



# How COVID Relief Funding is a Lifeline for Afterschool and Summer Programs During the Pandemic

 Afterschool Alliance  
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More than two years into the pandemic, individuals and institutions alike have faced significant hardships caused by COVID-19, which has had a serious impact on the health, economic stability, and overall well-being of the country. For the afterschool field, the pandemic has caused disruption to services, increased operational costs, and put further stress on an already overtaxed and overwhelmed workforce. Despite these challenges, the Afterschool Alliance’s *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* survey series has found that through the pandemic, afterschool and summer programs have developed ways to stay connected to their students and families, pivoted services to meet the most pressing needs in their communities, and continuously adapted to the constantly changing circumstances created by the coronavirus to ensure that young people have the supports in place to emerge on the other side of the pandemic healthy and happy.

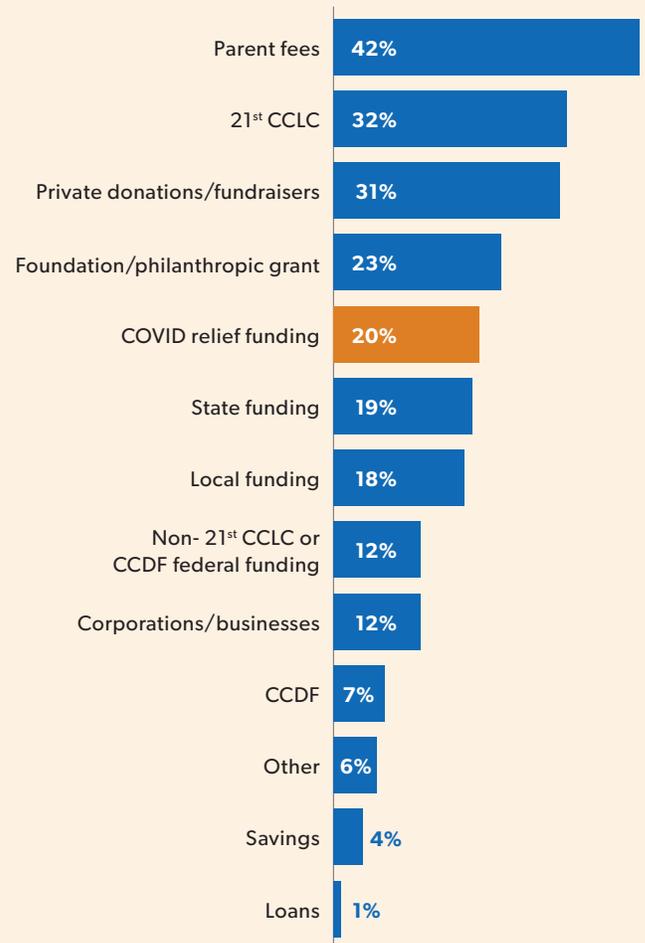
Funds from the American Rescue Plan, which provides as much as \$500 billion in COVID relief dollars that can be used in part to support young people during the out-of-school-time hours, present a tremendous opportunity to help afterschool and summer programs support the children and families in their communities. Results from the seventh wave of Afterschool Alliance’s survey series of 948 program providers, conducted March 21 through April 12, 2022, show that a large share of providers have not accessed COVID relief funding as of the time of the survey.<sup>1</sup> However, for the minority of providers who have been able to obtain COVID relief funding, the funds have allowed them to hire more staff, serve more students, and expand their programming.

## A minority of programs report receiving COVID relief funding

Although program providers reporting that they have received COVID relief funding increased between the summer and fall of 2021 (16 percent and 19 percent, respectively), results from the spring

2022 survey remain largely unchanged from the fall, at 20 percent. Among programs surveyed, rural program providers are the most likely to report receiving COVID relief funds (25 percent), compared to suburban (19 percent) and urban providers (18 percent). Providers in the South (23 percent), Northeast (22 percent), and Midwest (20 percent) are also much more likely than providers located in the West (14 percent) to report having received COVID relief funds.

### Only 1 in 5 program providers report receiving COVID relief funds



<sup>1</sup> Programs with COVID relief funding are those that report that they have received any public funding to address pandemic related challenges. The COVID relief funding streams range from education specific funds that flow from state and local education agencies, education funds that flow from governors’ offices, and relief funds that local elected officials can direct to afterschool and summer programs.

## A decrease in programs connecting with local education leaders about COVID relief funding

In an unfortunate turn, while providers reporting that their organization was reached out to or had conversations with local education leaders about COVID relief funding increased from 45 percent in the summer of 2021 to 50 percent in the fall of 2021, this number dropped back down to 45 percent in the most recent survey. Providers with funding from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) program initiative (53 percent) and programs typically located in public schools (51 percent) are much more likely than non-21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs (42 percent) and programs located outside of public-school buildings (36 percent) to report being reached out to or having conversations with local education leaders.

While a plurality of programs (45 percent) have been in conversations with local education leaders about COVID relief funding, a promising finding related to communication between program providers and school leadership is that a majority of program providers (56 percent) say that they have been involved in conversations organized by the school district or individual schools about how to best support students’ learning this upcoming summer. There is very little difference between programs with and without COVID relief funding reporting that they have talked to schools or school districts about supporting students’ learning over the summer (57 percent vs. 55 percent).

## Partnerships an area for improvement

Of programs that have received COVID relief funds, only 31 percent report that they have partnered with either a community-based organization (among programs that are school based) or a local school (among programs that are not school based) to address learning loss using COVID relief funds. Programs located in urban communities (44 percent) and programs located on school grounds (44 percent) are much more likely to report partnerships than programs in rural (27 percent) and suburban communities (27 percent), and programs located outside of public-school buildings (14 percent).

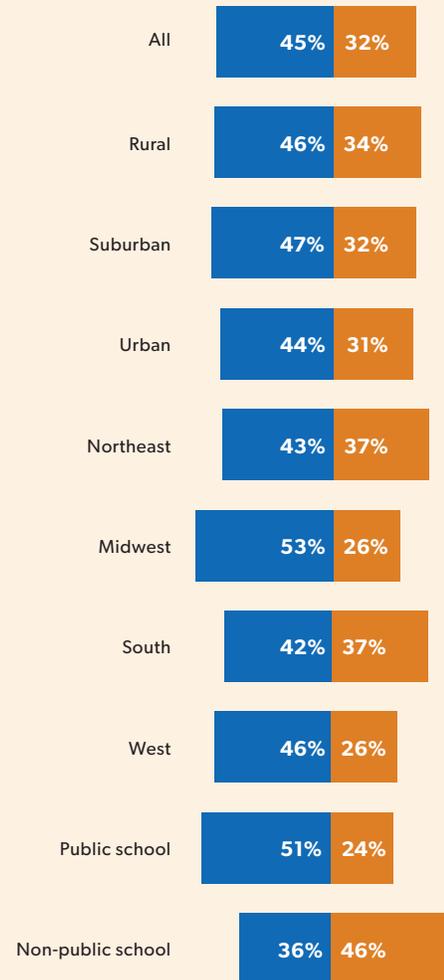
Access to operate the organization’s afterschool programs, summer programs, or both in the school building (48 percent) and expanding pre-existing contracts or grants for the organization to provide afterschool and/or summer programs (46 percent) are the two most common forms of partnerships, followed by joint professional development opportunities (33 percent). Less common partnerships include funding transportation to and from programs (23 percent) and staff sharing (20 percent).

## COVID relief funding helping programs with staffing, expanding programming

As nearly half of program providers with COVID relief funding (49 percent) report that their program’s cost-per-child for in-person services has or will increase due to COVID-19, a positive finding from survey results is that program providers with COVID relief funding report that the funding has helped them support staff recruitment efforts (59 percent), hire more staff (41 percent), serve more students (29 percent), and expand program offerings (29 percent). Additionally, 17 percent of providers report that the funding has allowed them to offer a new summer program.

## Programs that have been reached out to or had conversations with local education leaders about COVID relief funding remains low

■ Have been in contact ■ Have not been in contact



While most programs—both those with and without COVID relief funding—report that they are physically open in at least some capacity, programs with COVID relief funding are much more likely to report operating at pre-COVID capacity limits than programs without COVID relief funding (61 percent vs. 53 percent), as well as hiring more staff specifically due to increased demand for programming (37 percent vs. 25 percent).

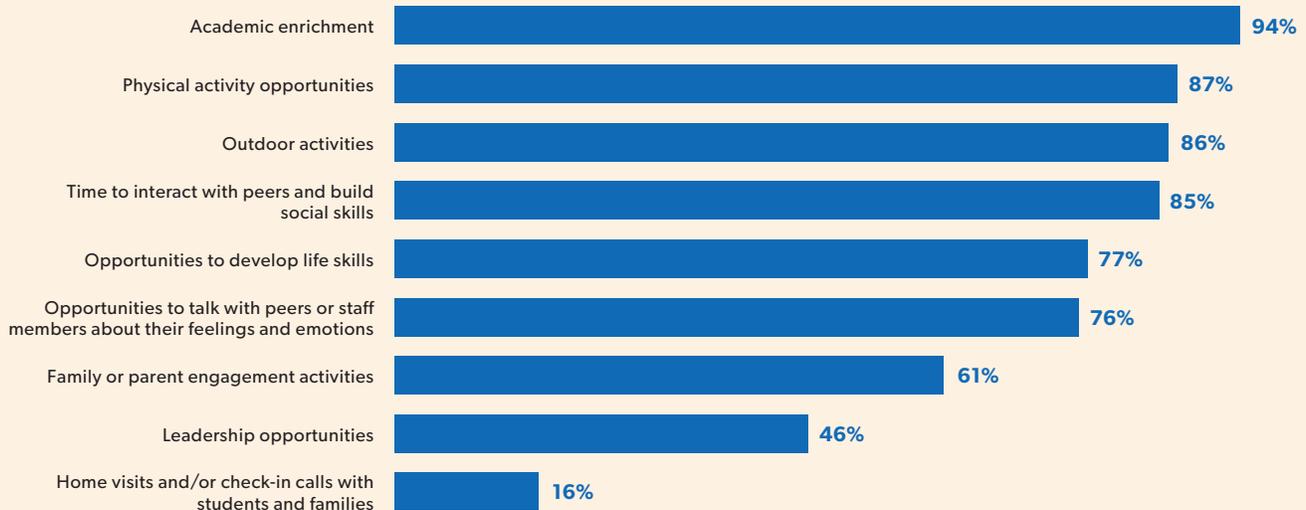
Programs with COVID relief funding are also more likely than programs without to report that they have been able to take steps to attract or retain staff. For example, 72 percent of programs with COVID relief funding report that they have increased their hourly wages or salaries, 16 percentage points higher than programs without COVID relief funding (56 percent). Programs without COVID relief funding are almost twice as likely as programs with COVID relief funding to say that they have not taken any steps to attract or retain staff (25 percent vs. 13 percent).

Although there is very little difference between program providers with and without COVID relief funding regarding plans to offer summer programming (84 percent vs. 82 percent), providers who report receiving COVID relief funding are much more likely to report plans to expand summer programming to serve more children (36 percent vs. 29 percent), as well as more likely to place a greater focus on balancing academic and enrichment activities (43 percent vs. 28 percent) and more intentionally focusing on students’ holistic needs (42 percent vs. 27 percent).

### COVID relief funds are helping programs address staffing challenges

	COVID relief funding	No COVID relief funding	Difference
Increased hourly wages and/or salaries	72%	56%	+16
Additional professional development opportunities	46%	33%	+13
Free childcare for staff	25%	17%	+8
Additional paid time off	19%	12%	+7
Sign-on bonuses	18%	14%	+3
Additional/new health and/or dental benefits	6%	10%	-4
My program has not done anything new to attract or retain staff	13%	25%	-12

### Programs with COVID relief funding provide a wide range of supports



## Challenges remain

While program providers with COVID relief funding are more likely to say that they are operating at pre-COVID capacity and report the many ways in which funding has helped them to meet the needs of children in their community, there are a number of areas where providers continue to report difficulties. Meeting the demand for programming is one such area, with nearly 3 in 5 providers with COVID relief funding (58 percent) reporting that their program has a waitlist.

Challenges with staffing, an issue tied to a program's ability to meet the demand for programming, is another concern for providers with COVID relief funding. While down from 81 percent in the fall of 2021, still 71 percent of programs with COVID relief funding say that hiring staff, retaining staff, or both have been somewhat or very difficult this past spring, with nearly half (49 percent) reporting that it has been very difficult. Additionally, as programs with COVID relief funding are more likely to anticipate expanding their summer programming, they are also more likely than providers without COVID relief funding to be worried about being able to hire enough staff for the summer (72 percent vs. 65 percent) and being able to meet the demand from families (48 percent vs. 40 percent).

Program sustainability is also a persistent concern among programs with COVID relief funding. While down from 82 percent in the fall of 2021, still approximately 3 in 4 providers (74 percent) report that they are concerned about their program's long-term funding and future, including 26 percent who are extremely concerned.

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**“The greatest challenge that we are experiencing as a result of COVID is the increased emotional needs and behaviors of the children in our care, coupled with greater sensitivity and anxiety among staff members. Fortunately, the greatest opportunity that we are experiencing is the increased awareness of the importance of our profession, the greater sense of community among diverse programs instead of competition, and the added funding support that is coming through from multiple sources. **We would not have been able to stay in business or provide the same quality of care and programming without financial assistance** [emphasis added]. Or we would have had to greatly increase the cost of our programming at a time when our families were least able to afford it.”**

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– Wave 7 program provider respondent with COVID relief funding

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## Promising Practice in Structuring COVID Relief Funding for Afterschool

One promising example of COVID relief funding expanding access and improving the quality of afterschool and summer programs is the partnership between the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) to award \$85 million in Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grants to community and statewide organizations across Georgia. Recognizing the value in community-based organizations, the Georgia Department of Education partnered with GSAN—an intermediary organization with expertise in the afterschool field, providing technical assistance, developing policy priorities, and educating the public about the effectiveness of afterschool and summer learning programs—to administer the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief state set-aside. The partnership also includes GSAN providing technical assistance and professional development to BOOST grantees in areas including, but not limited to, youth development, mental wellness, trauma-informed care, and the Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards.

The BOOST grants were structured in a way that prioritized community-based organizations, made grants broadly accessible, and was purposeful in supporting program sustainability. Only nonprofit organizations, colleges or universities, and municipalities, such as park and recreation departments, were eligible to apply for the grants. The RFP process also helped to ensure funding reached programs across the state and communities most in need of afterschool and summer programming. For example, GSAN created two types of BOOST grants that organizations could apply to: one for organizations with statewide reach, such as the Georgia Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs or the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association, and the other for standalone community-based programs operating afterschool and/or summer learning programs. Additionally, extra points were awarded to programs operating in counties where there are no current programs receiving government funding through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program or the Afterschool Care Program, as well as to programs serving target populations, such as youth with disabilities,

youth receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and English-language learners. Supporting program sustainability was also built into the structure of the grant, where BOOST grants are renewable up to three years and all grantees will be able to access direct coaching and webinars on nonprofit finance and administration. Due to GSAN's established network and partnerships in the state, it was able to publicize the grants widely, including through United Ways, community foundations, the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, and the Georgia Family Connection Partnership.

BOOST grants were awarded to four organizations with statewide reach and 97 community-based organizations to provide comprehensive out-of-school-time programming over the summer months, after school during the academic year, or year-round. Although \$27 million in grants were awarded, in all, there were nearly 150 applications that did not receive funding due to the high demand to increase access to afterschool and summer programs in Georgia.



Photo credit: Shavita Marsh/Big Car Collaborative

### Demographics of programs with and without COVID relief funding

Category	Demographics	COVID relief funding	No COVID relief funding
<b>Community type</b>	Rural	44%	34%
	Suburban	29%	32%
	Urban	32%	38%
<b>Grade level</b>	Elementary school	89%	85%
	Middle school	49%	49%
	High school	22%	29%
<b>Free or reduced-price lunch program</b>	<50%	29%	25%
	50% – 75%	20%	16%
	>75%	39%	48%
	Unsure	12%	11%
<b>Other funding sources (top 5)</b>	Parent fees	62%	37%
	Private donations/fundraisers	36%	30%
	21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC	28%	33%
	State government funds (not 21 <sup>st</sup> CCLC)	27%	17%
	Foundation/philanthropic grant	26%	22%

### Conclusion

Findings from the Wave 7 *Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19* survey demonstrate how funds from the American Rescue Plan are helping afterschool and summer programs continue to provide important services and supports to their students, from academic enrichment to opportunities to engage with their peers, during an extraordinarily challenging moment. At the same time, the survey brings to light the need to connect more programs with local education leaders about COVID relief dollars and help a greater number of programs access funding to ensure that all young people are able to benefit from afterschool and summer programs that are keeping them safe, inspiring learning, and sparking new passions and interests.



The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. Learn more at: [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)