



**TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON 2020-2021 EXECUTIVE
BUDGET PROPOSAL ON HUMAN SERVICES
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Our thanks to Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, Senator Brisport, Assemblymember Hevesi, Senator Persaud, and Assemblymember Rosenthal, and to the other members of the Finance, Ways and Means, Children and Families, and Social Services Committees for the opportunity to present testimony to you today regarding the Executive Budget Proposal.

COVID-19 has created extraordinary circumstances for many children and families in New York. Hard hit by the pandemic, the opportunity gaps that already disadvantage communities of color and children from low-income families are likely to grow. Afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs have been crucial in helping young people and their families through this crisis: These programs provide services and support that promote resilience, provide protective factors, and elevate assets that can help overcome the effects of trauma and adversity, such as traumas of 2020 including political divisions, racial unrest, and COVID-19. As children face learning loss and isolation from the pandemic, these programs are helping to expand learning opportunities to support students who are learning remotely and parents who need a safe place for their kids while they are working.

Afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs have been hard hit by the pandemic as well. With the grave impact of COVID-19 leading to school closures, programs have had to transition into new program spaces to operate. They have had to cover additional costs of lower staff ratios, longer hours, and enhanced cleaning protocols and equipment. Also, with programs facing unexecuted contracts and delayed payments, many of these programs had to close or bear the brunt of running their programs at unsustainable levels. Delayed and restricted guidance about how to utilize state funds also caused many afterschool programs to close and continues to cause providers to bear expenses for their programs through lower and restricted reimbursement rates. The need to rebuild the current afterschool infrastructure, which was fragile before the pandemic, towards a more robust system is paramount at this time.

In spite of program disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the limited resources to work with, afterschool programs in New York continue to step up in various ways to help youth and their families by providing the critical services and support that promote resilience, provide protective factors, and elevate assets that can help overcome the effects of trauma and adversity. Today, driven by passion and commitment to meet critical needs, afterschool programs in New York continue to adapt high-quality programs to keep children safe and engaged in learning; help families continue to do their jobs by expanding childcare services; provide and deliver food and other supports to families in need; share diverse resources and connection to services families need to stay safe and whole at this time, and strive to protect and retain dedicated program staff.

Impact of Afterschool

Evidence shows that afterschool programs play a critical role in improving student outcomes and that summer programs halt summer learning loss. As recently as 2019, a new Research for Action study looked at a broad range of afterschool programs across age groups and across focus areas such as academics, athletics, and career pathways, and found significant positive impacts on students. These quality afterschool and summer programs support students as they pursue their passions and learn how to take chances and make calculated risks and healthy choices.

For students who are fortunate enough to be enrolled in high-quality afterschool and summer programs, these opportunities contribute to the development of social-emotional skills that employers look for in their future employees. They also provide Protective Factors such as access to, and relationships with, nurturing adults that we know result in healthier children who make better decisions and are able to build skills that last a lifetime.

Parents also value quality afterschool programs. Programs not only help working families build bridges to their children's school day by offering academic and social supports, they also help working families maintain their own economic stability at work while knowing their children are safe and engaged. New York parents and guardians agree that afterschool programs have a positive impact on their families. According to the 2020 America After 3PM report:

- 94% of New York parents/guardians are satisfied with their child's overall afterschool program experience.
- 76% agree that these programs keep kids safe and out of trouble, and
- 82% agree that afterschool programs provide opportunities for kids to learn important life skills.

Support from afterschool programs have been crucial for families returning to work amid the pandemic. Afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning opportunities play a necessary role for New York students and families.

Despite the many benefits of these programs, the demand for afterschool programs remains high. While New York has made important investments in afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs, it still falls short of the amount that is needed to ensure that the 1.6 million students who would participate in an afterschool program if one were available to them, are able to do so. For every child in an afterschool program in New York, four are waiting to get in. With the onset of COVID-19, this need has most likely increased.

New York must ensure that afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs are able to recover from the impact of COVID-19, adequately respond to the needs of children and families, and build resilience of their programs, youth, and families served.

To fully RECOVER, New York must safeguard investments, commitments, and protections provided to afterschool, summer, and other expanded learning programs by:

- Baseline critical funds that support afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs at FY2020-2021 levels. This includes restoring the cuts in Advantage After School Program (\$5 million) and Youth Development Program (\$2.2million) in the FY2021-2022 Executive Budget: A cut to these programs in the midst of a crisis and ongoing grant period is detrimental to the afterschool programs, staff, and more than 2,500 students and families who are depending these programs to find healthy and safe spaces to foster positive development.

- Utilizing funds committed to expanded learning programs in the FY2021-2022 State Budget and any remaining funds from FY2020-2021. This includes streamlining the current contract process for a timely execution of contracts and payments to awarded afterschool grantees to help them recover from the huge financial costs many programs have had to bear amid the pandemic.

To adequately RESPOND to the needs of children and families, expanded learning programs must be nimble to provide a continuum of care and seamlessly adapt, especially during crisis.

- New York must include language in the State budget that:
 - a. Directs \$250,000 to the NYS Network for Youth Success to sustain the mobilization and coordination of high-quality expanded learning programs, especially to respond to crises such as COVID-19. None of the required 9% set-aside in CCDBG quality funds currently supports technical assistance for the 2,837 school-age child care programs in New York. Throughout all of 2020, the Network continued providing quality support, without funding, to the field and increased its services to meet the needs of a collapsing school-age child care (SACC) field amid the COVID-19 pandemic (See Appendix 1 for quality support provided by the Network). Without these quality funds, the Network will no longer be able to offer quality support services and technical assistance to the field, which it has provided consistently over its rich 25-year history. New York will truly have no statewide support dedicated to SACC providers at a time when the field is on the brink of collapse due to the economic hardships brought on by the pandemic.
 - b. Allows modifications to afterschool contracts and performance outcomes during a State disaster emergency, and directs state agencies to provide timely guidance in the case where budget modifications to afterschool contracts may be required. Programs funded under any state funding stream require official guidance in order to operate effectively, and so timely and flexible guidance about how to utilize state funds are critical to sustain the field.
 - c. Allows summer programming as a vital component of all afterschool funding streams, especially for the Advantage After School Program. Summer learning opportunities are a critical component of youth programs that operate outside of school hours and are even more crucial in light of the “COVID slide” and widened summer learning loss. Advantage After School Program is the only main funding stream for afterschool that does not allow summer.

To build RESILIENCE of expanded learning programs and the youth and families they serve, New York State must make new investments to help programs operate safely, securely, and effectively by:

- Dedicating a percentage of new revenue streams, specifically 25 percent of revenue from adult-use cannabis to increase access to affordable high-quality expanded learning programs. Legalization of adult use cannabis must include strategies to prevent children and youth from partaking in marijuana use. And research shows that afterschool programs decrease drug abuse and misuse. They are the ideal venue to not only educate children and youth about the dangers of drug abuse, but to also provide and strengthen the Protective

Factors that have been shown to decrease drug use. (See the Network's brief on "[Cannabis Tax Revenue: The Case for Investing in Afterschool Programs](#)".) Leveraging cannabis tax revenue is an intentional investment in a portfolio and body of work around direct prevention for young people, and this revenue should be used to enhance current afterschool programs and bring more programs to our families, particularly in communities hardest hit by the war on drugs, and where there are not enough afterschool programs to meet the demand. Several states that have legalized have already made the determination to use revenue in this effective way: In Alaska, which recently allocated 12.5% of revenue from the legalization of adult-use cannabis to afterschool, data shows that youth who participated in programs just twice a week were 40% less likely to use marijuana. New York State, as a leader in the afterschool field, cannot miss the opportunity to do the same.

- Increasing the per student allotment of Advantage and Empire afterschool programs to at least \$2,320. Even before the pandemic, the true costs of providing a high-quality afterschool was estimated to be just under \$3,000 in Buffalo and about \$6,000 in New York City. Amid the pandemic, programs continue to have a difficult time both increasing salaries and paying for supplies/activities that not only support programs, but make those programs high quality. While \$2,320 is nowhere near the true costs of programming, this amount will account for minimum wage increase (2020 data used), while holding everything constant.
- Fully utilizing the \$450 million in federal funds for childcare and other untapped funds to stabilize and achieve a fully-invested, high-quality, responsive continuum of care and development for children and youth in New York State. The child care needs of families are dire, and New York cannot fully recover if these needs are not met.

In conclusion, please note that the Network also supports the Winning Beginning NY agenda.

Appendix 1.

\$250,000 in Quality Support to Mobilize and Coordinate High-Quality School-Age Child Care Programs in New York

As Governor Cuomo mentioned in his 2021 State of the State address, COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges low-income families and caregivers, especially women, face in providing care for their young ones. At a time when the need to expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare is paramount, school-age child care providers must receive the necessary support and resources to help them continue to effectively meet the needs of families and children.

Throughout all of 2020, the New York State Network for Youth Success (NYSNYS) continued providing quality support, without funding, to the field and increased its services to meet the needs of a collapsing school-age child care (SACC) field amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Network for Youth Success continues to provide quality support and technical assistance to SACC providers, services that are aligned with the requirements of federal funding. OCFS' decision to stop compensating the Network for its services, compounded with the State's lack of timely guidance to afterschool grantees, has greatly crippled the Network's ability to serve the field and assist the State in meeting federal requirements needed to sustain high-quality programs in New York.

Ask: Direct \$250,000 in the 2021 State Budget to the NYS Network for Youth Success to sustain the mobilization and coordination of high-quality SACC programs. Without these quality funds, NYSNYS will no longer be able to offer quality support services and technical assistance to the field, which it has provided consistently over its rich 25-year history. New York will truly have no statewide support dedicated to SACC providers at a time when the field is on the brink of collapse due to the economic hardships brought on by the pandemic.

Loss of Funding

Federal funding provided to New York requires that the State sets-aside a minimum of 9% for quality support. Unfortunately, in New York, none of the quality funding is dedicated to technical assistance for school-age providers at this time.

History: NYSNYS received funding of \$50,000 annually from the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to partially fund its work providing technical assistance, quality support, and systems building for SACC programs from 2011 through 2019. This funding was part of federal Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding, which requires a state plan and initially mandated an amount to be directed to technical assistance for SACC programs. In 2020, OCFS stopped providing this funding as it was not through a competitive bid and was unable to create a competitive bid for such a small allocation. Currently, about 48% of subsidies support school-age children. NYSNYS continues to be listed within the state plan for work that is no longer funded: NYSNYS is included as a partner within New York's state CCDF plan for plan development, stakeholder feedback, dissemination of resources, providing technical assistance, training of staff, and development of resources for serving homeless children and families.

The Network is the only organization in New York providing support for school-age child care programs statewide with experts specific to school-age programs. Not receiving this funding has resulted in a huge loss of capacity for the Network and without this funding, the Network will not be able to provide the quality support services and technical assistance school-age child care

providers must receive to adequately respond to the dynamic needs of families and children amid COVID-19.

Amid COVID-19, the Network for Youth Success has been critical in supporting the quality, capacity, and alignment of the school-age child care field in New York.

Throughout all of 2020, NYSNYS continued providing quality support, without funding, to the field and increased its services to meet the needs of a collapsing school-age child care field amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Concurrently, the State was unable to provide timely guidance to afterschool programs receiving state and federal funding. Providers were unable to confidently begin programs for the 2020-21 school year without confirmation that they would be receiving their contract payments. Therefore, the Network lost funding from contracts with grantees to directly support the quality of their grant-funded programs.

Amid COVID-19, the Network:

- developed a COVID-19 resource page to collate and disseminate information to programs on updates to state funding streams; tools for supporting youth, families, and staff; resources for operating virtually or socially distanced; and reopening guides and guidance.
- kept the field informed by highlighting and sending frequent blasts to our listservs with updated information and guidance.
- developed and conducted trainings on the new Department of Health guidelines for child care programs and summer camps.
- developed new professional development trainings including a training series on Trauma Informed Care and a new training on virtual self-assessment to help the field effectively adapt, respond, and support their programs, families, and communities.
- served as the liaison between providers and OCFS to ensure there is constant communication of information in both directions.
- cataloged all of the school district reopening plans and how they do or do not include afterschool, childcare, and pre-k to serve as a resource to help SACC programs strategize in their partnership efforts with schools to meet students' needs.
- Worked closely with our regional afterschool networks to convene local partners (school districts, funders, city/county leadership, colleges/universities, local providers, etc.) and mobilize localized efforts to support programs amid COVID-19

In addition to quality support NYSNYS is providing amid the pandemic, NYSNYS has been supporting the field by:

Disseminating resources

- The Network sends weekly newsletters to its full listserv of thousands of afterschool providers including new research and resources, highlights from the field, upcoming events, and more.
- More than 2,000 individuals follow the Network on Facebook to take advantage of posted resources and activities.
- AfterschoolPathfinder.org, a free, statewide job and training posting site for the afterschool field, is administered by the Network.
- As the state representative for the 50 State Afterschool Network, state affiliate for the National AfterSchool Association, state lead for the National Girls Collaborative Project, and backbone for the New York State Community Schools Network, the Network connects the field to national experts, best-practices, and resources.

- Through its 15 affiliated regional afterschool networks, the Network uplifts local models. Regional networks help share best practices and coordinate local professional development resources for programs and providers. They also provide effective means to distribute information and engage programs and parents on state and local policy issues.

Developing quality tools

[The Quality Self-Assessment \(QSA\) Tool](#)

- The Network developed the QSA Tool with experts, researchers, and practitioners to be relevant and reasonable.
- The updated 3rd Edition includes new indicators on diversity, equity, and inclusion and with a new Informal STEM Learning element developed in partnership with the PEAR Institute at Harvard University.
- The free tool allows programs to self-assess across 11 elements of quality, reviewing best-practices from administration and sustainability to programming and family engagement, and create and implement improvement plans supported by aligned resources.
- The QSA Tool is available in 10 languages and is recommended for use for all state and federally funding programs in New York.
- The Network offers free webinars to train practitioners on the use of the tool, and includes the recordings on its website and in newsletters.
- The Network attends local, state, and national conferences to provide workshops on the use of the tool, including for Advantage After School Program and 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees.
- The Network recently acquired printed copies of the updated tool, which have been distributed across the state and continued to be offered free of charge.

A sampling of other resources developed by the Network for Youth Success and offered free to the field:

- [Including All Participants: Frequently Asked Questions About Including Participants with Disabilities in Afterschool and Summer Programs](#)
- [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources](#)
- Webinar: [Supporting Homeless Students and Families through Afterschool](#)
- [The State of Youth Justice in New York](#)
- [School-Community Partnership Guidebook](#)

Providing technical assistance

- The Network provides assistance to individuals and organizations looking to start new programs, many of whom are unfamiliar with or have questions regarding school-age child care regulations, via phone.
- The Network serves as a liaison between existing programs and OCFS and is often the first group contacted with questions and concerns.
- To improve communication between providers and OCFS, the Network hosts regional meetings between OCFS Managers, the Network's regional afterschool networks, and providers.
- In response to recent changes to comprehensive background check requirements, the Network hosted a webinar for the field to gather questions and feedback, surveyed providers at the request of OCFS, and continues to field questions from the field and assist providers in finding resolutions to the barriers they are facing.
- Through its newsletter and listservs, the Network keeps providers up-to-date on OCFS work and school-age child care regulations by sharing Dear Provider letters and statements.

- To address a gap where new Health and Safety Trainings were only offered with a focus on child care but were required for school-age child care providers, the Network became trained in, and now offers, Health and Safety Trainings for school-age child care providers.

Bringing providers together

- The Network's two-day Annual Conference offered each spring has sold out for several years and has now moved to a larger venue due to high demand. During the pandemic, it has taken place virtually.
- The Network offers complimentary tickets for Advantage Managers to its Annual Conference.
- To meet regional needs, the Network also offers regional training days throughout the year.

Offering professional development

- The Network administers the School-Age Care Credential, which serves as an education qualifier for directors under the SACC regulations, and advertises it broadly across the state to help programs improve quality and sustainability by getting their staff credentialed.
- Over the past year, the Network has brought on additional Host Agencies across the state and provided them with training to be able to offer the Credential in their communities and meet increased demand.
- The Network also offers a Distance Learning course online to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the Credential, no matter where they are located.
- The Network develops a full professional development catalog based on the needs raised by the field:
 - The Site Leader Institute helps prepare new afterschool program grantees and new site directors to operate high-quality programs through in-person and virtual trainings and coaching throughout the year.
 - Coaching Circles are offered in various communities to bring together providers and help them learn to work together to solve the issues they face in their programs, and they are designed to be sustained.
 - Professional development around Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math is offered on demand, including Click2SciencePD, CryptoClub, and Citizen Science.
 - To address needs around Healthy Eating and Physical Activity, the Network sought and acquired funds to offer three free workshop series for providers across the state.

Gathering stakeholder feedback

- For each Request for Proposals released by the state, the Network consults the field and provides advance recommendations before the RFP development, questions and comments once it is released, and feedback after awards have been made.
- As needed, the Network conducts surveys of the field to learn more about current needs and issues, including several surveys to gather feedback around the School-Age Child Care Regulations.
- The Network serves as the state advisors to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and provides input to the State Education Department and Technical Assistance Centers based on feedback from grantees and national best-practices.

Curating vision for the field

- The Network maintains an active Capacity Building Committee of experts, practitioners, funders, and researchers across the state, which guides the work of the Network and addresses the current needs of the field.
- The Advisory Council run by the Network brings together the Office of Children and Family Services, the State Education Department, and other state and New York City public agencies to allow for updates and collaboration.
- The Network has led New York State's team for multiple peer learning communities run by the National Center of Afterschool and Summer Enrichment, which have brought together public and private partners to develop plans for advancing New York State's afterschool field around workforce, social-emotional learning, and quality systems.