



News Release
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Eight in Ten School Districts Are Investing Pandemic Relief Funds in Afterschool and Summer Learning, But the Overall Investment Is Small and Focus Is Primarily Tutoring

Washington, DC – As the COVID-19 pandemic uprooted our education system, putting the academic and emotional health of our nation’s children and youth in peril, the federal American Rescue Plan provided \$122 billion to school districts through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund. The law mandates that at least 20% be spent to address learning loss through strategies that respond to students’ social, emotional, and academic needs, with afterschool and summer enrichment an allowable way to allocate those funds. A new study from the [Afterschool Alliance](#) – the first ever to examine how school districts are using those funds for afterschool and summer programming – concludes that most of those investments are going to tutoring and programming focused only on academics, and not to comprehensive out-of-school-time programs that offer enrichment as well.

The research team for [Investments in Student Recovery: A Review of School Districts’ Use of American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Afterschool and Summer Opportunities](#) looked at the 6,315 school districts with ESSER spending plans that were publicly available at the time of review. Only 4,618 of them specified spending levels. Those 4,618 districts are spending a total of \$69 billion in ESSER funds. \$5.4 billion of it is allocated specifically for afterschool and summer learning programs, but just \$1.5 billion for comprehensive programs that offer both academic support and enrichment. The majority of that \$1.5 billion (\$906 million) is supporting summer learning programs and \$544 million is supporting afterschool.

“The fact that only one in five school districts are investing ESSER funds in afterschool programs that provide both academics and enrichment is a missed opportunity to support our kids, since [extensive research](#) shows that comprehensive afterschool and summer learning programs improve attendance, academic performance, well-being, and family engagement, which are high priorities for both educators and parents,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “But there’s still time to make ESSER investments in comprehensive afterschool and summer learning programs. We urge school district leaders to keep in mind that comprehensive afterschool and summer learning programs help students in ways that are especially important right now, as many are still struggling to recover academically and socially from the pandemic. Comprehensive programs that make learning fun and offer team-based educational activities help young people learn, be healthy, and thrive.”

Investments in Student Recovery also finds:

- Eighty-two percent of the 6,315 school district spending plans researchers reviewed specify allocation of ESSER funds to afterschool or summer programming to address learning loss through

interventions that respond to students' academic, social and emotional needs. That general category includes tutoring, Saturday school, comprehensive afterschool and summer learning programs, and more.

- Tutoring and academic supports, without enrichment, is the most common way districts are investing ESSER funds devoted to afterschool programming.
- Of the 3,988 school district plans that mention afterschool, just 19% are using ESSER funds for afterschool programs that offer both academic and enrichment components.
- Summer programming is the most popular strategy school districts are using to address learning recovery and social and emotional health, with most focused on academic remediation only, like summer school.
- Of the 4,632 school district plans researchers reviewed that mention summer, just 27% are using ESSER funds for summer programming that offers both academics and enrichment.

Among the new study's recommendations for school districts: include comprehensive afterschool and summer programs as an ongoing strategy to accelerate students' learning and engagement; leverage community partners to provide afterschool and summer learning opportunities; consider braiding funds to provide afterschool and summer learning.

Among its recommendations for policymakers: generously grant extensions for spending down American Rescue Plan ESSER funds; include specific language related to comprehensive afterschool and summer learning programs and partnerships with community groups in policies related to afterschool funding; and increase investments in afterschool and summer programs.

The study also includes recommendations for afterschool and summer program providers and advocates.

Investments in Student Recovery is being released this week as some 8,000 rallies are taking place across the country for the 24th annual [Lights On Afterschool](#).

"Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and give working parents peace of mind that their children are safe and supervised after the school day ends," Grant continued. "But there aren't nearly enough programs to meet the need. Some [24.7 million U.S. children](#) not in an afterschool program would be enrolled, if a program were available to them. Ensuring that all students can attend a comprehensive program that offers both academic and social supports should be a priority, because these programs are essential to students' recovery and success."

Investments in Student Recovery is here: <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Investments-in-Student-Recovery-2023.pdf>. In addition to reviewing the spending plans, researchers interviewed school district leaders and afterschool and summer program providers around the country. Based on data from the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), there were 19,269 operating school districts during the 2021-22 school year.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.