



May 1, 2020

Governor JB Pritzker
Office of the Governor
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, 16-100

Re: Education Stabilization Funds and the Afterschool Community

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Thank you for your outstanding leadership during this difficult time. Your quick action has helped ensure the immediate safety of our youth, families, and communities. As we look ahead, we will again need strong leadership to ensure that we recover fully and quickly—and that includes making sure our youth have the support they need to catch up and re-engage in school and community life. Fortunately, there are a number of steps we can take today to help. Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now) is a statewide coalition that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality, affordable afterschool, community school, and youth development programs. ACT Now includes over 1,600 members, giving voice to Illinois families, educators, business leaders, community advocates, youth organizations, and policymakers.

Afterschool and summer learning programs have long provided supplemental education and support to help close academic and opportunity gaps among students most in need. Studies show that afterschool programs are sparking students' interest in school leading to better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior.¹ During this crisis, afterschool programs are trying to continue supporting some of the most vulnerable students and families – connecting families to essential items and services, conducting remote programming, and in some cases in-person programming for the most vulnerable youth or youth of essential workers. Moving forward, afterschool programs will be crucial in supporting Illinois families as we rebuild following this crisis. However, 75% of programs are at risk of laying staff off or shutting down permanently due to financial concerns, according to a recent survey of the afterschool field conducted by the Afterschool Alliance.

Learning gaps are likely to widen between demographic groups and special populations. As the research on summer learning loss shows, these gaps are exacerbated by time out of school. The current virtual learning environment is expected to make them even more extreme. As we look toward recovery, it will be critical to help youth re-engage and catch up on hours of lost learning time. Academic content that was not delivered due to school closures can best be supplemented by afterschool and summer programs, which have a demonstrated expertise in how to keep students engaged in learning and supported socially and emotionally. Students, including those who need the most support, will need teachers and program

¹ Durlak, J.A. & Weissberg R.P. (2010). *Afterschool programs that follow evidence-based practices to promote social and emotional development are effective*. Retrieved from http://www.expandinglearning.org/docs/Durlak&Weissberg_Final.pdf.

leaders who have the ability to teach academic content while engaging students through their interests and specialized needs.

As parents return to work, they will need afterschool programs. Before the pandemic, parents already relied heavily on afterschool programs to keep their children safe and engaged while they work, with 4 in 5 saying it helped them stay employed. Parents will need those same supports to be able to return to the workforce.

If the state's education system, economy, and future workforce is to rebound quickly, using federal and state supports to maintain staff, and keep afterschool and summer programs running and serving additional students will be essential. Immediate action can be taken now and will mitigate more costly interventions later. Our recommendations for action are below:

Immediate Recommendations

Ensure the state is utilizing the supports offered at the federal level to support students, families and staff.

1. Covid Education Relief Funding: We ask that you utilize resources in the Governor's Emergency Education Relief and Elementary and Secondary Education Relief Funds in the CARES Act to strengthen afterschool and summer programs and provide specific guidance to districts on these measures.

- The uses of the funds include specifically (Sec. 18003 (d)(11)): *"Planning and implementing activities related to summer learning and supplemental afterschool programs, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care."* **Ensure that guidance goes from the State Education Agency to Local Education Agencies on the uses of these funds for afterschool and summer programming work.**
- These Education Relief funds can be used to support any activity in ESSA which includes the 21st Century Community Learning Center Funds. We suggest supporting these already robust programs for low income youth to work towards closing learning gaps.
- Funds may be best leveraged by bringing afterschool and summer program educators into the conversation. We ask that you **ensure coordination with afterschool partners as funds are spent.**

2. 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) Grant Flexibility: We recommend ensuring that the state is using full federal flexibility to make sure quality afterschool professionals under the Department of Education Title IV B 21st CCLC grants are remaining employed, supporting immediate needs, and preparing to support students fully when in person operations resume, including over the summer and in the upcoming school year.

Issue statewide Title IV B guidance that:

- Programs continue to pay staff during the crisis.

- Staff can be performing roles such as planning; checking in with families; providing programming through virtual learning environments; providing and connecting participants to academic resources, meals, and other supports; developing staff through PD; and working on health and wellness for students and families.
- Provide flexibility in monitoring, attendance and other grant requirements that grantees would struggle to meet under current conditions.
- Provide flexibility in grant funding to allow for the purchase of technology and essential items for families.
- Any students with a co-pay can be waived.

3. Business and Non-Profit Funding: Many providers not supported fully or in part by federal and state funds may be particularly struggling to keep their organizations afloat. These businesses and nonprofit organizations will be critical when people go back to work, and keeping them operational now ensures a more fluid transition for economic recovery. **Encourage state offices in Education, Child Care and Commerce, and other relevant offices to reach out to providers to help connect afterschool and summer program providers with federal and state programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program to help keep their businesses operational and their staff on payroll. Also, develop supports for those nonprofits that do not qualify for programs like Paycheck Protection.**

4. Meals supports for Students: Continue to use flexibility in USDA congregate feeding requirements, provided in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to provide creative solutions to provide meals and other resources to students.

- Where feasible, afterschool programs can continue to act as meals delivery sites.
- As possible, afterschool staff can assist in home meal delivery, especially alongside other academically related supplies and resources.

5. Child Care (CCDBG) Funding: Continue to use the flexibility provided by the Federal Office of Child Care, as well as additional flexibilities and funding provided in the CARES Act, to ensure that childcare centers are safe, educational, and operational where open, and supported and prepared to re-open quickly for families returning to work where closed. This includes continuing the following measures:

- Provide program and staff pay based on enrollment rather than attendance.
- Fund programs despite enrollment numbers and closures to ensure (as the law recommends) that “they are able to remain open or reopen as appropriate.”
- Ensure essential workers’ children are being supported with these funds – including making sure child care workers are themselves designated as essential workers.
- Support the ability of the new \$3.5 billion allocation in CCDBG funding or the state’s quality set aside funding to pay for any new programs needed to support children of essential workers, and use the regular allocation to support the programs that would have been serving these children under normal conditions as suggested in the [Office of Child Care FAQs](#) (Question #9) for these new funds.



Sincerely,

ACT Now Coalition

- CC: Superintendent Carmen Ayala
 Secretary Grace Hou
 Jesse Ruiz, Illinois Deputy Governor for Education
 Sen. Scott M. Bennett
 Sen. Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant
 Sen. Kimberly A. Lightford
 Sen. Andy Manar
 Sen. Pat McGuire
 Sen. Jason A. Barickman
 Sen. Steve McClure
 Sen. Dan McConchie
 Sen. Chuck Weaver

Co-Signers

WeGo Together for Kids	West Chicago
220	Chicago
Project Exploration	Chicago (Austin and Bronzeville)
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois	Statewide
Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs	Statewide
ReadyNation Illinois	Statewide
Illinois AfterSchool Network	Springfield
The Sinai Family Life Center	East St Louis
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago	Chicago
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	Chicago
Enlace Chicago	Chicago
Christopher Unit School District 99	Christopher
Human Resources Development Institute, Inc.	Chicago
America SCORES Chicago	Chicago
Metropolitan Family Services	Chicago

ACTNOW!

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ESL SD 189	East St. Louis
Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education	Chicago
Chicago Run	Chicago
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago	Chicago
Bella Ease	Quincy
Opportunities for All	Chicago
Madison CUSD #12	Madison
Project Success of Vermilion County	Danville
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	Chicago
Central States SER	Chicago
Illinois Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs	Springfield, Illinois (Statewide)
YMCA of McDonough County	Macomb
Frida Kahlo Community Organization	Chicago
Family Focus	Chicago
After School Matters	Chicago
Angel Of God Resource Center	Chicago
Belvidere Family YMCA	Belvidere
DREAAM House	Champaign
GRHS Project Success	Georgetown
West Cook YMCA	Oak Park
YMCA Children's Center	Freeport
Illinois Collaboration on Youth	Chicago
Carole Robertson Center for Learning	Chicago
Homewood Science Center	Homewood
Youth Guidance	Chicago