THE EXPANDED Classroom

How making out-of-school time learning part of every student's experience can improve academic outcomes and prepare the next-generation workforce.

A JOINT REPORT FROM

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF INDIANAPOLIS

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF ST. JOSEPH COUNTY

INDIANA Afterschool NETWORK

The Mind Trust

United Way of Central Indiana

"It takes a village to raise a child."

—African proverb

INTRODUCTION

Learning Shouldn't Stop When the School Day Ends.

MAXIMIZING THE TIME KIDS SPEND LEARNING, building relationships, and exploring interests will lead to better outcomes for students academically and over the course of their lifetime. When it comes to providing such learning, the K–12 classroom has been paramount. But today, in a post-COVID era when academic outcomes are languishing across the board, there's growing recognition that the classroom alone is not enough. There's an increased focus on leveraging the time kids spend outside of school, from after-school hours to summers and weekends, to provide learning opportunities that equip them to succeed in school, the workforce, and life.

For kids from affluent households, this kind of out-of-school engagement happens frequently and naturally, from after-school programs to summer camps, music lessons, sports teams, and a host of other organized activities. But for too many low-income students, the non-school hours are spent at home and unsupervised, due to parents' work schedules and limited resources to pay for out-of-school time (OST) programming.

Nationally, there are 24.7 million young people in grades K–12 who are not in OST programs who would be if they could access them.[1] **In Indiana, for every student enrolled in OST programs, there are three K–12 students without access to any program.**[2] These access gaps compound disparate outcomes in school and the workforce between students from high-income families and those from low-income families. Gaps can be particularly acute in rural and urban areas.

> ***"All too often in low-income communities, we expect schools to provide for every single student need during regular school hours. Kids who are performing well in school are accessing out-of-school time learning. We need to ensure that all students—and particularly those furthest behind—have access to these opportunities."***[3]
>
> **—Kristin Grimme, Chief Strategy Officer, The Mind Trust**

The idea of programming out-of-school time is not new. The initial push to fill this time with productive activities came in the mid-1990s[4] in response to concerns over students' safety. In the early 2000s, the focus of OST programming turned to academics, as accountability drew increased attention to longstanding disparities in academic performance.

But experts say the current momentum around maximizing out-of-school time marks a different era. It's not just about structuring the hours not spent in the classroom. Rather, this time around, there's a fundamental recognition that the learning happening in the classroom and the learning that takes place outside of school

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1 Afterschool Alliance. (2022). *Access to afterschool programs remains a challenge for many families.* http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/afterschool-COVID-19-Parent-Survey-2022-Brief.pdf

2 Afterschool Alliance. (2022). *This is afterschool in Indiana.* https://www.indianaafterschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/This-Is-afterschool-in-Indiana.pdf

3 Murphy, S., & Grimme, K. (2023, August 14). Interview with Seana Murphy and Kristin Grimme: [Recorded notes].

4 Afterschool Alliance. (2021). *Two Decades of 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing afterschool and summer opportunities to millions of young people and families* (Issue Brief No. 78). http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue_briefs/issue_21stCCLC_78.pdf

must be integrated. That requires making out-of-school time experiences available for all students, regardless of income or geography, and addressing barriers to make that possible.

"At a time when our state needs to focus on helping students recover from the learning losses of the pandemic—and prepare for the workforce—we must focus on time outside of school just as we focus on the time spent in the classroom," said Indiana Senator Ryan Mishler, a Republican from northern Indiana who chairs the Senate Committee on Appropriations. "Indiana is fortunate to have several high-quality out-of-school time programs that are helping to accelerate learning and workforce readiness for Hoosier kids in the hours after school and in the summer. Our legislature proudly invested in growing these programs over the last couple of years, and we're seeing great results. If we're going to maintain this momentum, we need to continue to prioritize these programs and better integrate time students spend in and out of the classroom."

The need for out-of-school time programming has never been greater.

APRIL 1983 MARKED A WATERSHED MOMENT IN EDUCATION, when the U.S. Department of Education released "A Nation at Risk." This landmark public report raised concern[5] about declining U.S. educational performance, growing international competition, and public schools that were woefully unprepared to tackle these challenges. While the findings of the report—and the underlying causes of the poor education outcomes it chronicled—have since been debated,[6] it's clear that huge gaps remain in academic outcomes based on income and race in the U.S. And those gaps bode poorly when it comes to helping people achieve economic opportunities and maximize their contributions to society and the workforce.

The closure of U.S. schools with the COVID-19 pandemic—and the precipitous decline in student performance that followed it—marked another watershed moment in education. It laid bare the truth about the decreased overall performance for students across demographic groups as well as the long standing gaps in achievement that were exacerbated by the pandemic.

Data from across the nation and Indiana bear this out.

> ***"In the three years since the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted schooling across the United States, a growing body of research has consistently indicated that students' academic progress lags significantly behind even the most pessimistic predictions…Some have suggested that these learning gaps are 'steep but not permanent,' but only if school systems respond with urgency and focus."***
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> **—Lydia Rainey, Paul Hill, and Robin Lake, Teaching Recovery, 2023**

5 National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. U.S. Department of Education.

6 Kamenetz, A. (2018, April 29). What 'A Nation At Risk' Got Wrong, And Right, About U.S. Schools. nprEd. https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/29/605285169/what-a-nation-at-risk-got-wrong-and-right-about-u-s-schools

The *State of the American Student,*[7] a report released this fall by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) in partnership with Arizona State University's Teachers College, paints a dire picture. Between 2020 and 2023, math scores for 13-year-olds on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) dropped by an average of six points for white students, 10 points for Hispanic students, and 13 points for Black students. Overall, the math scores for 13-year-olds reflected a low not seen since 1990, according to the report. Eric Hanushek, a Stanford University economist, has projected[8] that, if unaddressed, these learning losses could amount to $28 trillion in lost lifetime earnings—equivalent to shutting down the nation's economy for an entire year.

"Everybody who was in school during the pandemic will experience 5–6 percent lower lifetime earnings," Hanushek said in a recent interview[9] with *The 74 Million.* "It's almost like a 5 or 6 percent added tax, with this cohort earning less than the cohorts immediately ahead of it and immediately behind it, because they're just less skilled. Unless we do something about it."

Indiana academic recovery has stalled.

STUDENT OUTCOMES IN INDIANA REFLECT THIS TROUBLING NATIONAL TREND. From 2021 to 2023, the Indiana Department of Education has partnered with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc. (Center for Assessment) to produce studies showing the impact of COVID-19 on student academics. These annual Academic Impact Studies—which factor in assessments such as ILEARN, IREAD-3, and the SAT—have shown a consistent theme: Students have fallen behind in reading and especially in math, and there's more work to do to catch up.

For each of the last three years[10] of the study, the percentage of Indiana students in grades three through eight who are at or above proficient in English/Language Arts has hovered around 41%, while math proficiency has ticked up over the years from 37% to 41%. While the IDOE cautions against comparing the results to 2019—as 2021 establishes a new baseline score—it is helpful to contextualize the decline. Results in 2019, the first year ILEARN was administered, show that approximately 48% of students in third through eighth grades were proficient in English/Language Arts, and 48% were proficient in math.[11]

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7 Center on Reinventing Public Education & Arizona State University Mary Lou Felton Teachers College. (2023). The State of the American Student: We Are Failing Older Students—Bold Ideas to Change Course. https://crpe.org/wp-content/uploads/The-State-of-the-American-Student-2023.pdf

8 Hanushek, E. (2022, July 27). 74 Interview: Stanford Economist Eric Hanushek on COVID's Trillion-Dollar Impact on Students. *The 74 Million.* https://www.the74million.org/article/74-interview-stanford-economist-eric-hanushek-on-covids-trillion-dollar-impact-on-students/

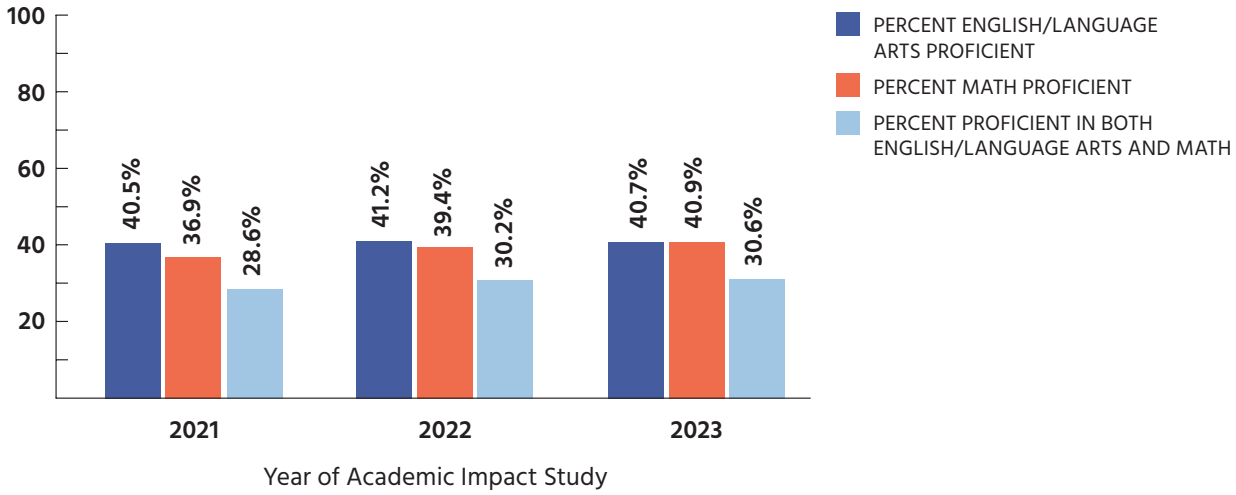
9 Hanushek, E. (2022, July 27). 74 Interview: Stanford Economist Eric Hanushek on COVID's Trillion-Dollar Impact on Students. *The 74 Million.* https://www.the74million.org/article/74-interview-stanford-economist-eric-hanushek-on-covids-trillion-dollar-impact-on-students/

10 Indiana Department of Education. (2023, July 12). Indiana Department of Education presents update on COVID-19 academic recovery and ILEARN results. https://www.in.gov/doe/about/news/indiana-department-of-education-presents-update-on-covid-19-academic-recovery-and-ilearn-results/

11 Indiana Department of Education. (n.d.). ILEARN Data Reports Archive. Retrieved from https://www.in.gov/doe/it/data-center-and-reports/data-reports-archive/#ILEARN

TABLE 1: Indiana Students' Academic Performance after COVID-19

Source: Indiana Department of Education



"Immediately following the pandemic, we saw the greatest academic impact in math, so the fact that we have now seen gains in math for two consecutive years is positive—yet there's no doubt we have more work to do," said Dr. Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education, in a press release[12] about the 2023 study. "English/Language Arts is an area where many students continue to need additional support, particularly our English Learner and middle school students. We knew that experts were projecting years in recovery time, and yet, the urgency is real, and requires us all to keep our foot on the gas pedal."

Ongoing research from CRPE highlights some of the underlying reasons why the learning loss challenge is so persistent. The organization has conducted a deep-dive[13] into five traditional district and charter school operators' experiences with COVID-19 learning loss and recovery since Winter 2021. In their most recent interviews with district leaders in Spring 2023, the researchers found that the disruptions and challenges posed by COVID-19 have not only affected students; teachers have also suffered, and the quality of their instruction has declined. Implementing learning-loss recovery strategies, such as extended learning and high-dosage tutoring, has been nearly impossible for schools that are grappling to regain a sense of normalcy and get back to high-quality core teaching practices.

In tandem with academic challenges, many kids also struggled under the weight of social isolation and economic and human loss that accompanied the pandemic. A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study[14] showed

12 Indiana Department of Education. (2023, July 12). Indiana Department of Education presents update on COVID-19 academic recovery and ILEARN results. https://www.in.gov/doe/about/news/indiana-department-of-education-presents-update-on-covid-19-academic-recovery-and-ilearn-results/

13 Rainey, L., Hill, P., & Lake, R. (2023, July). *Teaching Recovery? Three Years In, School System Leaders Report That the Pandemic Weakened Instruction.* American School District Panel, Center on Reinventing Public Education, & Arizona State University Mary Lou Felton Teachers College. Retrieved from https://crpe.org/pandemic-teaching-recovery-july-2023

14 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, March 31). Youth mental health during COVID-19: Disparities persist, but connection to school is a promising factor. CDC Media Releases. https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0331-youth-mental-health-covid-19.html

that in 2021, 44% of high school students felt sad or hopeless during the last year. These feelings have a direct impact on students' engagement in school.

The State of the American Student reports an estimated 16 million students were chronically absent—meaning they missed more than 10% of their school days—in the 2021–22 school year. More than a quarter (27%) of school districts have reported enrollment declines of at least 5%. And fewer students are enrolling in education beyond high school, with a decline of 1.3 million students nationally from 2019 to 2023.[15] Indiana has also seen enrollment drop[16] to a low of 53% of high school students enrolling in college in 2020–21, down from 65% in 2015.

The current state of student affairs paints a dire picture for the future. Without dramatic interventions, the U.S. risks failing a generation of students. The consequences of this would be catastrophic, from lost productivity to economic decline in the face of a talent shortage and the human suffering that accompanies failure to fulfill one's innate potential.

Many educational experts and researchers agree that addressing these gaps through classroom interventions alone won't work. We must change the way we think about schooling so we can better prepare students for success in school and in life and work beyond it. As authors of the CRPE report[17] wrote:

"The uncharacteristically frank assessments (charter and traditional district) leaders offered about teaching in their systems even after years of confronting challenge after challenge suggest that district strategies alone cannot reverse pandemic learning loss in the near term. In the words of one teacher, this is an 'all hands on deck' moment."

High-quality OST programs improve students' outcomes—in academics, and in life.

KARLA DURIO SWEATS THE DETAILS. That's evident from the care and attention she put into every aspect of the Indy Summer Learning Lab she ran in Summer 2023.[18]

> ***"We're investing in the first 18 years of a child's life so the next 65 are as productive as possible."***
>
> **—Jacqueline Kronk, CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County**

Her site, located in a school building on Indianapolis' westside and operated through La Plaza, was one of 43 that hosted five-week, immersive summer learning programs in Indianapolis. The Indy Summer Learning Labs

15 Center on Reinventing Public Education & Arizona State University Mary Lou Felton Teachers College. (2023). *The State of the American Student: We Are Failing Older Students—Bold Ideas to Change Course.* https://crpe.org/wp-content/uploads/The-State-of-the-American-Student-2023.pdf

16 Indiana Commission for Higher Education. (2022, June 20). *2022 College Readiness Report.* https://www.in.gov/che/files/2022_College_Readiness_Report_06_20_2022.pdf

17 Rainey, L., Hill, P., & Lake, R. (2023, July). Teaching Recovery? *Three Years In, School System Leaders Report That the Pandemic Weakened Instruction.* American School District Panel, Center on Reinventing Public Education, & Arizona State University Mary Lou Felton Teachers College. Retrieved from https://crpe.org/pandemic-teaching-recovery-july-2023/

18 Durio, K. (2023, July 6). Observational Site Visit and Interview with Karla Durio: [Recorded notes].

are administered by The Mind Trust and United Way of Central Indiana. In their third year last summer, they collectively served close to 5,100 students.[19]

For her program, Durio mapped out a weekly schedule that would make a supply chain management executive proud. Each day was color-coded by grade and filled with plans for intensive morning academics followed by afternoon enrichment for the first through seventh graders in the program.

During the morning academic period, a peek inside a primary grade classroom revealed a group of students sounding out words phonetically as they competed for points by getting the correct spelling of similar-sounding words, such as "sheep" and "cheat." A few doors down, laughter erupted from a classroom as older students huddled around a table with their smiling teacher, sharing stories in Spanish.

LaPlaza's Indy Summer Learning Labs site.

In the afternoons, activities ranged from Aztec art to woodworking and field trips to a popular suburban playground and splash park. There was individualized tutoring available for students who needed additional support. And as a girl scout troop leader, Durio insisted on engaging the students in a service project of playground beautification. She'd even identified which weeds they needed to pull to make the courtyard look fresh for the upcoming academic year's students.

These details make a difference for students, Durio said, but it's also something more fundamental.

"A lot of these children who are in this level of economic status thrive in an environment where procedures and expectations are clear—it is vital for them to succeed," Durio said.[20] "The summer learning labs are a great place to ensure consistency so they progress, not regress, during the summer."

This progress shows up in the program's results. Students who participate in the Indy Summer Learning Labs take assessments prior to the program and after its conclusion. For two consecutive years, those assessments have shown significant student academic gains.

In 2023, the number of students participating in Indy Summer Learning Labs who tested basic or proficient grew by 23 percentage points in English and 22 percentage points in math. That follows similar double-digit proficiency gains in both 2021[21] and 2022.[22]

"We know this program has helped close the educational gap," said Maggie A. Lewis, CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Indianapolis, which hosts Indy Summer Learning Labs across several of its sites. "To have educators come alongside youth development professionals, it is a magical combination—a win-win for our families."

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19 Cloncs, J., & Sanders, J. (2023, August 15). Interview with Jenny Cloncs and Jazmin Sanders: [Recorded notes].

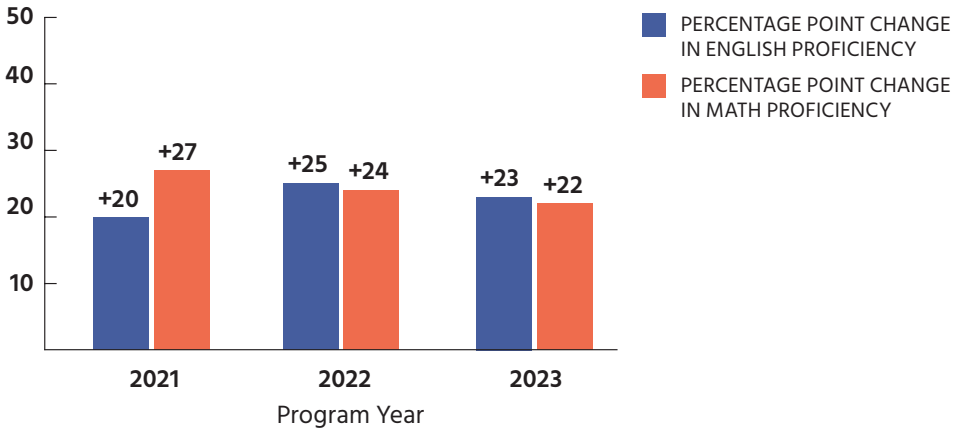
20 Durio, K. (2023, September 11). Interview with Karla Durio: [Recorded notes].

21 The Mind Trust & United Way of Central Indiana. (2021). *Indy Summer Learning Labs 2021 Progress and Success.* https://www.themindtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2021_indy_summer_learning_lab_wrap_up.pdf

22 The Mind Trust & United Way of Central Indiana. (2022). *Indy Summer Learning Labs 2022 Progress and Success.* https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l1gGl_5YcsRL_plZ4mzgx3Ff-Ua6MN4H/view

TABLE 2: Indy Summer Learning Labs Consistently Produce Double-Digit Proficiency Growth

Source: The Mind Trust and United Way of Central Indiana



These results align with a broader study of Indiana's Student Learning Recovery Program,[23] which the Indiana General Assembly established in 2021 to provide funding for K–12 students who experienced learning loss or failed to meet academic benchmarks. Indy Summer Learning Labs were among 190 grantees who received a collective $166.2 million from a combination of state and federal funds to support such programs. The state's study on this program showed that participants "indicated statistically significant gains ($p < 0.05$) in learning above pre-pandemic rates of learning."

The report went on to note that even with this progress, the problem is far from solved. Given how significant the learning losses from the pandemic were, the report noted, work remains to be done. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure all students perform on grade level and emerge from school prepared for life and work.

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM IMPROVES ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Part of what makes the Indy Summer Learning Labs so successful is that they intentionally do not focus on remediation. Rather, the program deploys a high-quality curriculum that pushes students to engage with grade-level material that is aligned with the state's academic standards. While that might sound common, it's non-conventional, as many summer programs focus on catching kids up.

> ***"Students who need the most support are too often given remediation when research is clear that what they need is grade-level material matched with adult support."***
>
> **—Brandon Brown, CEO, The Mind Trust, *The 74 Million***

23 Indiana Department of Education. (2022). Student Learning Recovery Grant Final Report. https://media.doe.in.gov/news/1008-student-learning-recovery-grant-final-report-11.1.22.pdf

The Mind Trust and United Way built the Indy Summer Learning Labs approach based on the evidence that students need to be challenged to ensure they progress at a sufficient rate. Jenny Cloncs, The Mind Trust's former Senior Director of Talent who helped administer the Indy Summer Learning Labs, said the curriculum is designed to teach students to think critically and problem-solve—skills that translate beyond the summer learning experience.[24]

"We have kids entering the program who are at an age where they should be fluent readers and they're not," Cloncs said. "Giving access to grade-level content—and that emphasis on thinking—can help them regardless of where they are. Just like in sports, when you play a high-performing team, you rise to the challenge."

Indy Summer Learning Labs at Sankofa School of Success.

It's not just about incorporating a rigorous curriculum. The Mind Trust and United Way also are intentional about hiring licensed teachers for the learning labs and providing them with the high-quality training and support they need to successfully implement the curriculum. By offering competitive pay, they were able to secure 400 applicants for 260 teaching spots this summer. To support rigor and quality instruction, The Mind Trust, which administers the academic elements of the program, hires academic deans who visit each site and work with teachers to ensure the curriculum is implemented successfully.

This kind of academic rigor pays off, as reflected not only in the Indy Summer Learning Labs' results, but also in national studies of programs that deploy a similar intentional focus on academics and a commitment to quality.

A 2017 report[25] by RAND analyzed the results of various out-of-school time programs by time. The report showed that focusing on academics pays off when it comes to student results:

> *Random assignment evaluations of these programs have found that including intentional academic instruction and enrichment activities can improve student achievement. For example, a reading intervention in an after-school program that provided 60-minute reading lessons, which included whole-class teacher instruction and two of three rotation exercises each day, four days a week for 23 weeks found positive reading outcomes. Similarly, a math after-school program for children in grades 2–5 that provided structured math instruction three to four days a week for a full school year produced significant effects after one year on a standardized math test.*

Another example of how out-of-school time programs can drive academic impact can be seen through Indiana Learns, a high-dosage tutoring program launched by the Indiana Department of Education in partnership with The Mind Trust in 2022. The initiative enables families whose students qualify for the program to receive a renewable grant of up to $1,000 that they can use at an approved tutoring program of their choice to get support in math or English/Language Arts.[26]

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24 Cloncs, J., & Sanders, J. (2023, August 15). Interview with Jenny Cloncs and Jazmin Sanders: [Recorded notes].

25 McCombs, J. S., Whitaker, A. A., & Yoo, P. Y. (2017). The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE267.html

26 Murphy, S., & Grimme, K. (2023, August 14). Interview with Seana Murphy and Kristin Grimme: [Recorded notes].

Third through eighth grade students who score below proficiency in either math or English/Language Arts—and who meet income criteria for free and reduced lunch—qualify for the grants. Once they've used their initial $1,000, they may receive an additional $1,000 grant to continue progress.

The Mind Trust's team said IDOE designed the program with specific goals in mind. They wanted to target support toward younger students who still have time to demonstrate improvement. They also sought to empower families to choose the best tutoring option for their kids—whether in schools, online, or through a private center.

Seana Murphy, senior director of Indiana Learns, said giving parents agency and access to tutoring providers that otherwise would fall out of their financial reach is part of the program's power.

"The idea is that you build a platform where parents can go shop around to find what's the best program for them," Murphy said.[27]

With choice-based programs like these, making the grant easy to administer, navigate, and access through simple technology also is key. Mark Duran, co-founder and CEO of Student First Technologies, which built the online platform for Indiana Learns, said they developed the technology with this approach in mind.[28]

"It has to work off a simple smartphone—we only include what you really need to close that digital divide," Duran said. "It's so easy to use that you can be in and done in a minute. Anything that's like still going to Blockbuster, they're not going to want to do that."

The choice-based, academically focused design of Indiana Learns has produced outstanding results for Hoosier students. [PLACEHOLDER FOR RESULTS FROM RESULTANT STUDY.]

Parents whose students participate in the program also speak to its impact.

In an August 2023 voluntary online survey about the program, a parent[29] whose child receives tutoring in Warsaw said they enrolled their daughter, who had struggled with reading since kindergarten and was still behind in fifth grade.

After several weeks of tutoring, the parent said they noticed big progress, and their daughter said she is learning helpful new skills. "Now she can retell what she read more easily," the parent wrote. "She surprised me with an A+ on a reading assignment in school."

BY SUPPORTING STUDENT WELL-BEING, BUILDING WORK ETHIC, AND SPARKING INTERESTS, OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PREPARES STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS IN WORK AND LIFE.

Along with rigorous academics, Indy Summer Learning Labs provide enriching activities, from woodworking to art and music, and wraparound supports such as food and other essentials through community centers, churches, schools, and other civic partners. These elements give children the experiences needed to build relationships, discover interests, and function with full needs met. They also make it fun to learn, which keeps kids engaged and helps avert absenteeism.

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27 Murphy, S., & Grimme, K. (2023, August 14). Interview with Seana Murphy and Kristin Grimme: [Recorded notes].

28 Duran, M. (2023, August 16). Interview with Mark Duran: [Recorded notes].

29 In August 2023, The Mind Trust and Indiana Department of Education sent an informal online survey to 200 families who participate in Indiana Learns and asked for voluntary responses. All 36 respondents submitted answers online via a survey tool, and names were kept confidential due to privacy agreements with the state.

Rose Person can speak to the difference that this kind of support has made in her students' success.[30] The mother of three children ages 5, 7, and 9, enrolled her kids in an Indy Summer Learning Lab at The ROCK Community Center on Indianapolis' east side. She learned about the program through her church, which operates the community center.

Person relies on childcare during the summer so she can ensure her kids are cared for while she waitresses full-time at Waffle House. The summer learning program not only ensured they were safe; it allowed her kids to continue learning while building new interests and skills, from karate to home engineering projects. Person saw a schedule of what her kids learned daily and loved watching their enthusiasm grow.

"I know it's a safe community there," Person said. "And they're still learning during the summer. They experienced a lot. They were sad when it ended."

Her kids' enthusiasm from their summer learning experiences carried into the school year and was on full display one late August evening, when Person and her kids attended a meet-the-teachers night at their school across the street from The ROCK Community Center. When Person's oldest son, Joshua, heard that their recent Northwest Evaluation Association test scores were available, he ran to the classroom, excited to show his mom his progress. Later that evening, a conversation with his teacher affirmed Joshua's effort.

"He's working really hard," she told Person.

Experts say the value of out-of-school time programs not only comes from the academic learning that takes place during them but also from the hands-on learning experiences and relationships to which students are exposed. The latter components of the program, experts say, help give students the resilience they need to prepare for the future and skills for the workforce.

"We have the data that says out-of-school time is important to improve attendance, it improves test scores, but it improves a sense of belonging more than anything," said Kim McWilliams, chief officer of family, school, and community partnerships for Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, which operates OST programs in 22 of its schools. "If a student has a sense of belonging, they want to get up and go to school, and they want to stay."[31]

Some programs have proven a direct link to higher college enrollment and completion. And because programs focus on different specialties, from STEM to literacy and career and technical education, they also help students identify interests that can become long-term career passions.

Jacqueline Kronk is CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County, which, like Indy Summer Learning Labs, received state funding for growth and expansion following the pandemic.[32] Their clubs focus intently on math and literacy, but student well-being and college and workforce readiness are two other key components of programming, Kronk said.

The organization recently reimagined its teen center to serve as a "workforce development hub," where students

Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County.

30 Person, R. (2023, August 31). Observation and Interview with Rose Person: [Recorded notes].

31 McWilliams, K. (2023, September 25). Interview with Kim McWilliams: [Recorded notes].

32 Kronk, J. (2023, September 13). Interview with Jacqueline Kronk: [Recorded notes].

can explore career interests and build both hard and soft skills. The club launched a mobile RV maker space to connect kids with opportunities to learn STEM and see themselves in a high-demand field with a strong presence in the St. Joseph County region. Students who participate in the clubs also experience other hands-on learning, from exploring hydroponics to learning team-building skills and trying their hand at welding.

"What the (state) funding has allowed us to do is get creative and be innovative," Kronk said. "We're doing our best to remind legislators of the deliverables of that. When you're investing in us, you better see results."

Jorge Perez, a longtime national YMCA leader with more than three decades of experience in the OST space, has seen firsthand the power of exposure to varied college and career experiences that out-of-school-time programs provide.[33]

Perez, who formerly lead the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis and currently leads the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati, shared a story of when he was working in afterschool programming in Dallas and met a high school student named Lulu, who earned excellent grades and test scores. When he asked Lulu about her plans after graduation, she shared that she was on the supervisor track for her local grocery store.

Perez was determined to help her pursue education after high school, so he took Lulu and her parents on a college tour to help not only Lulu but also her family gain exposure to different possibilities for after high school. The tour was a transformational step in her decision-making process, Perez said.

Lulu went on to graduate from college and now leads the education department for a school district outside Dallas. Perez said this is one example of how "seeing is believing" when it comes to setting students up for success.

"How many kids wanted to become astronauts—not because they learned about astronomy in school," Perez said, "But because after school they shot off a rocket?"

A 2019 study[34] of federally funded out-of-school time programs in New Jersey showed that 86% of youth who participated in the programs reported that their program helped them find out what they are good at doing, and 84% reported the programs helped them think about what they might like to do when they get older.

Tracy and Lucas Davidson of Monticello, Indiana, have seen the impact that exposure to new interests and fields has made on their children.[35] Their daughter, Sophia, who is in kindergarten, and Olivia, who is in third grade, both attend summer and after-school programs through the Boys & Girls Club of White County.

During summer camp, Tracy said, the club partners with Purdue University to present information on robotics and astronomy—both of which have sparked Olivia's excitement and planted seeds for a career in the sciences.

"With the robotics camp in the summertime and things like that, Olivia found a love for robotics, and she's found a love for everything science," Tracy Davidson said. "She loves astronomy a lot because they would have Purdue come in and they did a whole session about the moon."

Kronk of South Bend said along with exposure to new opportunities and experiences, the Boys & Girls Clubs also provide vital support to address behavioral issues that might otherwise impede students' ability to learn. This ranges from partnering with outside providers to connecting students to psychologists and support for

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33 Perez, J. (2023, August 24). Interview with Jorge Perez: [Recorded notes].

34 Afterschool Alliance. (2021, March). *The Academic and Social and Emotional Benefits of Participation in 21st Century Community Learning Centers*. https://www.indianaafterschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Academic-and-Social-Emotional-Benefits-of-21st-Century-Community-Learning-Centers.pdf

35 Davidson, T., & Davidson, L. (2023, September 20). Interview with Tracy and Lucas Davidson: [Recorded notes].

autism to utilizing a computer game that helps students with emotional regulation. Those efforts pay off in myriad ways in the short term, such as improving classroom behavior, reducing disruptions, and increasing students' engagement.

A 2021–22 analysis[36] of Indiana's federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Center programs showed that students who attended the programs for 90 or more days were less likely to be suspended than peers who attended less frequently. And the benefits of out-of-school time persist until later in life, longitudinal research shows. For example, a study[37] conducted in 2020 showed that children who consistently participated in organized after-school activities in elementary school reported less impulsive behaviors and less contact with police by the age of 26.

Kronk shared a personal story of a time she encountered a student at one of the Boys & Girls Club sites who was throwing a chair in defiance during an after-school session. When Kronk took him outside for a talk and to shoot hoops, she learned that he was acting out because he was nervous about the planned activity to read aloud in front of the group—something he struggled with. While it would've been easy to label him as someone who was seeking to be disruptive, Kronk said, what he really needed was to double down on phonics.

"It's amazing now to walk in and see where he is now compared with where he was before that," Kronk said. "His narrative about himself has shifted over the course of time. Our kids are trying to tell us things all the time—we need to stop and listen to them."

Indiana Representative Bob Behning,[38] whose district includes part of Indianapolis and who chairs the Indiana House Education Committee, said he's seen the positive impact of out-of-school time programs first hand over his years working on education issues. Through his full-time role at Marian University, he facilitates a program called City Connects, which partners with local providers to help address basic needs, such as hunger or homelessness, that limit students' ability to learn.

City Connects also surveys kids about their interests—whether Lego clubs or soccer or music—and develops individualized plans for each student to connect them with programs that align with those interests. Patrick McAlister, director of the City of Indianapolis' Office of Education Innovation, which funds the program in Indianapolis, said this helps kids discover a sense of purpose. And that contributes to their overall academic success.

"We should listen to kids about what they're interested in and then meet those interests and needs. That's what City Connects does," McAlister said. "Literally every City Connects study I've seen shows a positive measure of academic achievement – choose your metric, graduation, test scores, college persistence."

A study[39] released this year showed those types of interventions pay off. Students who participate in City Connects in elementary school are more likely to enroll and persist in education after high school. Another

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36 Diehl Consulting Group. (2023, July). *Indiana 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Evaluation Report: 2021-2022.* Indiana Department of Education.

37 Afterschool Alliance. (2021, April). *The Evidence Base for afterschool and Summer.* http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/The-Evidence-Base-For-afterschool-And-Summer-2021.pdf

38 Behning, B. (2023, September 12). Interview with Bob Behning: [Recorded notes].

39 Pollack, C., Lawson, J. L., Raczek, A. E., Dearing, E., Walsh, M. E., Kaufman, G., & Leigh, Y. R. (2023, August 9). *Long-term effects of integrated student support: The relation of an elementary school intervention with postsecondary enrollment and completion.* Applied Developmental Science. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2023.2240232

study[40] showed that for every dollar invested in City Connects and its services to families, society sees a $3 return.

Working parents also reap economic benefits from the programs, which allow them to maintain their hours when students are learning in a safe environment after school and during summers. In a national survey, 86% of parents said having their child in an afterschool program has allowed them to keep their jobs or increase their hours.[41] Kronk is quick to remind lawmakers that the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County's seven-week summer program provided $5 million in no-cost childcare.

Teachers also see benefits, Behning said, and this supports long-term teacher retention.

"If you can embed a program like City Connects, which leverages OST programs as well as in-school programs, teacher satisfaction is through the roof," Behning said. "[Teachers] can teach—they don't have to deal with all of these other behavioral issues."

The demand for out-of-school time programs outpaces supply in Indiana and nationally, and low-income kids suffer most from this gap.

WHILE OST PROGRAMS ARE TRANSFORMATIONAL FOR CHILDREN, there is not enough capacity to serve all students. A report released in 2018 by the Indiana Out-of-School Time Learning Advisory Board[42] showed that Indiana falls behind nationally in terms of the percentage of students enrolled in OST programs, at 11%, compared to 18% nationally. This access gap disproportionately affects low-income youth, who receive 6,000 fewer hours of enrichment and academic learning than their more affluent peers by the eighth grade, according to the report. And this exacerbates existing gaps in outcomes and opportunities.

"There simply are not enough programs for the people who want them," said Lakshmi Hasanadka, CEO of the Indiana Afterschool Network.[43] "We're working to increase access—whether working to ensure families with low incomes access the programs or by creating high-quality programs."

Systemic barriers, from workforce shortages to transportation access, make it difficult to increase the supply of out-of-school time programming for students who need it most. Especially in the tight, post-pandemic labor market, finding qualified staff to operate out-of-school time programs poses a challenge.

> ***"Why wouldn't you take advantage of the whole day—and the other time outside of school—to improve outcomes for your students?"***
>
> **—Lakshmi Hasanadka, CEO, Indiana Afterschool Network**

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40 Bowden, A. B., & Gish, J. W. (2021, April 26). *Small investments for big gains: Transforming wraparound services into an engine of opportunity.* Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/small-investments-for-big-gains-transforming-wraparound-services-into-an-engine-of-opportunity/

41 Afterschool Alliance. (2022). *Access to afterschool programs remains a challenge for many families.* http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/afterschool-COVID-19-Parent-Survey-2022-Brief.pdf

42 Indiana Out-of-School Time Learning Advisory Board. (2018). *Report and Recommendations Prepared for General Assembly: Summer 2018.*

43 Hasanadka, L., & Wake, B. (2023, August 17). Interview with Lakshmi Hasanadka and Brent Wake: [Recorded notes].

Curtis Lemieux, the national YMCA's director of strategy and quality practices for out-of-school time programming, said being able to provide family-sustaining wages for staff poses a significant challenge to recruitment and retention.[44] Indiana's out-of-school time sector also has felt the brunt of the broader trend in workforce shortages, which directly impact the supply of high-quality programs.

McWilliams, the leader from Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, said the out-of-school time programs his district provides at 22 of its schools face consistent waitlists because they can't meet the demand for instructional staff. The district partners with community-based organizations to staff some of its sites, but in other cases, they rely on educators who are willing to work longer days, which can be a tough selling point.

Transportation also poses barriers to entry, with some students unable to access programming because they lack transportation to non-school sites. Organizations like the YMCA, which provides out-of-school time programming to nearly 500,000 students nationally, aim to reduce those barriers by embedding their programming within school sites.

Heidi Brasher, senior director of product line cohorts, strategy, and innovation for the national YMCA, said access gaps can be particularly acute in rural areas where public transportation and lack of community partners can be an issue. The YMCA is working to address that challenge through partnerships with school districts and wraparound supports.[45]

"The barriers become greater in a rural setting," Brasher said. "On top of that, many rural communities are food deserts. We do a ton in that space—overlaying our after-school programs and our food programs."

The Davidsons of Monticello said the Boys & Girls Club of White County plays a critical role in providing childcare in their mostly rural community. Lucas works in accounting for a construction company in Logansport, a 35-minute drive from their home. Tracy manages a garden center that her family owns in Monticello.

"We both work full-time jobs. [Boys & Girls Club] is a great resource for those who work where kids can go to an after-school program and engage with other kids and do social things and arts and STEM without going to a babysitter," Tracy Davidson said. "If I didn't have [Boys & Girls Club], I'd pick them up from school and they'd have to go to work with me for the rest of the day, but a lot of people don't have that option. I'm just lucky to work in a family business."

LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE FUNDING IS NEEDED TO BRIDGE THE ACCESS GAP

OST programming is funded through a combination of federal and state dollars. The lion's share of the money has historically come from the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs), a program that started[46] in 1994 to help address working caretakers' need for childcare in response to concerns over a generation of "latchkey" kids. As of 2021, 21st CCLCs served[47] more than 1.7 million students in more than 10,000 communities nationwide. Nearly half (48%) of participants improved their math and English grades, 69% did a better job completing homework and participating in class, and 62% improved their behavior.

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44 Lemieux, C., & Brasher, H. (2023, August 23). Interview with Curtis Lemieux and Heidi Brasher: [Recorded notes].

45 Lemieux, C., & Brasher, H. (2023, August 23). Interview with Curtis Lemieux and Heidi Brasher: [Recorded notes].

46 Afterschool Alliance. (2021). *Two Decades of 21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing afterschool and summer opportunities to millions of young people and families* (Issue Brief No. 78). http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue_briefs/issue_21stCCLC_78.pdf

47 Afterschool Alliance. (2021, March). *The Academic and Social and Emotional Benefits of Participation in 21st Century Community Learning Centers.* https://www.indianaafterschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Academic-and-Social-Emotional-Benefits-of-21st-Century-Community-Learning-Centers.pdf

An evaluation[48] of the program in Indiana showed that 21st CCLCs served 15,839 students in the state in the 2021–22 school year. Indiana students who attended for at least least 90 days posted higher ILEARN scores, better grades, and fewer suspensions.

In fiscal year 2018, the most recent year for which the state conducted a comprehensive analysis of Indiana's OST funding, $20.1 million of the $22.7 million in total funds for out-of-school time programs came from 21st CCLC funds. The remaining $2.6 million came from a mix of state dollars and federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funds.[49]

While not factored into the overall funding picture below, families who meet income criteria may also apply to receive vouchers to cover the cost of childcare for children under age 12. These funds can be used for OST programs. The challenge is that not enough programs accept vouchers, and there is an opportunity to update state regulation and policy to make it easier for schools to become eligible to accept vouchers.

TABLE 4: Funding Sources for Out-of-School Time Programming in Indiana

Source: Indiana Afterschool Network (2018)

PROGRAM NAME	21st Century Community Learning Centers	School Age Child Care	Indiana Kids
SOURCE	U.S. Department of Education	Indiana Family and Social Services Administration	Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
AMOUNT	$20,062,546	$812,000	$1,800,000
STUDENTS SERVED	23,095[50]	1,200	5,083

Both state and federal funding for OST programs grew during and after the pandemic. The bulk of increased federal funding came through Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, with $35.3 million of the state's allocation directly supporting after-school and summer programs. State leaders also dedicated $150 million through House Bill 1008, which passed in 2021 to combat learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the state committed another $35 million to support student learning recovery, which IDOE will use to scale the successful Indy Summer Learning Labs model in regions across the state, over

48 Diehl Consulting Group. (2023, July). *Indiana 21st Century Community Learning Centers Statewide Evaluation Report: 2021-2022.* Indiana Department of Education.

49 Indiana Out-of-School Time Learning Advisory Board. (2018). *Report and Recommendations Prepared for General Assembly: Summer 2018.*

50 Service numbers declined during the COVID-19 pandemic.

the two-year biennium.[51] IDOE has dubbed this effort Expanding What Works! The Indiana General Assembly also increased overall K–12 education funding by $2.3 billion over the biennium, though dollars were not carved out specifically for OST programming.[52]

> ***"Lack of and disjointed funding for high-quality programs for all who need it is a persistent problem, cited by interviewees across the board. Many factors are at play here, including that programs for historically marginalized students who do not attend Title I schools were ineligible for some sources of financial support, such as federal Title I and 21st Century Community Learning Center funding, that districts often rely on for OST programming. Districts themselves often do not allocate enough to OST programs, interviewees said. Uncertainty also surrounds what will happen with pandemic introduced programming that was supported by federal COVID-19 relief funding once that funding ends."***
>
> **—Expanding Equity in After-school and Summer Learning: Lessons from School Districts**

TABLE 5: New Funding Sources for Out-of-School-Time Programming in Indiana

Source: Indiana Department of Education

PROGRAM NAME	Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)	Student Learning Recovery Grants (HB 1008)	Expanding What Works
SOURCE	U.S. Department of Education	Indiana Department of Education	Indiana Department of Education
AMOUNT FOR OST IN INDIANA	$35.3 million	$150 million	$35 million
EXPIRATION	September 2024	June 2025	June 2025

The infusion of new funds has helped expand high-quality programming to serve more students who need it—and will continue to need it. The Indy Summer Learning Labs supported by HB 1008 funds and supplemented by philanthropic investment from Bloomberg Philanthropies grew their reach from 2,870 students in their initial

51 Sandlin, R. (2023, September 22). IDOE Funding Question. [Email communication].

52 Indiana House Republicans. (2023). *FY 24/25 Budget: Overview of HB 1001 - CCR #5* https://www.indianahouserepublicans.com/clientuploads/2023/CCR__5/FY24-25_Budget_-_Overview_of_HB_1001_-_CCR05.pdf?_t=1682634895

year to 5,097 students in 2023.[53] With its state funding, the Boys and Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County grew from five to 29 sites, including in rural areas of the northern part of the state, such as Monticello, where the Davidsons live. In addition to expanding the reach of the program, the funding also allows the Boys & Girls Club to reduce their staff-to-student ratio so they can better target interventions for kids.[54]

Even with this increased funding, Kronk, the CEO of Boys and Girls Club of St. Joseph County, says nearly 1,000 kids remain on a waitlist for the program. Losing the new funding they've gained post-pandemic, Kronk said, would be "a massive blow."

The 2018 report[55] by the Indiana Out-of-School-Time Learning Advisory Board agreed with Kronk's assessment and called for "more funding streams to address the needs of Indiana youth and families, along with the gaps in current programming."

"There is a significant need for OST programs for elementary, middle, and high school students," the advisory board members wrote. "Funding provided to schools and nonprofit organizations would expand access to programs and increase the quality of programming offered."

Gaps in access to high-quality OST programming exacerbate existing disparities in academic and workforce outcomes between high- and low-income students. Experts are quick to point out that high-income students pay out of pocket for such opportunities, and more affluent schools typically offer an array of specialized activities that kids can participate in.

"While many families leverage personal resources to ensure their children get customized opportunities that support their success and nourish their passions, other families lack sufficient funds, information, or agency to do the same," the authors of a 2022[56] report by Bellwether Education Partners wrote.

Research from the investment banking firm Tyton Partners showed that only 6% of high-income students don't participate in out-of-school activities that confer some educational value. For low-income students, 30% do not participate.[57] Lewis, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Indianapolis CEO who also serves on the City-County Council and was herself a Club member growing up, said closing access gaps is also about supporting students in making healthy decisions.

"When the school bell rings, there's got to be a safe place for kids to go," she said. "Often, kids go home to an empty house, where they may face a variety of temptations that could lead them to make a bad decision. Why not create that safe space where kids can go after school and find a caring adult to provide them with mentorship, help with their homework, and serve a meal?"

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53 Cloncs, J., & Sanders, J. (2023, August 15). Interview with Jenny Cloncs and Jazmin Sanders: [Recorded notes].

54 Kronk, J. (2023, September 13). Interview with Jacqueline Kronk: [Recorded notes].

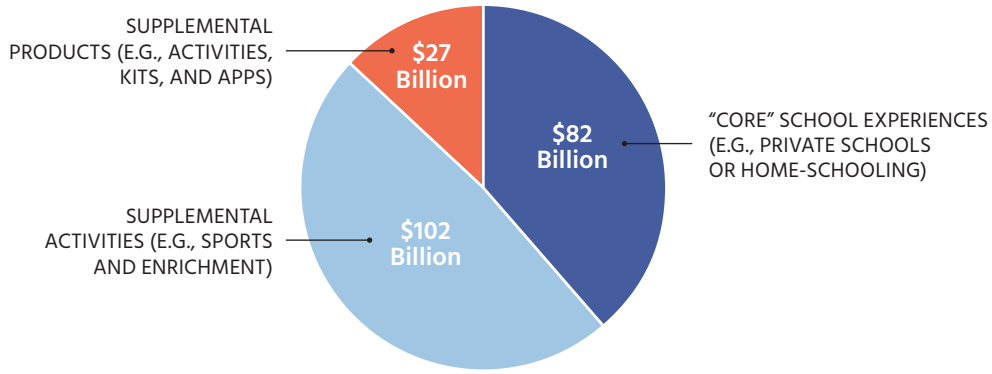
55 Indiana Out-of-School Time Learning Advisory Board. (2018). *Report and Recommendations Prepared for General Assembly: Summer 2018.*

56 Squire, J., & Spurrier, A. (2022, August). *Some Assembly Required: How a More Flexible Learning Ecosystem Can Better Serve All Kids and Unlock Innovation.* Bellwether. https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SomeAssemblyRequired_BetaByBellwether_August2022_FINAL.pdf

57 Squire, J., & Spurrier, A. (2022, August). *Some Assembly Required: How a More Flexible Learning Ecosystem Can Better Serve All Kids and Unlock Innovation.* Bellwether. https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SomeAssemblyRequired_BetaByBellwether_August2022_FINAL.pdf

FIGURE 1: Family Spending on Education Pre-Pandemic

Source: Some Assembly Required



Rep. Behning said he thinks there's a case to maintain the additional state funds that have been allocated for OST post-pandemic. He thinks the case is especially strong to allocate those funds for a specific purpose, such as targeted support to help increase literacy. But he makes a point that he knows fellow lawmakers will raise: Education is now an $8 billion annual line item[58] in the state budget. Given the share of resources that schools already receive, Behning encouraged schools and districts to think differently about how they deliver education and prioritize funding so that out-of-school time becomes an integral part of the education system.

"We're leaving kids behind—not because kids can't learn, but because we've created systems that don't meet the needs of those kids," Behning said. "We need to take the system apart and rebuild it, and as we do, out-of-school factors are clearly something we can't ignore."

It's time to rethink K–12 education in a way that incorporates out-of-school-time learning for all students.

REP. BEHNING ISN'T THE ONLY ONE ASKING HOW SCHOOLS CAN BETTER SERVE STUDENTS, nor is he alone in his belief that the K–12 system needs to better incorporate out-of-school time programming for all students. Academic researchers, educators, out-of-school time practitioners, and other policymakers say it's time to restructure K–12 education so that the academic rigors of the best-performing schools combine with the best aspects of out-of-school time programming, such as relationship-building and learning by doing. A study[59] released last summer by Bellwether Education Partners framed this as creating an "ecosystem of flexible learning experiences" that meet the needs of each individual child.

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58 Indiana House Republicans. (2023). *FY 24/25 Budget: Overview of HB 1001 - CCR #5* https://www.indianahouserepublicans.com/clientuploads/2023/CCR__5/FY24-25_Budget_-_Overview_of_HB_1001_-_CCR05.pdf?_t=1682634895

59 Squire, J., & Spurrier, A. (2022, August). *Some Assembly Required: How a More Flexible Learning Ecosystem Can Better Serve All Kids and Unlock Innovation.* Bellwether. https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SomeAssemblyRequired_BetaByBellwether_August2022_FINAL.pdf

Perez of the Cincinnati YMCA sees momentum in this direction if policymakers and education leaders make the changes required. He offered the example of a school in Denver[60] where students operate a coffee shop to learn mathematical ratios by understanding the proportions of various ingredients that go into making coffee or learn about physics by doing bike repairs. Executing this approach doesn't mean diminishing the role of pure academic learning. Rather, it's about viewing out-of-school time as a part of the overall student learning experience, and better integrating these OST experiences with classroom time.[61]

> **"What would a school look like if you were starting a school today, versus what we've always had?"**
>
> **—Rep. Bob Behning, Chairman of Indiana House of Representatives Education Committee**

"If you want your math class to work, if you want your English class to work, you have to be committed to the [full] development of the child," Perez said. "Maybe one of the reasons your child isn't understanding algebra is they don't see it in the world."

The momentum for integrating in- and out-of-school learning experiences comes from different forces. For one, the ability to learn informally through YouTube or myriad other sources of online information has opened the door for more self-directed learning. Parents also are driving the change.

Duran of Student First Technologies works with states across the country that are implementing choice-based models for K–12 education. He said since the pandemic, there's been a growth in demand among parents in states nationwide to pursue alternative education models. One example includes learning pods, which consist of a small group of students mainly organized by parents, and microschools, which typically are operated by education providers with a formal curriculum and a small number of students.[62] In another powerful indicator of parents' willingness to try new approaches, homeschooling also has seen a surge in popularity since the pandemic,[63] including among Black families.

Parents who send their kids to public schools also believe it's time for change. A survey[64] of public school parents in January 2022 showed 56 percent of respondents agreed more with the statement, "Schools should be focused on rethinking how we educate students, coming up with new ways to teach children moving forward as a result of the COVID-19 crisis," rather than, "Schools should be focused on trying to get back to the way things were before the COVID-19 crisis as soon as it is safe to do so."

The appetite is ripe for reinvention that allows for more integration of enriching experiences with the K–12 learning ecosystem. But this change has to happen in a way that's strategic and inclusive, or it risks exacerbating

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60 Embark Education. Enterprises. https://www.embarkeducation.org/

61 Perez, J. (2023, August 24). Interview with Jorge Perez: [Recorded notes].

62 Duran, M. (2023, August 16). Interview with Mark Duran: [Recorded notes].

63 McDonald, K. (2023, September 21). *Not back to school: Time for homeschoolers as support systems strengthen, more families embrace new approach to education. The 74 Million.* Retrieved from https://www.the74million.org/article/not-back-to-school-time-for-homeschoolers-as-support-systems-strengthen-more-families-embrace-new-approach-to-education/

64 National Parents Union. (2022). National Parents Union Survey: Survey of N=1000 parents of public school students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. Sample from online web panels, January 21-28, 2022. https://nationalparentsunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NPU-Topline-January-2022.pdf

existing gaps in access to opportunities.[65] Integrating in- and out-of-school time learning in a way that is comprehensive and accessible to all students is therefore critical.

"Families and students' ability to access options and customize their learning is too often contingent on families' financial means, knowledge of what options exist, ability to navigate complex systems and exercise agency in choosing the best options for their child, and other personal or community resources needed to overcome logistical barriers to participation," authors of the Bellwether report wrote. "A system of education equal to the demands of the modern era will require the flexibility to customize learning experiences for each child."

A Community Learning Site at Hawthorne Community Center in Indianapolis.

Experts point to two different approaches that could help achieve this kind of customization at the scale needed to serve all students.

The first is an embedded approach that integrates hands-on learning, engaging experiences, and wraparound services within the K–12 school system. The second is an a la carte approach that empowers families to select the programs and opportunities that best meet their student's needs and gives them robust support to navigate and connect with those options. Indiana Learns presents a hybrid approach of the two, since schools are offering tutoring that aligns with classroom learning, and parents are choosing the option that best meets their child's needs.

One approach is not superior to the other. In fact, the increased state funding for OST programming supports both types of programs in Indiana, with winning results for both. To enable high-quality in- and out-of-school learning experiences for all students, the state will likely need a mix of both.

EMBEDDED: BRINGING ACADEMICS, ENRICHMENT, AND SUPPORT UNDER ONE ROOF

Indy Summer Learning Labs were born out of a desire to meet community needs during the pandemic. When the first sites—then called Community Learning Sites—opened in Fall 2020 with $250,000 from The Mind Trust and $250,000 from United Way of Central Indiana, the needs they met were basic: keeping kids safe and fed and providing access to high-speed internet and laptops so students could continue virtual learning while schools were closed.[66]

Because of how these sites came together, they were integrated with community spaces such as daycares, churches, and community centers. The Mind Trust and United Way set up the sites in places that would be easily accessible by families by foot, bus, or a short drive.

"The accessibility was so important—accessibility from a financial and geographic perspective," said Shannon Williams, chief operating officer and executive vice president at The Mind Trust. "We're very focused on doing

65 Squire, J., & Spurrier, A. (2022, August). *Some Assembly Required: How a More Flexible Learning Ecosystem Can Better Serve All Kids and Unlock Innovation.* Bellwether. https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/SomeAssemblyRequired_BetaByBellwether_August2022_FINAL.pdf

66 Williams, S., & Peterson, L. (2023, August 17). Interview with Shannon Williams and Lauren Peterson: [Recorded notes].

things with the community and not to the community. We've adopted a village approach. We like to go alongside."

As the sites remained open throughout Winter 2021, it became clear that the needs were evolving. One of the big ones that emerged was that students needed learning time during the summer so that they could advance academically, rather than fall behind. Even as the organizations made the shift to provide this kind of programming, they kept the same community-driven, holistic approach that they adopted during the earliest days of the learning labs, including by housing the sites in a mix of schools and community hubs.

This continued focus on accessibility has helped garner community buy-in and trust. It also distinguishes the Indy Summer Learning Labs from national peers, which focus more on a school-based learning model.

And, just as in the early days of the pandemic, Indy Summer Learning Labs continue to focus on meeting basic needs. For example, the La Plaza site that Durio ran last summer provided breakfast and lunch to students daily. Gleaner's delivered food to the sites weekly, and it was distributed for families to use as needed.[67]

With this "one-stop shop" approach, the learning labs integrate myriad offerings—from rigorous academics to hands-on learning and enrichment to wraparound social services and support—under one roof.

"That's the secret sauce of the sites—the accessibility is what's making it work," Williams said. "That's what's different, and that's what's going to move things forward. And on a larger scale, that's how we're going to close these gaps in an accelerated way."

Person, the mother of three children at the ROCK Community Center site, said the wraparound support was instrumental for her and her kids. Early in Summer 2023, their apartment burned down, and they lost all of their belongings. Her kids' school—which partners closely with the Indy Summer Learning Labs community site—helped put her family in a hotel for a few nights and provided clothing and backpacks to help them get back on their feet. This support helped enable Person to get back to work and her kids back to school much more quickly than they could have without the support.[68]

A LA CARTE: EMPOWERING PARENTS TO TAILOR THEIR STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

If the learning labs showcase the power of integrating services, Indiana Learns highlights the appeal of a choice-based model. The program's approach to empower families with direct grants for tutoring aligns with a broader national shift to give parents agency over how they utilize education funds, whether for microschools or for enrichment programs.

Unlike those examples, though, Indiana Learns targets a specific learning purpose.

"Indiana Learns is nationally unique in that it marries high-dosage tutoring initiatives with an Education Savings Account (ESA) philosophy," said Grimme, The Mind Trust's chief strategy officer. "It fits with the general philosophy of putting money in the hands of families."[69]

Parents say they appreciate the flexibility and freedom of choice that comes with this approach. As of November 2023, more than 13.2% of the 127,000 eligible families had claimed their Indiana Learns awards.[70] In its Phase 1 Pilot Report on Indiana Learns, The Mind Trust reviewed usage rates for broader ESA programs in a

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67 Durio, K. (2023, September 11). Interview with Karla Durio: [Recorded notes].

68 Person, R. (2023, August 31). Observation and Interview with Rose Person: [Recorded notes].

69 Murphy, S., & Grimme, K. (2023, August 14). Interview with Seana Murphy and Kristin Grimme: [Recorded notes].

70 Grimme, K. (2023, September 25). A couple questions [Email communication].

handful of other states. They ranged from 0.11% to 6.54%, all far below the Indiana Learns claim rate.[71]

Murphy, the Senior Director of Indiana Learns, said she's spoken to parents and guardians who have told her about the power of having agency to choose the program that best meets their needs. Among them is a grandmother from Gary, Ind., whose grandson is in fourth grade and barely knew his letters prior to starting tutoring.

The grandmother makes the drive from Gary to Merrillville three times per week to get him the help he needs at a Sylvan Learning Center, a private tutoring site that otherwise would've been out of their financial reach. Once the family used their $1,000 grant, she was able to replenish it to support his continued progress, and Sylvan invested in their efforts by offering a discounted hourly tutoring rate. The grandson is seeing improved grades and not acting out as much in school.[72]

Indiana Learns community outreach.

In an online survey[73] of 200 families participating in Indiana Learns conducted in August 2023, the 36 respondents spoke to how the program meets a critical need by providing a service they otherwise couldn't pay for.

"I couldn't afford to get a tutor for my granddaughter for math," one respondent wrote. "I felt very blessed for my granddaughter to be chosen and given this opportunity. Because the financial resource was provided for her to receive the help she needed in math, she feels a lot better about herself. "

For all the benefits of this approach, though, it also presents challenges. Among them is that it requires a lot of time and effort to engage families. The Indiana Learns team has done so doggedly—through outreach at apartments, community events, pizza parties, ice cream socials, and more.

While it would be logistically easier for the state to allocate funding to school districts to run the tutoring program, that approach carries its own risks. For students who experience difficulty at school, Murphy said, providing tutoring through school could amount to more of the same negative experience.

THE CHANGES NEEDED TO MAKE REINVENTION A REALITY

Changes to policy and practice are needed to reshape K–12 learning in a way that meets student's needs, prepares them academically, and ensures they can excel in the 21st century workforce. These include better integrating traditional school and out-of-school learning experiences and supporting this marriage with sustainable funding.

To accelerate this, Perez said, "more shared conversations need to take place." OST providers should be embedded in school conversations and examining school standards. And, when issues arise that are better

71 The Mind Trust. (2023, March 1). *Indiana Learns Phase 1 Pilot Report* [Report]. Prepared for The Indiana Department of Education.

72 Murphy, S., & Grimme, K. (2023, August 14). Interview with Seana Murphy and Kristin Grimme: [Recorded notes].

73 In August 2023, The Mind Trust and Indiana Department of Education sent an informal online survey to 200 families who participate in Indiana Learns and asked for voluntary responses. All 36 respondents submitted answers online via a survey tool, and names were kept confidential due to privacy agreements with the state.

suited to OST—for example, half of a school's students don't have winter coats—schools should leverage out-of-school time resources to tackle those challenges.[74]

There's promising evidence that such collaboration can be implemented successfully. One example is Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, which leverages two sources of federal funding to hire full-time Community Learning Center Coordinators at the 22 schools where the district provides extended school days through high-quality, out-of-school time programming.[75] These coordinators begin their days at 9:30 am and are fully embedded in the school day through 5:30 pm.

This marks a change from a decade ago, when the district's coordinators held part-time positions that focused solely on after-school programming. Under the new paradigm, coordinators help ensure that out-of-school time programming is fully integrated with students' educational experience. For example, they might meet with a third-grade teacher to understand what's being taught during the day so that the YMCA providing after-school programming can integrate those concepts into their curriculum.

That makes it so that OST programming is "a continuation of the school day, not a separate part of the school day," said McWilliams of Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation. "The two hours of programming they're running for us is making a difference during the eight hours of the school day."

McWilliams said the impact of this approach shows up in the district's results. Students who spend at least 45 days in their after-school programs have improved test scores and attendance and reduced incidents of behavioral disruption during the school day, relative to their peers.

As a more anecdotal indicator of the programs' success, the district is mandated to provide programming for 130 of the 180 school days. McWilliams said across schools, the staff and students voluntarily increase that by 20 or so days because they're both getting benefits from the programs and don't want to see them end.

At the other end of the state, Kronk's team also is piloting an integrated in- and out-of-school time approach in South Bend. Career and Success Academy, a public charter school in South Bend, opened a new school within a Boys & Girls Club facility in August 2023.[76] Students at the new school go to traditional academic classes taught by a licensed teacher for four days a week. During these instructional days, the teachers receive classroom support from Youth Development Instructors, who are promoted from the ranks of the Youth Development Professionals that lead the before- and after-school programming.

Youth Development Instructors work alongside the teachers during the school day so they're fully integrated with what's happening in the classroom. Students—the vast majority of whom come from low-income households—all attend before- and after-school care to continue learning, with rotating shifts of Youth Development Professionals leading this programming. On the fifth day of the school week, the Youth Development Instructors lead the class, giving teachers an extra professional development day to help with retention, while engaging students in hands-on learning and career development and exploration activities.

While still early in its existence, education leaders are hopeful that this new model can create momentum for a more integrated learning approach, while also helping to address the chronic challenge of teacher burnout.

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74 Perez, J. (2023, August 24). Interview with Jorge Perez: [Recorded notes].

75 McWilliams, K. (2023, September 25). Interview with Kim McWilliams: [Recorded notes].

76 Kronk, J. (2023, September 13). Interview with Jacqueline Kronk: [Recorded notes].

CONCLUSION

Building the 21st century ecosystem to raise all children successfully

THE OFT-STATED PROVERB, "it takes a village to raise a child," rings true today more than ever. With rising cost of living, parents face increased demands to work long hours so they can provide for their families. Students face heightened pressures from forces like social media, which put their lives under a microscope. And educators face an enormous job preparing students for a world of life and work that is more dynamic, nuanced, and complex than ever before.

What's more, the proportion of American children living in two-parent households is on the decline, especially among those with lower rates of educational attainment.[77] Ensuring students are safe and cared for—not to mention academically prepared and ready for the world of work—requires that we do things differently. Education can no longer stop at the end of the traditional school day; it has to engage all students in meaningful, hands-on experiences that foster relationships, spark interests, and grow confidence.

Indiana faces a unique inflection point and a confluence of factors that could propel it to be a leader in this new era of learning. Education experts and practitioners recognize the need to double down on added learning in settings beyond the classroom, and say that effort must be sustained over years—not months—to make up for the lost time of the pandemic and to begin to chip away at a decades-old gap in educational outcomes between high- and low-income students. Parents, both challenged by the pandemic-era school disruptions and energized by new types of learning options, have expressed a willingness to try new approaches to schooling. And Indiana policymakers have wisely allocated funds and taken advantage of federal resources to grow both overall education funding and out-of-school time programming.

The state already boasts several exemplary out-of-school time programs that are showing what's possible in improving student outcomes when high-quality academics combine with enrichment, wraparound support, and parent engagement and agency. Programs like Indy Summer Learning Labs, Indiana Learns, and the expansion of the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County that grew out of the pandemic are paving the way for Indiana to be a national model in high-quality OST programming. When integrated fully into the K–12 ecosystem, these programs, combined with stellar in-school offerings, can make Indiana a leader in learning loss recovery and overall student success.

> ***"It takes a village to raise a child."***
>
> **—African proverb**

77 Mahnken, K. (2023, September 25). The 74 Interview: Melissa Kearney on the "Two-Parent Privilege." *The 74 Million.* https://www.the74million.org/article/the-74-interview-melissa-kearney-on-the-two-parent-privilege/

"Why wouldn't you take advantage of the whole day—and the other time outside of school—to improve outcomes for your students?"

—Lakshmi Hasanadka, CEO, Indiana Afterschool Network

THE EXPANDED CLASSROOM

How making out-of-school time learning part of every student's experience can improve academic outcomes and prepare the next-generation workforce.

A JOINT REPORT FROM

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