

How can high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs be developed through school and community partnerships?

Afterschool and summer programs are in high demand. For every child in an afterschool program, [four Oklahoma children are waiting for an available program](#). A [growing body of research](#) shows the positive impact out-of-school time programs have on the academic and social and emotional learning of students. Evidence-based programs are highly effective in [closing the achievement gap](#).

The information in this document was developed to help schools and community partners develop sustainable afterschool and evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs to provide students what they need to thrive and grow.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Comprehensive, high-quality out-of-school time programs must be planned and [evidence-based](#) to meet the unique needs of students and families. Simply providing “extra time” for learning is not sufficient. National research defines high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs through [nine key principles](#): School-Community Partnerships; Active & Engaged Learning; Family Engagement; Intentional Programming; Diverse, Prepared Staff; Participation & Access; Safety; Health & Well-Being; and Ongoing Assessment & Improvement.

Every program must meet the unique local needs of students, families and the community. Successful programs are intentionally designed and include [strong partnerships](#) between

community organizations and schools. Partnerships that focus on program quality and shared professional learning and that value family input and [student voice](#) experience greater success and participation. Families are equal partners in their children’s learning. A key principle of effective out-of-school programs is family engagement and providing opportunities for families to support learning at home.

A diverse, prepared staff should engage in ongoing professional learning and technical assistance. Programs must promote active, engaged learning that is safe and supportive with embedded [social and emotional learning](#). Gathering relevant data is essential to measure program effectiveness and guide future programming decisions.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Strong school-community partnerships can provide continuous, year-round programs that address opportunity gaps of local students and families.
- ESSER funds have created opportunities to establish high-quality afterschool and evidence-based summer learning and enrichment programs.
- Partners should start small and build toward a comprehensive program with a goal of sustaining beyond the federal emergency relief funding period.
- Establishing comprehensive out-of-school programs starts with building effective school-community partnerships.
- Out-of-school programs must be designed to meet the unique local needs of students and families.

SEE ALSO

- [High-Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs Initiative](#)
- [How can community organizations develop strategic partnerships with schools?](#)
- [OSDE Family Engagement Framework](#)

The federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) requires school districts to [reserve a minimum of 20% of ESSER III](#) funds to address the academic impact of COVID-related lost instructional time through the implementation of evidence-based interventions. This funding provides schools and communities partnership opportunities to build comprehensive programs.

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

[Research](#) indicates that underserved students have less access to enrichment experiences. Diverse partnerships with school leaders and stakeholders help close opportunity and achievement gaps for students. Planning teams should reflect the community, families and students served by the program.

When inviting students to participate in high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs, it is important to prioritize underserved groups including students of color, students in poverty, students learning English and students with disabilities. Identifying potential barriers to program participation for disadvantaged groups (i.e., transportation, child nutrition, scheduling, etc.) will support equitable access.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Create a [year-round planning team](#) that reflects the school and community. Ensure members have diverse roles and bring different perspectives (e.g., students, family members, teachers, counselors, federal program directors, family engagement specialists, principals, etc.). Include community partners and voices outside education as advisory team members (e.g., city and tribal leaders and community and faith-based organizations).
- Use relevant and current data to conduct a [needs assessment](#).
- [Map community assets](#) to create programs that meet students' and families' needs and address identified gaps or weaknesses in services.
- Create [successful partnerships based on mutual trust and respect](#), taking time to collaborate and evaluate partnership opportunities, create shared goals and priorities, and strategize for long-term partnership and success. Establish a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to explain how organizations will work together to achieve a common goal.
- Develop a program plan that addresses identified gaps or weaknesses discovered through the needs assessment. There are numerous free, web-based resources such as [You for Youth](#), [Mizzen](#), and [Click2Science](#).
- Engage in a [continuous quality improvement process](#) to measure program quality and identify strengths and growth opportunities across planning, implementation and operations.