



## **Memorandum**

From: Afterschool Alliance

Date: December 19, 2024

Re: What 2025 is likely to bring for America's afterschool programs

2025 will be a pivotal year for our country's afterschool programs, which do so much to keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and give working families peace of mind that their children are safe, supervised and learning after the school day ends. Spend an afternoon at an afterschool program and you'll see students put down their screens and instead spend a few hours building robots, planting vegetable gardens, writing essays and music, learning to code or debate, engaging in physical activity, and getting homework help from teachers, career information from local business leaders, and guidance and encouragement from mentors and community leaders. These kinds of hands-on learning activities build teamwork and other life skills, and quality time with peers and mentors is especially important now, with so many of our youth experiencing mental health challenges. Afterschool programs also provide the healthy meals and snacks so many students would otherwise go without.

***But this fall, when schools around the country opened, too many afterschool programs did not.*** The reason is the economic pressures caused by skyrocketing costs, labor shortages, and the end of the federal pandemic relief funds that had been keeping many programs afloat. And many programs that are open have been forced to cut back hours, activities, or the number of students they can serve – and are facing uncertain futures.

If anyone doubts the value of afterschool programs, they need only look at the panic among parents when these programs are forced to close. That panic is justified because when programs close, students go without the academic and social supports they need to succeed, parents can be forced out of their jobs, and more children and youth are at risk for isolation, harmful behaviors, and other dangers.

The shortage of afterschool programs is not new. Today in the United States, for every child in an afterschool program, four more are waiting to get in. Nearly 25 million children not in an afterschool program would be enrolled, if a program were available to them, according to a 2022 survey of approximately 1,500 parents conducted by Edge Research. The primary reason is that, in recent years, Congress has failed to significantly increase funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC), the chief federal funding stream for afterschool and summer learning programs, which provides grants to states that run competitions for the three- to five-year grants that sustain programs.

***The need for Congress to significantly increase 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funding has never been greater – and the future of afterschool programs never more uncertain.*** During President Trump’s first term, his administration proposed zero dollars for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC in all four budgets he submitted to Congress. All four times, bipartisan members of Congress rejected the Trump proposal. Senators and Representatives on both sides of the aisle know how much people in their states and districts value afterschool and summer learning programs and support federal funding for them.

***The country is counting on lawmakers to fund afterschool and summer learning programs next year.*** Increasing funds for 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC is essential, but other federal fundings streams support afterschool programs, too. They include AmeriCorps, the Child Care Development Block Grants, afterschool and summer meals, and career technical education funding, which can support STEM education and more. Preserving and increasing their funding is also important.

So, too, is increasing state and local support for afterschool and summer learning. Twenty-seven states now provide some dedicated funds for afterschool programs, led by California, which began this funding more than 20 years ago, and most recently boosted by Michigan and Pennsylvania. State funding for afterschool programs has increased 20-fold since 2000 – but it is still a proverbial drop in the bucket given the vast unmet need.

***2025 will bring new studies, new challenges, and new opportunities.*** A wealth of data shows that students who regularly attend afterschool programs improve their grades, school attendance, behaviors, and more. Research has also found that students in afterschool programs are more engaged in school, more excited about learning, and develop critical work and life skills such as problem solving, teamwork, and communication. We will see more studies examining the impact of afterschool next year.

Here’s some of what’s ahead for afterschool in 2025, in addition to federal budgeting:

- In late January or early February, a national public opinion survey on public views on afterschool, commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance.
- In late winter, a study from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine on learning and development in out-of-school time settings across the K-12 age span.
- In September, the new *America After 3PM* household survey of U.S. parents and caregivers. It is the only national study to track how children and youth spend their out-of-school hours; how working parents manage those hours; how large the unmet demand for afterschool programs is nationwide *and in each state*; and whether parents are satisfied with their children’s afterschool programs. This will be the sixth in this study’s series, dating back to 2004.
- On October 23, *Lights On Afterschool*, the national rally for afterschool that typically includes more than 8,000 local events around the country.

What happens with afterschool funding and programming next year matters. It will have a significant impact on our children’s future, families’ wellbeing, how strong and STEM-ready the workforce of tomorrow will be, and whether our economy will thrive. The Afterschool Alliance has experts available on just about all aspects of afterschool and we can put you in touch with directors of local afterschool programs across the country. Don’t hesitate to let us know if we can help you cover this issue.