

RESCUE, RESTART, AND RESOURCES: MAKING THE MOST OF ENRICHMENT

by Dr. Dana Z. Godek & Dr. Robert M. Avossa

Introduction

The recovery from the pandemic and adjustments on social issues will be a multi-year process that will challenge school systems and the families they serve well into the foreseeable future. To jumpstart that process, multiple investments from the federal government are rapidly being distributed, while school district and building leaders are quickly organizing plans and staff to maximize these large, yet time-constricted financial supports.

The goal of this brief is to disentangle the legislation by providing clarity on what is authorized by the law, thereby making it practical for educational decision-makers to assist children in need. This brief defines some of these investments, illuminates practical areas that decision-makers need to consider for immediate action, and elevates promising performers who are already making the most of financial resources in service of student enrichment and academic support, with the primary goal of extraordinary results. This brief begins with recommendations that are based on observations from the field and the unprecedented flexibilities now available to public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✔ **RECOMMENDATION 1:**
Expand access now in partnership with adaptive, yet high-quality program providers.
- ✔ **RECOMMENDATION 2:**
Expand partnership to enrich and infuse the school day with highly engaging, social and emotional learning informed experiences.
- ✔ **RECOMMENDATION 3:**
Deepen sustainability discussion by focused collaboration with providers about strategic resource utilization.



These recommendations offer actionable approaches

to help education leaders make sense of the opportunity and deliver on quick, yet substantive returns for youth and families.

What is the American Rescue Plan?

The [American Rescue Plan \(ARP\)](#) is a major economic stimulus package that authorizes unprecedented and comprehensive funding support that will range from direct payments to families/caregivers, as well as more engaging funding for infrastructure support.

The package is injecting funds through [ESEA](#) authorized programs, such as Title I, Part A, Title II, Title IV, Part B (otherwise known as 21st Century Community Learning Centers) and [IDEA](#) and [Perkins V](#). It also offers significant investment opportunities for out-of-school-time (OST) programs and services for immediate implementation and into the coming years.

OST is defined as any opportunities to supplement learning from the school day, and it will provide targeted assistance to students whose needs extend beyond what they can expect to receive in the classroom¹. This is an important distinction, as OST can be interpreted as any experiences that are happening outside of the instructional standards-based, bell-to-bell schedule of a classroom routine. OST is highly aligned to the intent of ARP, which recognizes that social, emotional, and academic learning efforts moving forward are going to take an “all-hands-on-deck” approach if educators are to be fully responsive to the needs of the nation’s children.

As mentioned, ARP offers specific financial support for public schools through Section 2001, Subtitle A—Education Matters: Intent to Support Youth/Students. These funds are divided by percentages into two primary categories: funds that go to the states and funds that get redistributed to districts.

States must distribute no less than 90 percent of their [total allocation](#) to school districts. Of that 90 percent-based allocation, the school district must expend no less than 20 percent of the funds of its total allocation to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions such as summer learning (or summer enrichment), extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs, and the use of funds must ensure that such interventions respond to students’ academic, social, and emotional needs (Section 2001, Subtitle A.1).

The remaining funds (80 percent) may be used to maintain these programs, with a strategic eye to sustaining practices through traditional ESEA funding allocations or operating dollars in the future (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.A-R).



Use of the Funds: High Quality, Practical Approaches

In 2014, 10.2 million children in the U.S. (18 percent) and one quarter of families relied on afterschool programs.

A survey of parents suggests that an additional 19.4 million children would be enrolled in an afterschool program if one were available to them². ARP is the opportunity to fill that need through the 20 percent of funds devoted to learning loss. This isn't to suggest that an out-of-the-box program should be quickly purchased and scaled in all public schools, but it does invite deeper partnerships between school districts and OST providers who are open to adapting their models in alignment with a district's goals, while honoring evidence-based approaches to preserve quality of instruction.

While recognizing that school districts have until September 2023 to utilize the remaining 80 percent of ARP resources, it's worth pointing out the other impacts that these funds can have with respect to OST programming:

- Supplemental supports and strategies that would normally be authorized under ESEA are authorized under ARP. This includes and wraparound services, pre-kindergarten programs, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, [social and emotional learning \(SEL\)](#) practices, and even universal OST for all (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.A.)
- Programs that can be customized and tailored to students' specific learning styles and support them in overcoming barriers are also authorized in the law (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.F.) These can include individualized learning plans, particularly for underserved populations, mentoring, and homework/tutorial assistance.
- Services to address training and professional development of both instructional and non-instructional personnel is also authorized (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.H.) OST practitioners can benefit through training and joint professional-development opportunities with the scheduled school day staff to enhance and deepen coordination, improve quality, and calibrate learning experiences—both formal/standards-based curriculum and enrichment opportunities.
- Technology acquisition, use and enrichment is highly encouraged to address digital divide and learning barriers (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.K.) It's important to note that this doesn't exclusively mean technology-based devices. It means enrichment and high-quality programming too. Some examples can be experiential learning opportunities to go deeper in STEM education, digitized content, or even the use and potential of a given technology itself for the student and their family. In short, anything that engages students and improves the home to school connection is an asset to be sought.

- Planning and capacity building for ongoing or expanded OST is another strong use of the ARP funding (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.M.) This might even involve building youth agency and leadership by empowering older youth to be part of the leadership decision making process or by constructing community and/or service-learning opportunities that benefit youth and the local community.
- As previously mentioned, addressing learning loss is key, but it's important to remember that an off-the-shelf program may not have a strong evidence base behind it. The highest quality programs leverage socialization skills to address learning loss (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.N.) Examples of this are tutorials, homework help/assistance, and small group instruction for remediation or acceleration.
- Finally, the goal over the next three years is to address the continuity of service, not to return to the same structure, but to avoid common pitfall of the past and build back better (Section 2001, Subtitle A.2.R.) A good partnership always involves adaptive, flexible supports that customize models around the comprehensive needs assessment of the community and its children.



In the next section, we will explore examples of districts who have a history of excellence in OST and are poised to leverage ARP to further enhance instructional impact and stakeholder enthusiasm.

Spotlight on Promising Performers

Enriching programming and OST are based on the needs of families. 51 percent of families say they wanted their children to be enrolled in a summer learning program and 73 percent of parents agree that it is important for their children to have summer activities that help them maintain academic skills and learn new things and 85 percent of parents support public funding for summer learning programs³. Similarly, support for public investment in OST programs is consistently high.

A 2017 opinion poll conducted by Quinnipiac University found 83 percent of those surveyed opposed cutting public funding for after school because enrichment and youth esteem are seen as direct benefits of routine after school programming. In response to constituents, multiple school districts across the country have taken the lead on evidence-based OST programming, during summer, afterschool, and even during school through engaging supports that improve student experiences and learning gains. Similarly, in this section, we elevate some of these examples for consideration and replication.

Expanded Access Now

This is an unprecedented time to maximize student learning with an eye toward equity.

All too often, high-quality, enriching programs are reserved for families who have the financial means to afford things like expanded arts education, hands-on STEM experiences, community-service learning, and other non-standards based yet highly aligned experiences for youth to grow.

Cities like [Providence](#) and [Boston](#) have consistently focused on access issues and addressed common pitfalls such as transportation through the opening of additional programs in underserved neighborhoods and school locations. Other cities are thinking about expanded ways to connect summer programming with enrichment heading into the fall.

New Jersey cities like [Camden](#) are funding a significant expansion for low-income elementary school students with an emphasis on addressing students' academic, social and emotional needs. [Washington, D.C.](#) is honoring access by offering online enrichment programs now and into the summer to preserve families' rights to choose expanded learning methods that are best for them and their children. To resource this, a combination of ARP, ESSER, and ESSA funding can be used to monitor how direct family payments and tax credits continue to evolve during the next several years.

Afterschool programming will be especially important as cities come out of the pandemic. Youth access to enrichment activities (e.g., arts, sports, music, theater, or other types of activities not necessarily related to increasing academic performance) is highly dependent upon family income. Racial/ethnic minority children and youth, as well as those in other marginalized circumstances, will need enrichment opportunities to make up for the learning loss that has occurred and will continue to impact these children well into the future of their education years.

Research shows that enrichment programs that support low incomes students' development in communicating effectively, negotiating conflict, practicing empathy understanding their own skills and abilities, managing their emotions and behavior and other SEL skills lead to better academic and life outcomes⁴. These opportunities should connect with available programming time into the next school year.



Expanded Enrichment into the School Year

School districts are focusing energy on planning and calibrating the improvement of quality of programming using these funding mechanisms, integrating instructional standards with the development and widespread use of quality standards in OST. Coordination is a strategy designed to increase children's access to high quality OST programming by coordinating the work of decision maker: school districts, afterschool providers, government leadership and agencies to reduce the fragmentation that has generally characterized afterschool, summer, and extended learning programs⁵.

The Comprehensive After School System of [New York City](#) (COMPASS) is supporting STEM efforts that align summer programming with afterschool activities heading into school year 2022.

Focusing on individualized learning, [Hamden Public Schools](#) is connecting summer programs to school day, standards-aligned pull out models that give students opportunities to participate in lessons that are interactive and engaging to support "Covid catchup" and facilitate joyful learning tailored to the student's preferences.

Deemed a [District of Innovation](#) by the state agency, [Medina Valley ISD](#) is taking a creative and protective approach to tutorials by infusing SEL and extra learning time during the school day. It is positioned as an elective pull-out model so students are more likely to feel a sense of pride and ownership with their participation.

As part of the school year ahead, systems can ensure that providers are working closely with them to make sure resources are aligned in order to create opportunities for staff and children and youth as they build agency, learn and lead together, and develop strategies for responding in positive ways to our complex world.

Expanded Systems for Sustainability

Afterschool programming will be especially important as cities come out of the pandemic. Racial/ethnic minority children and youth, and those in other marginalized circumstances, will need social and emotional support and opportunities to make up for the learning loss that has, and will continue to impact children⁶.

Beyond ARP, several cities and school districts are already leading on optimizing funds to sustain programming and preserve equitable, high-quality OST. Cities like [Oakland](#) and [Seattle](#) have used ballot initiatives, budget set-asides, and property tax levies to create pools of dollars that can be used to fund OST. California's [Proposition 49](#) is the most well-known ballot initiative supporting expansion of afterschool programs. In [Miami Dade Public Schools](#), the braiding of funds is being sequenced to prioritize equity and reinforce fiscal planning into 2025.

In Ohio, [Beaver Creek City Schools](#) is organizing an equity-focused, comprehensive sequencing of supports and the use of all school facilities to respond to the community's needs. They are blending multiple funding sources and are thinking deeply about sustaining services so that the return to schools is coordinated and highly responsive to all as they move forward.

Coordinated systems can improve access by addressing common barriers, such as transportation, convenience, affordability, and number of available slots⁷. Moving forward through ARP, parents will receive a new, per-child allowance beginning this summer. It will arrive in the form of a monthly check to help families afford the everyday expenses of raising children. These funds can also be used to subsidize childcare costs to include high-quality OST and other enrichment offerings.

Conclusion

This is a moment of leadership, at a time when school districts are leaning into the challenge ahead in support of youth and those who care for them.

Through the ARP stimulus, funding states are compelled to develop and implement plans to immediately utilize that funding and get more schools safely opened this spring. They must work to effectively and efficiently close the gaps in education equity that the pandemic has exacerbated. School districts who are leveraging evidence-based, high quality OST programs now and into the future, will not only meet the instructional needs of students as expeditiously as possible this spring, but they will also focus on meeting the needs of all students during the long road ahead.



⁷ Linda Simkin, Ivan Charner, et al., *Is Citywide Coordination Going Nationwide?*, FHI 360, 2013.