

State Funding to Support Out-of-School Time Programming in Pennsylvania

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Introduction

Out-of-school time (OST) refers to programs that offer students activities after school and/or during the summer. OST programs “can be multipurpose (e.g., after-school clubs, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club), academically oriented, or related to specialty interests (e.g., sports clubs, theater programs).”ⁱ

Prior to the pandemic, a survey of Pennsylvania parents found that for every child that was enrolled in an afterschool program, four more would participate if more programs were available.ⁱⁱ The pandemic has only emphasized the need for OST programs as students across Pennsylvania and the country cope with learning loss and increased social and emotional needs in the wake of the crisis.

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Despite the need for more programming, the only ongoing dedicated public source of funding for OST that is available statewide in Pennsylvania is the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program. Specifically, 21st CCLC provides federal funding for the “establishment of community learning centers that offer academic and enrichment opportunities to children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools.”ⁱⁱⁱ According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) that administers the grant program, only one in three requests for 21st CCLC funding are awarded in the state.

In the wake of COVID-19, federal funding has also provided additional resources to support summer and afterschool programming. Most recently, the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) Fund passed in 2021 earmarked 1% of the total ARP ESSER allocation for evidence-based summer enrichment programs and 1% of the total ARP ESSER allocation for evidence-based comprehensive afterschool programs.^{iv} While this has offered considerable support to the OST sector, the funds expire in the fall of 2024,^v prompting concerns about a looming fiscal cliff.^{vi}

This brief examines Pennsylvania’s growing need for dedicated state funding to supplement the federal 21st CCLC grants, summarizes research evidence of the value of OST programming,

identifies existing quality standards available to guide investments to high quality OST programs, and reviews how other states provide supplemental funding to OST that could serve as models to Pennsylvania.

The Growing Need for State Funding to Support OST Programs in Pennsylvania

Unlike privately funded youth programs that primarily serve more affluent families, OST programs tend to serve lower income youth and rely on public funding to support operations. However, OST funding is currently far from sufficient to close the “growing class gulf in spending on children’s enrichment and extracurricular activities” which is only expanding the inequities in the lives of children across the country and in Pennsylvania.^{vii}

Federal funding provided by 21st CCLC is a critical piece of OST programming sustainability, but it is not enough. Over a decade ago, a cost analysis commissioned by the Wallace Foundation estimated that the average annual cost per student for a quality OST program averaged over \$4,300 at the elementary and middle school level and over \$4,500 for programs serving teenagers; those estimates can only have increased since the report was released in 2009.^{viii} In contrast, the average revenue for OST programs funded solely by 21st CCLC is approximately \$1,500 per student, only a third of the overall cost estimate.^{ix} Moreover, in inflation-adjusted terms, 21st CCLC funding is now \$10 million lower than it was in 2014, leaving the increasing burden of funding such programs to be shouldered by states, communities, and families.^x

Further, existing issues around low OST staff wages have only gotten worse since the pandemic. The OST sector across the nation is currently experiencing a staffing crisis “fueled by the burnout and tough working conditions plaguing the staff who supported our youth and families” during the height of pandemic.^{xi}

During Pennsylvania’s 2021-22 state legislative session (House Bill 2429) and again in April 2023 (House Bill 795), the **Building Opportunity through Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Grant Program** was introduced and referred to the House Education Committee. House Bill 795 as currently written would establish a grant program to expand OST programming opportunities for school-age youth across the Commonwealth, with \$70 million appropriated to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency from the General Fund to distribute for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. A committee composed of a cross section of stakeholders would prioritize grant applicants for funding that focus on serving at-risk school-age youth, students experiencing homelessness, foster care youth and students with a disability; reducing barriers to access; serving historically underrepresented and underserved school-age youth; developing community partnerships; including youth and community voice in planning OST programming; and integrating trauma-informed approaches into programming and professional development.

State Funding for OST Programs is a Worthwhile Investment

In 2021, a Pennsylvania Joint State Government Commission report on the Return on Investment of Afterschool Programs found that for every dollar the state invests, the state can expect a value of \$6.69 in benefits from OST programming.^{xii} This is due, in part, because research shows that high-quality afterschool programs can improve students' educational outcomes, school attendance, and social and emotional learning.^{xiii} RAND reviewed meta-analyses and large-scale, rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of after school and summer programs, focusing on recent (from 2000) evaluations of multipurpose programs and academic OST programs, and found that OST programs can help to improve outcomes:

- **Academic Skills:** The review found that OST programs that provide academic instruction “including intentional academic instruction and enrichment activities can improve student achievement.” Voluntary summer learning programs for low-income elementary students were found to be effective at improving reading and math skills as well.
- **Social and Emotional Skills:** A meta-analysis of after school programs that included at least some element of programming directed at developing social and emotional skills or that provided staff professional development around social and emotional skills found positive effects on social behaviors and self-perceptions, and a significant effect on the reduction of problem behaviors.^{xiv}

In the wake of COVID-19, research also indicates that “well-designed and well-delivered summer and afterschool opportunities and partnerships [can] *help students to re-engage, recover and accelerate learning and development after the severe disruptions caused by the pandemic.*”^{xv}

High-quality afterschool programs can improve students' educational outcomes, school attendance, and social and emotional learning.

Further, a 2021 evaluation of Pennsylvania's 21st CCLC programs by the Pennsylvania Department of Education showed improvement in student reading grades (31%) and math grades (33%) from fall to spring. According to teacher surveys, regular participants improved homework completion (76%), class participation (75%), class behavior (64%), and volunteering in class (61%). Additionally, nearly half of regular attendees (49%) improved their school-day attendance.^{xvi}

Finally, without OST care, *parents who do not have flexible work schedules may be left with few or no options* for childcare after school hours and during the summer. For this reason, RAND found that OST programs can also help to support family employment.

High Quality OST Standards have been Established in the Field

To ensure that state funding goes to OST programs that will produce the kinds of outcomes described above, it is critical to understand what high quality programming looks like and how to measure it. Throughout the OST field, youth development professionals consistently aim to meet a set of quality standards. Examples of these quality standards and tools for assessing their implementation are listed below. The following two standards – which overlap significantly but have different emphasis – have both been used to evaluate programs in Pennsylvania:

- The **Weikart Center’s Program Quality Assessment (PQA)** calls on programs to create a safe and supportive environment that is as interactive and engaging as possible.
<https://forumfyi.org/weikartcenter/>
- The **National Institute on Out-of-School Time’s (NIOST) ASQ: A Guide to After-School Quality** can also be used as a guide to improve the quality of OST programming.
<https://www.niost.org/ASQ/asq>

OST programs as well as state policymakers and program evaluators can use either of these established sets of standards and practices to ensure high quality services for children, youth, and their families. The **Pennsylvania Evidence Resource Center** also highlights more than 100 evidence-based strategies for the OST sector.^{xvii}

States Across the Country, including Most of Pennsylvania’s Neighbors, Provide Funding for OST

As of 2019, nearly half the states had allocated funds dedicated to afterschool programs and/or funded initiatives that include afterschool programs as an allowable use. Pennsylvania does neither. As outlined in Table 1 below, of the six states that border Pennsylvania, four (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York) have allocated funds dedicated to afterschool programs while Ohio funding includes grants for afterschool programs as an allowable use.

Table 1: Examples of State Funding for OST in Neighboring States

State	State Funding for OST Programs	Funding Level	Dedicated or Allowable
Delaware	Delaware Wraparound Services Initiative Grant	\$4.5 Million (2022)	Dedicated
	Opportunity Grant	\$60 Million/Year as of 2025	Allowable
Maryland	Learning in Extended Academic Programs (LEAP) Grant	\$4.5 Million (2022)	Dedicated
	Public School Opportunities Enhancement Program (PSOEP) Grant	\$2.5 Million (2022)	Dedicated
New Jersey	New Jersey Afterschool Summer Grant Program	\$1 Million (2022)	Dedicated
New York	Empire After School Programs	\$55 million (2020)	Dedicated
Ohio	Ohio Student Wellness and Success Fund	\$675 million (2020)	Allowable
Pennsylvania (Proposed)	Building Opportunity through Out-of-School Time (BOOST)	\$70 million (Proposed)	Dedicated

The state OST funding examples outlined in Table 1 are described in more detail below:

Delaware provides multiple state-funded grant programs that support OST programming:

- The **Delaware Wraparound Services Initiative Grant** is a competitive grant providing \$4.5 million to districts and charter schools serving “extraordinary percentages of children living in poverty”. Funding can be used for programs offered before school, after school, and during summer months.^{xviii}
- Delaware also annually allocates funds for the “**Opportunity Grant**” program to public schools based on the number of low-income and English as a Second Language students in each school district, which can be used for OST programs among other initiatives to address mental health and reading.^{xix}

Maryland similarly has multiple state-funded grant opportunities in support of OST:

- The **Learning in Extended Academic Programs (LEAP) grant program** provides support to school districts and eligible schools in building or expanding potential partnerships with other eligible schools and/or nonprofit organizations to offer extended day and weekend educational programs for children in kindergarten through eighth grade.^{xx}
- The **Public School Opportunities Enhancement Program (PSOEP) grant program** assists local school districts, public community schools, and nonprofit organizations to establish partnerships designed to expand or create extended day and summer enhancement programs. PSOEP also supports existing educational programming for children ages four to 19 that take place before or after the school day, on weekends and holidays; and during vacations and summer breaks.^{xxi}

The **New Jersey Afterschool/Summer Program** is a state funded grant program open to national or statewide youth serving organizations to expand existing afterschool/summer programs or to create new programs that offer high quality, engaging OST activities to youth throughout New Jersey. In 2022, \$1 million in state funding was allocated to provide OST programs for students at risk of academic failure. Funded programs were expected to increase students' career and college readiness and improve student behavior through targeted activities in at least one of following areas: academic support; intervention and/or enrichment in any subject area; career exploration; or community service.^{xxii}

In fiscal year 2020, **New York** allocated \$55 million for the **Empire After School Programs (EASP)**; this provided continuation funding for existing grantees and new funding for an additional cohort of grantees.^{xxiii} EASPs provide youth development opportunities directly after school to school-age children and youth and are supported by school, community, public and private partnerships offering educational and recreational activities.^{xxiv}

Ohio's HB 166 funded the Ohio Student Wellness and Success Fund during FY20 and 21, which included a broad array of services for youth and families. Districts used funds for a number of activities, including **services to students before or after the school day** and when school is not in session. Funds are distributed on a per-pupil basis based on poverty levels, with a \$675 million expenditure in school year 2020-2021.^{xxv} Ohio House Bill 110 now continues to support these services with Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid and the Base Cost Student Wellness and Success Component through student wellness funding.^{xxvi}

Of Pennsylvania's neighbors, only **West Virginia** mirrors Pennsylvania in the lack of any state OST funding. In contrast, **California** Assembly Bill 86 allocated \$4.6 billion for Expanded Learning Opportunities Grants; these grants do not require an application but require districts to implement a learning recovery program that provides supplemental instruction, support for social and emotional well-being, and meals to specific student groups. Other states, such as **Tennessee** and **Nebraska**, have allocated a portion of their state lottery profits to fund OST programs.

Considerations for a Pennsylvania State OST Funding Program

In developing a state OST funding program and the eligibility and selection criteria for grant recipients, Pennsylvania policymakers could consider the following lessons from the field and neighboring states:

- **Ensure sustainable state funding for OST programs in the long term.** Many states have developed grant programs to support OST, but too often they are one-time opportunities that fail to provide stability. In contrast, the grants available in Maryland were created through legislation and continuously funded for several years. Because successful "OST programs depend on stable streams of funding and require involvement and investment from numerous sources,"^{xxvii} long-term dependable state funding is key.
- **Consider both school districts and community-based organizations for funding so that all potential OST providers are eligible to offer services.** Recent funding guidelines

through the American Rescue Plan’s ESSER Fund encouraged partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations in providing OST programs to leverage the experience of dedicated OST providers. State funding of OST in Pennsylvania can similarly support such community and school partnerships.

- **Leverage state funding to expand OST programs in communities that lack adequate OST and that serve children in low-income households.** Unmet demand for afterschool programs has grown 60 percent nationally since 2004^{xxviii}, and we know that for every Pennsylvania child in an afterschool program, four more would participate if a program were available.^{xxix} As discussed, there is also a growing gap between higher and lower income families in spending on “children’s enrichment and extracurricular activities.” A state funding program in Pennsylvania can help to address these inequities by targeting funding to providers in areas of the state where there is the greatest need and the fewest opportunities for afterschool programming.
- **Ensure that programs selected for funding provide evidence of high-quality services.** While research provides evidence of the value of OST services, it also emphasizes that OST programs need to be high quality to lead to improved student outcomes. For this reason, grant recipients in Pennsylvania should be required to provide evidence of high-quality programming based on recognized standards.
- **Include an evaluation component as part of the funding requirements.** Grantmakers involved in the OST sector argue that “research and evaluation are key points of influence.”^{xxx} Indeed, OST providers need to have evidence that their programs are of high quality and lead to improved student outcomes to continue to be funded in the long term. For this reason, it is important to include an evaluation component with the state funding.

Establishing state funding for OST programs has never been more critical. Existing 21st CCLC funding is increasingly insufficient to ensure high quality programming and attract quality staff, and federal COVID-19 funding is approaching a cliff in 2024. Many states, including most of Pennsylvania’s neighbors, recognize the need for state funding support of OST. Pennsylvania’s children and families stand to benefit if state policymakers would implement similar investments in the future of OST.

About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit education research organization. We seek to use research to improve equity, opportunity, and outcomes for students and families. Our work is designed to strengthen early education, public schools, and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public; and enrich civic and community dialogue. This brief is a project of RFA's Pennsylvania Clearinghouse for Education Research (PACER) project, which seeks to inform state education policy discussions through rigorous objective research. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

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