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This Practice Brief is the tenth in a periodic series published by the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment (NCASE) to build awareness of research and promising practices in the field of school-age child care.

The goal of NCASE is to ensure that school-age children in families of low income have increased access to quality afterschool and summer learning experiences that contribute to their overall development and academic achievement. For more information, contact us at ncase@ecetta.info.



How Partnerships and Innovations Support the Increased Need for School-Age Child Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Out-of-school time (OST) programming has been an integral piece of the school-age child care puzzle for decades. Working families often depend on care before and after school and during school breaks (e.g., summer) for their children when their work schedules do not align with the traditional school day. Research shows that OST programs can prevent adverse outcomes, decrease risks, and yield positive outcomes for youth in several areas, including academic achievement, socio-emotional functioning, and school engagement and attendance.¹

Positive outcomes are made possible through school-based and community programs supported by successful partnerships and innovations. Schools and community-based programs, including center-based child care programs and family child care programs, work together to meet the needs of families in their communities.

Today child care at large is in a unique state of affairs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has created and continues to create new challenges for OST programs that usually synch with the

academic calendars of local school systems. During the spring of 2020, numerous OST programs across the nation either closed completely or offered a remote option. Further, the new school year ushered in remote or hybrid learning schedules that increased the need for school-age child care. In an effort to meet the needs of children and families, OST programs had to address unforeseen issues, such as enhanced health and safety guidelines, increased operational cost, expanded hours, and the virtual learning needs of children.

¹ Kremer, K., Maynard, B., Polanin, J., Vaughn, M. & Serteschi, C. (2015). Effects of after-school programs with at-risk youth on attendance and externalizing behaviors: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44(3), 616–636. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4597889/>

According to a survey conducted by the [Afterschool Alliance](#), from September to October 2020, OST providers reported an average increase of 11 percent in cost-per-child per week for in-person services in their programs due to the new requirements. In addition, 47 percent of OST providers were extremely or very concerned overall with new restrictions regarding student-staff ratios, cleaning protocols, and social distancing guidelines. Remote learning needs also posed a concern as 65 percent of providers felt more online resources or more student access to technology was extremely or very important.² These school-age child care needs, along with other considerations such as accessible programs and physical program space, call for a collaborative approach and innovative practices from the state level down to the local level.

Nationally, school districts have had to make difficult decisions about instructional methodology: traditional in-person, hybrid, or remote learning. Hybrid and remote learning trigger two specific needs for children and families: expanded child care and remote learning support for school-age children. Working parents work over 40 hours weekly on average, not including commute time, while their children attend about 30 hours of school.³ Basic hybrid learning schedules require over 25 hours of child care, while total remote learning plans call for over 40 hours of care.⁴ Remote learning not only means school systems and educators shift their in-person instruction to an online platform, but it also requires parents and caregivers to become remote learning mentors. Children need technology, supervision, and support to successfully navigate the remote learning experience.

There are additional issues to contemplate. First, hybrid and remote learning depart from the average child's normal learning process and raise concern about social and emotional development. Children thrive on relationships with peers and community engagement. A decrease or a lack of in-person interaction with peers, teachers, or others in their community may affect their social and emotional development and, ultimately, their academic achievement.

The Office of Child Care has posted and updates this resource, designed to highlight temporary, short-term measures that may be taken during the current public health emergency: [CCDF Frequently Asked Questions in Response to COVID-19](#).

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) operated in nearly 100,000 public and nonprofit private schools (grades PK–12) and residential child care institutions. The NSLP provided low-cost or free lunches to 29.4 million children daily at a total cost of \$14.1 billion. These children whose families qualify for NSLP may experience some level of food insecurity by missing school lunch and, for some, breakfast.⁵ This deficiency can greatly impede all aspects of development. Collectively, the lack of social interaction and proper nutrition can have dismal effects on the developmental outcomes of children. Issues of equity can further complicate how families and systems navigate new technology expectations, academic supports, and changes to daily activities.

2 Afterschool Alliance. (2020). Afterschool alliance COVID-19 tracking program provider survey - Wave 3 results. <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-COVID-19-Wave-3-Provider-Survey-Toplines.pdf>

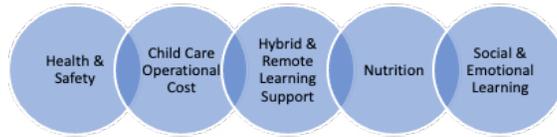
3 Adams, G. & Todd, M. (2020). *Meeting the school-age child care needs of working parents facing COVID-19 distance learning: Policy options to consider*. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102621/meeting-the-school-age-child-care-needs-of-working-parents-facing-covid-19-distance-learning.pdf>

4 Adams & Todd, *Meeting school-age care needs*, 4.

5 United States Department of Agriculture. (2020). *National School Lunch Program*. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/>



Major Themes of Concern Escalating During COVID-19 Pandemic



Given the concerns as described above, OST's role has become both more expansive and specialized to support remote learning. Today we find that partnerships and innovations are critical to the basic needs of children and their families. Intentional, effective partnerships and innovations among school districts; CCDF (Child Care and Development Fund) Lead Agencies; state afterschool networks; local OST programs; and other faith and community-based programs; and foundations, etc., can play an important role in enabling the needs of children and their families to be addressed.

State Examples of Partnerships and Innovations

Several states are using partnerships and innovations to support OST programs and ameliorate issues in meeting the needs in the community. The following examples highlight the power of state-level collaborative relationships and innovative strategies to address COVID-19 related child care, funding, and policy challenges.

Nebraska's DHHS CARES Act Child Care Stabilization Funds

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) partnered with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation's program Beyond School Bells

(a state afterschool network) to award [Stabilization CARES Act](#) funds to eligible child care providers.⁶ These grants were awarded to help relieve some of the financial burdens caused by the COVID-19 pandemic through two initiatives: (1) Child Care Provider Stabilization and (2) Incentive to Reopen Child Care Programs Funds. These funding opportunities are designed to reimburse licensed and school-based child care providers who have remained open, or who commit to reopening within 30 days, for allowable expenses such as utility payments, facility rent or mortgage payments, staff salaries, cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

In partnership with DHHS, the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF) will facilitate the disbursement of these CCDF CARES funds through processing applications and providing payments for child care providers seeking either fund.⁷

Washington State's School-Community Partnership Guide and Funding

School's Out Washington (SOWA), a state afterschool network, published [School-Community Partnerships for Students During COVID-19](#).⁸ SOWA compiled this resource along with dozens of youth development organizations, including the Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), to advance school-community partnerships. It is designed to provide supports for academic and social-emotional learning for all students through collaboration between schools, school districts, and community partners, while ensuring that students have child care, if needed. It includes ideas on ways to partner, links to resources, contacts, and partnership examples.

6 Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. (2020, July 8). *DHHS announces partnership With Nebraska children and families foundation to award funds to child care providers* [News release]. <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/DHHS-Announces-Partnership-with-Nebraska-CCDF-to-Award-Funds-to-Child-Care-Providers.aspx>

7 Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. (2020). *Center-based programs serving school aged only stabilization and reopening fund Q&A*. <https://www.nebraskachildren.org/school-age-providers.html>

8 School's Out Washington. (2020, August). *School-community partnerships for students during COVID-19*. https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0515/3189/files/Partnerships_for_Students_During_COVID-19_-_FINAL_August_2020.pdf?v=1597696100

Additionally, the Washington State Department of Commerce offered [Child Care Partnership Grants](#) to support local partnerships in developing action plans.⁹ These grants were meant to stabilize and expand child care capacity in communities, particularly in underserved areas and for historically marginalized communities and families. The competitive grants were open to Washington nonprofit organizations, federally recognized tribes, and local government entities, including school and educational service districts applicants. Awards of up to \$100,000 were made.

Washington's strong focus on the value and importance of partnerships is reflected in the ongoing engagement of partners throughout the development of their *School-Community Partnership Guide*. This focus is also clearly shown in the provision of funding for the development of partnership action plans at the local level.

Vermont's Regional Child Care Hubs

In Vermont, Governor Phil Scott directed 6.9 million dollars of federal coronavirus relief funding to establish [regional child care hubs](#).¹⁰ These hubs were designed to support thousands of working parents and their children (grades K–6) who needed a safe place to be on remote learning days. Vermont Afterschool, with key partners at the Vermont Department for Children and Families and Let's Grow Kids, coordinated this directive in a state-level cross-agency effort.¹¹

In order to understand the landscape across the state and identify programs that were interested in being considered as a hub, Vermont Afterschool released an initial inquiry survey to the field. This survey enabled partners to determine regions, numbers of youth to be served, and proposed program plans on remote learning



days. Simultaneously, Vermont Afterschool mapped school re-opening plans to help develop proposed hub profiles for interested programs. Over 160 inquiries were received from a variety of entities. Within a few weeks, 43 hubs were established, offering programming at 93 different sites. During the initial rollout, priority was given to programs that could be up and running quickly, serving a high number of youth. They also had to have Wi-Fi access to address the internet needs of families, and follow health and safety COVID-19 guidelines.

Grant funding for approved plans, administered through the Child Development Division, was allocated to the first month of start-up operating expenses. These expenses included equipment, furniture, technology for youth to use, cleaning supplies, PPE, staffing, rent, insurance, and Wi-Fi. (This funding did not include tuition for children.) These payments for the start-up costs took the financial risk off the individual programs.

The creation of regional child care hubs highlights Vermont's amplified partnership efforts to innovatively address funding, child care, education, and health and safety needs throughout the state.

⁹ Washington State Department of Commerce. (2020). *Child Care partnership grants*. <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/about-us/boards-and-commissions/child-care-collaborative-task-force/child-care-partnership-grants/>

¹⁰ Vermont Afterschool. (2020). *About the hubs*. <http://www.vermontafterschool.org/hubs/>

¹¹ Vermont Afterschool. (2020, August 26). *Reopening forum: School-age child care hubs* [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_86Z86ehLXM



COLLABORATION

Conclusion

The Afterschool Alliance's publication [*A School Year Like No Other Demands a New Learning Day: A Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can Help*](#) highlights the power of partnerships in creating a robust new learning day at the local level.¹² The OST field is a critical partner in this work; however, programs face several challenges in their redesign:

- » Incorporating new health and safety measures
- » Providing equitable access to technology across learning settings
- » Securing ample space
- » Expanding hours of programming during virtual school time

- » Meeting nutritional needs
- » Addressing achievement gaps
- » Securing financial resources

State-level partnerships can help address some of these needs. In the state examples included here, CCDF, DCYF, Licensing, the Department of Health, the 50-State Network, a governor's office, the Department of Commerce, and nonprofits provide support to OST through policy changes during virtual school days, stabilization funding, funding to support necessary health and safety protocol, partnership development guidance, and the establishment of child care hubs. Combined with innovative practices, these essential state-level partnerships serve to strengthen and coordinate available resources to benefit thousands of children and families.

¹² Afterschool Alliance. (2020). *A school year like no other demands a new learning day: A blueprint for how afterschool programs & community partners can help*. <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Blueprint-for-How-Afterschool-Programs-Community-Partners-Can-Help.pdf>

Resources

Adams, G. & Todd, M. (2020). *Meeting the school-age child care needs of working parents facing COVID-19 distance learning: Policy options to consider*. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102621/meeting-the-school-age-child-care-needs-of-working-parents-facing-covid-19-distance-learning.pdf>

Afterschool Alliance. (2020). Afterschool alliance COVID-19 tracking program provider survey - Wave 3 results. <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-COVID-19-Wave-3-Provider-Survey-Toplines.pdf>

Afterschool Alliance. (2020). *A school year like no other demands a new learning day: A blueprint for how afterschool programs & community partners can help*. <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Blueprint-for-How-Afterschool-Programs-Community-Partners-Can-Help.pdf>

Office of Child Care. (2020). *CCDF frequently asked questions in response to COVID-19*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/faq/ccdf-frequently-asked-questions-response-covid-19>

For more resources, see the NCASE Resource Library at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library>.

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