Policy Brief: How the District of Columbia Can Create Universal Out-of-School Time Opportunities for Youth

By: Ryllie Danylko, Senior Policy Analyst, DC Action

Out-of-school-time (OST) opportunities, including afterschool and summer programs, are critical for young people's growth and development. How youth spend time outside of the classroom can dramatically impact their social and emotional well-being, academic outcomes, college and career readiness, and community safety. But in the District of Columbia, access to OST programs is inadequate and inequitable, and funding for OST is far below where it should be to allow all youth to participate.

It's time for the District to commit to ensuring universal access to OST opportunities for our youth.

The District has successfully implemented universal preschool, and is on its way to making early childhood education available to all families through the Birth-to-Three Act. The District's leaders should build on these successes – which have become lifelines for working families – by creating safe and joyful spaces outside of the classroom for every youth. Universal OST would not only support young people's well-being, but also provide economic and public safety benefits for all District residents.



Black youth, in particular, face barriers to accessing OST programs due to decades of discrimination. Disinvestment linked to structural racism, as shown by data from the DC Policy Center's 2023 OST needs assessment of OST, highlights the fact that Ward 8, where 92% of youth are Black, is home to the highest population of students who do not have access to OST activities. Ward 7, where 82% of the youth are Black, has the second-highest population of students who lack these opportunities. As the District builds toward universal OST, it must center the needs of Black and brown youth, who have disproportionately been excluded from these crucial opportunities.

In DC Mayor Muriel Bowser's January 2023 inaugural address, she pledged to build "the most robust, free, before- and after-school programs in the nation." This brief provides context and recommendations for how the mayor and other District leaders can make that exciting proclamation a reality.

Key facts

- Across the District, approximately 37,000 public school students participate in afterschool programs and around 32,000 participate in summer programs that are publicly funded. However, 53,000 students are missing out on afterschool programs and 57,000 are missing out on summer programs that are publicly funded. A poll of District parents found that for every child enrolled in an afterschool program, one is waiting to get in.

- OST programs are proven to contribute to young people's academic success, college and career readiness, social and emotional well-being, and reductions in youth-involved crime.

- To achieve universal afterschool and summer programs, the District would need to increase funding by an estimated $276 million, including $131 million for afterschool and $145 million for summer.

How OST Benefits Youth and the District

Youth well-being: Afterschool and summer programs are crucial to young people's **growth and development**. District families, when asked about the most important outcomes of OST programs, most frequently mentioned social and emotional development, followed by learning a new skill or topic, keeping kids safe, and developing creative or artistic skills, according to the OST needs assessment.

Community safety: OST programs also turn the afterschool hours from a time of risk to a time of opportunity for youth. One study determined that the 2 pm to 6 pm is the peak time for youth-involved crime in the District on school days – 47% of youth-involved crimes occur during this time period. More afterschool programs would mean more safe, positive, and constructive spaces for young people during these critical hours. Fewer crimes would also help youth feel safer traveling to and from programs throughout the District.



Support for workers: Families – particularly working families – benefit greatly from having their children participate in OST activities. In a survey of District parents, 90% agreed that afterschool programs **provide working parents with peace of mind** knowing their children are safe while they work. 84% of parents agreed that afterschool program help them keep their jobs.

A smart investment: Research shows that every $1 invested in afterschool programs saves at least $3 by increasing young people's earning potential as adults, improving students' performance at school, and reducing crime.

Who Has Access to OST in the District

Of the District's 89,900 public and public charter school students, an estimated 37,000 (41%) participate in publicly funded afterschool programs, and 32,000 (36%) participate in publicly funded summer programs.

The tables below break down OST participation, first by grade level and then by Ward, using data from the 2023 OST Needs Assessment. They include estimates of the access gaps for those categories – in other words, how many spots the District would have to create to meet the need.

To serve all public and public charter school students, the District would need to add about 53,000 spots in afterschool programs and 57,000 spots in summer programs.

OST Participation by Grade Level

Afterschool			
	Available Seats	**Seats Gap**	**Need Currently Met**
PK3-Grade 8	30,360	-39,528	43%
Grade 9-12	6,090	-12,927	32%

Summer			
	Available Seats	**Seats Gap**	**Need Currently Met**
PK3-Grade 8	16,434	-53,454	33%
Grade 9-12	15,044	-3,974	79%*

*The percentage of demand met for summer programs for students in grades 9-12 is higher than other categories due to the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program. Excluding that program, the current supply of summer programs for that age group meets 35% of the need.

There are enough publicly funded summer program spots for just 24% of elementary and middle school students and just 35% of high school students (excluding the Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, or MBSYEP, which would increase that number to about 79%) The MBSYEP is a program of DC's Department of Employment Services that provides District youth ages 14 to 24 with summer work experiences through subsidized placements in the private and government sectors.

OST Participation by Ward: Where Students Live[1]

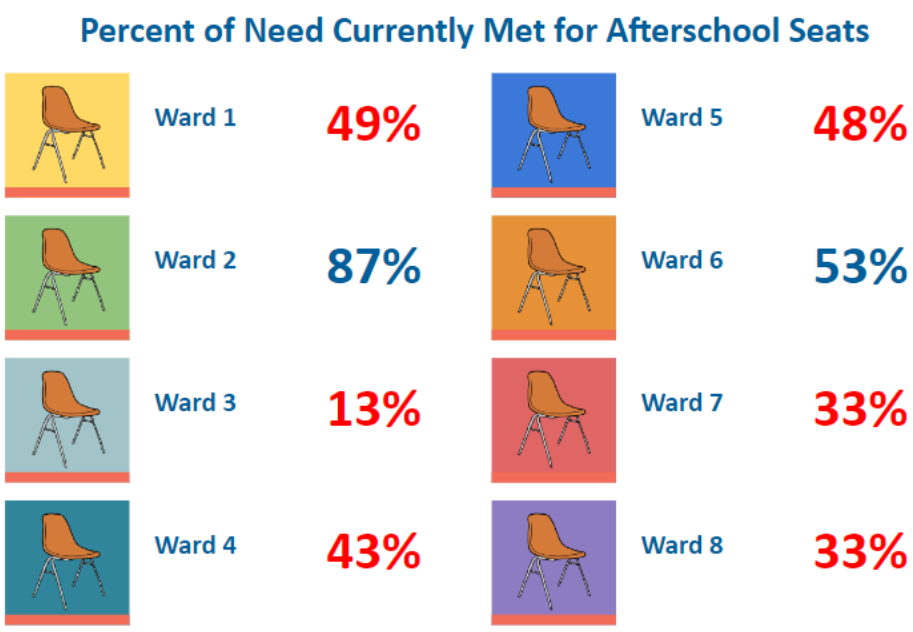
The tables below use data from the 2023 OST Needs Assessment to break down OST participation estimates by the ward where students live and include estimates of the access gaps – in other words, how many spots the District would need to create to meet the need.



[1] Note: In instances where the number of available seats and the number of needed seats do not add up to the total number of students in the ward, there are more seats than would be needed for full coverage at the high school level. This is true for Ward 2 for afterschool seats and Ward 6 for summer seats.

Afterschool			
Ward	**Available Seats**	**Seats Gap**	**Need Currently Met**
1	3,612	-3,781	49%
2	2,244	-428	87%
3	754	-4,970	13%
4	6,286	-8,441	43%
5	6,202	-6,859	48%
6	3,426	-2,991	53%
7	5,930	-11,999	33%
8	6,853	-13,800	33%

Summer			
Ward	**Available Seats**	**Seats Gap**	**Need Currently Met**
1	2,689	-4,704	36%
2	1,094	-1,484	42%
3	1,745	-3,979	30%
4	4,938	-9,789	34%
5	4,216	-8,845	32%
6	2,724	-4,002	42%
7	6,600	-11,329	37%
8	6,986	-13,667	34%



Looking at gaps in OST participation by where students live, there is high unmet demand for afterschool and summer programs in all eight wards. But the level of need varies across the wards. Wards 2 and 6 have the greatest coverage, with 65% and 45% of the

need being met, respectively, by existing programs. Unmet need is high in Wards 7 and 8, with just 35% and 34% of the OST need being met, respectively, by existing programs.

While there is not complete data on the race of OST participants, it's clear from contextual data that OST access in the District is not equitable by race or income. While Ward 3 stands out as having the lowest percentage of need met for OST, it's important to note the significant racial wealth gaps between Ward 3 and Wards 7 and 8. For example, in Ward 3, where 66% of youth are White, the median household income for White families is greater than $250,000, according to data from DC Kids Count. This stands in stark contrast to Ward 7, where 92% of youth are Black and the median income for Black families is $58,000; and Ward 8, where 87% of youth are Black and median household income is $43,000. Because of this, White families in Ward 3 are more likely to be able to afford and enroll their children in fee-based programs, potentially creating less demand for subsidized programs.

OST Participation by Ward: Where Students Go to School

The tables below use data from the 2023 OST Needs Assessment to break down OST participation estimates by the ward where students go to school and include estimates of the access gaps – in other words, how many spots the District would need to create to meet the need.

Afterschool			
Ward	**Available Seats**	**Seats Gap**	**Need Currently Met**
1	3,612	-2,646	58%
2	2,244	-1,989	53%
3	754	-6,604	10%
4	6,286	-10,049	38%
5	6,202	-9,982	38%
6	3,426	-8,415	29%
7	5,930	-6,740	47%
8	6,853	-7,013	49%

Summer			
Ward	**Available Seats**	**Seats Gap**	**Need Currently Met**
1	2,689	-3,621	43%
2	1,094	-3,139	26%
3	1,745	-5,613	24%
4	4,938	-11,397	27%
5	4,216	-11,968	26%
6	2,724	-9,117	23%
7	6,600	-6,703	50%
8	6,986	-8,751	44%

Because 57% of District youth attend a school outside the ward where they live, it can also be important to consider the proximity of OST program seats to schools. This is especially relevant for afterschool programs, and even more so for younger students, whose parents may not want their child to travel between school and another location for an OST program. It is also noteworthy that where a student lives carries more weight in relation to enrollment patterns, depending on the ward. For example, 81 percent of students who live in Ward 3 attend school in their home ward, but only 49 percent of youth who live in Ward 7 also attend school there.

Licensed Child Care Centers for School-Age Youth

In addition to traditional out-of-school-time programs, the District also has approximately 26,000 slots for school-age children at child care programs licensed by the Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE).[2] Licensed child care is an important resource for working parents and provides positive environments for children and youth to spend time before and after school, during the summer, and on school breaks.

The table below breaks down by ward the number of seats for school-age children that OSSE-licensed child care programs have the capacity to serve.

Ward	Available Seats
1	2,631
2	3,813
3	3,482
4	3,771
5	2,660
6	2,869
7	2,465
8	4,063



[2] Data provided by OSSE based on licensed child care center capacity in September 2023

How The District Funds OST Programs

OST programs in the District are funded through a variety of public and private sources, and many community-based organizations fund their programs with a combination of local, federal, and private grants. The combined total of local and federal OST funding budgeted for Fiscal Year 2024 is $50.8 million, and approximately $38.6 million of that is from local funding sources. This is just a tiny fraction – approximately 0.2%– of the District's $19.7 billion budget.

Subsidized OST opportunities are offered by more than 110 nonprofits, including many community-based organizations, across all eight wards. Many youth also participate in subsidized programs offered by public and public charter schools or the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Local funding[3]:

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)

Learn 24

The District's largest source of public funding for OST is through the Office of Out of School Time Grants & Youth Outcomes (aka Learn 24), which is housed within the office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. The Learn 24 Office provides grants, largely funded by local revenue, to nonprofits and public charter schools that provide OST programs to youth. In FY 2024, Learn24 awarded grant funding to:

- 113 nonprofit organizations
- 7 public charter schools
- 1 independent Catholic school

Learn24 also funds an application-based scholarship program that enables up to 200 youth to participate in fee-based programs. In total, Learn24 currently funds OST spots for approximately 15,200 youth.

Approximately 30% of Learn24's FY24 budget is funded through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund, a pandemic-era recovery program that is set to expire at the end of Fiscal Year 2024. The remainder is made up of local funds. **District leaders must plan to address the roughly $6 million gap in funding when ESSER funds run out, or thousands of youth will be at risk of losing access to their OST programs.**

[3] Local funding does not include the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP), which, while not typically considered an OST program, offers summer work opportunities for youth between the ages of 16 and 24. In FY 2024, the MBSYEP received $27.3 million in funding.

My Afterschool DC

The DME announced a new OST initiative called My Afterschool DC starting in 2024 to "lay the foundation for our long-term vision that every elementary school student and family has a free afterschool option at their school as well as citywide programs to choose from." It is expected to launch in FY24 with $3.1 million in grant funding for afterschool programs at 26 DCPS and public charter schools identified by the DME as having the greatest need for programming.

Department of Parks and Recreation

The second largest pool of public funding comes from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), which provides direct OST programming to youth, including summer and seasonal camps, teen programs, and the Roving Leaders program. Beginning in Fiscal year 2023, DPR also began providing grants to community-based organizations "to support community-based programs, activities, and events that will engage youth, provide recreation opportunities, and/or promote skill development." DPR has not released information about its grantees for Fiscal Year 2023.

Public and public charter schools

Some DCPS schools allocate local funds within individual school budgets for afterschool programs, and most schools that do so also receive federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grants. This funding is primarily used to pay full-time afterschool coordinators, site leaders, teachers, or paraprofessionals to support programming.

District public charter schools' publicly available budgets do not include details about funding budgeted for OST activities, which is why that data is not included in this report.



Federal funding:

The Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative is the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to supporting local afterschool, before-school and summer learning programs. The District's program, which is managed by the DC Office of the State

Superintendent of Education (OSSE), receives funding each year from the federal government based on its share of Title I funding for low-income students. OSSE provides grants on a competitive basis to nonprofits, DCPS, and public charter schools.

While OSSE has not announced Fiscal Year 2024 21st CCLC grantees and did not hold a grant competition in Fiscal Year 2024, the most recent pool of grantees (Fiscal Year 2022) includes seven community-based organizations that will be funded for a three-year period.

Public Investments in OST: Fiscal Year 2024

The following is a summary of public funding dedicated to OST programs, through the grant programs and initiatives described above. The District's Fiscal Year 2024 begins October 1, 2023 and ends September 30, 2024.

Funding Stream	Source	Fiscal Year 2024 Amount
Learn24 Grants (Local)	Local Funds	$15,050,000
Learn24 Grants (Federal)	ESSER Pandemic Recovery Funds	$6,300,000
Learn24 Scholarships	Local	$750,000
My Afterschool DC Grants	Local	$3,100,000
21st Century Community Learning Centers	Federal	$6,000,000
Department of Parks & Recreation[4]	Local	$15,540,000
DCPS School Budgets[5]	Local	$4,122,200
DC Public Charter Schools	N/A	Data not available
Total		$50,862,200

[4] The DPR figure was calculated by combining the line items in the DC Fiscal Year 2024 budget that fund programs specifically for youth (seasonal camps, out-of-school time programs, Roving Leaders programs, and teen programs)

[5] The DCPS figure was calculated through an analysis of DCPS school budgets for FY 2024, which are available at dcpsbudget.com

Private funding and fees

Nonprofits, including community-based organizations (CBOs), providing OST receive significant funding through private sources, including foundations and donations. Using data from a 2017 study of the District's OST funding sources, and accounting for inflation, we estimate that CBOs received approximately $34.3 million from private funders in Fiscal Year 2023, including $18.2 million from foundation grants, $12.4 million from corporate and individual donations, and $3.7 million from events and fundraising. The sector also received an estimated $2.5 million through fees charged to families, and approximately $2.4 million for services charged to schools.

While nonprofit CBOs are not the only provider of OST programming, they have the benefit of multiplying the impact of public funding by combining public grants with private and philanthropic dollars. This combined funding also supports the sustainability of programming, since grants from public agencies require nonprofits to also receive grants from private funding sources. Similarly, many philanthropic funders are more likely to fund nonprofits that are already receiving public funds to support their programming. The diversified funding model ensures that if a CBO loses a grant – public or private – it lowers the risk of a program being forced to close its doors.

What It Will Take for the District to Achieve Universal OST

What it will cost

To achieve universal OST access for school-age youth, the District must make new and substantial recurring investments of public dollars to expand programs offered by nonprofit providers, schools, and DPR. This could cost approximately $275.6 million – including $131.1 million for universal afterschool access and $144.5 million for universal summer access, using the current value of the dollar.

How much does a new OST seat cost?

The cost of serving one youth in an OST program varies greatly based on a number of program characteristics. OSSE awards 21st CCLC funding based on a per-seat cost of $2,225, according to its most recent grant application. and Learn24's most recent grants were awarded based on an average per-seat cost of $2,790 (though this ranged among the various grant competitions from $1,400 to $4,750)[6]. The average of these two funding sources is approximately $2,500 per youth.

[6] Data received via an information request to Learn24

If the District made a commitment to achieving universal OST by 2030 by steadily adding seats, it would need to increase funding by around $46 million annually starting in Fiscal Year 2025, adjusting as needed for inflation and updated needs assessments.

This funding could open approximately 18,300 spots in afterschool and summer programs each year, creating youth development opportunities that the District's children want and deserve.

Support for public funding for afterschool programs in the District is high, with 89% of parents in favor of funding for afterschool opportunities, according to an Afterschool Alliance poll.

Funding more OST seats is just part of the solution. The District must also ensure that youth can participate in OST by addressing these common barriers to access faced by families and ensuring proper support for providers to build capacity.

- **Ensure safe, reliable transportation:** In a survey of District parents, lack of transportation was the second most common reason for a child not participating in OST, after cost. Many students reportedly do not feel safe on public transit, exacerbating this issue. Transportation between schools, programs, and where students live can be especially challenging for youth with disabilities who need separate transportation options or assistance. District leaders should develop policy solutions that provide transportation options for students who want to participate in an OST program that is not close to their school or home.

- **Improve data collection and coordination:** To get a full understanding of OST participation and access, the District must collect standardized data about programs, including those administered by agencies, those that receive public funding, and those that are privately funded and operated. OSSE and Learn 24 must also coordinate how licensed child development centers factor into the OST sector.

- **Ensure inclusive programs for youth with disabilities and special needs:** According to OSSE, one out of five students in the District has a disability, yet many families struggle to find OST programs that meet the needs of their children with disabilities or other special needs. The District must increase OST opportunities for these students and ensure that existing programs can access resources to provide aides, professional development, and other support to make activities more accessible. The District should leverage existing data on where

students with disabilities and special needs live and go to school, as well as collect new data specific to OST experiences, to address this challenge.

- **Respond to employment needs of high school students:** Many high school students and young adults miss out on the enriching experiences offered by OST programs because of the need to contribute to their family's household income. The District must consider ways to ensure youth who want to work can earn income, gain work experience, and participate in activities that allow them to explore interests and talents. One potential way to do this could be providing stipends for older youth to participate in afterschool and summer programs – an approach backed by research and currently utilized by some OST programs.

- **Help programs build capacity to expand:** Nonprofit OST providers will need resources to expand their reach and serve more young people. The District must support these programs by offering professional development opportunities for youth development professionals. In addition, because smaller, grassroots organizations must spend a larger share of their limited resources on "overhead" costs – limiting the resources that can be directed toward programming – the OST Office should consider adopting more flexible allowances for indirect rates, building off of the Nonprofit Fair Compensation Act of 2020.

- **Help programs build capacity to expand:** Nonprofit organizations, especially small, grassroots organizations, will need resources to expand their reach and serve more young people. The District must support these programs by providing capacity building grants and offering professional development and training opportunities for youth development professionals.

- **Grow and sustain the OST workforce:** The District's OST programs will need to hire and train thousands more youth development professionals to staff the sector as it grows. Leaders must create a strategy to ensure that programs can hire and retain candidates, especially as staffing remains a top challenge for OST programs, according to the OST needs assessment. The District should proactively develop career pathways for young adults to become OST professionals, which would support both program staffing and employment needs for the District's young people.

Join the DC OST Coalition in Collectively Advocating for OST for All

DC Action is home of the DC OST Coalition, which consists of dozens of organizations and individuals that advocate for equitable access to OST opportunities for youth. We do this through collective action in support of budgets and policies that advance our goal of making afterschool and summer programs available to all young people.

We invite community-based organizations, parents, youth, educators, community leaders, and youth advocates to join us in our mission to achieve universal OST. To learn more, visit wearedcaction.org/OST.

