



MEETING THE MOMENT: Cities Increase Investments in Young People to Support Pandemic Recovery and Beyond

BY: BELA SHAH SPOONER, MARTIN BROWN, & GISLENE TASAYCO*

New survey results from the National League of Cities (NLC) find that mayors, city councilmembers, and other municipal leaders across the country overwhelmingly believe that afterschool and summer learning programs are important strategies to utilize as the nation continues on a path to pandemic recovery. Respondents say they are more likely to invest in these programs now than ever before.

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Historical Municipal Support for Afterschool and Summer Learning

Over the last decade, there's been a groundswell of support for critical youth-serving programs, based on a fresh appreciation for the benefits they provide for children, youth, and families. Initially, many city leaders invested in afterschool and summer learning as effective strategies to primarily promote public safety, increase academic achievement, and support working families. Today, after navigating a two-year global pandemic, mayors and councilmembers see these programs as a key resource for promoting learning recovery and supporting youth and families most in need as well.

Cities Respond During the Pandemic

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, local leaders have leveraged afterschool and summer learning programs to ensure broader access to food, computers and internet, homework help, recreational and physical fitness opportunities, adult supervision and mentoring, mental health supports, and more - all while providing safe spaces for young people to socialize with peers and have fun, even in the darkest times.



Bridgeport Mayor Joe Ganim and Superintendent Testani recognize that many of our students have fallen behind academically and socially because of the pandemic. In response, Bridgeport has made afterschool programs an even greater priority. We have leveraged over \$10 million in city, school district, and federal funds to expand community programs that support school day learning and provide youth with structured, high-quality afterschool and summer opportunities to learn, socialize and move forward.”

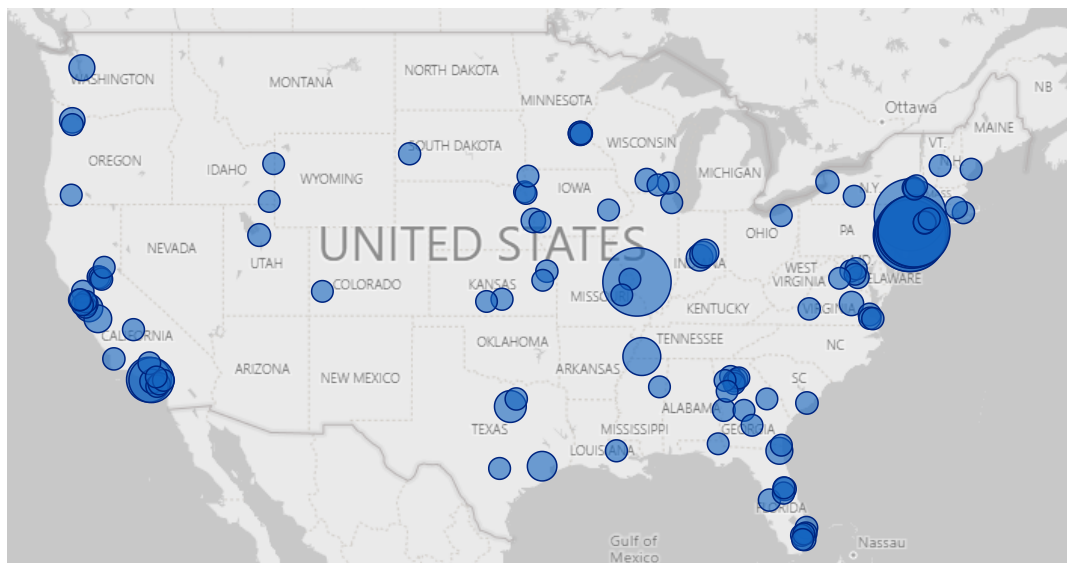
Tammy Papa, Director of Youth Services, City of Bridgeport, CT

Purpose of Survey

The NLC survey was designed to explore the evolution of municipal investments and partnerships to support afterschool and summer learning for all children and youth, especially vulnerable ones, during a tumultuous time in U.S. history.

NLC was also interested in determining if the Covid-19 health crisis impacted municipal leaders' perceptions of the value of these programs. An additional research focus was cities' plans for afterschool and summer learning in the aftermath of the pandemic, especially as municipalities, school districts, and states received an unprecedented amount of federal dollars for "learning recovery" via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* and the American Rescue Plan Act** (ARPA).

Survey Respondents by City (Circle size indicates population size)



* The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, a \$2.3 trillion economic stimulus bill allocated \$39.75 billion as new, one-time funding for the Education Stabilization Fund to include the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, K-12, and Higher Education.

** The American Rescue Plan Act delivered direct federal funding to all states and municipalities for the first time ever through a \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program as well as provides \$500 billion that can be used in part to support young people during the hours they are out of school.

The NLC survey captured evolving city actions and respondent perceptions on these issues across four periods, Pre Pandemic (before March 2020), Peak Pandemic (March 2020- January 2021), Pandemic Recovery (February - December 2021), and Post-Pandemic* (2022-2023).

NLC will continue to track how cities are investing in programs serving young people in the months and years ahead. NLC is also committed to supporting cities in this work by developing new resources and hosting peer-learning events focused on what's working to meet the needs of young people and their families.

* For the purposes of this survey, Post Pandemic references the 2022-2023 timeframe even though NLC acknowledges the pandemic continued with variants in 2022.



During remote learning, 5000+ students were supported during the day and afterschool through partnerships with our school district, state, county, and non-profit partners. Together, we created community learning hubs and provided youth with access to food, internet, their schools' virtual curriculum, nursing staff, and other in-person enrichment opportunities to help them cope with the stress of a changing world. Using a combination of private and public funding, including local child care dollars and ESSER funds, Madison invested millions to ensure all youth, regardless of income, had access to these important resources.”

Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, Madison, Wisconsin

Key Findings

- 1** The number of cities funding afterschool and summer learning programs in the pandemic recovery period has surpassed pre-pandemic levels.
- 2** More cities anticipate funding afterschool and summer learning program post-pandemic.
- 3** A significant number of cities increased their investment in afterschool and summer learning programs during the 2021 pandemic recovery period and plan for continued growth in the future.
- 4** Cities drew on a broader range of funding streams for afterschool and summer learning during pandemic recovery, with federal funding from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) providing critical support.
- 5** Cities expanded afterschool and summer learning partnerships with youth-serving community-based organizations throughout the pandemic recovery period.
- 6** City leaders overwhelmingly say that afterschool and summer learning programs are “very” or “extremely” important – a growing sentiment compared to the pre-pandemic period.
- 7** Cities are making increased investments in both city-run and community-based programs, but more cities are targeting their dollars to city-run programs.
- 8** City leaders say they need additional resources and new tools to fully tap the transformative potential of afterschool and summer learning programs, including stronger partnerships with schools.

Key Findings

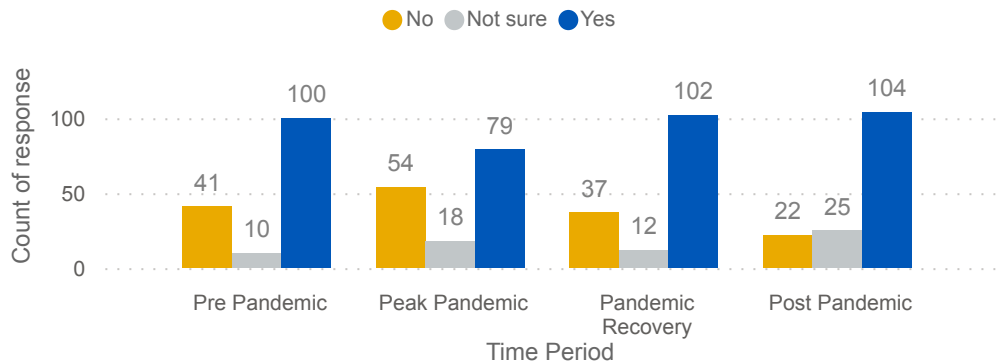
1 The number of cities funding afterschool and summer learning programs in the pandemic recovery period has surpassed pre-pandemic levels. (Figure 1)

2 More cities anticipate funding afterschool and summer learning program post-pandemic. (Figure 1)



During each time period, **did your municipality provide funding for afterschool and/or summer learning programs** (including funds the city received through state and federal grants)? This includes city-run programs as well as funds the city may have granted to nonprofit providers to support programs.

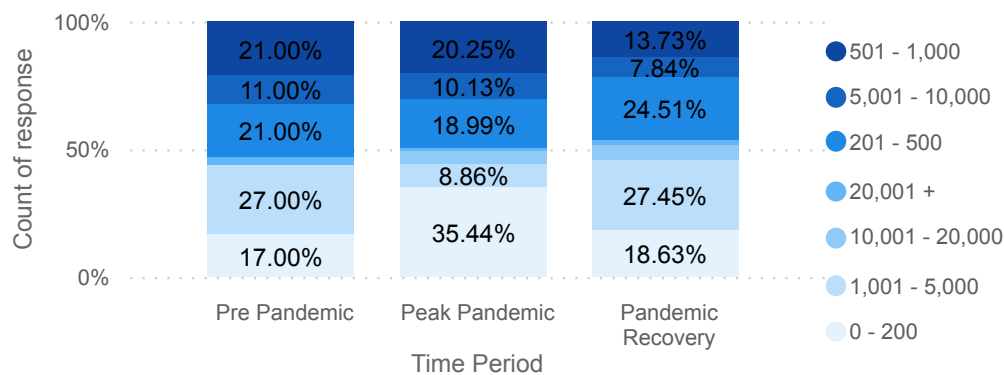
Figure 1. Number of Cities Funding Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs





How many children and youth did your municipality serve annually through afterschool/ summer learning programs during each time period?

Figure 2. Number of Students Served



During the peak of the pandemic, the number of cities funding afterschool and summer learning programs decreased, as did the number of children and youth served by these programs (see Figure 2). Conversely, programs began to regain their scale during pandemic recovery and returned to serving larger numbers of youth.

Since the peak of the pandemic in 2020, the number of cities funding these programs not only returned to pre-pandemic levels, but has surpassed it. More striking is that even more cities anticipate investing in youth programs after the pandemic is over, compared to the pre-pandemic and pandemic recovery periods.

Key Findings

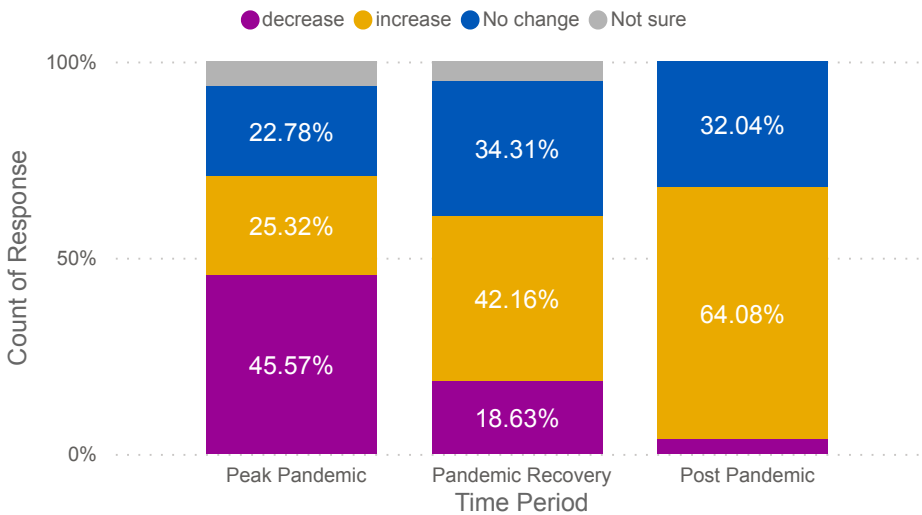
3 A significant number of cities increased their investment in afterschool and summer learning programs during the 2021 pandemic recovery period and plan for continued growth in the future. (Figure 3)

During the peak of the pandemic, nearly half of respondents *decreased* their level of spending on afterschool and summer learning programs (45.6 percent). During pandemic recovery, however, more than 4 in 10 survey respondents reported *increasing* city funding from peak pandemic levels (42 percent). Post-pandemic almost two-thirds of survey respondents plan to *increase* their investments even further for afterschool and summer learning programs. (Figure 3)



How did your municipality’s level of spending on afterschool and/or summer learning programs change during each time period?

Figure 3. Change in Spending Levels for the Prior Period



Key Findings

4 Cities drew on a broader range of funding streams for afterschool and summer learning during pandemic recovery, with federal funding from the CARES Act and ARPA providing critical support. (Figure 4)

Prior to the pandemic, cities relied on a mix of funding sources for afterschool and summer learning programs; these included city general fund dollars, private philanthropic dollars, and state and federal funding. During peak pandemic and pandemic recovery, cities leveraged additional funding sources for these purposes, including federal CARES and ARPA dollars. The number of cities using these federal resources for afterschool and summer learning rose from 28 in the peak pandemic period to 47 during pandemic recovery. Over the three time periods, the two most common funding sources for afterschool and summer programs were parks and recreation budgets and city general fund dollars.



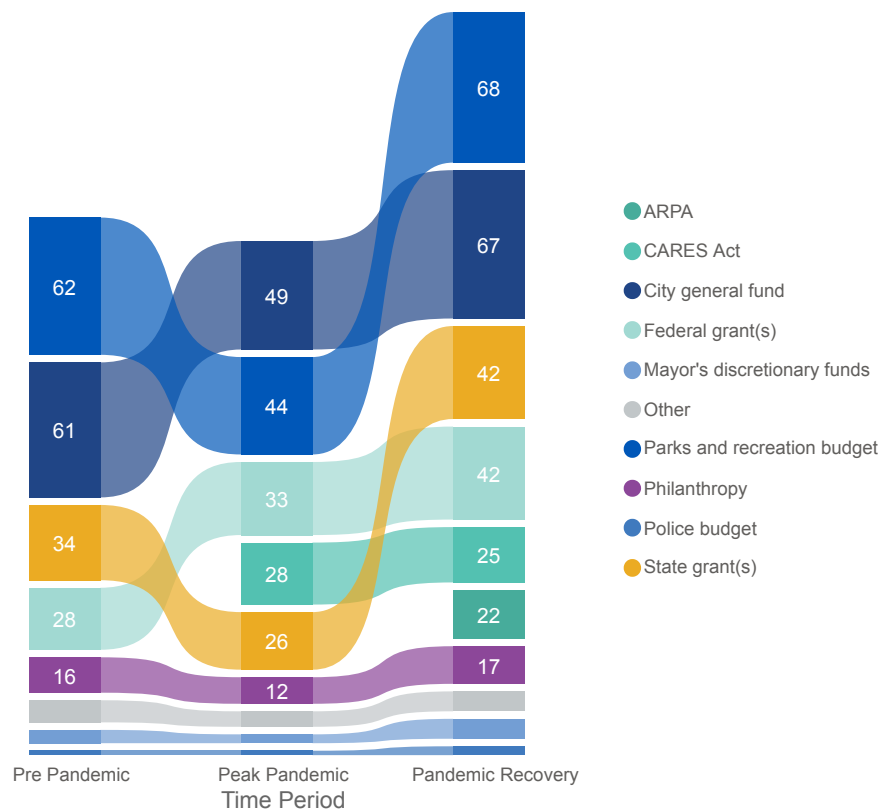
In summer 2020, the City of Fort Worth restructured its camps to provide safe and affordable spaces for kids, complete with games, crafts, and sports. As remote learning began, our Park & Recreation Department utilized \$300,000 of CARES Act funding to create Camp Connection, which offered students enrichment programs, nutritious meals, and homework help from 8am-5pm every weekday. We also doubled our community centers' computer labs and increased our wi-fi capabilities. Once school buildings reopened, the City offered a hybrid of Camp Connection and after school programs to support working parents."

Mayor Mattie Parker, City of Fort Worth, TX



What sources of funding did your municipality use to fund afterschool and/or summer learning programs during each time period?

Figure 4. Funding Sources



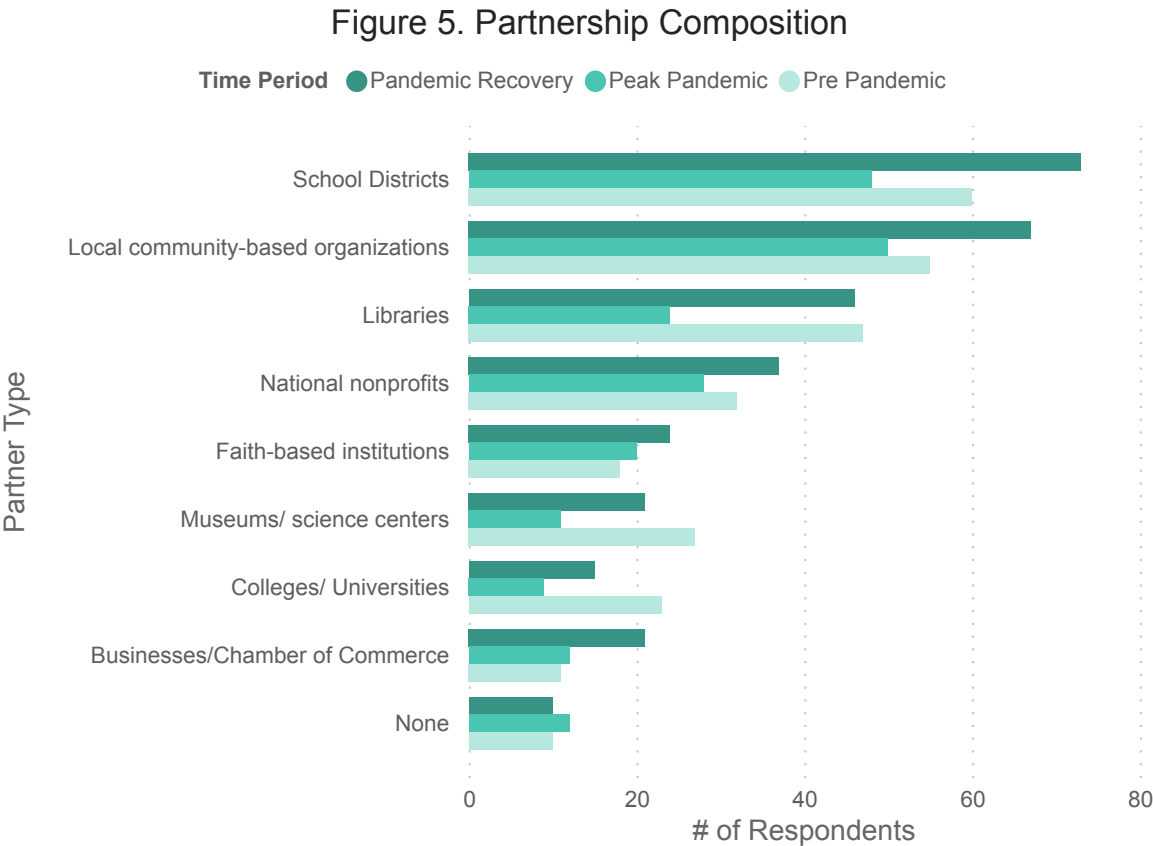
Key Findings

5 Cities expanded afterschool and summer learning partnerships with youth-serving community organizations throughout the pandemic recovery period. (Figure 5)

According to the NLC survey, the three types of organizations cities are partnering with most frequently to provide afterschool and summer learning are school districts, community-based nonprofits, and libraries. The survey also reveals that the number of afterschool and summer learning partnerships between cities and community-based partners increased by 10 percent in the pandemic recovery period, compared to pre-pandemic. (Figure 6).

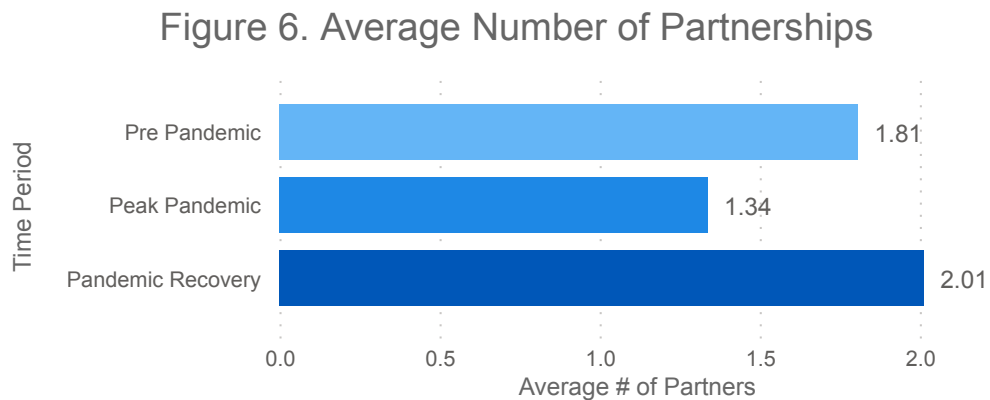


Please identify the entities your municipality partnered with to provide afterschool and/or summer learning programs during each time period.





Average number of partner entities working with cities to provide afterschool and summer programming.



As an educator and administrator for twenty years, I know firsthand the importance of technology to education. To provide our youth with opportunities to grow skills like coding, video production, and podcasting, Athens-Clarke invested \$300,000 from the influx of federal government relief funds to renovate three outdated computer labs into Teen Tech Labs. Through these Labs, Athens-Clarke youth are exposed to technology and opportunities they don't have at home and the city can provide organized youth development programs using state of the art technology."

Mayor Kelly Girtz, Athens-Clark County Unified Government, GA

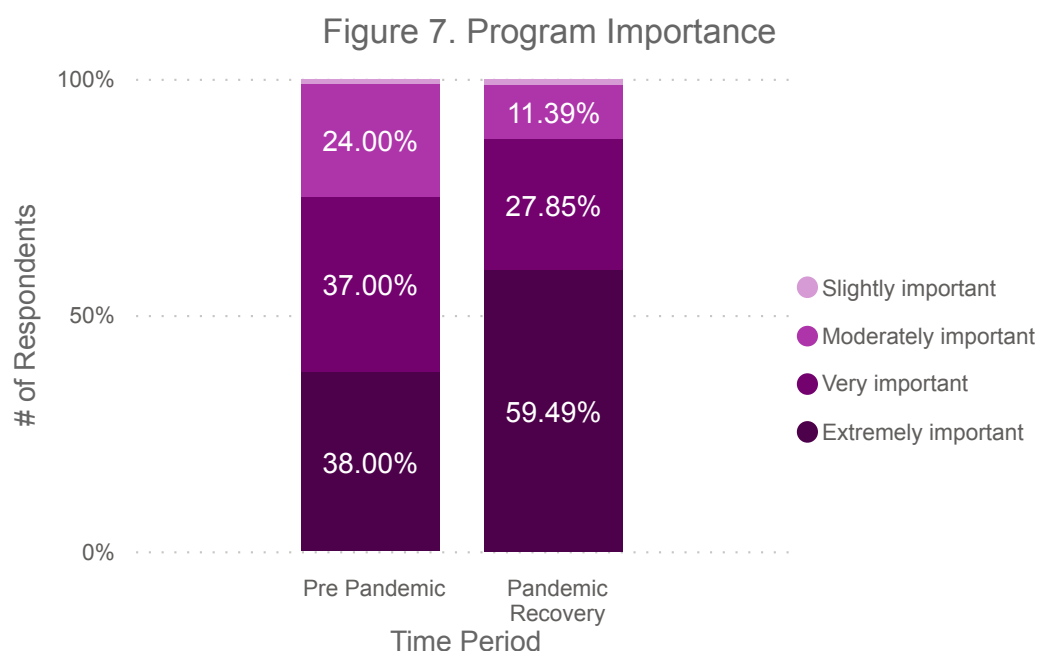
Key Findings

6 City leaders overwhelmingly say that afterschool and summer learning programs are “very” or “extremely” important - a growing sentiment compared to the pre-pandemic period. (Figure 7)

Survey respondents indicated that they believe afterschool and summer programming for youth is *even more important now than* before the pandemic. Before the pandemic, 38 percent of respondents said afterschool and summer learning programs were extremely important; this number grew to 59 percent of respondents during pandemic recovery. Combining the numbers of respondents who said these programs were either “very” or “extremely” important, the survey reveals an overwhelming belief in the power of afterschool and summer learning (87 percent) among local leaders in the pandemic recovery period.



During each time period, **how important are afterschool and summer learning programs** for the children and families in your community?



Key Findings

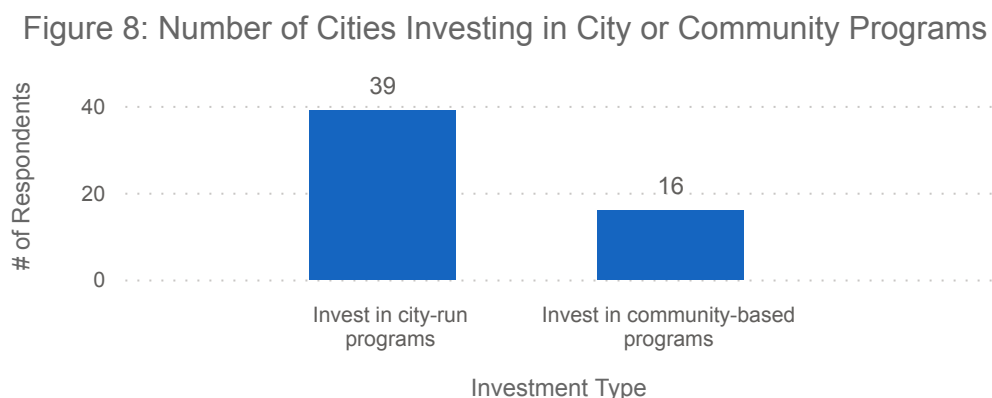
7 Cities are making increased investments in both city-run and community-based programs, but more cities are targeting their dollars to city-run programs. (Figure 8)

Of the 43 survey respondents who indicated that their cities increased funding for afterschool and summer programs since the peak of the pandemic, over 90 percent (or 39 respondents) stated they currently are investing or plan to invest in city-run programs. The most common uses of new investments in city-run programs were: creating new programs (74%); growing the size of an existing program (74 %); and hiring new staff (66%).

Thirty-seven percent of respondents who said they increased funding for afterschool and summer learning programs since the peak of the pandemic invested in community-based programs, such as YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other local nonprofit youth-serving organizations. The most common purposes of these investments were: creating new programs (87%); paying for additional services (75%); and growing the size of an existing program (62%).



What types of afterschool and/or summer programming has your municipality invested in or is planning to invest in to help children and youth succeed in school this year and beyond?



Key Findings

8 City leaders say they need additional resources and new tools to fully tap the transformative potential of afterschool and summer learning programs, including stronger partnerships with schools. (Figure 9)

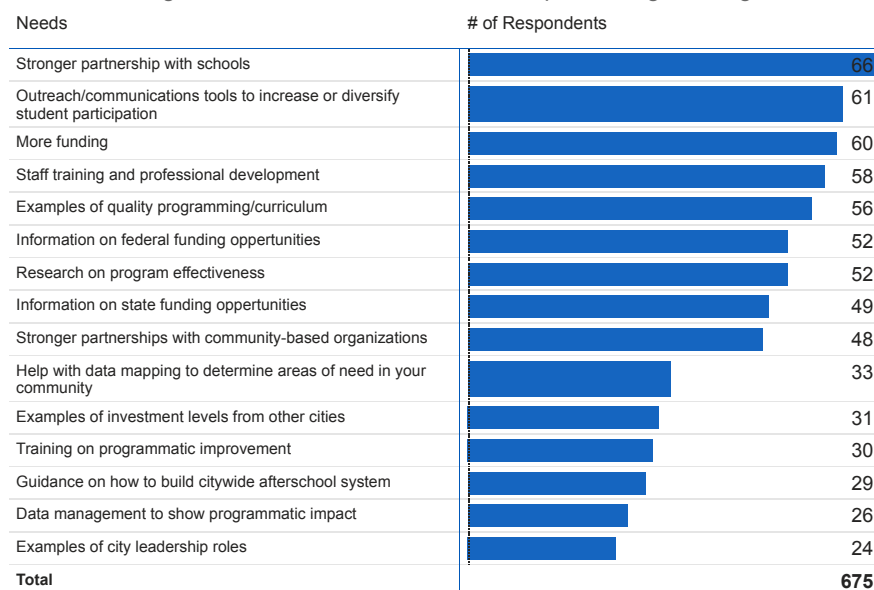
The NLC survey shows local leaders across the country are committed to improving the reach and the quality of afterschool and summer learning programs in their communities. At the same time, respondents acknowledged that they need additional help to achieve this important goal. Survey respondents identified a range of needed resources and supports to help them better provide critical programming for their children and youth. Their top three needs were:

- ◆ Stronger partnerships with schools (43 percent)
- ◆ Outreach and communication tools to increase diversity of program participants (40 percent)
- ◆ More funding (39 percent)



What additional resources or support does your city need to improve its ability to provide quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities to all children and youth who need or want access?

Figure 9: Resources Cities Need to Improve Programming



Conclusion

NLC's survey findings highlight an abiding - and growing - belief among mayors, city councilmembers, other local elected officials and senior municipal staff in the power of afterschool and summer learning programs to meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families in their communities and put them on a path towards success.

FUNDING DECLINES EXPECTED DURING PEAK OF PANDEMIC

It is no surprise that these programs faced funding declines and reduced service levels during the peak of the pandemic in 2020, as municipal revenues and spending were impacted in substantial ways because of the public health crisis. NLC's earlier research on city fiscal conditions showed that most municipal departments of parks and recreation, libraries, and even community policing programs were impacted by budget cuts, staff layoffs, and furloughs during this period. Even if some city budgets were not affected, schools and many community programs were closed during this time as an added precaution to keep children and communities safe.

CITIES INVEST IN AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS AS CRITICAL LIFELINE

However, the NLC survey suggests that municipal leaders quickly recognized the degree to which afterschool and summer programs remained an important lifeline for many young people and their families during the peak of the pandemic and pandemic recovery. At a time when most schools remained closed, these programs continued to provide programming, pivoted to respond in new ways to community needs, and doubled down on efforts to ensure that young people had access to food, socialization and other critical supports. These programs proved especially critical during the summers of 2020 and 2021. The summer months are a challenging season when young people from lower-income families often have little to do during the weekday hours and are more likely to engage in risky behaviors. With the support of these programs, parents and guardians could continue to work knowing their children were safe, active, and learning new skills.

The NLC survey findings also suggest that city leaders' recognition of the valuable role of afterschool and summer programs influenced municipal investment and partnership decisions during the pandemic recovery and in their plans for the post-pandemic period. Cities invested more dollars from their own budgets into these programs, set out to serve more students, and joined with more partners to deliver services; they also increased the number and diversity of funding streams for these programs.

CONTINUED GROWTH EXPECTED

Local leaders' responses may shine a light on what is ahead. Municipalities, local school districts, and states have received important and historic federal resources to support pandemic recovery through the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). In the legislation, afterschool and summer learning programs were identified as justifiable and important uses of these funds for learning recovery. The NLC survey findings show that some communities are already leveraging these federal dollars to create or expand afterschool and summer programs. NLC expects to see these investments continue and grow, given that communities have until 2024 to make their budgetary decisions about how to spend their ARPA dollars.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a harmful impact on the nation's children, especially those living in vulnerable communities. Between the pandemic's health and economic impacts, the effects of school closures, reduced services and supports, and a loss of social peer interaction, young people have been hit especially hard by this crisis. As cities, towns, and villages recover, municipal leaders appear intent on making up for lost time through new and expanded investments in afterschool and summer programs for young people in their communities. NLC applauds these local elected officials for prioritizing children and youth as the future leaders of their communities and the foundation for economic growth and quality of life for years and decades to come. NLC looks forward to supporting all cities as they continue to explore the leadership roles they can play to advance quality afterschool and summer learning programs for children and youth nationwide.

ACTION STEPS FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS

1

Leverage the municipal “bully pulpit” for afterschool and summer learning.

Mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders can play a key role in sparking and advancing local conversations about the importance of strengthening afterschool and summer learning opportunities for youth. Municipal officials also can help lead the way to better, stronger partnerships on these issues between school district leaders, local afterschool and summer learning program providers, civic and business organizations, philanthropy, and government. With strong advocacy and coordination from local government, cities, towns and villages will be well on their way to the development of a citywide approach that meets the comprehensive needs of children and youth in the afterschool hours and during the summer months.

2

Make the most of federal recovery funding for afterschool and summer learning.

ARPA’s State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund program and the CARES Act provide critical resources that cities can use to create and expand afterschool and summer learning programs in ways that address Covid-related loss of instructional time and learning recovery. Cities have until 2024 to obligate these dollars and until 2026 to spend them. City leaders can help ensure that their communities are using some of their federal recovery resources to support these critical programs for local youth.



3

Explore and support new partnerships between schools and afterschool and summer programs.

Municipal officials can set up conversations with school superintendents and principals about how to leverage the city's investments in recreation, libraries, the police athletic leagues, and other youth programs to reduce the negative impacts that the pandemic has had on student learning, physical fitness, and mental health. In these conversations, city leaders and their partners also can explore how to align school district and city funding.

Under ARPA, the federal government made significant funds available to school districts for partnerships with municipalities and community-based groups to provide afterschool and summer learning services through the Elementary and Secondary Education Emergency Relief (ESSER) program. Each school district is required to use at least 20 percent of their ESSER funds on learning recovery strategies that can include afterschool or summer programs. Begin mapping out what the city or your community-based organizations can offer schools. Use this [toolkit for reaching out to local education leaders](#) from NLC's partners at the Afterschool Alliance to access these resources.

4

Champion the work of community-based afterschool and summer programs to schools, the city, and other funders.

Municipal leaders can serve as high-profile and effective spokespersons, connectors and advocates for community-based organizations that provide quality youth programs. Many of these groups are well-positioned to partner with schools to provide afterschool and summer programming for children and youth. However, these same organizations often struggle to connect with school leaders; they also struggle to attract the funding they need to scale and enhance their programs, or even survive as we have seen during the pandemic. City leaders can help broker relationships and open doors for community-based groups to schools, philanthropy and other local partners. (As noted in #3 above, schools are allowed and encouraged to share their ESSER funds for learning recovery with community-based organizations.)

5

Connect with your [Statewide Afterschool Network](#). These networks exist in all 50 states as a critical resource for tools, research, training, and other support. Your statewide network can be a key partner in improving the quality and quantity of local afterschool and summer learning programs. In each state, these groups manage a wide network of youth providers, map programs and gaps across the state, track state legislation for youth programming, and serve as advocates for increased state and federal funding.

6

Bring an equity lens to your work on afterschool and summer learning. When exploring how to expand and strengthen these programs, municipal leaders and their partners should focus on how to advance racial equity. This can mean using techniques such as asset mapping* to identify neighborhoods with limited access to programs, yet with great need. Another possible strategy is to explore how to use strategically located and easily accessible public facilities such as recreation centers or libraries to create [community learning hubs](#) where these programs can reside. These neighborhood-based hubs ensure that youth who are most in need will have access to quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities.

7

Promote and participate in national public awareness celebrations to increase visibility of these issues. Mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders can help underscore the importance of afterschool and summer learning programs by participating in national public awareness celebrations such as [National Summer Learning Week](#) and [Lights on Afterschool Day](#), held annually in July and October, respectively. Build awareness of these events among peer elected officials, senior municipal staff, community partners, residents, and young people — and work together to explore your own local celebrations. Mayors can sign mayoral proclamations, pass city council resolutions, conduct media outreach; attend celebrations of local programs and participating children, or light up a city landmark in honor of the programs in your community and the children participating in them.

* Asset mapping is a process of cataloging key services, benefits, and resources within the community, such as individuals' skill sets, organizational resources, partners, physical space, institutions, associations, funding streams and elements of the local economy. Asset mapping can help to identify community assets and strengths as well as identify areas of need that require targeted resources and services.

8

Share research and tools with your community youth providers.

The Wallace Foundation is a key national philanthropic entity focused on improving learning and enrichment for young people across the country. The foundation's [Knowledge Center](#) houses key research, infographics, program planning tools, videos, case studies, evidence-based practices, program examples and more. Specific resources to note include: [a Summer Learning Planning Toolkit](#), [a Framework for Measuring Continuous Improvement](#), as well as a curated list of [Evidence-Based Considerations for Reopening and Recovery Strategies for Summer Learning Programs](#) and one on [Afterschool Coordination Systems for Afterschool Programs](#).

9

Help youth providers access state-of-the-art curriculum and program management tools to deliver high-quality afterschool and summer programming.

Often times, youth program providers lack access to quality curriculum and evidence-based strategies to ensure their programs make the most impact. An exciting new and free resource for communities is the [Mizzen App](#). It delivers high-quality afterschool experiences through a comprehensive digital library of teaching and learning resources via a mobile app and web-based platforms.

10

Stay connected to NLC. NLC's Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute) is the go-to place for city leaders seeking to improve outcomes for children and families. Visit www.nlc.org to find more information and resources on how to be a champion for children and youth in your city, city examples and more. The Institute also offers resources and advice on citywide afterschool system building, along with introductions to your statewide afterschool network, and opportunities to join the Afterschool Policy Advisors' Network (APAN) and the Mayor's Education Task Force. Email educationexpandedlearning@nlc.org for more information.

Appendix

SURVEY METHODS AND RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The NLC National Municipal Afterschool and Summer Learning survey was distributed via email to over 8,000 mayors, city councilmembers, city managers, and senior city staff through NLC's membership and education/afterschool related peer city networks for six weeks between September 13 and October 31, 2021. During this time, over 275 cities responded in part or in full with a total of 151 complete responses from 115 unique cities. To incentivize and thank cities for their participation, respondents had the opportunity to enter a lottery for a chance to win one of 20 \$100 Visa gift cards.

The survey responses came from individuals from 33 states across the U.S., with the largest number of responses coming from states in the southern region of the US (33 percent of respondents). Individuals who completed the survey represented cities ranging in population sizes; the median population size of cities represented was 78,000, with a maximum population size of 8.6 million (New York, NY) and a minimum population size of 103 (Town of Washington, VA). Thirty-nine percent of respondents were city staff from various city departments, 25 percent were from external entities responding on behalf of the city, 18 percent were from the mayor's office, and 7 percent were elected officials.

SURVEY LIMITATION

This survey includes responses from 115 unique municipalities, representing less than 0.6 percent of incorporated municipalities in the U.S., and about 6 percent of NLC member cities. Responses to individual survey questions should not be interpreted as reflective of all incorporated municipalities with afterschool and summer programs, rather only those responding to the survey. Additionally, survey responses are over representative of cities within the Southern region of the U.S. and under representative of cities in the Northeastern U.S. and Midwest.

While individual responses and the survey sample size should not be viewed as representative of all U.S. cities, the 115 city responses give a helpful view into municipal leaders' attitudes, city practices, and investments. The key themes identified from this survey can be used in tandem with ongoing outreach and communication with cities to inform the roles that municipal leaders and their governments are playing and can play in the future to support young people through afterschool and summer learning programs.



ABOUT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES, INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH, EDUCATION, AND FAMILIES

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions. NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. Throughout the YEF Institute's 22-year history, it has recognized the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the municipal leaders who completed the survey and to our national partners and the 50 statewide afterschool network directors who helped to disseminate the survey. Thank you to Jen Rinehart and Nikki Yamashiro at the Afterschool Alliance, Jenna Tomasello at the Hatcher Group, Melissa Connerton at The Wallace Foundation for their expert review and feedback on the survey questions. Additional appreciation to William Woodwell for his editorial review, Karen Nava, Lorena Prada and their team for the beautiful design work, and Ebone Clifton for her communications expertise.

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