STATE FUNDING SPOTLIGHT

New York Invests in Afterschool

$116 million for the Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program Supports grant in FY26-27

The Challenge

New York has a long history of out-of-school time (OST) investment, dating back to its introduction of the Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention program in 1996. However, budget austerity, caused by the Great Recession, suppressed OST funding for years. While New York incrementally reinvested in the Advantage After School program beginning in 2015 after years of legislative advocacy, OST funding remained below its pre-recession level. Unmet demand for programs continued to rise. Nearly 50% of New York children would have participated in an afterschool program if one were available to them, according to *America After 3PM*.

The Opportunity

The New York State Network for Youth Success invested in grassroots coalition building, launching the Power of 3:00 public awareness campaign and hiring two staff members to lead the grassroots organizing efforts across the state. The Power of 3:00 campaign focused on three benefits that afterschool programs can provide to the state—supporting working families, improving academic and social development of young people, and providing a safe environment during peak hours of juvenile crime. The network drew on messaging research conducted by national partners, as well as the concerns that legislators and state leaders had raised in previous sessions. The campaign took advantage of an existing structure of regional networks to train advocates to connect the benefits of afterschool to the priorities of lawmakers in the state. The network also secured media placements with influential local and statewide outlets.

Strategies

- Cultivate grassroots support through an ambassador program
- Work with legislative champions to draft and introduce legislation
- Leverage media placements, webinars, and roundtables to elevate public awareness through a statewide communications campaign

Timeline

- **2009:** The primary fund for OST in New York, Advantage After School, peaks at $28M.
- **2015:** After years of cuts, Advantage After School funding is increased for the first time since 2009, bringing the total to $19.25M.
- **2016:** The network launches the Power of 3:00 campaign to promote the impact of afterschool and unmet demand for programs.
- **2017:** Governor Cuomo's budget proposal introduces a new $35M funding stream (Empire State After School) to provide high-quality programming to high-need districts. The Power of 3:00 Ambassador program launches to cultivate grassroots advocates focused on funding sufficient to meet demand.
- **2020:** After years of incremental increases, Advantage After School is funded at $33M and Empire State After School (ESAP) is funded at $55M.
- **2021:** Legislative champions continue to advocate to raise the per student allocation awarded to ESAP grantees. This legislation (A7881/S6750) raises awareness of the barriers to quality programming imposed by current grant structures.
- **2023:** The state convenes a task force to solicit funding recommendations from the field. Funding for afterschool programs remains stable in the budget, but language is included to conduct a Universal Afterschool Feasibility study.
- **2024:** Advantage After School and ESAP are merged into one grant program, Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program Supports (LEAPS), and funded at $97.5M, a $9.5M increase over the previous year.
- **2025-2026:** After receiving $112.2M in FY25-26, LEAPS is funded at $116 million in the FY26-27 budget.

Hoping to create momentum from the 2015 increase to Advantage After School funding, the expanding coalition campaigned for investment that would match demand. Governor Cuomo proposed a new $35 million Empire State Afterschool Program (ESAP) in his 2017 State of the State address, which was approved in the final budget. Targeting under-resourced counties, the ESAP grants aimed to provide afterschool access to an additional 22,000 students. Between 2017 and 2020, the network continued to deliver advocacy training to afterschool providers across the state. The Power of 3:00 Ambassador program trained 44 grassroots ambassadors and network webinars minted new advocates.

After years of incremental increases, New York appropriated a total of $88 million through Advantage After School and ESAP in the FY19 state budget. Despite historic investment in OST, grant awards provided a limited amount of funds per student, presenting challenges to overall program quality. Leaning on champions in the state legislature to introduce bills that raised this amount, advocates ensured that the true cost of quality OST remained on the political agenda year after year.

To streamline program administration at the state level and ease the application process for the afterschool field, the state network convened a Public Funding Taskforce to solicit input on public funding RFPs, grant implementation, and data collection on grant activities. Between 2021 and 2024, many providers chose to return state funding rather than brave the administrative challenges caused by New York's divergent grant requirements and cycles. The task force produced recommendations on the components of afterschool grants that presented challenges to providers. The task force recommendations not only inspired policymakers to prepare for the consolidation of Advantage After School and ESAP, but also prompted a Universal Afterschool Feasibility study in the FY23-24 state budget.

The Result

The FY24-25 budget consolidated Advantage After School and ESAP into the Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program Supports (LEAPS) program, funded at an unprecedented $97.5 million. Since the consolidation of LEAPS, state-level OST funding continues to grow. After operating at $112.2 million in FY25-26, LEAPS was funded at $116 million in the FY26-27 budget. Advocates looking to expand afterschool access further still eagerly await the forthcoming Universal Afterschool Feasibility report.

What's Next

Advocates are now working to:

- Increase funding to meet the qualified, but unfunded applications to LEAPS
- Restore OST access to middle and high school students left out of LEAPS funding
- Ensure the efforts to establish universal child care include school-age children in the full continuum