

# This is Afterschool in Arkansas



Afterschool Alliance

Throughout the pandemic, afterschool and summer programs adapted and expanded services to meet the needs of children and families. They are vital partners today in supporting students' well-being and academic growth. Yet, too many kids in Arkansas are being left out. Prior to the pandemic, a survey of Arkansas parents found that for every child in an afterschool program, **3 more would participate if a program were available**. These programs provide safe and supportive spaces to keep young people engaged in learning during a difficult and trying time. So it comes as no surprise that in a national fall 2020 survey, 75% of parents agreed that the experience of the pandemic made them appreciate teachers and afterschool providers more than ever before.

## Accelerating students' learning and growth

Students in afterschool programs in Arkansas are:

-  Getting homework help – **54%**
-  Interacting with their peers and building social skills – **86%**
-  Taking part in STEM learning opportunities – **61%**

## Promoting healthy futures

Parents in Arkansas agree that afterschool programs are helping young people to:

-  Learn life skills – **81%**
-  Be physically active – **86%**
-  Build positive relationships with caring adults and mentors – **77%**
-  Access nutritious foods – **67%**
-  Build confidence – **80%**
-  Stay safe and out of trouble – **69%**

A 2021 evaluation by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality of Arkansas' 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC program found that, consistent with previous years, an overwhelming majority of students report that the programs helped them improve their social and emotional skills, including making friends (86%), working well with others (86%), and sharing their thoughts even if they disagreed (82%), as well as academic habits, such as finishing their work on time (87%). While state assessments were cancelled due to COVID-19, programs continued to provide academic enrichment, including literacy (98%) and STEM (92%) activities, and during the 2018-19 school year, a majority of regularly attending participants increased or maintained advanced or proficient levels in math (61%) and English (55%).

## American Rescue Plan Funding Helping Increase Access to Afterschool and Summer Programs During the Pandemic

Over the past two years, an overwhelming majority of afterschool and summer program providers have been concerned about their program's long-term funding and future. Costs associated with recruiting and retaining staff, instituting new COVID-19 health and safety protocols, and adding program space to allow for social distancing are a few of the added expenses afterschool and summer programs faced through the pandemic. Funds from American Rescue Plan present a tremendous opportunity to help afterschool and summer programs support the children and families in their communities. In Northwest Arkansas, the SOAR afterschool program received \$150,000 to support their third program site in Springdale through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III funds allocated through the Arkansas Afterschool Network. SOAR supports students in grades K-5 to grow academically, experience new opportunities through engaging programming, build healthy relationships with peers and adults, and practice the public speaking and leadership skills they need for future success.



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## Supporting working families

Parents in Arkansas agree that afterschool:

- Helps working parents keep their jobs – **83%**
- Helps parents build connections to their child’s school day education – **61%**
- Provides working parents peace of mind – **83%**

## A smart investment

Research spanning several states shows that every \$1 invested in afterschool programs saves at least \$3 by:

- Increasing kids’ earning potential as adults
- Reducing crime and juvenile delinquency
- Improving kids’ performance at school

## Arkansas parents want investment in afterschool and summer programs

The overwhelming majority of parents in Arkansas favor public funding for afterschool and summer learning programs:

**89%**  
favor public funding  
for afterschool opportunities

**89%**  
favor public funding for  
summer learning opportunities

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers

21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) are local before-school, afterschool, and summer learning programs that serve students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools. These programs engage students in hands-on learning activities aimed at supporting their academic growth, provide a variety of enrichment activities to complement school-day learning, and offer educational and support services to the families of participating children.

The 2021 Department of Education annual performance report of 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC found that among regular participants:

- 1 in 2** improved their language arts or math grades
- 7 in 10** improved their homework completion and class participation
- MORE THAN **3 in 5** improved their behavior in class

In Arkansas, **10,000 children in 58 communities** take part in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center.

21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants are the only dedicated federal funding sources that support local communities’ afterschool and summer programs.

Demand for programming in Arkansas is so great that **nearly 2 out of every 5** applications were not funded during the most recent competition.

## Transforming Lives

“During the pandemic, it was challenging because I was social distancing and not doing certain activities. But, my 21<sup>st</sup> Century [Community Learning Center] program has been a place where I’ve been able to meet new friends, communicate, and be social with others. I wasn’t a talker, but now I am! The mentors in my program also helped me stay on top of my work and encouraged me. Without my program, I wouldn’t have the grades I do now, and I wouldn’t be as social as I am. I wouldn’t be able to do a lot of things without my program.”

**Kyla Anderson**

High school student attending a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center afterschool program



The Afterschool Alliance is working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. Learn more at: [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)