

High Quality Summer and Afterschool Programs



The Big Idea:



It is critical that students have access to high-quality learning opportunities outside of the traditional school day to accelerate and support their learning.

Why are Summer and Afterschool Programs Important?

As of 2025, according to the Nation's Report Card (NAEP), Alabama is ranked 34th in the nation for 4th-grade reading proficiency and only 28% of Alabama's 4th-grade students are reading proficiently. As students continue to catch up from multiple years of disrupted learning, opportunities outside of the traditional school day new supports will be needed to get students to grade-level standards. Research shows that students in summer and afterschool programs show more improvements in academic achievement, fewer absences at school, and demonstrate more positive behaviors than their peers. These programs also help caretakers by providing childcare and youth supervision during typical work hours, which keeps parents employed and businesses thriving.

Funding Summer and Afterschool Programs in Alabama

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama districts received \$3.28 billion in ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds from the U.S. Department of Education. These funds were a part of a series of federal packages to address the financial impact of the pandemic on public schools and anticipated student achievement declines. At least 1% of these funds had to go towards afterschool programs. Additionally, many districts in Alabama chose to use some of these funds on summer reading or math camps to support Alabama Literacy Act and Alabama Numeracy Act implementation.

In 2021, the Alabama Legislature allocated \$1.5 million for a 3-year summer and after-school pilot grant program, administered by the Department of Early Childhood Education, and funded partnerships between local school districts and community-based organizations to expand access to high-quality summer and after-school programs.

In 2023, the pilot was moved to the Alabama State Department of Education and renamed the Alabama Summer and Afterschool (ASAP) grant program. These grants continued to provide support for existing and new afterschool programs during the 2024-2025 school year, as ESSER funding began to phase out. 45 grants up to \$50,000 each were awarded.

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In 2025, the Alabama legislature increased funding for summer and after-school programs by \$14.4 million, bringing the total to \$17.3 million. These funds will go towards some summer and afterschool initiatives that were previously funded by ESSER, and represents an ongoing commitment to student success. Additionally, the legislature created the Joint Interim Study Commission on Expanding Access to High-Quality Out-of-School Time (OST) to study Alabama's afterschool and summer opportunities for students and provide recommendations to expand program access and quality.

A+ Policy Recommendations

- [Dedicated State Funding](#)

Alabama has committed to supporting high-quality expanded learning programs for students in the FY2026 Education Trust Fund budget. The state should continue to invest in summer and afterschool programs across the state. Additional funds should be available for underserved communities for these programs to create opportunities for students who otherwise would not be able to participate due to cost.

- [Focus on Literacy and STEM](#)

Programs should focus on building students' reading and STEM skills, because these areas are where Alabama students have the largest deficits. Summer and afterschool programs in literacy and STEM lead to better academic outcomes, more students pursuing higher education, and more students entering STEM fields.

- [High-Quality Instruction](#)

Summer and afterschool programs should use high-quality instructional materials to make the biggest impact possible. Programs need to align summer and afterschool programs with school curriculum through engaging and rigorous opportunities for students.

- [Community-Based Partnerships](#)

Summer and afterschool programs should be hosted by community-based organizations, such as child care centers, faith-based centers, college and university lab schools, private schools, and community organizations. This allows the leaders closest to students to identify and address their needs.

- [Enrichment Component](#)

Programs should engage students to improve attendance both in the program and on typical school days. Students who are engaged in clubs, sports, and other enriching opportunities have better academic outcomes, fewer behavioral challenges, and are more likely to graduate. In addition to programs centered around sports or other activities, academically-focused programs should aim to engage students.

