

INVESTMENTS IN STUDENT RECOVERY



St. Louis Park Public Schools, MN

\$4M

Amount of ARP ESSER funding dedicated to afterschool and summer learning

1,120

Average number of students served by the afterschool program during the 2022-2023 school year

40%

Percentage of children from families with low incomes

50%

Approximate percentage of children of color served by afterschool and summer programs funded through ARP ESSER

Main funding sources:

- ▶ ARP ESSER funds
- ▶ Parent fees
- ▶ State funds
- ▶ Local funds
- ▶ Private donations

This spotlight examines how a school district in Minnesota leveraged federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to better support students of color through afterschool and summer programming, and offers strategies other districts can replicate.

Per the U.S. Department of Education, school districts must use at least 20 percent of ARP ESSER funds to address learning loss using strategies that address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on underrepresented student groups, including “each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care”.¹ Afterschool and summer programs are named as one strategy to help support students.

A recent review of school district plans found that while 8 in 10 school districts have dedicated ARP funds for afterschool and summer programs, the investments represented only a small portion of available funds. Districts still have the opportunity to direct ARP ESSER funds to support afterschool and summer opportunities.²

Overview

St. Louis Park Public Schools is a suburban school district home to more than 4,000 students, approximately 47 percent of whom identify as students of color.³

In creating its plan for ARP funds, the district began by listening to the parents and young people in their community. Through surveys and gatherings hosted by the district, parents and students voiced a need for out-of-school time opportunities, especially during COVID when not as many opportunities were available. In particular, the Somali community expressed sentiments of not being seen or heard. Parents and students wanted offerings that supported student well-being and created space to engage in shared activities of interest. It became clear that out-of-school time needed to be prioritized, especially for students of color, and afterschool and summer programming became a priority area of the district’s strategic plan.

Existing afterschool and summer programs were hosted on school grounds and were typically fee-based. The Youth Enrichment Program (YEP) offered activities such as theatre, art, gaming, cooking, or STEM learning. Students in grades 4-12 had the opportunity to take part in the Youth Development Committee, where they worked on cultivating leadership skills through service learning and volunteerism.

However, the district identified that cost and transportation were preventing youth of color, in particular the district's Somali population, from participating in afterschool and summer offerings.

With ARP ESSER funds, St. Louis Park Public Schools was able to address these barriers and respond to the community's input. The district used funding to expand free afterschool and summer activities, offer transportation to programs, partner with community-based programs, incorporate culturally relevant opportunities representative of youth and families, and provide professional development for summer staff around mental health and social-emotional needs.

A typical day for students

Historically, St. Louis Park Public Schools hosted its afterschool programs on school grounds. With ARP ESSER funds, the district was able to work with multiple partner locations to bring programming to locations more convenient for those challenged by transportation, and provide a free shuttle to transport students. Afterschool opportunities were offered Monday through Friday, for two to three hours per day. Thanks to partnerships with groups such as the Parks and Recreation Department, Prose of the Rope, Mini-me Sports, and Young Rembrandts, students had the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities, from archery to the arts, and from double-dutch to swimming.



TIP: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

To build stronger relationships with underserved students and families, go where they are, ask for input, and prioritize investments that strengthen those relationships.

Utilize outreach liaisons, listening sessions, or other vehicles for input. St. Louis Park Public Schools held "world cafes" to listen directly to students, families, teachers, and community partners. They hired a native Somali speaker as an Outreach Liaison, and held pop-up events with community partners to showcase programs and opportunities.



TIP: REFLECT THE COMMUNITY

To honor identities and cultural backgrounds in your community, identify specific partners and opportunities that reflect the students and families you serve.

By reaching out to racially and culturally specific nonprofits and prioritizing mutually beneficial partnerships, St. Louis Park Public Schools was able to partner with smaller, lesser-known, and Black-led community organizations. As a result, they were able to provide racially diverse programming while creating opportunities for students and families to learn more and connect with identity-specific organizations in the community.

owned community-based organizations. The district leadership's full support was instrumental in inviting community partners to the table, recognizing that it was not the role of the school district alone to support the community.

Stronger family engagement. The district used ARP ESSER funds to hire a native Somali speaker with ties to the Somali community in St. Louis Park who served as an outreach liaison, promoted awareness around their program offerings, and invited families to share their visions for summer programming. As a result, at least 10 percent of their summer participants were Somali.

Outcomes

ARP ESSER funds enabled St. Louis Park Public Schools to better support students and meet their needs, in particular students of color and those in the Somali community.

Expanded support for students. By shifting the program structure, developing stronger partnerships with community organizations, and providing tailored support to their students of color, the afterschool program was able to serve more than 1,000 students, 50 percent of whom identified as students of color.

New partnerships that enhanced programming and reflected community. In addition to partnering with established partners such as their local Parks and Recreation Department, the district identified new partners and conducted asset mapping to understand what they could provide. The district targeted culturally diverse local nonprofits with skill sets and offerings that were different from what was already provided, leading to partnerships with smaller Black-

Looking to the future

Without new funding to sustain its afterschool and summer programs created with ARP ESSER funds, St. Louis Park Public Schools will need to revert to fee schedules and a pared-back version of afterschool and summer activities. However, if additional funds were available, the district would continue to offer its newer model of afterschool and summer programming, put funds toward transportation to ease barriers to participation, and invest in community partners that are multi-racial and multi-lingual, helping make programming more accessible to an even greater percentage of the districts' children of color.



With the help of ARP ESSER funds, we were able to bring ideas and opportunities to light and create space for unexpected opportunities to come together. As we identified partnerships, we were intentional in diversifying our partnerships and creating space for future opportunities.”

-St. Louis Park Public Schools leader



TIP: ENSURE EQUITY

To ensure equity is front and center in your district and with partners, listen to young people and their needs.

Conduct a needs assessment to identify which students are not engaging in offerings and the barriers they face, and create an asset map to pinpoint key stakeholders who can help you address their needs. Communicate with stakeholders about your goals for prioritizing underserved student groups and what barriers exist.

As much as you can, be creative and innovative in leveraging partnerships. Once St. Louis Park district leaders identified the barriers students of color, particularly Somali students, faced in accessing afterschool and summer offerings, they were able to prioritize and address those needs by centering student needs in all their work and goals with partners. For example, district leaders asked how they could help diversify the groups of students engaging with their local Parks and Recreation Department. The district utilized ARP funds to address barriers to access, including limited equipment and staffing. The Parks and Recreation Department also increased communications about their offerings to underserved communities, letting them know what opportunities exist.

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 U.S. Department of Education. (2021). U.S Department of Education Factsheet American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER). Retrieved From: https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL_ARP-ESSER-FACT-SHEET.pdf

² 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>

³ Minnesota Department of Education. (2023). Minnesota Report Card St. Louis Park Public School 2023 Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved from: https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId-10283000000_groupType-district_p-3