended day programs will run for 25 weeks for 2 days a week and we will hire 15 teachers each year.”

Academics + enrichment: Activities taking place before or after school that include a component that extends beyond tutoring or academics. For example, plans that included programming during the after school hours that spent time on learning and activities for students to engage with their peers; dedicating time to homework help as well as debate, STEM, community service, arts, robotics, and outdoor activities; and partnering with community-based organizations to provide activities that complemented the school day, but did not replicate learning taking place during the school day.

“[The district] will offer comprehensive after-school programs as a way to support students who are often underserved...Additional services, programs, and activities, focusing on subjects like STEM, physical fitness and wellness, drug and violence prevention, nutrition and health education, service learning, youth development, social emotional learning and arts and music; will also be provided.”

“Partnership for providing After School Cultural Enrichment & Tutoring Collaboration to provide an after school teaching model, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques interventions for all K-12th grade students per student priority service needs. These extended learning opportunities allow for after school cultural enrichment interventions, and one-on-one tutoring multiple times weekly for students struggling in reading and math shows the largest educational performance improvement effect sizes to close the learning gap.”

Unclear: Descriptions where the lack of details prevented the ability to categorize funding accurately.

“Increased Afterschool Program offering: Add staff to allow access to more students”

“After school intervention provided by certificated and classified staff (\$200,000) for the years 2023-2024”

Summer

EXAMPLES FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANS

Summer school/academic only: Activities taking place during the summer that are academic only in nature, such as credit recovery, credit remediation, and programming focused on reading and math interventions.

“Provide summer learning opportunities K-12 to accelerate learning and also support secondary students with credit recovery needs. The goal is to expand the number of K-12 sites offering summer school to localize opportunities for students.”

“...credit recovery summer school; Homeless ARP I summer credit accrual; K-6 summer school for Tier II and Tier III students; Transportation for summer school.”

Summer academics + enrichment: Oftentimes, school districts described planning to provide comprehensive summer programming that included an element of academics and one of enrichment, or a blend of academic and enrichment programming for elementary and middle school students and credit recovery for high school students. Due to summer budgets largely aggregating these various summer offerings, the category was created to capture spending by districts that was more than remediation alone.

“Enhanced summer programming to include Elevate Math and Computer Science Immersion, Farm Camp, Art Camp, STEAM Camp, Credit recovery for high school, SEL and Academic support programs”

“Offer free Summer Enrichment programming with transportation to all our K-12 students to provide opportunities for students and teachers to establish positive connections and relationships during the summer. Summer enrichment courses will allow students to dive into topics of their choice and experience interesting courses that they would otherwise not been able to get exposed to.”

Unclear: Descriptions where the lack of details prevented the ability to categorize funding accurately.

Salaries and benefits for teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, nurses, and security officers for “Summer Learning/Enrichment Program/Extended School Year”

“Summer Programming for all students”

Key takeaways

The analysis of school districts' ARP ESSER plans found seven trends that emerge from a review of 6,315 school district spending plans, approximately one-third of all school districts nationwide.

① More than 8 in 10 school districts dedicated some ARP ESSER funds to afterschool and summer opportunities, with at least \$5.4 billion going toward afterschool and summer programming.

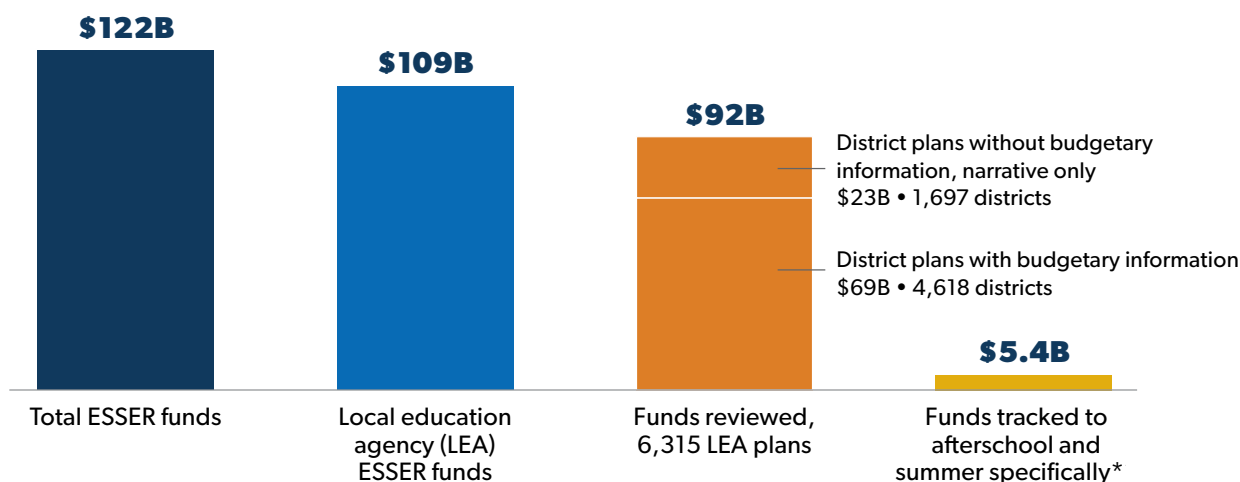
Of the 6,315 school district plans reviewed, 82 percent of the districts report that they have or would dedicate ARP ESSER funds toward afterschool programming, summer programming, or both. The types of out-of-school time activities and supports in district plans are varied and include, but are not limited to, tutoring sessions with school-day teachers during the afterschool hours, Saturday school, additional tutoring supports provided during intersessions, afterschool programs that provide both academic and enrichment activities, summer school, and summer-learning programs focused on topics such as STEM, arts, and the outdoors.

Most of the plans reviewed included funding amounts with allocations to afterschool and summer programming outlined.² Based on this smaller set of 4,618 plans, districts are dedicating approximately \$5.4 billion (8 percent) of their ARP ESSER funds specifically toward afterschool or summer programming. While this is a significant amount of money, it is a small slice of the funding available and much lower

than districts' 20 percent learning recovery set-aside, indicating that these offerings are not a primary strategy school districts are using to address learning recovery despite being included as an allowable use of districts' funds.

For 1,296 plans, or 21 percent of all plans reviewed, funding for afterschool, summer, and school-day programming was grouped together, making it unfeasible to separate out how much went toward any one activity. For example, in one school district plan, a \$2.7 million line item was budgeted to "... provide high impact tutoring during the school day and after/before school for grades K-12, summer school, as well as provide academic support positions for staff and student support." In another plan, \$3.3 million—more than two-thirds of its ARP ESSER budget—was dedicated to the following items: "RTI Teacher, Reading Interventionist, Academic Tutorials (Outside of School Day), Academic After-School Clubs, Saturday Learning Opportunities, Summer Learning Opportunities, Curriculum." Although these instances are included in calculating the number of school districts that mention afterschool or summer programming in ARP ESSER plans, these funds have been separated out from the \$5.4 billion mentioned above. The combined funding for this blend of in-school activities with afterschool activities, summer activities, or both, totals \$3.5 billion.

Figure 2. School districts dedicated \$5.4 billion to afterschool and summer programming.



* Not included in this total is \$3.5 billion in funding that blended in-school activities with afterschool activities, summer activities, or both, and funds could not be disaggregated.

² The 1,697 school district plans excluded from this subset are those that provided a narrative description of the ways in which they would allocate ARP ESSER funds, but did not include dollar amounts to associate with spending plans. See the methodology section for further details.



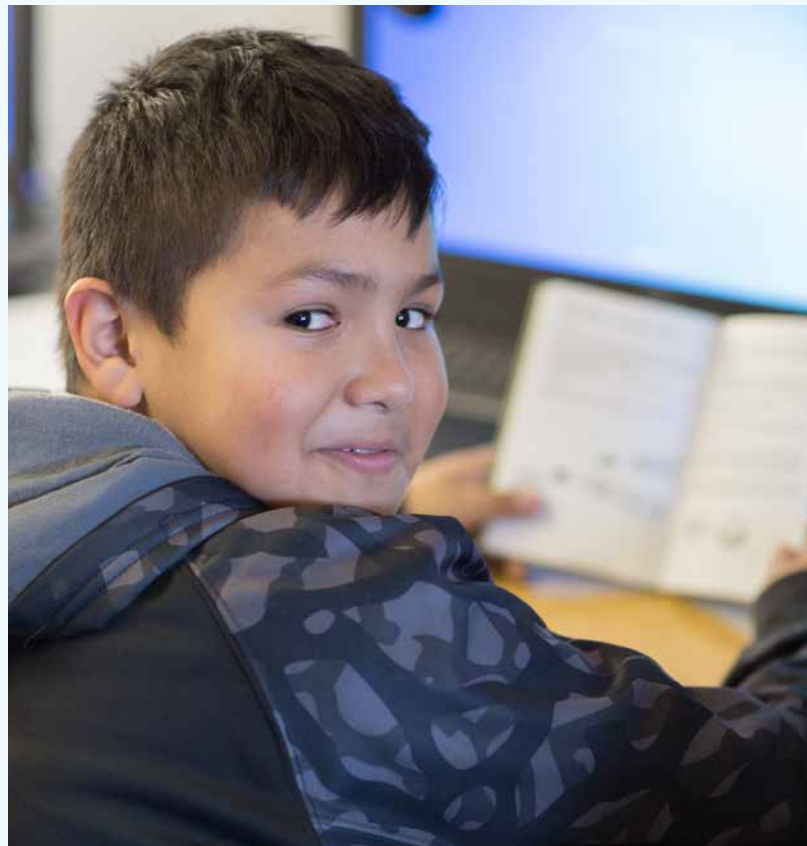
Expanding and enhancing afterschool and summer learning opportunities

In a rural community in the West, ARP ESSER funds have allowed the district to provide afterschool programming for significantly more students. For example, during the 2022-2023 school year, more than 8 in 10 of the district's elementary schoolers (81 percent) participated in afterschool programming, up from 76 percent in 2019-2020. And the number of high school students served more than doubled, from an average of 13 students per day to more than 30. Additionally, ARP ESSER funds support the district's out-of-school time director and help the district continue its mobile learning center, which was started during the pandemic to provide tutoring support, educational activities, snacks, and access to the internet for families in the surrounding community. District staff shared that a number of teachers in the school district credit the afterschool program for students' continued academic growth during the pandemic, providing the additional targeted support they needed.

On the other side of the country, in an urban district in the South, ARP ESSER funds enabled the district to serve two times as many students during the summer months, reaching nearly 30 percent of the district's student population. While the district's summer model did not change—providing a mix of academics and enrichment—the additional funding allowed the district to significantly increase the scale of the summer enrichment provided. With the ARP ESSER funds, they were able to hire more than 500 staff, including a new out-of-school time learning coordinator, work with a greater number of community partners, expand the types of programming available, and make the full-day program free for students to participate. A district leader shared the success of the initiative from the perspective of students, families, and school staff, describing how students were frequently reluctant to leave the summer program due to the fun and enjoyment they had participating. Parents were pleased to see the level of their child's engagement and were appreciative of a safe, supportive, and educational place for their child during the summer months. And school staff recognized the program's positive impact on mitigating students' learning loss over the summer. Data collected from the 2022 summer program indicates that participation in the program prevented learning loss. Students regularly attending the program had a 73 percent chance of showing no learning loss from the spring of 2022 to the start of the next school year, while students who attended 10 days or less only showed a 13 percent chance of no learning loss.

For a Northeast district, ARP ESSER funds made it possible to operate afterschool programs at all five schools—three of which never hosted a program. The district was also able, for the first time ever, to offer summer programming across the schools, which included a blend of academic and experiential learning opportunities taught by veteran school day teachers. It also included meals and field trips to activities throughout the community, free of charge. Art, STEM projects,

gardening, nature walks, build-it challenges, field trips to local science centers and museums, and educational outings to the coast were a handful of the activities offered. However, like many of the districts interviewed, without the continuation of ARP ESSER funds, there is tremendous uncertainty about the future of its afterschool and summer programming. This district feels this weight even more acutely, as prior to ARP ESSER funds, the district had no history of supporting afterschool and summer programming in their general budget. During the current 2023-2024 school year, the limited remaining ARP ESSER funds only allow the district to offer free afterschool programming at two schools and to take a hybrid approach in its other three schools, employing a mix of parent fees and ARP ESSER funds to run programming. When planning for the 2023 summer, the district originally strategized to stretch ARP ESSER funds into the 2024 summer and offer summer programming at a small cost to parents during both summers. However, based on feedback from families and concerns that a fee would prevent students from participating, the district decided to offer the program at no cost, resulting in not enough ARP ESSER funds remaining to support a program in summer 2024. The district staff said of the programming, "We've seen such positive benefits. We want to know how we keep this going. ... but there's this horrible reality that without the same level of funding, we cannot provide the same level of support."



② Summer programming was the most popular strategy to address learning recovery, although a majority of school districts allocated ARP ESSER funds to both afterschool and summer programming.

Among the 6,315 district plans reviewed, plans to implement summer programming using ARP ESSER funding was mentioned by nearly 3 out of 4 districts (73 percent), or 4,632 districts. While close to 2 in 3 school districts (63 percent) reported plans to spend ARP ESSER funds on afterschool programming, this is 10 percentage points lower than districts planning to support summer activities. Similarly, the dollar amount allocated to summer programming by school districts is higher than that going toward afterschool programming, with \$2.4 billion going toward summer programming alone and \$1.6 billion going toward afterschool programming specifically. These figures do not include \$1.3 billion in funds where the combined spending on afterschool and summer programming could not be disaggregated (See Figure 3). It is also worth noting that 3,413 districts—more than half of the school districts included in the analysis (54 percent)—mentioned in their plans that ARP ESSER funds would go to both afterschool and summer programming.

③ Most ARP ESSER summer interventions focused on academic remediation or recovery only.

Among school district plans that mentioned summer programming, 46 percent reported using ARP ESSER funds for summer school, credit recovery, or credit remediation, while 27 percent of plans described summer activities with both academics and enrichment (See Figure 4). An example of the latter is a school district that planned to offer a free six-week summer program with academic classes in the morning and community partners providing enrichment experiences such as a STEM camp, art projects, and outdoor and recreation activities, in the afternoon.

Interestingly, when analyzing the smaller subset of plans that include dollar allocations for summer activities, the difference between the

two categories disappears. Among plans that include this detail, nearly \$897 million is going toward summer academic-specific interventions and an estimated \$906 million is dedicated to summer programming that is a mix of academics and enrichment. Percentage wise, this breaks down into 37 percent of plans dedicating funds toward summer programming with an academic focus and 38 percent of plans dedicating funds toward summer programming that include academics and enrichment (See Figure 4). The difference in districts' spending for summer reflects larger budgets for programming that includes enrichment. The average budget for summer school is approximately \$710,000, whereas the average budget for districts reporting summer programming with an academic and enrichment component is \$1.25 million, a difference of more than half a million dollars. Similarly, the median school district budget for summer school is approximately \$196,000, compared to roughly \$371,000 for more comprehensive programming over the summer. The significant difference is explained in a review of budget descriptions and plan narratives, where summer programming focused on academics alone was often aimed at a targeted group of students to help with credit recovery or remediation, and districts planning to provide academic and enrichment programming over the summer largely opened the opportunity up to all students, with a greater number of program hours.

④ Tutoring and academic-only focused supports were the most common type of ARP ESSER funded afterschool activity.

Among district plans that described afterschool activities, tutoring and academic-focused interventions arose as the most commonly mentioned support. A majority (53 percent) had or were planning to put funds toward supports that were exclusively academic, such as tutoring, hiring school-day teachers to teach reading and/or math through extended day programs, or Saturday credit-recovery classes. In total, at least \$728 million of ARP ESSER funds (44 percent of the funding going toward afterschool programming) was allocated toward these singularly academic-focused activities (See Figure 4).

Figure 3. Of the funding for afterschool and summer programs, the largest portion is going toward summer exclusively.*



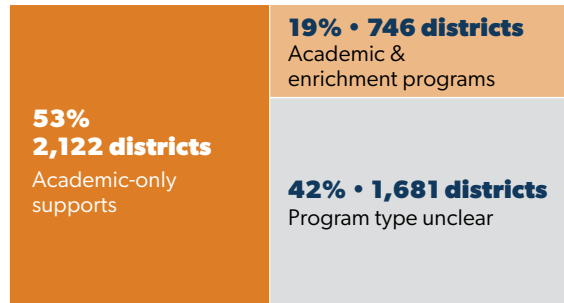
* Totals may not add up due to rounding.

Figure 4. Differences between afterschool and summer mentions in district plans vs. spending on afterschool and summer programming.



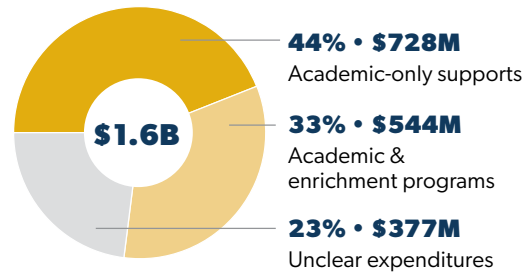
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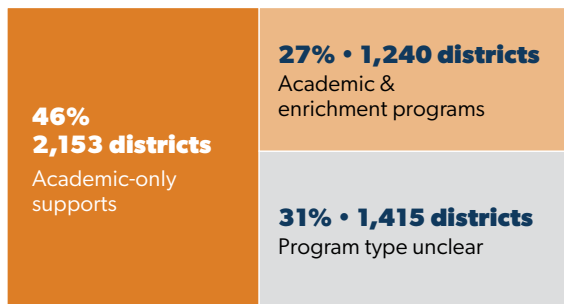
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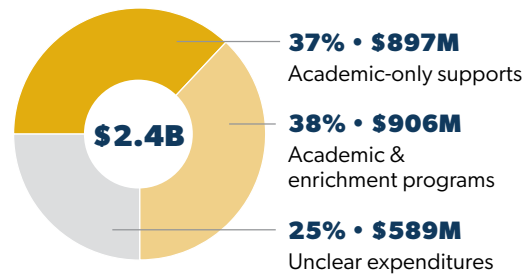
Summer Mentions in District Plans

Among the 4,632 plans that mention summer:



Summer Spending*

Among the 4,618 districts with budgetary information



* The pie charts do not include the \$1.3 billion in funding where district plans blended afterschool and summer budgets together. Refer to Figure 2 for the full breakdown of the \$5.4 billion in afterschool and summer funding.

5 Only 1 in 5 school districts invested in afterschool programming with academic and enrichment components, totaling approximately \$544 million.

Again looking at district plans that described afterschool activities, 19 percent specified that ARP ESSER funds would be used to implement afterschool supports or activities that extended beyond tutoring or academic remediation or recovery efforts. While the percentage is low, the total dollar investment is proportionately larger. Roughly, \$544 million, or 33 percent of funds dedicated to afterschool specifically, supports programming that includes both an academic and enrichment component (See Figure 4). This discrepancy between the number of districts versus the amount of funding is due in large part to the significant amount of funds a handful of larger school districts dedicated to comprehensive afterschool programming. For example, the 13 school districts that are identified as dedicating the greatest amount of funding toward comprehensive afterschool programming have an average student population of 95,000 and account for more than half of funds in this category.



What I saw before was middle school kids running out of the door at the end of the day when [the programming] was tutoring only. When we were able to have a variety of activities, and afterschool became more than reviewing reading and math standards, they had fun, and we had kids wanting to stay for the tutoring portion.”

—SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF, SOUTH



AFTERSCHOOL INSIGHT

Braiding funds to enhance afterschool and summer programming

One promising strategy school districts have implemented is braiding ARP ESSER funds with existing funding streams—the process of using two or more funding streams to support a project, while also tracking and reporting out on each funding stream used separately—to enhance their afterschool and summer program offerings. For example, during the 2022 summer, a school district in the rural southwest utilized ARP ESSER funds to provide a half-day summer school with breakfast and lunch to approximately 70 students over the course of two weeks. The summer programming focused narrowly on helping students meet the state’s academic standards, providing student assessments to students’ teachers at the end of the summer.

However, during the 2022-2023 school year, the district received its first 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grant—a federal funding source awarded through state education agencies and dedicated exclusively to support local before school, afterschool,

and summer learning programs—and was able to braid this with its ARP ESSER funds to offer a full-day two-week STEAM summer camp during the 2023 summer. ARP ESSER funds supported teachers who provided tutoring and academic support, while 21st CCLC funds supported teachers leading enrichment activities. In addition to activities such as coding, sports, water activities, STEM learning opportunities, and field trips, students were provided with transportation, breakfast, and lunch.

The braiding of funds allowed the district to offer a summer enrichment program for the first time and district leaders believed that offering a summer program that included both academics and enrichment increased student interest, with the number of students attending the STEAM summer camp growing by more than 20 percent, from 74 to 90 students. District leaders also reported that students had a fun and engaging learning experience and saw students in the STEAM camp improve their relationship with both their peers and their teachers.



AFTERSCHOOL INSIGHT

Addressing challenges to providing and accessing afterschool and summer programs

The afterschool challenges faced by providers and families have been well-documented. A spring 2023 survey of afterschool and summer program providers found that staffing was a top concern and nearly 3 in 5 providers (57 percent) reported difficulties recruiting staff, retaining staff, or both.ⁱ Likewise, in a spring 2022 survey of parents, a majority reported that a lack of a safe way for their child to get to and from programs (52 percent) and inconvenient program locations (51 percent) were important factors in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program, with barriers even higher for Black (58 percent and 60 percent, respectively) and Latinx families (67 percent and 59 percent, respectively).ⁱⁱ ARP ESSER funds presented many school districts with the opportunity to eliminate barriers that students and families encountered accessing programming, as well as to address challenges the district faced providing afterschool and summer programming.

A common theme in interviews with school districts that were dedicating ARP ESSER funds toward afterschool programs, summer programs, or both, was strategically allocating funds in ways that would facilitate greater participation in programs. Removing the cost barrier for families was one approach, and providing transportation was another. Among the districts dedicating at least a portion of their

ARP ESSER funds to afterschool or summer programming, 23 percent spent some of their funds on transportation, which could include vehicles, driver salaries and benefits, and gas. There were also districts that took nontraditional routes to connect students with afterschool and summer programs. For example, one district partnered with organizations in the community to provide program offerings across the city and funded a circulator bus that shuttled students to the various sites, while another paid a stipend to staff who provided transportation to the summer program.

To expand the afterschool and summer programming available to students, some school districts took steps to hire additional staff during a time when recruiting and retaining staff was proving difficult. There were school districts that were able to use ARP ESSER funds to increase salaries for staff, making salaries more competitive with local businesses, while others used ARP ESSER funds to hire more staff to reduce student-to-staff ratios or turn a formerly part-time position into a full-time one and increase the attractiveness of the position. There were also districts that said they were unable to serve the number of students they would like on their own, which led them to use ARP ESSER funds to contract with outside program providers, enrichment providers, and local professionals and businesses to help reach more young people with afterschool and summer programming.

⑥ A significant portion of plans describing afterschool or summer programming were unclear in nature.

An important observation is that many districts did not delineate the type of afterschool or summer programming that would take place. Among plans that mentioned afterschool programming, 42 percent had at least a portion of their plan where it was ambiguous what type of afterschool programming that would take place; among plans that mentioned summer programming, 31 percent had a component of their plan where the type of summer programming could not be categorized as academics only or academics and enrichment.³ This accounted for \$966 million in total, \$377 million for

afterschool program expenditures, and \$589 million toward summer programming. In some cases, the lack of specificity by a school district led to a plan's designation as "unclear" for the purposes of this analysis. For example, regarding its afterschool plans for ARP ESSER funding, one school district wrote, "The district will also implement an after school program at the elementary level." In other instances, the structure of the application for ARP ESSER funding did not allow for specific details to be captured. For example, one state had districts use a template that bundled interventions into one budget category without a budget narrative to describe the intervention in further detail.

³ For both afterschool and summer categorizations, a district may be counted as "unclear" and be included in another category dependent on the information provided in the plan. One example of this is a school district with budget line items for "after school tutoring," "stipends for teachers to provide after school tutoring for students who are below grade level," and "college and high school tutors at afterschool programs," which were cataloged as afterschool tutoring and academics alone; a line item for stipends, supplies, and benefits for "after school music clubs for elementary," which was counted under the academics and enrichment category; as well as a line item for "contractor service that will provide after school services to underserved students for two years," which was categorized as "unclear" due to the lack of details.



AFTERSCHOOL INSIGHT

Serving as a catalyst to build and strengthen partnerships

Although only 7 percent of district plans that dedicated ARP ESSER funds to afterschool or summer programs mentioned partnerships with outside organizations, intentional partnerships between school districts and community groups are an effective strategy to provide afterschool and summer programming by leveraging existing resources. Despite the infrequency of partnerships included as a method of providing out-of-school time programming, there are strong examples of school districts working hand-in-hand with their community that demonstrate the invaluable nature of partnerships. For instance, district leadership in an urban Midwest school district took the opportunity presented through ARP ESSER funds to heavily invest in afterschool programming using an expansive partnership model, which in turn enabled them to increase afterschool programming in the district exponentially, from programs in six schools to sites across 96 schools, serving approximately 5,700 students.

The partnership between the district and the community first began to take shape during the peak of the pandemic, when schools were required to be closed. It was then that the district reached out to community groups about the possibility of offering learning pods for students, many of whom lived in families with essential workers. With the support of local philanthropy, learning pods hosted by nonprofits were established, providing academic help and keeping more than 1,000 students learning and connected to their peers in a safe and supervised space. Evaluations of students who were able to participate in the learning pods found that 67 percent of participants passed all of their classes compared to less than half (48 percent) of their peers who were not in a pod.

With the arrival of ARP ESSER funds, district leadership saw the chance to address an issue they had always faced: the lack of funds to support afterschool programming across its schools. However, due to a minimal afterschool program presence in its schools prior to the pandemic, the district was faced with the question of how to bring programming to scale. The district's answer was to look to the community, where afterschool activities were already taking place and where positive relationships had already formed during the pandemic. A unique aspect of the district's strategy was to engage a subset of nonprofits to serve as both program providers and coordinating partners who would team up with additional community partners to provide a range of afterschool supports. To more fully take advantage of community resources, the district required that coordinating partners contract with at least two additional specialized providers to provide afterschool programming four to five days a week, for two to three hours after school. In total for the 2022-2023 school year, the district had more than a dozen coordinating partners, with more than 40 groups providing students access to activities in areas such as writing, visual arts, robotics, sports, dance, photography, career exploration, financial literacy, and cooking and nutrition.

In anticipation of the expiration of ARP ESSER funds, together with local foundations and community organizations, the district formed a collaborative to develop strategies for a long-term funding plan to continue to support afterschool programming, with the mayor's office now involved. As one district leader stated, "Although ESSER is going to go away, the kids are not, and the needs are not."



⑦ Districts located in cities are most likely to mention afterschool programming in their ARP ESSER spending plans and fund afterschool programming that includes both academics and enrichment; rural districts are most likely to fund academic-only summer programming.

Differences in spending decisions did arise when comparing districts by community type. Districts located in cities are most likely to include plans for afterschool programming (70 percent), compared to 64 percent of suburban districts, 62 percent of districts located in towns,⁴ and 60 percent of rural districts. City districts also made up the largest share of districts reporting spending on afterschool programming that included both academics and enrichment (71 percent). Among all city districts analyzed, nearly 1 in 5 (18 percent) reported budgeting for afterschool programs that included academics and enrichment activities, in contrast to just 8 percent of rural districts. Compared to the national average, city districts are more likely to mention dedicating funds toward afterschool programs that include academics and enrichment (12 percent vs. 18 percent), while rural districts fall below the national average (12 percent vs. 8 percent) (See Figure 5).

Examining plans that mention summer programming, there is less difference between districts by community type, with 80 percent of city, 78 percent of suburban, 75 percent of town, and 74 percent

of rural districts mentioning summer programming. However, there are differences when comparing the type of summer programming districts are planning for. While academic summer programming was the most common type of summer strategy for districts regardless of location, the largest difference was among rural districts (See Figure 5). Among rural district plans reviewed, 37 percent dedicated funding toward academic summer programming, 20 percentage points higher than those funding summer academic and enrichment programming (17 percent). Among the 2,153 districts that allocated funding toward summer school and academic-focused supports over the summer, rural school districts comprise approximately one-third of districts (34 percent), compared to 29 percent of suburban districts, 23 percent of districts located in towns, and 15 percent of districts located in cities.

Overall, rural districts and those in towns were the least likely to include mentions of spending on afterschool and summer programming in their plans (20 percent and 18 percent, respectively), compared to 15 percent of city districts and 16 percent of suburban districts. Among plans that were unclear, rural and suburban districts made up the largest percentage within unclear mentions of afterschool activities (30 percent and 29 percent, respectively) and unclear mentions of summer programming (28 percent and 30 percent, respectively).

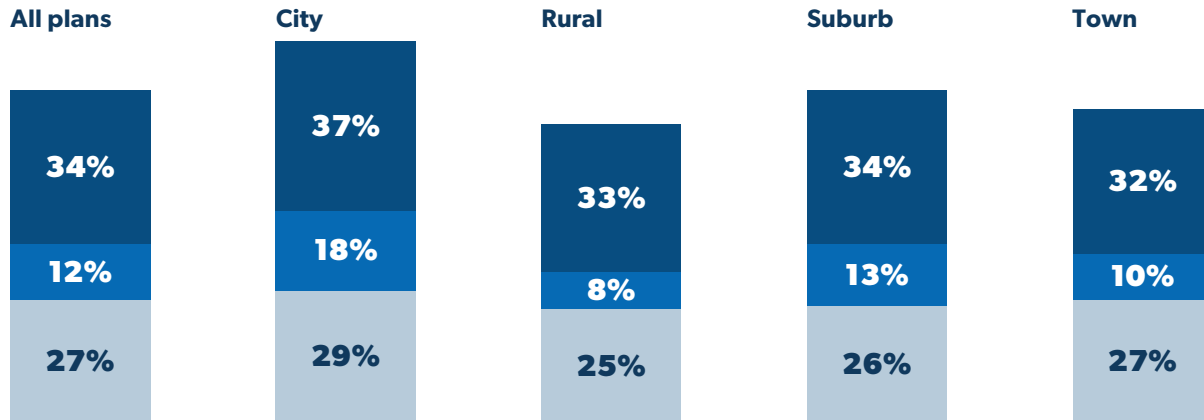
⁴ The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses a locale framework designed to generally describe the type of geographic area where a school is located. Their framework is based on standard urban and rural designations, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. NCES defines all territories as rural, town, suburban, or city, which are based on proximity to an urban area or population size. As defined by NCES, towns contain at least 2,500 but less than 50,000 people in their territory and are located closer to larger, urban areas than rural territories. Rural territories are located outside urban areas and have a population less than 2,500.

Figure 5. Percentage of school district plans that mention afterschool and summer programming, by community type*



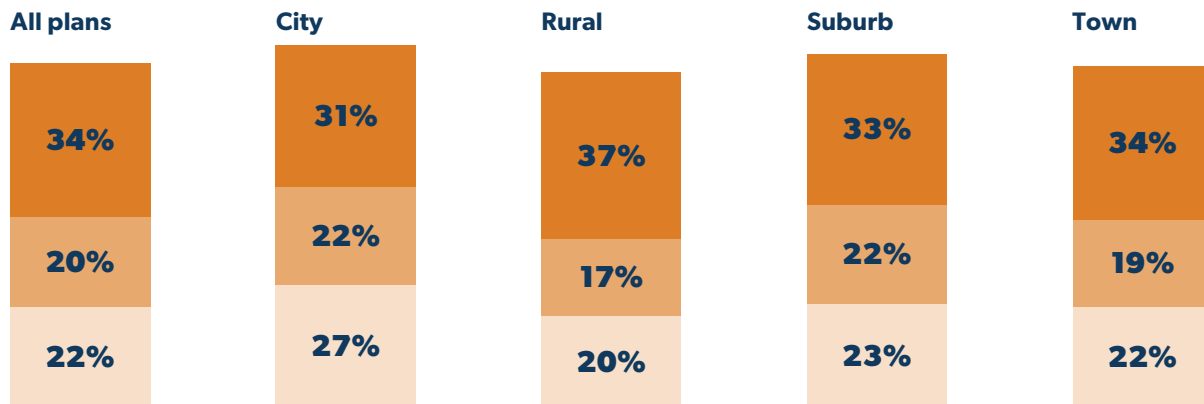
Afterschool Mentions

● Afterschool academics ● Afterschool academics + enrichment ● Afterschool unclear

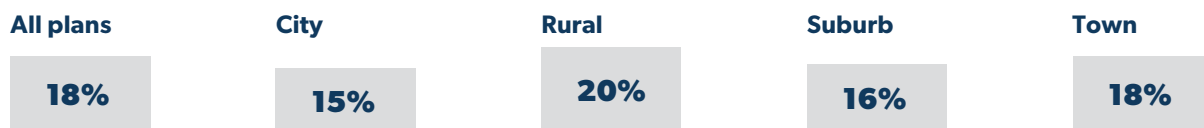


Summer Mentions

● Summer academics ● Summer academics + enrichment ● Summer unclear



No Mention of Afterschool or Summer



*A plan may mention multiple out-of-school time strategies, therefore totals will equal more than 100 percent.

Recommendations

The broad mandate for school districts to spend 20 percent of ARP ESSER funding on the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs represents a potentially enormous investment in out-of-school time programs and expanded supports for students. Below are recommendations for school districts, afterschool and summer program providers, advocates, and policymakers to consider for the time remaining to obligate and spend ARP ESSER funds, as well as into the future.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- 1. Include comprehensive afterschool and summer programs as an ongoing strategy to accelerate students' learning and engagement in school.**

Although most school districts included afterschool or summer programming in their ARP ESSER spending plans as a way to address students' learning recovery, only 6 percent invested in both afterschool and summer programming that extended beyond tutoring and remediation or recovery support. Additionally, a 2023 survey of superintendents found that 51 percent planned to decrease or end enrichment and summer-learning offerings currently being offered when the 2024-2025 school year begins and the deadline to obligate ARP funds arrives.ⁱⁱⁱ Research has demonstrated that participation in quality comprehensive afterschool and summer programming improves school-day attendance and engagement, academic performance, classroom behavior, on-time grade promotion, and mental well-being.^{iv} Investing in afterschool and summer programming can provide students the additional academic support they need, while also providing time to connect with their peers and caring adults, engage with content through hands-on projects in a low-stakes setting, and build on their interests and passions to create a deeper love of learning.

- 2. Leverage community partners to provide afterschool and summer-learning opportunities for students.**

As one district leader said, "We know that there are others that are more expert in certain areas, and rather than us trying to duplicate services or ramp up something ... we're leveraging our partnerships with others." Taking stock of the assets available in the community and identifying organizations that can aid in efforts to provide afterschool

and summer programming is a strategic and efficient use of resources, while also strengthening ties to the community and creating more robust learning and enrichment opportunities for students.

- 3. Dedicate resources to coordinate afterschool and summer-learning opportunities for students.**

In interviews, districts with a dedicated position for out-of-school time programming shared the benefits of a structure and system that allowed for coordinating afterschool and summer programming. Greater alignment between afterschool and summer activities and state-level academic standards, regular communication between school-day teachers and afterschool program staff, and a closer partnership between the school and programs were a few of the common advantages discussed. For example, one district stated that the out-of-school time coordinator position made it possible for afterschool program staff to know which students were struggling on a particular academic concept and adapt programming to work with those students, as well as which students were having behavior issues, and providing additional time during the afterschool program to talk with students about what was going on in their lives. Another district discussed how the coordinator position helped other departments better understand how afterschool and summer programs could support their work and goals for the school year. There were also school districts that contracted with community organizations to manage and oversee coordination of afterschool and summer programs across school sites.

- 4. Consider braiding funds to provide afterschool and summer programming.**

Many school districts interviewed discussed how braiding ARP ESSER funds with another funding stream, such as Title I, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative (21st CCLC), or state-specific

grants to name a few, enabled the district to enhance its programming in a way that was valuable to students, parents, and staff. Braiding funding streams can increase the capacity of the program, add to the types of activities and supports offered in the program, and help to improve the sustainability of the program.

5. **Take advantage of available resources to provide quality afterschool and summer programs, such as tools available through the Engage Every Student Initiative.** In July 2022, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona launched Engage Every Student (EES), an initiative to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs by providing the tools and resources schools and communities may need to start or grow their afterschool and summer offerings. On the [EES website](#), school districts and schools can access an afterschool and summer needs assessment, tip sheets on topics such as the research on out-of-school time learning and collaborating with municipal officials to support afterschool and summer learning, and office hours providing technical assistance.

“With the help of [ARP] ESSER funds, we created spaces for unknown opportunities to come together. And one of those unknown opportunities was the opportunity to identify partnerships. ... We were intentional in diversifying what those partnerships looked like and creating space for those unknown partners. It was an opportunity for awareness and community building ... and was mutually beneficial.”

—SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF, MIDWEST



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER PROGRAM PROVIDERS

1. **Find ways to connect with your school district to develop a meaningful relationship.** Interviews with school district leaders who partnered with outside organizations to provide afterschool and/or summer programming through ARP ESSER funds often did so due to the strength of the existing relationships with community organizations. However, there were many paths that led to establishing the partnership. In one instance, a school district looked to the community to help establish learning pods for students who needed a safe space to learn during the regular school day when schools were closed during the pandemic. In another, the connection began with a recommendation from a principal who had a positive experience with a community-based afterschool program provider. Finding ways to establish and build a relationship with schools and school districts can take different routes, but based on interviews with both program providers and school district leaders, taking the first step to [reach out](#) is key.
2. **Understand the needs of the school and students, and bring to the table the value of your organization to address those needs.** To partner with a school or school district, an outside organization should know how its services will help to address a gap or need of the school and its students. Whether it is providing specific content expertise, activities and learning opportunities that build on school-day content but look different than traditional classroom lessons, or access to caring youth development professionals, explaining the benefits a partnership would bring to support a school district's goals can help an organization make the case for collaboration. Additionally, understanding the resources available to a school district is an integral component of making the case. For example, if a school district does not have a dedicated position or office to oversee afterschool and summer programming, programs should consider ways to reduce the administrative burden for districts and think about the management and communication assets they bring.
3. **Reach out to your statewide afterschool network for help.** The 50 State Afterschool Network offers technical assistance and professional development opportunities, quality standards, and tools and resources to help afterschool and summer programs increase access and improve program quality.⁵ For example, the New York State Network for Youth Success created a toolkit that includes tips for how to build your case for why school districts should partner with your organization, email and letter outreach templates to school leaders, and talking points and handouts on the benefits of afterschool and summer learning programs.⁶ New Jersey's Afterschool and Out-of-School Time (OST) Professional Network (NJSACC) also created its own free downloadable toolkit that includes ARP ESSER requirements for New Jersey school districts, the role of afterschool and summer programs to

⁵ Contact information for the 50 State Afterschool Network can be found at: <http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/about-the-networks>

support districts' learning goals, a checklist for creating a quality afterschool or summer learning program, and technical assistance available through the network.^{vi}

4. **Leverage tools available through the Engage Every Student Initiative to support program offerings.**

As referenced above, Engage Every Student (EES) has developed tools and resources to help schools and communities expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs. This also includes supports that may be beneficial to afterschool and summer program providers, such as a tip sheet on how to plan and organize a site visit with stakeholders to help grow awareness of and support for a program, as well as talking points on how ARP ESSER funds can be used to support afterschool and summer learning programs.



Because of my longstanding relationship with the district and all of the different school boards, principals, and superintendents, we would dream from time to time and I would do a check-in and ask what are some things you wished took place for your students and families? Well, the silver lining of COVID, as it relates to this, is that some of those wish lists could finally be addressed after decades, because finally, people started to see the impact we have.”

—PROGRAM PROVIDER, WEST





Getting creative to expand afterschool and summer opportunities

One of the notable approaches employed by districts has been thinking creatively about the ways in which ARP ESSER funds could help to enhance afterschool and summer learning offerings. For example, one Midwest district, while traditionally offering afterschool and summer programming, had not been able to reach as many of its students of color and immigrant and refugee students due to language barriers, transportation issues, and cost of programs. With its ARP ESSER funds, in addition to providing free afterschool and summer programming and eliminating the issue of cost for students and families, the district hired a native Somali speaker who was connected to the local Somali community to serve as an outreach liaison, sought out and partnered with small nonprofits that reflected the community and were culturally responsive to the needs of the community, and created a circulator system to transport students from the school to the various afterschool opportunities around the city. Partners included the city's parks and recreation department, national organizations like Young Rembrandts, and Black-owned companies like Pros of the Rope, which teaches structured physical activity with an emphasis on double Dutch.

In total, the district was able to double the number of students it served, growing from 400 to 800 K-8th grade students, and was able to increase the number of students from the traditionally underserved communities that the district was targeting.

On the west coast, another school district allocated ARP ESSER funds toward summer programming, which included STEAM camps, outdoor activities, internships, courses at the local college campus, and credit recovery. In addition, they partnered with a parks and recreation district to grow one of its existing summer programs, a singular pass that would grant an individual entry into more than a dozen locations across the city, including, but not limited to, museums, aquatic centers, a trampoline park, a golf course, a bowling alley, and a climbing wall. Using ARP ESSER funds, the district and the park and recreation district made the pass available to every student in the district in order to provide additional options for students and families over the summer. Nearly 3,500 students received the pass at no cost, and across the city, passes were used approximately 50,000 times over the course of the summer.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVOCATES

- 1. Continue to make the case that afterschool and summer programming is a necessity, not just a nice-to-have.** When asking school district leaders about their decision-making process to allocate ARP ESSER funds and planning for the sunset of ARP ESSER funds, many talked about making the distinction between something the district would want to have versus what the district needs to have. For some district leaders, out-of-school time programming is viewed as an extra, not an essential that all young people should be able to access. Without efforts to ensure that those making budgetary decisions—whether that is at the school, local, state, or federal levels—appreciate and recognize the unique value of afterschool and summer programs to support school-day learning, develop students' interpersonal skills, provide hands-on and experiential learning opportunities, and help students build their confidence, funding for afterschool and summer programming will remain a lower-tier priority.
- 2. Advocate for increased funding for afterschool and summer-learning programs.** As ARP ESSER funds are spent down, raising awareness of the importance of increasing funding for afterschool and summer learning at the local, state, and federal levels becomes even more paramount. Due to successful advocacy efforts, there are now 20 states with a funding stream dedicated to out-of-school time programming, ranging from approximately \$382,000 to \$4 billion. However, there remains a need to expand the number of states dedicating funds specifically to afterschool and summer programs, as well as increase the amount of funding for afterschool and summer programs in states with existing funding streams.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1. **Generously grant extensions for spending down ARP ESSER funds.** Although the Department of Education announced on September 18, 2023, that school districts had the option of submitting a waiver for an extension of liquidating funds for up to 14 months, extensions will only be granted on a case-by-case basis.^{vii} While some districts have obligated nearly all of their ARP ESSER funds, others, in particular smaller, rural school districts, would benefit from additional time to spend down ARP ESSER funds. In interviews, school district leaders discussed challenges finding staff or vendors, delays in obtaining supplies, and the additional time it took to put in place the infrastructure to distribute funds as contributing to the difficulty meeting the September 2024 obligation deadline. Similarly, a survey of superintendents found that 49 percent said that a later deadline would be helpful to retain staff and extend new programs and supports for students.^{viii} Making the process of applying for and being awarded a waiver as easy as possible for districts would provide relief to those that are struggling to meet the spending deadlines.
2. **Include specific language related to comprehensive afterschool and summer-learning programming and partnerships with community organizations in policies related to education spending.** The review of available school district plans illustrates the critical role legislative language and subsequent guidance plays in budget decisions. Including explicit language describing quality, comprehensive afterschool and summer programming, as well as prioritization of reaching out to and partnering with community-based organizations, would increase collaboration between schools and community organizations and increase access to afterschool and summer programs that take a holistic learning approach and support both academic and enrichment opportunities for students. For instance, in Georgia, the Georgia Afterschool Network (GSAN), in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education, developed the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grants with the state education agency

afterschool and summer-learning set-aside funds through ARP ESSER. These grants specified that grantees must be a youth development organization, use a whole-child approach, serve students most impacted by the pandemic, and reduce barriers to participation. An evaluation of the BOOST grant's year-one impact reports that 100 grantees that were youth development organizations served nearly 79,000 students across more than 1,300 sites in 87 of Georgia's 159 counties.^{ix}

3. **Increase investments in afterschool and summer programming.** As the end date for spending ARP ESSER funds approaches and with no new federal funding stream dedicated to preventing learning recovery on the horizon, many schools are faced with a fiscal cliff for their investments in afterschool and summer learning programs. Further investments in afterschool and summer programs will allow districts to continue to provide the level of services and supports to students that was made possible with ARP ESSER funds. As one Midwest school district leader explained, "Any gap [in funding] isn't just a gap, and it isn't like turning on and off a tap. You lose what you've created and you have to rebuild capacity." Without local, state, and federal policymakers increasing the level of funding for afterschool and summer programs, too many young people across the country will miss out on the critical academic and whole child supports they need when school is out.

“ We’re facing a pretty significant staffing crisis. Without funding like [ARP ESSER], our traditional programs aren’t going to be able to sustain a dramatic increase in wages without passing this to parents and consumers, and they’re already spending way too much on afterschool programming.”

—PROGRAM PROVIDER, NORTHEAST



Conclusion

This review of school district ARP ESSER plans documents the significant impact of ARP ESSER funds in helping school districts expand access to afterschool and summer learning opportunities, and provides insight into the nature of those opportunities. Most investments are toward tutoring and programming that has only an academic focus. This is a missed opportunity to invest in comprehensive afterschool and summer programs that provide both academic and enrichment supports and have lasting impacts in key areas such as student attendance and engagement in school, academic performance, and overall well-being.

At the same time, this brief highlights approaches to consider, as there are still a significant amount of ARP ESSER funds available to invest before the obligation deadline. And, more broadly, leaders at every level are faced with the question of how best to support students as pandemic relief funding ends. Comprehensive afterschool and summer programs are a valuable educational strategy; a resource to provide students additional academic help while also offering supports that are holistic in nature and supporting students' overall

well-being. Evaluations of ARP ESSER investments in afterschool and summer programs are also showing positive results.^x More than 8 in 10 voters say that afterschool and summer programs are an absolute necessity for their community, and at least 3 in 4 voters are in favor of schools, local governments, and federal leaders investing in afterschool and summer programs.^{xi}

As the deadline for ARP ESSER funding approaches, many school districts have already cut back the afterschool and summer offerings created through the federal funding stream and many more will reduce or end programming completely when funds are no longer available. In the words of one Northeast district staff member, "We're really stuck. What do we do next? It's sad to see such a robust program grow and grow, and then you run out of funding." Afterschool and summer programs are critical to students' well-being and academic growth, and greater investment in afterschool and summer programming at the local, state, and federal levels is needed to ensure that all young people have the supports available they need to help them reach their full potential.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was taken to learn how local education agencies are spending ARP ESSER funds. This included a review of 6,315 school district ARP ESSER spending plans in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as more than 40 interviews with school district leaders and afterschool and summer program providers to gain insight into the following questions:

1. How much in ARP ESSER funds is being spent on afterschool and summer learning opportunities?
2. What types of afterschool and summer learning activities and supports are school districts dedicating ARP ESSER funds to?
3. What factors contribute to school districts dedicating ARP ESSER funds to afterschool and summer programming?
4. What are promising strategies for implementing comprehensive afterschool and summer programs?

School District Plan Review

School district plans included in the analysis were those made available through a contract with Burbio, a data service that has scraped the web to find and compile school districts' ARP ESSER plans. In total, ARP ESSER plans from 6,315 school districts were reviewed and coded into a matrix tracking the type of afterschool and summer spending allocations. The dataset is a subset of all districts in the United States, representing 33 percent of all districts, with district representation by state dependent upon publicly available plans, ranging from 91 percent of a states' school districts to 4 percent, with an average of 43 percent. The breakdown of school districts by community type includes 16 percent of districts located in cities, 30 percent located in the suburbs, 23 percent located in towns, and 32 percent in rural communities.

Plan categorization

Due to the different strategies employed by school districts during the out-of-school time hours, a matrix was created to track the different types of afterschool and summer programming funded through ARP ESSER funds to support learning recovery. The afterschool matrix includes any mention of funds going toward strategies taking place outside of traditional school hours during the school year—such as afterschool and before-school programs, intersession programs that occurred during winter and spring breaks, Saturday school, and programs that added hours to the school day—while the summer matrix includes mentions of funds supporting student-learning-recovery activities taking place during the summer months. In the afterschool matrix, distinctions were made between funding for programming purely academic in nature, such as tutoring, and programming that included both an academic and enrichment component, such as a district partnering with a community-based organization to provide afterschool programming that included homework help, STEM learning opportunities, and time for

recreational activities. Similarly, the summer matrix differentiated between school districts that only budgeted funds for summer school that was providing credit recovery or remediation, and those that included enrichment offerings, such as districts that offered academic classes during the morning hours and brought in community partners during the afternoon hours to provide enrichment and camp-like learning experiences. Both the afterschool and summer matrices included the category “unclear,” where based on the information available further categorization was not possible.

Mentions of afterschool and summer spending versus budget items for afterschool and summer programming

To understand the reporting of findings based on the dollar amount budgeted toward afterschool and summer programming versus mentions of afterschool and summer programming, it is important to note that while some district plans include budget amounts broken down to include spending on staffing, supplies, transportation, and other components of programming, other plans omit budget details, providing only a narrative of how they will address the learning recovery set-aside. In the cases where only narrative text was available, it was noted when plans included references to budget ARP ESSER funds toward afterschool and summer offerings.

Through a review of the various ways school districts report budget items, this analysis also separates out allocations where afterschool and summer expenses were blended with school-day expenses. For example, one district allocated close to \$95,000 to, “Everyday Math From McGraw Hill - New curriculum will be used in the classroom, intervention, and/or afterschool programs to increase learning loss due to COVID19.” Based on this text, while the example could be counted as a school district that will be dedicating some ARP ESSER funds toward an academic support taking place after school, because the curriculum will be used both during school and after school hours, separating out funding that would count toward the afterschool budget is unclear.

School District and Program Provider Interviews

Interviews with school district staff and program providers were also incorporated into the analysis process for an in-depth examination of how school districts approached spending ARP ESSER funds, especially in relation to afterschool and summer programming; the process for implementing afterschool and summer programming funded with ARP ESSER funds; and the sustainability of programming as the deadline for obligating and liquidating ARP ESSER funds approaches. Outreach was made to nearly 200 school districts and programs in 45 states, resulting in 20 interviews with school district leaders and 22 program providers representing the Midwest, Northeast, Southern, and Western regions, across rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Endnotes

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- ix Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network. (2023). Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time: Year 1 Impact Brief. Retrieved from: <https://www.afterschoolga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/BOOST-Year-1-IMPact-Brief-v5.pdf>
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