

Supporting Youth Learning, Development, and Futures

Out of School Time in Central Texas



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. More than 80% of Texas students' time is spent learning **outside of school**. High-quality out of school time (OST), which includes afterschool, summer, and enrichment programs, provides applied learning opportunities that help kids develop critical social and emotional skills as well as nurturing peer and mentor relationships that accelerate academic learning and prepare youth for postsecondary success.

OST is a critical component of the functioning ecosystem of support necessary for whole child development and whole communities. Community-based providers have been essential during the pandemic, standing up additional health and safety measures to continue offering in-person care and learning, while also connecting families to critical services and resources, such as food, technology, and healthcare. Strong partnerships between schools and these community-based organizations are vital to our state's successful recovery.

For Learn All the Time, Quality is the Guiding Light

Quality is at the forefront of **Learn All the Time (LATT)**, an out of school time intermediary and the coordinating hub for more than 30 programs that provide expanded learning opportunities for over 57,000 Central Texas youth, most in families with low incomes, from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Managed since January 2020 by the Austin-based Andy Roddick Foundation, LATT serves as a convener for these programs and other out of school time partners, provides training and resources for quality improvement, and supports programs through data collection and evaluation.

Quality programming is what makes a difference in kids' lives. Robust research demonstrates the value of out of school time programs, and prioritizing quality ensures program credibility. "By making quality a shared value across the out of school time community, we can show that programs deliver on their promise to produce positive youth outcomes and that these programs are worth investing in," says Richard Tagle, CEO of the Andy Roddick Foundation.

LATT at Work with Out of School Time Programs

Guided by LATT's support, OST programs serve Central Texas communities with a range of needs that have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic—not only by providing new learning opportunities and academic support but also by helping with things like food and technology.

"Out of school time programs in the region are meeting students' needs in many ways—whether through STEM, sports, or arts—but the common thread is social and emotional learning," Tagle says. "Most of our trainings and resources focus on how to build strong, supportive relationships between adults and kids in these programs."

LATT offers frequent—46, in 2020—professional development workshops for out of school time leaders, including management and frontline staff. For example, it hosted a quality institute for mid-level managers focused on social and emotional learning and racial equity. LATT also develops tip sheets, tools, and other resources to support continuous program quality improvement and provides technical assistance and evaluation support.

It all comes down to making sure that programs have access to high-quality professional development, have the latest information and research, and convene regularly to exchange strategies and share best practices across the board. Especially during the early months of the pandemic, LATT played a key role in disseminating timely and accurate information to program leaders so they could effectively respond to ever-changing local needs.



Providing Support in Times of Crisis

All of this has been especially important since the pandemic struck, when *all* time became out of school time, and organizations had to pivot their programs. Says Mary Riggs, Chief Program Officer for the Foundation: “We helped organizations transition to virtual programming, both the technical side of it—how to use online platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom, or how to build a bitmoji classroom—and the social and emotional learning components. How do you bring social and emotional learning into a virtual space? How do you make it feel like a welcoming, supportive environment? How do you make sure there’s youth voice and choice?”

Tagle marvels at how flexible the programs have proved in a crisis. “When the pandemic hit, schools and many businesses closed, but the out of school time sector was nimble and flexible enough to shift, whether by focusing on family resources, food distribution, cash assistance—whatever families needed. Across Texas, out of school time programs have good, solid relationships with families. Oftentimes, they’re the first contact for many families.”

Recovery and Beyond

Tagle says the next challenge will be measuring and addressing learning loss over the past year, which means that expanding quality learning opportunities is more important than ever. “Quality learning time will be essential for kids to get back on track to where they were before the pandemic,” he says. “And if we want them to do better, more quality learning supports are needed.” That means greater investment in more equitable partnerships among school districts, out of school time programs, child care programs, and other community partners.

LATT’s Principles of High-Quality Programming



Opportunities for safe and supportive relationships and connections. This includes peer-to-peer, staff-to-youth, staff-to-families, and staff-to-staff reciprocal relationships.



A positive environment that fosters learning and growth opportunities academically and developmentally for youth and staff. This includes creating an inclusive, age-appropriate, and culturally relevant environment for learning that covers both content knowledge and social and emotional skills.



Opportunities for youth engagement through voice, choice, reflection, and leadership. This includes authentically partnering with youth to include them in planning as well as offering leadership roles within programs as a way to promote engagement and investment in their own learning.

Austin Youth River Watch: Engaging Young People through Environmental Stewardship

Austin Youth River Watch transforms and inspires young people through environmental education, community engagement, and adventure. Although its hands-on focus is mentoring high school students and young adults in environmental stewardship, including measuring and tracking water quality, it is much more than that. It's about building community, self-confidence, and personal responsibility.

During “normal” times, River Watch serves about 200 students at approximately 20 Austin-area high schools across all its programs. But since the COVID-19 pandemic led to scaling back programs, it's been working with roughly 100 young people, called River Watchers. Many new youth come through referral. The program is especially interested in kids who are early in their high school careers and would benefit from additional support as they move toward high school graduation and college.

River Watch is highly accessible: It's free, provides transportation for in-person programs, provides meals, and pays students a stipend.

A Day at Austin Youth River Watch

Raven Bernella, a high school junior who became a River Watcher during freshman year, describes a typical pre-pandemic day with the program. After school, students board a van that brings them to a watershed site where they'll run tests. Once there, they divvy up activities: from testing for nitrates, pH, or dissolved oxygen to checking water and air temperature. The data they collect is submitted to the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) and the City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department, which use the information to track waterway health—sometimes identifying significant problems. River Watchers are really frontline water quality monitors, and the public can use their data to learn about water quality in their neighborhood streams and creeks.

After work is done—about an hour later—the van takes the River Watchers to the “eco-house,” a kind of clubhouse near a trail along the Texas Colorado River, where they all have dinner together before the van transports each student home.



Program Innovation During COVID-19

During the pandemic, River Watch is running a virtual program that includes an hour on Zoom, where discussion topics range from environmental activism and pollution to agriculture, cooking, and field assignments that students conduct near their homes. It also sends them kits every month with supplies like pots, soil, and thermometers, to maintain hands-on learning. Since the pandemic, the program has also provided and delivered meals directly to some families every week. The program has also supported a few students lacking access to technology with WiFi hotspots and laptops.

Other services include college financial aid workshops, help with college essays, and opportunities for students to meet with professionals in their communities to discuss their careers. Raven, for example, met with a multimedia animator to talk about potential careers in entertainment, advertising, marketing, education, communication, and technical design.

“We’re trying to help create a better future for our youth—and for all of us,” says Executive Director Melinda Chow. “If we can support the next generation in learning about the environment and nature and potential careers while developing the community, that ripples out to everyone.”







“ Austin Youth River Watch is like a family. It’s a community that fosters confidence. And it’s more than learning about the environment. Not only am I learning what I can do to help, but I am actually doing that thing. I’m working with other people my age to do important things for the community.”

– Raven Bernella, high school junior and River Watcher



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, including LATT, which 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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ANDY RODDICK FOUNDATION

Learn All the Time (LATT) is an initiative of the Andy Roddick Foundation and is Central Texas’ out of school time intermediary. As an out of school time (OST) intermediary, we serve as the hub for high-quality OST in our community, connecting program providers and other stakeholders around afterschool and summer workforce development, program quality improvement, and data collection and evaluation.

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