

INVESTMENTS IN STUDENT RECOVERY



Chickasaw City Schools, AL

\$980K

Amount of ARP ESSER funding dedicated to afterschool and summer learning

82%

Percentage of children from families with low incomes

Chickasaw City Schools braided the following funding streams to support their afterschool and summer learning programs for the 2021-2023 school years:

- ▶ ARP ESSER funds
- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Center initiative

Benefits from investment

- ▶ Academic improvements
- ▶ Engaging, hands-on learning
- ▶ Increased student participation
- ▶ Stronger staff supports

This spotlight takes a closer look at one school district in Alabama that braided federal pandemic relief funds with 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) funding to address afterschool teacher retention and expand the type of activities offered to students.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds provided the greatest opportunity to support students in afterschool and summer programs with federal funds since the creation of the 21st CCLC initiative.¹ However, demand for afterschool programs still far exceeds the supply. For every child in a program, four are waiting to get in.

While most school districts reported dedicating ARP ESSER funds toward afterschool and summer programs, the investments represented only a small portion of available funds. Districts can still direct ARP ESSER funds to support afterschool and summer opportunities. Braiding funds is one way that district leaders and program providers can make the most of ARP ESSER funds to enhance programs, increase their capacity, and provide more supports for students. When braiding funds, district leaders and program providers fund the different components of their program with multiple funding streams — such as the 21st CCLC initiative or city and state-specific funds — while reporting on each funding stream separately. This strategy allows district leaders and program providers to enhance the benefits of their program for youth and build comprehensive out-of-school time offerings.

Overview

In the suburbs of Mobile County, Alabama, Chickasaw City Schools (CCS) braided funds to enhance their afterschool and summer programs, investing in a comprehensive mix of both academics and enrichment for their students. Though they had existing 21st CCLC programs, district leaders still faced two main challenges in their out-of-school time spaces: engaging students who struggled academically, and addressing teacher shortages and burnout. With the added ARP ESSER funds, they were able to increase the pay for the 21st CCLC teachers, allowing them to retain teachers and provide quality instruction. They also expanded the range of engaging, hands-on activities offered in the afterschool program, as the providers recognized that the same students who struggled academically prioritized enrichment activities. For the summer program, ARP ESSER dollars funded the summer school components, while the 21st CCLC funds made it possible to provide enrichment activities for middle and high school students. Funds were also used for transportation to and from school, serving 166 students in K-12 programs during each program.

A Typical Day for Students

Chickasaw City Schools' afterschool program serves students at two program sites. One site serves 106 elementary students (about 20% of the district's elementary student population) with Monday through Friday programs from school dismissal until 5:45 p.m. The second site serves approximately 60 middle and high school students on Mondays through Thursdays from school dismissal until 4:45 p.m. Both sites offer enrichment and support focused on health, wellness, STEM, and community engagement, with the site serving older youth offering credit recovery. Enrichment offerings vary and include teaching math through a cooking club, using drones to learn about STEM, and partnering with Sunnyside Theater to offer acting, drama, and theater classes — a partnership that would not have been possible with 21st CCLC funds alone.

Impact and Outcomes

ARP ESSER funds sent to the district by the Alabama State Department of Education for afterschool and summer programs allowed Chickasaw City Schools to expand and enhance existing programs funded by 21st CCLC, enabling the district to be efficient and realize gains in a short time.

Academic Improvement. In 2022, Chickasaw City Schools was recognized by the Alabama State Department of Education for the academic improvements of their elementary students. Programs, combined with school-day interventions (also funded by ARP ESSER), reinforced students' learning, making academic improvements possible.



TIP: ASK QUESTIONS

Don't hesitate to ask the funding entity about their requirements and allocation plans.

The game changer for Chickasaw City Schools was contacting their state education agency and clarifying that they could use ARP ESSER funds to supplement the salaries of their 21st CCLC staff to support their afterschool program.



TIP: DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL

If you are starting a program, take time to experience a program and learn how to run one. Talk to someone who has experience running a program. Pay attention to student engagement and address barriers to student participation and quality programming.

CCS pursued four strategies to address challenges with student participation and enhance the overall quality of their programs:

1. Raised teacher pay to provide consistency in staffing
2. Decreased barriers to participation by providing transportation
3. Prioritized hands-on activities and opportunities students valued
4. Coordinated efforts with school offerings and supports

Expansion of Engaging Student Activities. ARP ESSER funds enabled districts to enhance the kinds of hands-on engaging activities that students prioritize. Existing 21st CCLC funds had mainly supported staff, with few funds remaining for supplies, materials, programs, and contracts. ARP ESSER funds allowed the district to support opportunities such as cooking, interacting with drones, and acting classes with Sunnyside Theater. It also led to collaboration with high school coaches to create schedules that allowed students to practice sports two days a week and spend the remaining three days on activities such as ACT preparation, workforce development, and tutoring.

Student Participation Rose. Expanded activities encouraged greater student participation. Demand for programs was so high the program developed a waitlist. In previous years, there was no waitlist.

Better Staff Support. The Chickasaw City Schools advisory committee faced teacher shortages for the afterschool and summer programs. ARP ESSER funds enabled the program to supplement 21st CCLC funding for teachers. By braiding the funds, they were able to increase teacher hourly pay.



TIP: THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Get creative about splitting costs!

If CCS purchased drones with 21st CCLC funds, those drones could only be used by students enrolled in 21st CCLC programs. But if the drones were paid in half by 21st CCLC funds and in half by ARP ESSER funds, then students enrolled in non-21st CCLC programs could also use the drones. The key to braiding funds was to document what was purchased with ARP ESSER funds separately from what was purchased with 21st CCLC funds.



TIP: SPECIFY BENEFITS

To make the case for investments, emphasize the benefits for students and families.

CCS programs articulated how they would build on school-day interventions to support the academic improvement of students, and communicated the value that families place on having a safe place for their children to learn and grow while they are at work. The programs also support working parents who know they can leave their child at their afterschool or summer program while they go to work, and that their child is being well taken care of and receiving holistic support.

Looking to the Future

For now, Chickasaw City Schools will be able to continue to support their afterschool program with the 21st CCLC funds, though they will have to rethink their programs. For example, they have already decreased teacher salaries. While they do not plan to decrease pay further, they are planning to increase the student-to-teacher ratio from 10-15 students to 20-25 students per teacher in order to continue to serve the same number of students. Additionally, they will look for alternative funding sources (such as parent-pay models, hosting community partners, and other grants) to maintain the additional enrichment activities that they have offered.

Visit [EngageEveryStudent.org](https://engageeverystudent.org), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education, to learn more about accessing ARP funds for afterschool and summer.

Endnotes

¹: Afterschool Alliance. (2023). Investments in Student Recovery: A Review of School Districts' Use of American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Afterschool and Summer Opportunities. Retrieved From: <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Investments-in-Student-Recovery-2023.pdf>

