

5 Facts about High-Poverty School Districts' Pandemic Relief Spending on
Afterschool and Summer Programs

Afterschool Alliance

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INVESTMENTS IN STUDENT RECOVERY

5 Facts about High-Poverty School Districts' Pandemic Relief Spending on Afterschool and Summer Programs

In New Jersey's East Orange School District, students from families with low incomes benefitted from expanded enrichment and academic support, thanks to the district's investment of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds in afterschool and summer programs. Students who regularly attended the afterschool programs saw gains in literacy and math and reduced disciplinary referrals.

In all, the American Rescue Plan provided \$122 billion to support schools and their efforts to address students' learning recovery. A lifeline for schools, in particular those serving a high percentage of students from families with low incomes, this funding has allowed for critical investments, including the expansion of afterschool and summer learning opportunities.* **While most high-poverty districts[†] reported dedicating ARP funding toward afterschool and summer programs, the investment was only a small portion of available funds. For high-poverty districts, both afterschool and summer programming were used as strategies to support learning recovery, whereas summer programs were low-poverty districts' strategy of choice.**

ARP funds have the potential to help more young people access afterschool and summer programs, especially in high-poverty school districts. Research shows students in these districts have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

- ✓ High-poverty districts saw a larger decline in reading and math scores than low-poverty districts during the pandemic.¹
- ✓ Research examining academic recovery between 2022 and 2023 found that significant achievement gaps between students in high- and low-poverty districts remain, with even wider gaps than before the pandemic. Students in the highest poverty school districts lost 70% of a grade level in math and 42% in reading, compared to 30% and 10%, respectively, among their peers in the highest income districts.²
- ✓ 61% of high-poverty schools report that students seeking mental health services has increased since the pandemic, and most agree that the pandemic has negatively impacted their students' behavioral (79%) and social and emotional development (86%).³

* This fact sheet follows up on the report, "[Investments in Student Recovery: A Review of School Districts' Use of American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Afterschool and Summer Opportunities](#)," which analyzes more than 6,300 school district ARP plans.

[†] "High-poverty school districts" in this fact sheet refer to districts that have more than 75% of their students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) and "low-poverty school districts" are those where 25% or less of their students qualify for FRPL. FRPL is used as a proxy for students from low-income families.

Ensuring that all young people, regardless of where they live or their socio-economic circumstances, are able to take part in quality, affordable afterschool and summer learning programs is instrumental for learning recovery. Programs help inspire learning, provide opportunities for young people to build connections with their peers and supportive adult mentors, teach life skills such as critical thinking and responsible decision making, and allow young people to find their passions and explore potential career pathways.

Given the opportunity ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds presented, how have high-poverty districts invested in afterschool and summer programming for students, and how do they compare to investments in low-poverty districts? Below are five key findings about high-poverty districts' ARP ESSER spending.[‡]

1. High-poverty districts mentioned afterschool and summer programming more often than low-poverty districts, and are dedicating close to \$1.8 billion toward afterschool and summer activities.

Of the high-poverty district plans reviewed, more than 8 in 10 (86%) mentioned spending ARP ESSER funds on afterschool programming, summer programming, or a combination of both. While low-poverty districts were less likely to mention out-of-school time (OST) programming, still 77% included afterschool or summer activities in their plans for ARP ESSER funds.

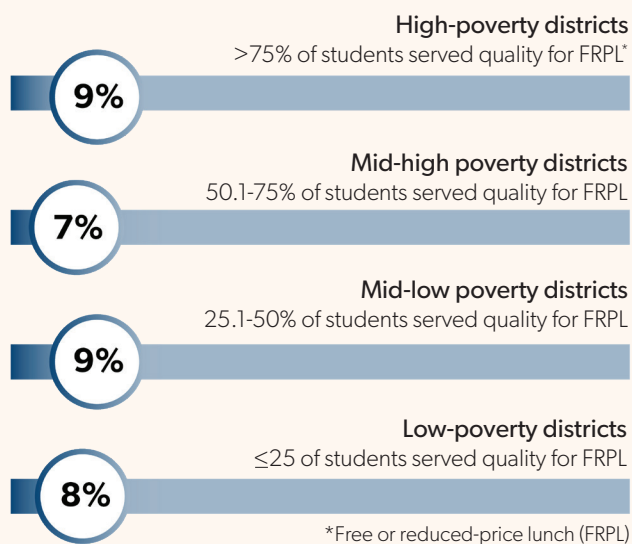
Among the subset of district plans that included funding amounts in their plans, high-poverty districts dedicated nearly \$1.8 billion to afterschool and summer programs.

2. Both high- and low-poverty districts allocated a small fraction of their total ARP ESSER funds toward afterschool and summer programming.

Both high- and low-poverty districts spent less than one-tenth of their total ARP ESSER budgets on afterschool and summer programming. High-poverty districts dedicated 9% of their ARP ESSER funds to afterschool and summer programming, and low-poverty districts spent 8%. Spending was consistent regardless of poverty levels, as measured by the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) (See Figure 1).

However, there are small regional differences. Districts in the Northeast dedicated a slightly larger portion of their ARP ESSER funds to afterschool and summer activities, and districts located in the South dedicated a slightly smaller portion. For high-poverty districts the national average was 9%, while Northeastern high-poverty districts allocated 10% and Southern high-poverty districts dedicated 7%. Among low-poverty districts, where the average was 8%, Northeastern districts dedicated 12% and Southern 6%. Additionally, higher poverty school districts in the West spent a degree more of their ARP ESSER funds on afterschool and summer programming, including high (11%) and mid-high poverty Western districts (10%).

Figure 1. Spending on afterschool and summer programs across poverty levels largely consistent



[‡] High- and low-poverty school district findings are based on a review of school districts' ARP ESSER plans that included the percentage of students qualifying for FRPL made available through the data service, Burbio. There were 4,848 plans that included FRPL data, 1,126 of which were categorized as high-poverty districts (serving more than 75% of students who qualify for FRPL) and 614 that were categorized as low-poverty districts (serving 25% or less of students who qualify for FRPL).

3. High-poverty schools adopted both afterschool and summer programming as strategies to support students' learning recovery; low-poverty schools largely looked to summer programming.

To support learning recovery, high-poverty districts were more likely to include afterschool and summer activities in their ARP ESSER plans (70% and 75%, respectively), whereas low-poverty districts largely looked to summer programming (70%) as a strategy to support students' learning, and were much less likely to mention afterschool programming in their plans (49%).

These preferences are also reflected in the ARP ESSER budgets of school districts. High-poverty district budgets for OST programming were more evenly split between afterschool (39%) and summer expenses (38%), whereas 61% of low-poverty school districts' OST budgets were for summer programming, with only 22% for afterschool programming (See Figure 2).

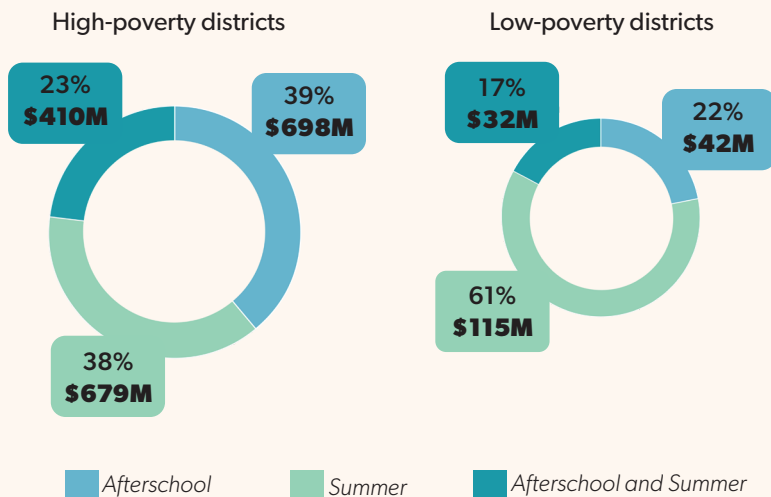


AFTERSCHOOL INSIGHT

**East Orange School District
New Jersey**

East Orange School District first invested ARP funds in running full-day, four-week summer programs for its students, a majority of whom are from families with low incomes. The programs included academic support, enrichment, and field trips to places such as the Liberty Science Center. Positive feedback on the summer programs led the district to use additional ARP funds to expand its afterschool program, growing it from a single site serving 150 students to seven sites across the district, providing academic enrichment, STEM learning opportunities, meals, and social and emotional support to more than 1,100 K-5th grade students at no cost to parents. As stated by a district leader, "Afterschool programming has become a part of the fiber of the district." The investment of ARP funds enabled the district to make the program more accessible to students, as program fees were a barrier for many East Orange parents.

Figure 2. High-poverty vs. low-poverty budgets for afterschool and summer





AFTERSCHOOL INSIGHT

Leveraging partnerships to enhance afterschool offerings

Partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations are an effective strategy to provide afterschool and summer programs. This strategy takes stock of and capitalizes on strengths of each group, which can be especially beneficial for districts serving a large percentage of students from families with low incomes. For example, Birmingham City Schools, where 82% of the student population qualifies for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, partnered with Lawson College and the Jones Valley Teaching Farm to enhance their out-of-school time offerings and provide their students with STEM, horticulture, and culinary arts programming.

4. Academic-only programs were the most commonly chosen method of supporting student learning recovery for both high- and low-poverty districts during the afterschool and summer hours.

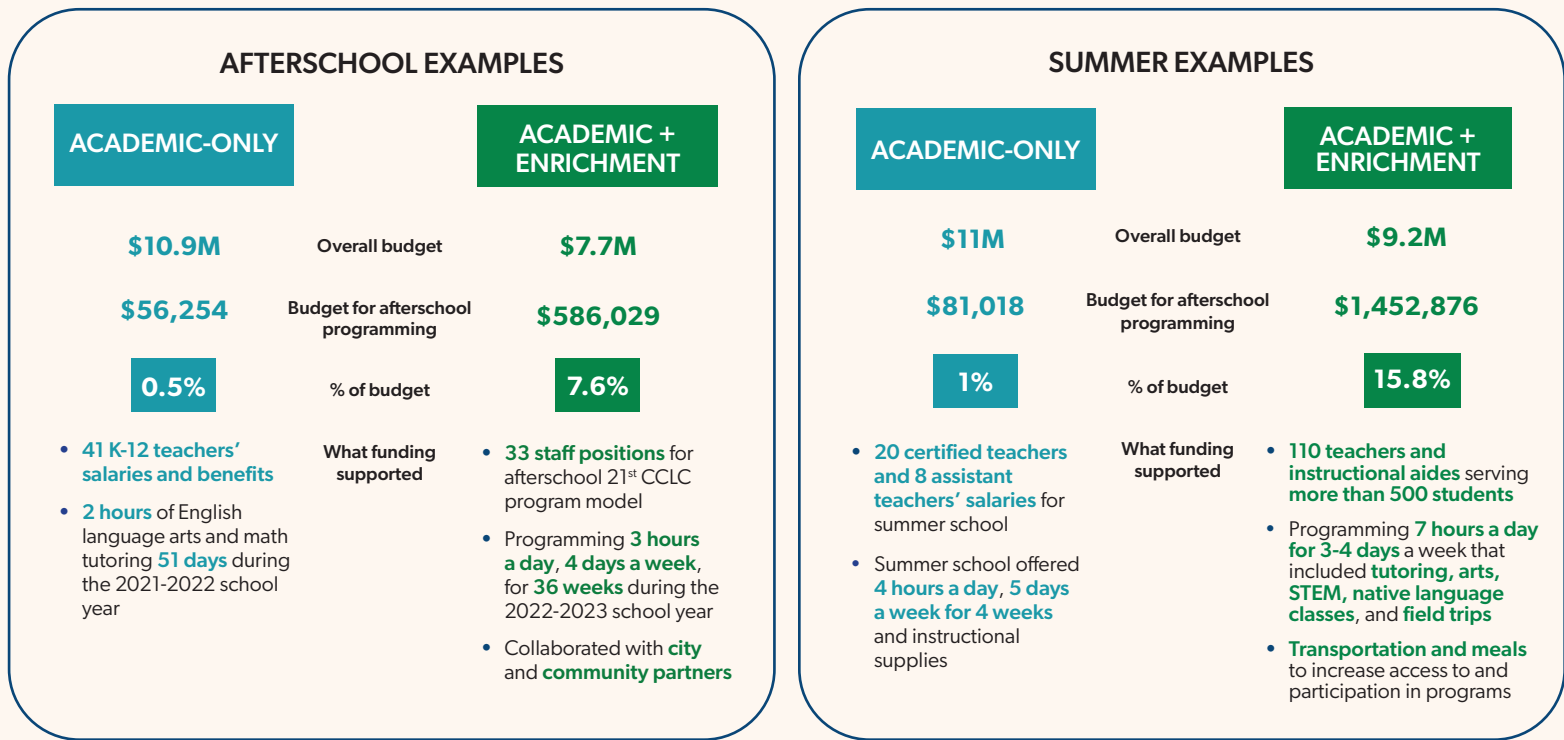
Academic-only supports—such as high-intensity tutoring or summer school for remediation or credit recovery—were most often selected as the focus of afterschool and summer programs. An analysis of plans that mention afterschool and summer programming found that for both high- and low-poverty school districts, academic-only programming after school (57% and 51%, respectively) and during the summer (49% and 53%, respectively), was much more likely to be mentioned in ARP ESSER plans. Programming that included both academics and enrichment was mentioned by a minority of high- and low-poverty districts when reporting on their afterschool (19% and 22%, respectively) and summer plans (25% and 26%, respectively).

5. High-poverty districts spent a larger percentage of their out-of-school time dollars on afterschool and summer programming that included both academics and enrichment.

Although high-poverty districts were more likely to mention academic-only focused programming for their afterschool and summer plans, spending on more comprehensive programming comprised a larger portion of their budget for out-of-school time activities. As mentioned above, among the high-poverty district plans that included afterschool, only 19% described afterschool programming that included academics and enrichment, but 44% of the funds budgeted for afterschool programming are going to these more robust programs. Similarly, although only a quarter of high-poverty district plans that mention summer programming include academic and enrichment activities, 40% of their summer budget is for these programs.

This contrast is due in large part to the more sizable budgets needed for programming that includes enrichment (see Figure 3). For example, districts offering summer school that focused on remediation often served a small, targeted number of students, with classes available for part of the day, while districts offering comprehensive summer programs often made it widely available to the student body, with the program open for longer periods of time. Similarly, districts implementing academic-only measures after school often described providing tutoring services to a limited number of students, for an hour after school a few days a week, while comprehensive afterschool programming was an opportunity for all students, with a variety of activities and higher dosage.

Figure 3. Examples of school districts' ARP plans illustrating that districts often spent more on programming that included academics and enrichment compared to academic-only programming



A Window of Opportunity Remains

Afterschool and summer programs provide critical supports to students in high- and low-poverty districts. From offering a safe and supportive environment to providing enriching learning opportunities, afterschool and summer programs are helping young people, regardless of their socio-economic status, learn, grow, and thrive.

ARP ESSER funds are still available in many high-poverty school districts to support afterschool and summer opportunities. While the initial deadline for obligating funds was September 30, 2024, districts can request waivers via their state education agencies to extend that deadline until early 2026, providing an opportunity to work with community partners to provide afterschool and summer programs for at least the next school year (2024-2025) and summer of 2025, as funds allow. Forty-three percent of high-poverty districts' ARP ESSER funds are still available (as of April 2024), totaling more than \$11.6 billion that could be invested in comprehensive afterschool and summer programs to support students' academic growth and well-being.

Visit [EngageEveryStudent.org](https://engageeverystudent.org), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education, to learn more about accessing ARP funds for afterschool and summer.

Endnotes

¹ Fahle, E. M., Kane, T. J., Patterson, T., Reardon, S. F., Staiger, D. O., & Stuart, E. A. (2023). School District and Community Factors Associated with Learning Loss During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved from: https://cepr.harvard.edu/sites/hwp.harvard.edu/files/cepr/files/explaining_covid_losses_5_23.pdf

² Fahle, E. M., Kane, T. J., Patterson, T., Reardon, S. F., Staiger, D. O., & Stuart, E. A. (2024). The First Year of Pandemic Recovery: A District-Level Analysis. Retrieved from: <https://educationrecoverycorecard.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ERS-Report-Final-1.31.pdf>

³ Institute of Education Sciences. (2022). Mental Health and Well-Being. Retrieved from: <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>; Institute of Education Sciences. (2022). Student Behavior. Retrieved from: <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/>