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Afterschool All

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Introduction

Key takeaways

The analysis of school districts' ARP ESSER plans found seven trends that emerge from a review of 6,315 school district spending plans, approximately one-third of all school districts nationwide.



Expanding and enhancing a erschool and summer learning opportunities

In a rural community in the West, ARP ESSER funds have allowed the district to provide a erschool programming for significantly more students. For example, during the 2022-2023 school year, more than 8 in 10 of the district's elementary schoolers (81 percent) participated in a erschool programming, up from 76 percent in 2019-2020. And the number of high school students served more than doubled, from an average of 13 students per day to more than 30. Additionally, ARP ESSER funds support the district's out-of-school time director and help the district continue its mobile learning center, which was started during the pandemic to provide tutoring support, educational activities, snacks, and access to the internet for families in the surrounding community. District staff shared that a number of teachers in the school district credit the a erschool program for students' continued academic growth during the pandemic, providing the additional targeted support they needed.

On the other side of the country, in an urban district in the South, ARP ESSER funds enabled the district to serve two times as many students during the summer months, reaching nearly 30 percent of the district's student population. While the district's summer model did not change—providing a mix of academics and enrichment—the additional funding allowed the district to significantly increase the scale of the summer enrichment provided. With the ARP ESSER funds, they were able to hire more than 500 staff, including a new out-of-school time learning coordinator, work with a greater number of community partners, expand the types of programming available, and make the full-day program free for students to participate. A district leader shared the success of the initiative from the perspective of students, families, and school staff, describing how students were frequently reluctant to leave the summer program due to the fun and enjoyment they had participating. Parents were pleased to see the level of their child's engagement and were appreciative of a safe, supportive, and educational place for their child during the summer months. And school staff recognized the program's positive impact on mitigating students' learning loss over the summer. Data collected from the 2022 summer program indicates that participation in the program prevented learning loss. Students regularly attending the program had a 73 percent chance of showing no learning loss from the spring of 2022 to the start of the next school year, while students who attended 10 days or less only showed a 13 percent chance of no learning loss.

For a Northeast district, ARP ESSER funds made it possible to operate a erschool programs at all ve schools—three of which never hosted a program. The district was also able, for the rst time ever, to offer summer programming across the schools, which included a blend of academic and experiential learning opportunities taught by veteran school day teachers. It also included meals and eld trips to activities throughout the community, free of charge. Art, STEM projects,

gardening, nature walks, build-it challenges, eld trips to local science centers and museums, and educational outings to the coast were a handful of the activities offered. However, like many of the districts interviewed, without the continuation of ARP ESSER funds, there is tremendous uncertainty about the future of its a erschool and summer programming. This district feels this weight even more acutely, as prior to ARP ESSER funds, the district had no history of supporting a erschool and summer programming in their general budget. During the current 2023-2024 school year, the limited remaining ARP ESSER funds only allow the district to offer free a erschool programming at two schools and to take a hybrid approach in its other three schools, employing a mix of parent fees and ARP ESSER funds to run programming. When planning for the 2023 summer, the district originally strategized to stretch ARP ESSER funds into the 2024 summer and offer summer programming at a small cost to parents during both summers. However, based on feedback from families and concerns that a fee would prevent students from participating, the district decided to offer the program at no cost, resulting in not enough ARP ESSER funds remaining to support a program in summer 2024. The district staff said of the programming, "We've seen such positive bene ts. We want to know how we keep this going. ... but there's this horrible reality that without the same level of funding, we cannot provide the same level of support."



- ⑤ Only 1 in 5 school districts invested in a afterschool programming with academic and enrichment components, totaling approximately \$544 million.

Again looking at district plans that described a afterschool activities, 19 percent specified that ARP ESSER funds would be used to implement a afterschool supports or activities that extended beyond tutoring or academic remediation or recovery efforts. While the percentage is low, the total dollar investment is proportionately larger. Roughly, \$544 million, or 33 percent of funds dedicated to a afterschool specifically, supports programming that includes both an academic and enrichment component. See Figure 4. This discrepancy between the number of districts versus the amount of funding is due in large part to the significant amount of funds a handful of larger school districts dedicated to comprehensive a afterschool programming. For example, the 13 school districts that are identified as dedicating the greatest amount of funding toward comprehensive a afterschool programming have an average student population of 95,000 and account for more than half of funds in this category.



What I saw before was middle school kids running out of the door at the end of the day when [the programming] was tutoring only. When we were able to have a variety of activities, and afterschool became more than reviewing reading and math standards, they had fun, and we had kids wanting to stay for the tutoring portion.”

—SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF, SOUTH

AFTERSCHOOL INSIGHT

Serving as a catalyst to build and strengthen partnerships

Although only 7 percent of district plans that dedicated ARP ESSER funds to a afterschool or summer programs mentioned partnerships with outside organizations, intentional partnerships between school districts and community groups are an effective strategy to provide a afterschool and summer programming by leveraging existing resources. Despite the infrequency of partnerships included as a method of providing out-of-school time programming, there are strong examples of school districts working hand-in-hand with their community that demonstrate the invaluable nature of partnerships. For instance, district leadership in an urban Midwest school district took the opportunity presented through ARP ESSER funds to heavily invest in a afterschool programming using an expansive partnership model, which in turn enabled them to increase a afterschool programming in the district exponentially, from programs in six schools to sites across 96 schools, serving approximately 5,700 students.

The partnership between the district and the community first began to take shape during the peak of the pandemic, when schools were required to be closed. It was then that the district reached out to community groups about the possibility of offering learning pods for students, many of whom lived in families with essential workers. With the support of local philanthropy, learning pods hosted by nonprofits were established, providing academic help and keeping more than 1,000 students learning and connected to their peers in a safe and supervised space. Evaluations of students who were able to participate in the learning pods found that 67 percent of participants passed all of their classes compared to less than half (48 percent) of their peers who were not in a pod.

With the arrival of ARP ESSER funds, district leadership saw the chance to address an issue they had always faced: the lack of funds to support a afterschool programming across its schools. However, due to a minimal a afterschool program presence in its schools prior to the pandemic, the district was faced with the question of how to bring programming to scale. The district's answer was to look to the community, where a afterschool activities were already taking place and where positive relationships had already formed during the pandemic. A unique aspect of the district's strategy was to engage a subset

Figure 5. Percentage of school district plans that mention a erschool and summer programming, by community type *



Recommendations

The broad mandate for school districts to spend 20 percent of ARP ESSER funding on the implementation of evidence-based interventions, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs represents a potentially enormous investment in out-of-school time programs and expanded supports for students. Below are recommendations for school districts, afterschool and summer program providers, advocates, and policymakers to consider for the time remaining to obligate and spend ARP ESSER funds, as well as into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

1. Include comprehensive afterschool and summer programs as an ongoing strategy to accelerate students' learning and engagement in school.

Although most school districts included afterschool or summer programming in their ARP ESSER spending plans as a way to address students' learning recovery, only 6 percent invested in both afterschool and summer programming that extended beyond tutoring and remediation or recovery support. Additionally, an American Association of School Administrators (AASA) survey of superintendents found that 57 percent planned to decrease or end enrichment and summer-learning offerings currently being offered when the 2024-2025 school year begins and the deadline to obligate ARP funds arrives. Research has demonstrated that participation in quality comprehensive afterschool and summer programming improves school-day attendance and engagement, academic performance, classroom behavior, on-time grade promotion, and mental well-being. Investing in afterschool and summer programming can provide students the additional academic support they need, while also providing time to connect with their peers and caring adults, engage with content through hands-on projects in a low-stakes setting, and build on their interests and passions to create a deeper love of learning.

2. Leverage community partners to provide afterschool and summer-learning opportunities for students. As one district leader said, "We know that there are others that are more expert in certain areas, and rather than us trying to duplicate services or ramp up something ... we can partner with them to provide the services we need." Research has demonstrated that participation in quality comprehensive afterschool and summer programming improves school-day attendance and engagement, academic performance, classroom behavior, on-time grade promotion, and mental well-being. Investing in afterschool and summer programming can provide students the additional academic support they need, while also providing time to connect with their peers and caring adults, engage with content through hands-on projects in a low-stakes setting, and build on their interests and passions to create a deeper love of learning.

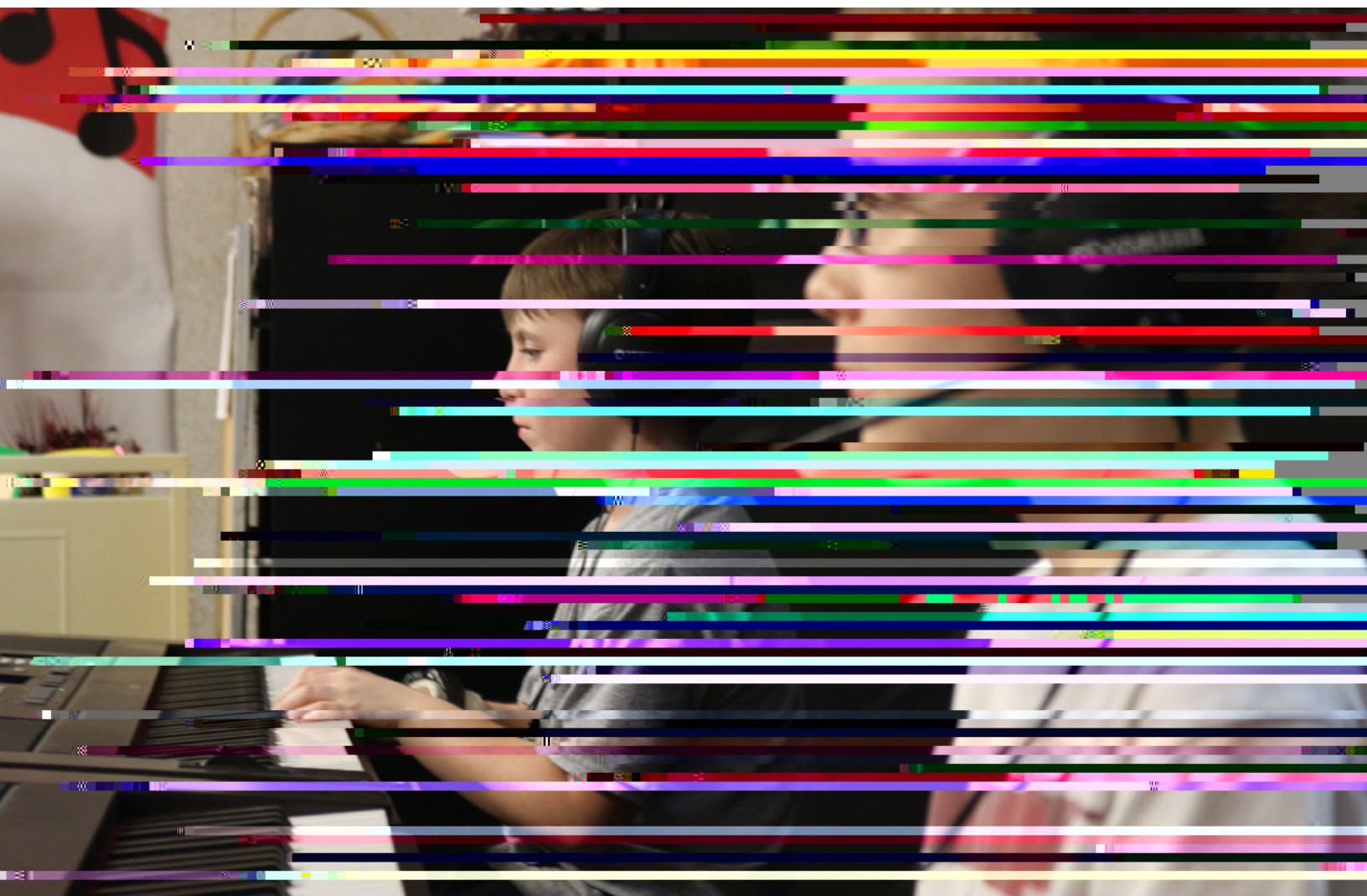
grants to name a few, enabled the district to enhance its programming in a way that was valuable to students, parents, and staff. Braiding funding streams can increase the capacity of the program, add to the types of activities and supports offered in the program, and help to improve the sustainability of the program.

5. Take advantage of available resources to provide quality afterschool and summer programs, such as tools available through the Engage Every Student Initiative. In July 2022, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona launched Engage Every Student (EES), an initiative to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs by providing the tools and resources schools and communities may need to start or grow their afterschool and summer offerings. On [the EES website](#), school districts and schools can access an afterschool and summer needs assessment, tip sheets on topics such as the research on out-of-school time learning and collaborating with municipal officials to support afterschool and summer learning, and office hours providing technical assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AFTERSCHOOL

support districts' learning goals, a checklist for creating a quality afterschool or summer learning program, and technical assistance available through the network.

4. Leverage tools available through the Engage Every Student Initiative to support program offerings



Getting creative to expand afterschool and summer opportunities

One of the notable approaches employed by districts has been thinking creatively about the ways in which ARP ESSER funds could help to enhance afterschool and summer learning offerings. For example, one Midwest district, while traditionally offering afterschool and summer programming, had not been able to reach as many of its students of color and immigrant and refugee students due to language barriers, transportation issues, and cost of programs. With its ARP ESSER funds, in addition to providing free afterschool and summer programming and eliminating the issue of cost for students and families, the district hired a native Somali speaker who was connected to the local Somali community to serve as an outreach liaison, sought out and partnered with small nonprofits that reflected the community and were culturally responsive to the needs of the community, and created a circulator system to transport students from the school to the various afterschool opportunities around the city. Partners included the city's parks and recreation department, national organizations like Young Rembrandts, and Black-owned companies like Pros of the Rope, which teaches

Conclusion

This review of school district ARP ESSER plans documents the significant impact of ARP ESSER funds in helping school districts expand access to a erschool and summer learning opportunities, and provides insight into the nature of those opportunities.

Most investments are toward tutoring and programming that has only an academic focus. This is a missed opportunity to invest in comprehensive a erschool and summer programs that provide both academic and enrichment supports and have lasting impacts in key areas such as student attendance and engagement in school, academic performance, and overall well-being.

At the same time, this brief highlights approaches to consider, as there are still a significant amount of ARP ESSER funds available to invest before the obligation deadline. And, more broadly, leaders at every level are faced with the question of how best to support students as pandemic relief funding ends. Comprehensive a erschool and summer programs are a valuable educational strategy; a resource to provide students additional academic help while also offering supports that are holistic in nature and supporting students' overall

well-being. Evaluations of ARP ESSER investments in a erschool and summer programs are also showing positive results. More than 8 in 10 voters say that a erschool and summer programs are an absolute necessity for their community, and at least 3 in 4 voters are in favor of schools, local governments, and federal leaders investing in a erschool and summer programs.

As the deadline for ARP ESSER funding approaches, many school districts have already cut back the a erschool and summer offerings created through the federal funding stream and many more will reduce or end programming completely when funds are no longer

available. In the words of one Northeast district staff member, "We're really stuck. What do we do next? It's sad to see such a robust program grow and grow, and then you run out of funding."

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Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was taken to learn how local education agencies are spending ARP ESSER funds. This included a review of 6,315 school district ARP ESSER spending plans in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as more than 40 interviews with school district leaders and afterschool and summer program providers to gain insight into the following questions:

1. How much in ARP ESSER funds is being spent on afterschool and summer learning opportunities?
2. What types of afterschool and summer learning activities and supports are school districts dedicating ARP ESSER funds to?
3. What factors contribute to school districts dedicating ARP ESSER funds to afterschool and summer programming?
4. What are promising strategies for implementing comprehensive afterschool and summer programs?

School District Plan Review

School district plans included in the analysis were those made available through a contract with Burbio, a data service that has scraped the web to find and compile school districts' ARP ESSER plans. In total, ARP ESSER plans from 6,315 school districts were reviewed and coded into a matrix tracking the type of afterschool and summer spending allocations. The dataset is a subset of all districts in the United States, representing 33 percent of all districts, with district representation by state dependent upon publicly available plans, ranging from 91 percent of a state's school districts to 4 percent, with an average of 43 percent. The breakdown of school districts by community type includes 16 percent of districts located in cities, 30 percent located in the suburbs, 23 percent located in towns, and 32 percent in rural communities.

Plan categorization

Due to the different strategies employed by school districts during the out-of-school time hours, a matrix was created to track the different types of afterschool and summer programming funded through ARP ESSER funds to support learning recovery. The afterschool matrix includes any mention of funds going toward strategies taking place

Endnotes

i A erschool Alliance. (2023). Then and Now: A Retrospective on the A erschool in the Time of COVID-19 Survey Series. Retrieved from: http://a_erschoolalliance.org/covid/A_erschool-in-the-Time-of-COVID-19-Spring-2023.cfm

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