



NEW YORK STATE
NETWORK FOR
YOUTH SUCCESS



AFTERSCHOOL RECOVERY PLAN:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN IN NEW YORK

JUNE 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has created extraordinary circumstances for many children and families across the nation. In addition to this health crisis, many families also face the threat of mass unemployment and an exacerbation of racial and economic disparities, highlighting the significant inequities that communities of color and low-income communities experience. The losses and accompanying grief are shattering, the stability and economic security of millions of families has been undermined, and many of our children — our most precious resource — have been shaken or traumatized. Our country and state will emerge from COVID-19 in a different place. As we emerge from this crisis, our priority must be to rebuild the resilience and hope of our children for the future. Afterschool and summer programs will help achieve this.

RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

BUILDING ON CURRENT COMMITMENTS AND FLEXIBILITIES TO ALLOW AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS TO CONTINUE SERVING STUDENTS

1. Provide official contractual flexibility for Empire State After-School Program (ESAP) grantees so that programs can continue to pay their high-quality, dedicated, and trained staff and provide the vital services students and families need.
2. Extend contractual flexibility for all afterschool program funds into next school year to support an adequate, efficient, and coordinated response to recovery plans.
3. Utilize afterschool and summer programs to implement a statewide “recovery summer” as New York works towards reopening.
4. Protect current investments in afterschool and summer programs amid budget uncertainty.
5. Utilize federal flexibility provided in congregate feeding requirements to support provision of meals to children and their families.
6. Provide support for afterschool programs to effectively adapt resources to continue providing culturally and linguistically responsive services including virtual learning, enrichment, wellness check-ins, and trauma support to students and families remotely.

PROVIDING SAFETY AND PROTECTION FOR AFTERSCHOOL PROVIDERS AND THE STUDENTS THEY SERVE

7. Increase provider’s access to personal protective equipment and critical safety equipment.
8. Provide consistent and ongoing communications and timely guidance to keep providers and the children they care for safe.
9. Adequately fund, prepare, and equip providers to implement health and safety protocols.
10. Provide incentive pay and health insurance for afterschool providers at risk of COVID-19 exposure.

SUPPORTING EFFORTS TOWARDS A ROBUST, EQUITABLE, AND INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

11. Incorporate afterschool providers and community-based organizations (CBOs) as strategic partners in the State’s efforts towards reopening.
12. Commit to long-term partnerships developed during this time to achieve a fully-invested, high-quality, responsive continuum of care and development for children and youth in New York State.
13. Provide an equitable system to help providers access relevant, high-quality professional development opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

A [recent RaisingNY poll](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on parents with young children revealed that the virus has been incredibly disruptive and put the wellbeing of these families at risk. Most parents reported high levels of stress, identified a food crisis with 1 in 3 parents skipping or reducing meals, and cited that their current childcare situation was only somewhat workable or not workable. More than 9 in 10 parents supported greater public investments in quality affordable childcare. The current childcare challenges identified in this survey impact countless parents with school-aged children who need support for their families to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

As trusted partners, afterschool and summer programs have long provided a safe space and environment for children to be cared for and high-quality supplemental education to mitigate learning loss, while helping parents balance work and family. The importance of afterschool and summer programs is especially pronounced in low-income communities where, historically, [participation in and demand for afterschool programs](#) have been much higher than in higher income communities. Demand is also higher among African-American and Hispanic children. The afterschool field is an essential part of our communities' response to COVID-19.

Governor Cuomo has made it clear that New York cannot fully reopen without addressing childcare needs. Before the pandemic, parents reported losing 8 days of work per year and businesses up to \$300 per year due to parental concerns about care. Now, parents must also care for their children during the work day, compounding this employment and economic problem. The State will need to reimagine students' days and leverage the role high-quality afterschool programs play and the significant impact they have on New York's children and youth. The following recommendations will enable New York to maximize its investment in our children, working families and the economy: 1) build on current commitments and flexibilities to allow afterschool and summer programs

to continue serving students, 2) provide safety and protection for afterschool providers, and 3) support efforts towards a robust, equitable, and integrated system of care for children and youth.

BUILDING ON CURRENT COMMITMENTS AND FLEXIBILITIES TO ALLOW AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS TO CONTINUE SERVING STUDENTS

Afterschool programs are mobilizing during the COVID-19 pandemic to best serve their participants, families, and staff. These programs have currently adapted to support students and families by continuing to provide culturally and linguistically responsive virtual programming, enrichment opportunities, and full-day learning; serving and delivering meals; performing wellness check-ins; and sharing diverse resources and connections to services families need to stay safe and whole at this time. As afterschool programs continue to be a critical element in the continuum of care for children, the State must ensure that these programs have contractual flexibility and full investment to continue providing services.

1. Provide official contractual flexibility for Empire State After-School Program (ESAP) grantees so that programs can continue to pay their high-quality, dedicated, and trained staff and provide the vital services students and families need. Currently, only the Empire State After-School Program, which is the largest state funding stream for afterschool, has not released guidance on use of funds to support participants during this unprecedented time. Lack of guidance means programs will have to lay off high-quality, dedicated, and trained staff, and creates unnecessary uncertainties and delays to rehiring and retraining them. This also means that many children and families will lose out on the crucial services they need to remain resilient against the impact of this pandemic.

2. Extend contractual flexibility for all afterschool program funds into next school year to support adequate, efficient, and coordinated response

to recovery plans. New York must safeguard commitments, investments, and protections provided to afterschool programs including ESAP, Advantage After School Program (AASP), Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention (ESD/SVP), and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs during this time to ensure that they are fully prepared to support plans for reopening the state. As there is still uncertainty about what reopening schools will look like and the threat of lower attendance depending on where the State is in its fight against the virus, New York must ensure that there is a statewide policy to provide program and staff pay based on previous enrollment rather than current attendance.

3. Utilize afterschool and summer programs to implement a statewide “recovery summer” as New York works towards reopening. Before the pandemic, afterschool and summer learning programs were helping students reach their full potential. Students in programs earned better grades, were more engaged in school, and were more likely to graduate. ([See supporting data.](#)) Afterschool providers already have an arsenal of contingency plans ready to provide virtual, in-person or a combination of programming styles appropriate for New York’s emerging recovery plan. All regional and state plans must integrate afterschool and summer programs as essential elements in all recovery and sustainability efforts that support children, youth, and families.

4. Protect current investments in afterschool and summer programs amid budget uncertainty. As the State revisits and makes adjustments to its fiscal budget, it must ensure that current investments in afterschool are maintained. Also, the State must provide flexibility for programs to continue to operate in the summer by making summer an allowable expense under AASP and allowing ESAP, ESD/SVP, and 21st CCLC grantees to repurpose funds towards summer programming, whether the initial contract included summer or not. New York’s economy cannot completely

reopen without safeguards to ensure that children and youth can fully re-engage in school and community.

5. Utilize federal flexibility provided in congregate feeding requirements to support provision of meals to children and their families. Many children rely on free or low-cost meals provided by schools and afterschool programs as their primary – or sole – source of nutrition. The pandemic has caused even more parents to lose jobs and income, leaving them struggling to pay for food. This makes these meals even more critical for preventing hunger and promoting children and families’ health.

6. Provide support for afterschool programs to effectively adapt resources to continue providing culturally and linguistically responsive services including virtual learning, enrichment, wellness check-ins, and trauma support to students and families remotely. As summer schools are occurring remotely and there is uncertainty around schools’ reopening in the fall, the State must direct and equip afterschool providers with the necessary technology and tools to continue operating during this pandemic and beyond. This support will ensure continued provision of vital services to meet students’ and families’ needs. It will also help provide necessary virtual alternatives to respond to guidelines and requirements encouraging social distancing and limiting personnel and support staff in school buildings and other facilities that cater to children.

PROVIDING SAFETY AND PROTECTION FOR AFTERSCHOOL PROVIDERS AND THE STUDENTS THEY SERVE

Parents and guardians who rely on afterschool programs cannot return to work without having the peace of mind that their children will be safe and taken care of. Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to help kids learn and grow, especially during this time – and that includes helping them manage stressful,

traumatic experiences. Afterschool providers – who are educators, mental health counselors, social workers – are a part of the very fabric of our communities and what makes them strong. These essential frontline workers must remain protected and safe so that they can continue to serve our children. Additional funding will be needed to help programs operate safely and cover the costs of lower staff ratios, longer hours, and enhanced cleaning protocols and equipment. This investment must:

7. Increase provider's access to personal protective equipment and critical safety equipment. PPE supplies must be adequate in number and quality, and all staff should be fully trained to use PPE.

8. Provide consistent and ongoing communications and timely guidance to keep providers and the children they care for safe.

As this is an evolving crisis, guidance to safely operate programs must not only be timely but effectively communicated and revised frequently based on new assessments and observations about the impact of COVID-19.

9. Adequately fund, prepare, and equip providers to implement health and safety protocols. All staff should also be fully trained to implement new health and safety guidelines, as well as respond to COVID-19 and non-COVID 19 health emergencies. Providers should also be able to access and afford cleaning supplies necessary to keep their program sanitized and social distancing equipment necessary to keep their staff and participants safe. Additionally, costs for extra equipment, such as sports equipment, art supplies, and other materials to allocate to each individual child should be covered. Finally, increased costs associated with required trainings, such as expenses associated with CPR and First Aid courses now requiring one mannequin per trainee, must be covered. In order to adequately cover these costs, the State will need to supplement additional funding for afterschool and

summer programs as needed or increase the current per student rates associated with these funding streams.

10. Provide incentive pay and health insurance for afterschool providers at risk of COVID-19 exposure.

Many childcare providers, including afterschool programs, struggle with low reimbursement rates and per-student rates that often result in staff being underpaid. Staff currently working to provide emergency childcare and enrichment opportunities for children of essential workers risk exposing themselves and their families to COVID-19. The State must provide these workers with incentive pay and access to comprehensive health care, including mental health coverage.

We echo Raising NY's recommendation to invest CARES Act and other untapped childcare funds in a Re-Opening NY Child Care Investment Fund to provide direct financial support – including basic operating expenses, materials and equipment to enhance child development, funding for staff training, adequate supplies to keep children healthy and safe, and financial relief to families – for childcare providers, including afterschool providers.

SUPPORTING EFFORTS TOWARDS A ROBUST, EQUITABLE, AND INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

COVID-19 has disrupted seamless provision of services and threatened fragmentation in these collaborative systems that serve children and youth. All reopening plans must consider how afterschool programs are leveraging their relationships with students and families to orient them to new ways of learning, serving as an important avenue for information and resource sharing, and maximizing their resources and partnerships to increase collective impact on educational and developmental outcomes for New York's children.

11. Incorporate afterschool providers and community-based organizations (CBOs) as strategic partners in the State's efforts towards reopening.

Reopening efforts must include youth-serving CBOs, parents, and students as thought partners on various state and regional councils tasked with developing reopening recommendations.

12. Commit to long-term partnerships developed during this time to achieve a fully-invested, high-quality, responsive continuum of care and development for children and youth in New York State.

This crisis presents the opportunity to further engage education, childcare, health, and child development partners who are critical to supporting a child throughout the day and at different stages of their lives. Current coordination among stakeholders involved in the development of the whole child must be established and continued in efforts to work towards a more comprehensive system beyond the pandemic.

13. Provide an equitable system to help providers access relevant, high-quality professional development opportunities.

Efforts should include ongoing access and flexibility for providers to receive OCFS training credit for virtual face-to-face professional development provided by an approved

New York State Training and Technical Assistance Professional Credential holder. As COVID-19 presents new and emerging needs for children and families, afterschool providers will need additional tools to ensure that they are prepared to respond to the shifting dynamics of their roles and responsibilities. It is more important than ever that providers are able to access relevant trainings, workshops, and other professional opportunities that will expand their practical knowledge and skills in serving children and families at this time. Credentialed trainers have honed their skills in providing virtual face-to-face professional development during this pandemic, and continued access to these opportunities will provide a more equitable system moving forward.

CONCLUSION

The afterschool field has long focused on the whole child and afterschool staff are trained professionals who stand ready to provide the necessary supports children and youth need to emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, and hopeful. Afterschool programs stand ready to help parents return to work — and keep participants safe and learning.

Now more than ever, New York must invest in afterschool and summer programs.

