



Thank you to the members of the Senate Finance Committee, Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and the Children and Families and Social Services Committees for the opportunity to present testimony today on the FY 2026–27 Executive Budget.

The New York State Network for Youth Success is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs throughout New York. We envision New York as a place where all K–12 youth have access to high-quality learning experiences beyond the traditional school day that prepare them for success in school, college, careers, and life. The programs we represent serve tens of thousands of young people and working families in communities across the State.

We are grateful for the Governor’s proposed increased investment of \$6M in LEAPS (Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports), which allows for minimum wage increases for the staff in these programs. However, the demand for afterschool in New York State persists - with over 1.3 million children whose parents want to enroll them in a program but cannot. While the State has made encouraging investments and taken notable steps to streamline the system, including the consolidation of Advantage and Empire, approximately 48,000 children lost programming. This [map](#) shows lost slots by county.

We further urge policymakers to consider that afterschool programs are critical to the success of universal early care and learning. Without simultaneous investment alongside the Governor’s proposals across the child care system, we will destabilize providers and undermine that system from the start.

### **FY 2026–27 Afterschool Budget Requests**

We bring to you today a budget ask that would restore access to students, as well as a targeted ask that would support the State’s move toward universal child care.

We urge the Legislature to prioritize the following investments in the FY 2026–27 Budget:

## **1. Allocate an additional \$180M to enhance and expand the LEAPS grant.**

This investment would:

- **Provide \$155M** to fund high-quality LEAPS applicants deemed “eligible but not funded,” restoring access for approximately 48,000 children.
- **Invest \$25M** to restore afterschool access for middle and high school students who were excluded from LEAPS funding.

## **2. Align afterschool investments with universal child care pilots.**

We ask state leaders to add universal afterschool to the county pilots for universal child care—Broome, Dutchess, and Monroe— which have lost 369, 1,440, and 1,166 afterschool slots, respectively, since the creation of LEAPS. An expansion of both child care and PreK cannot succeed without parallel investments in afterschool and expanded learning opportunities. We must not destabilize the system, but instead raise all boats. We would also note that LEAPS funding can, in fact, be used for PreK—another way to connect these programs. **At a per pupil rate of \$3,400, restoring LEAPS slots in the three pilot counties will cost an estimated \$10.2M.** We look forward to working with policymakers to determine how the State could provide truly universal afterschool in these three counties.

## **Afterschool programs represent essential infrastructure for working families and communities.**

Afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs are a lifeline for families and communities alike. Expanded learning opportunities are an essential part of New York’s education, childcare, and youth development systems. These programs provide more than academic support; they foster hands-on learning, social-emotional development, mentorship, and safe environments where young people can thrive. For working families, afterschool programs function as essential infrastructure.

They enable parents and caregivers to maintain stable employment, reduce reliance on costly and ad hoc child care arrangements, and allow families to focus limited household resources on other essential needs. These benefits are widely recognized by New York families:

- 94 percent of caregivers report satisfaction with their child’s afterschool program; 95 percent with summer programs;
- 88 percent support public funding for afterschool;
- 95 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program report being satisfied with the program overall; and
- 97 percent rate the quality of their child’s program as "excellent," "very good," or "good".
- Among parents with a child in a program, 83 percent report a positive impact on their stress levels, and 90 percent report a positive impact on their overall well-being.

As New York plans to expand access to child care and Pre-K, it is critical that afterschool investments keep pace. Without a simultaneous investment across the full child care and youth development continuum, we risk destabilizing providers and undermining the system from the start. Families with multiple children have had to opt out of free early care programs in the past due to the lack of options for their older children. Families are now expressing concern about the steep financial cliff they face when moving from free early care to paying, on average, \$17,000 per year for afterschool following a full-day Pre-K program.

It is important to note that LEAPS funding can be used to serve Pre-K students, making it a potential vehicle for expanding Pre-K. We urge the State to design a comprehensive system that serves all families in a variety of modalities.

### **LEAPS is a great step forward; let's build on it**

In recent years, New York State has made notable strides in afterschool investments, including the creation of the LEAPS initiative. For many communities, LEAPS offered a new opportunity to provide high-quality afterschool programming. The program introduced important structural improvements, including a streamlined contracting process, a revised funding methodology to enhance program viability, and greater cash flow flexibility.

However, significant challenges remain. Only about one-third of eligible LEAPS applicants ultimately received funding. Organizations approved to deliver services, but that did not secure a LEAPS award, continue to face unmet afterschool needs, including former Advantage and Empire State grantees who have experienced significant disruptions and, in some cases, program closures. The result has been a net loss of afterschool slots for working families across the State.

### **Older Youth Left Behind: Middle and High School Gaps Persist**

LEAPS also excluded children aged 13 who were previously served under earlier state afterschool investments. Instead, the State made a limited investment in a new pilot program, BOOST (Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time).

While we appreciate the intent behind BOOST, the scale of unmet need for youth ages 13 to 17 far exceeds the program's current capacity. BOOST serves only the highest-risk older youth and excludes New York City, except for specialized high schools. This leaves tens of thousands of middle and high school students without access to safe, enriching afterschool opportunities during a critical developmental period.

### **Closing**

In closing, afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs are essential to New York's youth, families, workforce, and long-term economic vitality. By addressing the remaining gaps in LEAPS, restoring access for younger children and older youth alike, and including afterschool in

the implementation of universal child care/PreK, the State can lay the groundwork for a truly comprehensive, stable, and equitable system of care.

Thank you.

Contact: Jenn O'Connor, policy consultant, 518/817-1107, [policy@networkforyouthsuccess.org](mailto:policy@networkforyouthsuccess.org)