

Helping Kids Recover with American Rescue Plan Funding

Students in elementary through high school spend more than 80 percent of their time learning outside of school, making afterschool and summer programs powerful partners for school districts. Decades of research show that programs are uniquely positioned to accelerate students' academic growth and support their overall well-being, and that they have strong reach in communities impacted most by the pandemic. In the face of learning loss and feelings of isolation and anxiety, students need the support that afterschool and summer programs provide more than ever.

The Challenge

Afterschool and summer programs stand ready to help, but they simply do not have adequate funding to do so.

Public investments in 21st Century Community Learning Centers—the only federal funding stream dedicated exclusively to afterschool, before-school, and summer learning programs—have largely stalled. The program has not kept up with the **cost of inflation, increasing less than 12 percent between 2014 and 2022**. After adjusting for inflation, the current funding level is \$87 million below the 2014 level.

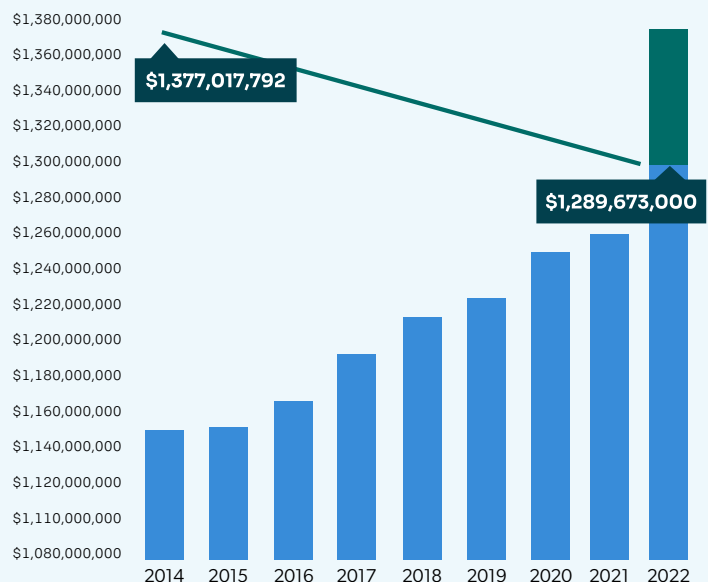
Furthermore, only 1 in 3 requests for funding Community Learning Centers is awarded. Over the span of 10 years, \$4 billion in local grant requests were denied because of intense competition and lack of adequate federal funding.

This lack of public investment has real consequences for young people and families.

Despite the acknowledgment of the impact programs can have on positive youth development, the opportunity gap for our young people is growing. Nearly 25 million children nationwide would attend afterschool programs, but barriers prevent them.

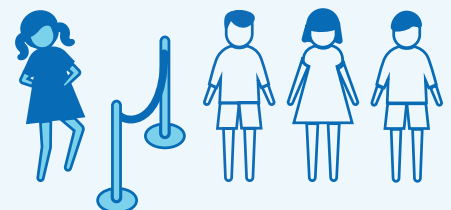
Young people from families with low incomes, those living in rural communities, and kids of color face the greatest challenges. In fact, the number of children from households with low incomes participating in afterschool fell from 4.6 million in 2014 to 2.7 million in 2020. Their families report cost, transportation, and lack of access as the top barriers to participation.

Funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers has not kept up with the cost of inflation.



Adjusting for inflation, the current funding level is \$87 million below the 2014 funding level.

For every child in an afterschool program, three are waiting to get in.





The Opportunity

Fortunately, the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) (ARPA) provides billions of dollars to state and local education agencies to help meet the needs of students today and names afterschool and summer learning programs as an effective strategy to help young people thrive.

Approximately \$500 billion of ARPA funds can be used to support young people during the hours they are out of school, including \$22 billion provided to local education agencies (LEAs or school districts) to accelerate students' academic growth and support their overall well-being with comprehensive afterschool, summer learning, and extended-school day and school year programming.

These funding dollars must be spent by fall 2024, and currently, there are billions of dollars on the table. There is an urgent need to allocate these dollars at local levels to groups that can help schools maximize student recovery and accelerate learning.

School districts have an incredible opportunity to partner with local afterschool and summer programs, which are proven to help kids:



Build social skills and healthy relationships with peers and adults



Develop workforce skills



Strengthen work habits, grades, and behavior



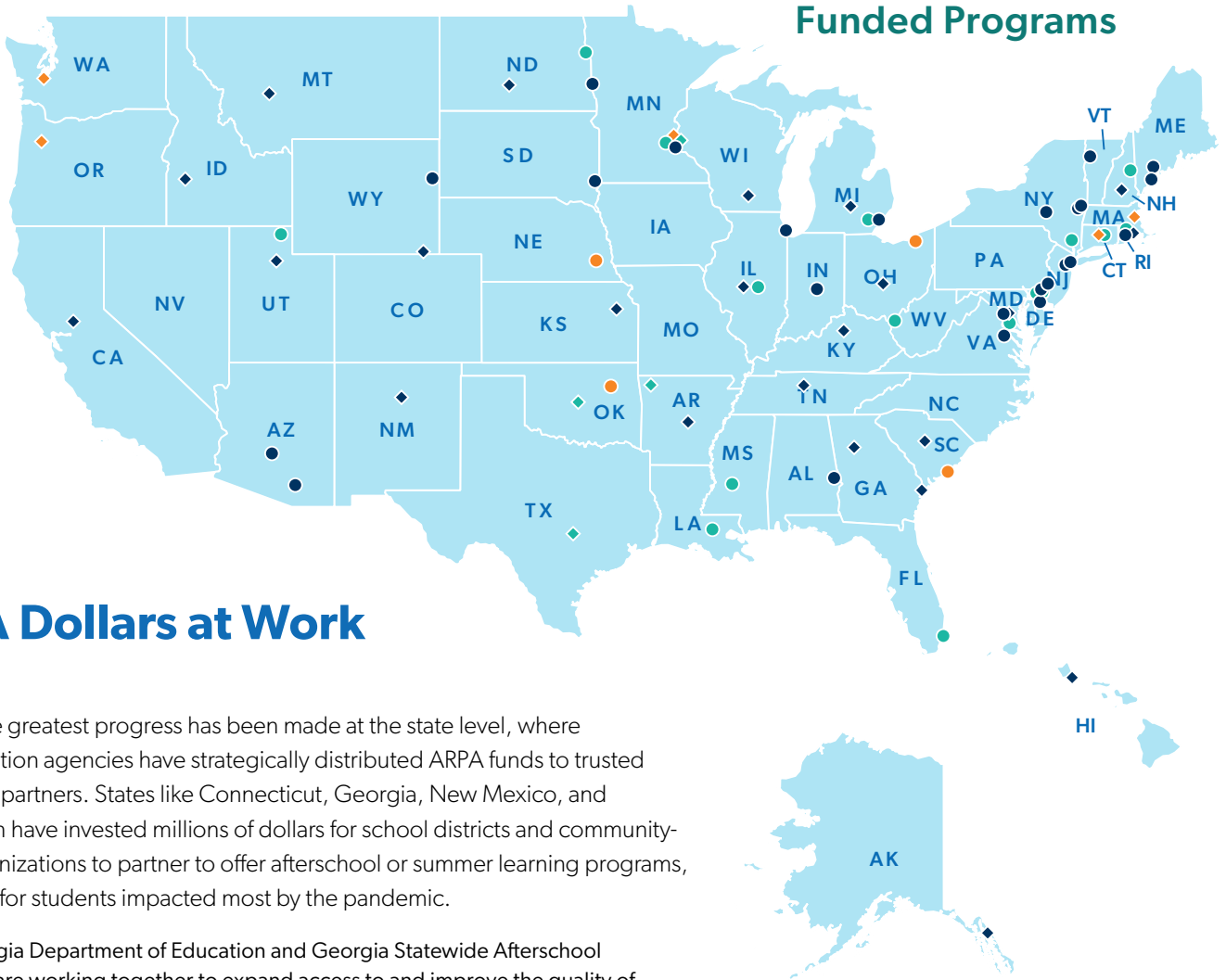
Improve school attendance and graduation rates



Reduce drug use and other risky behaviors

School districts can count on afterschool and summer learning professionals to help them implement evidence-based practices and follow the [principles of effective programs](#), like building relationships with families and providing active learning opportunities.

American Rescue Plan Funded Programs



ARPA Dollars at Work

To date, the greatest progress has been made at the state level, where state education agencies have strategically distributed ARPA funds to trusted afterschool partners. States like Connecticut, Georgia, New Mexico, and Washington have invested millions of dollars for school districts and community-based organizations to partner to offer afterschool or summer learning programs, particularly for students impacted most by the pandemic.

- ◆ The Georgia Department of Education and Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network are working together to expand access to and improve the quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities across the state. More than 100 grants have been awarded to support programs serving students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including youth with disabilities, youth experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, English language learners, youth receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and migratory youth.
- ◆ The Connecticut State Department of Education launched its Summer Enrichment Initiative in Spring 2021 to help students re-engage with peers, accelerate learning, and prepare for returning to school. The \$8.6 million in grants went to more than 200 programs, including camps focused on STEM, college and career readiness, arts, life skills, and more. An overwhelming majority of participants had fun (94%) and would return to camp the following summer (70%). Additionally, 58% said their camp had gotten them excited to go back to school, and a majority of site supervisors reported that their camps were either very effective (49%) or extremely effective (27%) in bolstering student readiness to return to school.

Program Types

- Afterschool & Summer Programs
- Afterschool Program
- Summer Program

Funding Level

- Local
- ◆ State

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While examples of investments in afterschool and summer programs are growing, it is a small percentage of the potential investment that could be made in supporting young people’s well-being and academic growth. Billions of dollars have yet to be expended, especially at the school district level. Given the challenges facing our youth, we must be more strategic than ever and maximize the partnerships and resources available to support youth and families.



To fully support our young people, we need an all-hands-on-deck strategy so that all youth can heal, play, learn, and thrive.

- ◆ Afterschool and summer providers can reach out to districts to be a resource, share quality principles and related resources, and offer to be partners in providing expanded learning opportunities.
- ◆ Local education agencies and school districts can move quickly to invest ARPA funds in evidence-based, community-driven afterschool and summer programs.
- ◆ State education agencies can work together with state afterschool networks to design, manage, and evaluate state-level ARPA-funded grant competitions for afterschool and summer programs that are aligned with quality practices, address issues of equity, and complement existing funding streams.
- ◆ Policymakers and advocates can help share best practices, identify gaps in quality and access, and work toward securing funds for operational sustainability beyond 2024.

Smart ARPA investments have the potential to ensure that young people emerge from this crisis strong, confident, and hopeful—but we have to tap every resource in our communities to help, starting with the afterschool and summer program providers that have helped students learn and grow before and throughout the pandemic.