

# A Future Reimagined

## Texas Out of School Time Programs Are Essential for COVID-19 Recovery and Beyond



Photo by Allison Shelley for American Education: Images of Teachers and Students in Action

For K-12 students, more than 80% of their time is spent learning outside of school,<sup>1</sup> and yet we continue to rely on the school day as the only place to prepare them for the future. Despite all we know about the importance of learning outside the school day, only about 750,000 Texas kids participate in critical out of school time (OST) programs.<sup>2</sup> The other 90% of kids in Texas deserve the same access to these vital programs that create more learning opportunities and drive equity in a system that often fails to adequately serve those most in need.

Classrooms are not the only places that kids learn, and academic learning is not the only learning that students have lost because of the pandemic. It's true that students who participate in out of school time programs attend class more regularly, do better in school, and develop key 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills vital for today's economy.<sup>3</sup> It's also true that OST programs give them the space to explore their interests and talents while building positive, supportive relationships.<sup>4</sup> These rich, stimulating environments spur the brain to form and strengthen connections that promote further development and learning.<sup>5</sup> A functioning **ecosystem of support** is necessary to see the whole-child development we expect for our kids.<sup>6</sup>

As Texas continues to navigate through COVID-19 recovery, we must not only respond to what we've lost but also keep looking ahead to what Texas kids need going forward. We have an opportunity to rebuild Texas education to better respond to the needs of our youth and prepare them for the careers of tomorrow.

If we want to come back stronger than we were before and take advantage of any of the opportunities before us, we have to fortify learning opportunities *in and out of the classroom*. We need to stabilize the experiences of Texas kids and prioritize their health, safety, and security. We need to deepen our partnerships with one another and better collaborate according to our individual strengths in our local and regional education ecosystems. We need to get the most resources to the kids who most need them. And ultimately we have to come together to take care of **every** kid in **every** community.

## TXPOST Priorities for the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session

### > Put the safety, stability, and good nutrition of all Texas youth first.

Out of school time programs are places where students' basic needs are met every single day. They operate during hours when their parents must be at work; provide meals and snacks, which are increasingly important as Texas families struggle with job losses and food insecurity; and help young people build healthy relationships and heal from trauma.<sup>7</sup> In a time when so many need so much, we must eliminate unnecessary barriers and increase access to basic supports and services to meet the immense needs of Texas kids.

### > Protect and preserve the organizational capacity of OST programs.

COVID-19 has affected attendance and staffing of OST programs. As most programs rely on enrollment or attendance for funding, so many are at grave risk of closing their doors permanently.<sup>8</sup> As our programs continue to innovate so they can safely support Texas families amidst ever-changing circumstances through COVID-19 recovery, we must ensure these programs have the resources they need to survive this crisis as well.



## ➤ Invest in high-quality programming to improve access and affordability.

Without out of school time programs, it's harder and sometimes impossible for parents to get back to work, and in Texas there was an insufficient supply of affordable OST programs even before the pandemic struck. Today, there are 2.5 million children statewide waiting to get in.<sup>9</sup> As our students are learning in nontraditional settings with constantly changing schedules because of COVID-19, we must support out of school time programs that are filling academic gaps for kids and getting Texans back to work.

## ➤ Build and strengthen partnerships to recover youth learning.

Learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits,<sup>10</sup> and it takes place in countless settings in and outside the classroom. We have to first focus on students' well-being if we want to see positive learning outcomes. In addition to helping youth make gains in reading and math and improving their test scores and graduation rates, OST programs help support social and emotional development; offer experience and observational tools that foster positive youth development; create opportunities for students to express their voice and lead in their communities; and foster connections between young people and caring, engaged adults.<sup>11,12</sup> Texas students need strong OST programs to guarantee they have the support they need to recover from the pandemic and succeed in school and in life.

## ➤ Prioritize resources for the youth most impacted by the pandemic.

Negative impacts on learning and development disproportionately impact students from families with low income, communities of color, and those who face barriers to remote learning.<sup>13</sup> The digital divide, the ability of parents to help students with homework, and the economic strain on so many Texas families make learning during the pandemic even harder for those who have long been underserved. According to UCLA education professor Pedro Noguera, "This virus is exacerbating the inequalities we knew were there before. The kids who have the least are getting the least now." Texas kids who need the most should get everything we have, and OST is already doing that.

## ➤ Increase collaboration to meet the state's College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) objectives.

Within and beyond our education community in Texas, we all agree that we want our youth to be prepared for their futures for their own sake and the sake of all Texans. To ensure we better support Texas youth and meet the state's lofty CCMR objectives, we must continue to build partnerships and broaden the coalition around the table, identifying innovative opportunities to leverage diverse experiences and disparate resources in pursuit of our shared goals. Deeper integration of high-quality out of school time programs into educational ecosystems will help kids do better in school, graduate, go on to college or serve in the military, and explore and succeed in fulfilling careers that spark their interests.



## ➤ Demand high-quality programming of out of school time programs statewide.

There are many different quality standards and frameworks that OST providers use to ensure high-quality programming, including TXPOST's own Texas Standards of High Quality Afterschool, Summer, and Expanded Learning Programs. However, the tools are not aligned with one another to allow for broader measurement and improvement, which can inform future policy-making or investment, and utilization of any standard is not typically required of OST programs. No matter where a child lives in Texas, they deserve access to the same, high level of quality in their out of school time program.

## About TXPOST

The Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (TXPOST) is a statewide intermediary whose mission is to convene, educate, and advocate to improve the quality and increase the availability of out of school time (OST) opportunities for Texas youth. TXPOST works in partnership with vital leaders at local and regional levels who invest deeply in their own communities to offer professional development opportunities, engage in system building work, advocate for the OST field, and support local programs.

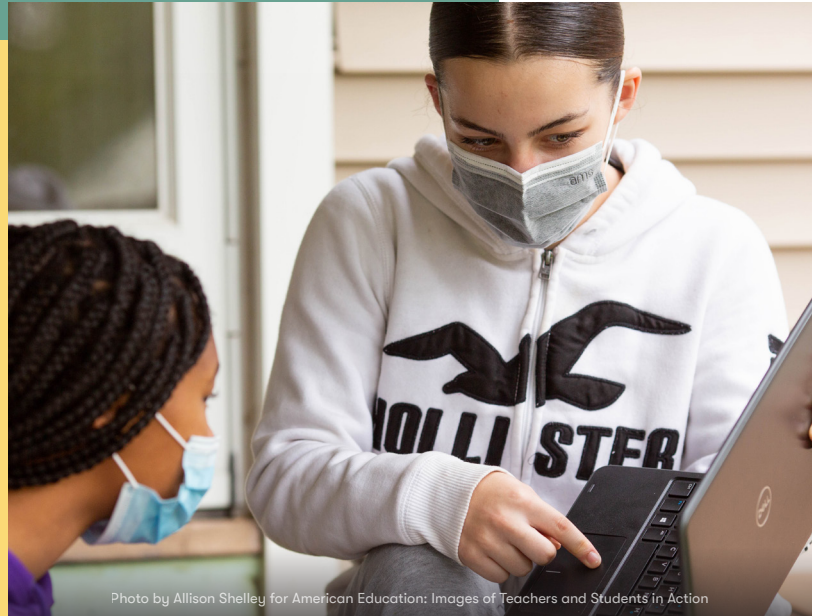


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Strengthening the quality and availability of afterschool, summer, and expanded learning opportunities for Texas kids.

## Learn More about Out of School Time Programs in Texas

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