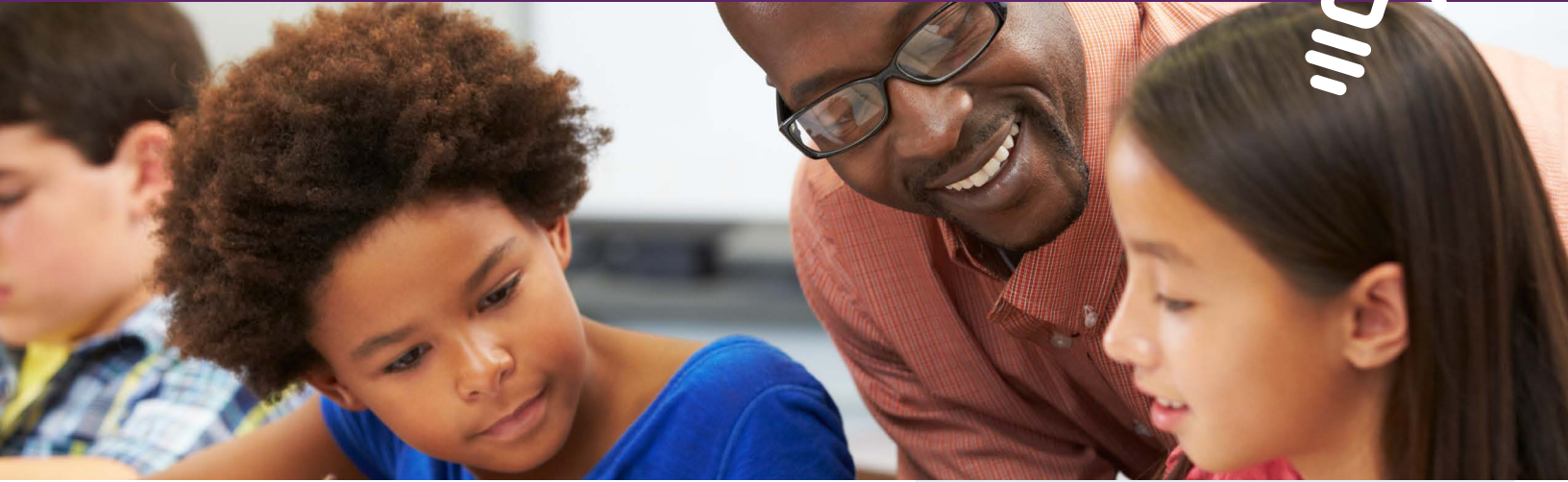


Leveraging the Grantee for Sustainability



WHAT STEPS CAN PROGRAMS TAKE TO EXPAND THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT A MORE INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM?

For 25 years, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program has provided afterschool and summer enrichment and learning opportunities to millions of youth who reside in communities that experience poverty. Although grants to first-time grantees often serve as seed money to encourage the creation of new programs, grantees have consistently faced challenges with sustainability after the grant expires (Afterschool Alliance, 2023). Despite many states pursuing policies to enable grantees to secure ongoing funding, sustainability remains a challenge, especially with the upcoming expiration of federal pandemic relief funds and resulting fiscal cliff.¹

Despite these challenges related to sustainability, some exemplary sites have strategically used 21st CCLC grants to create a lasting service infrastructure. Our study of 21st CCLC programs nationwide highlights how certain sites have leveraged the grant as a catalyst to establish a sustainable array of broader supports and services for families beyond the funding life cycle. The approaches we share in this brief have enabled sites to leverage the initial 21st CCLC grant funds toward developing systems to empower communities and schools to sustain and expand their initiatives long after initial funding expires.

With funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) conducted the **21st CCLC Integrated Service Delivery Study**, a 3-year project designed to:



Identify 21st CCLC programs that are integral parts of broader systems characterized by the coordination of multiple programs, activities, and services



Document strategies and approaches that support the coordination and integration of services; and



Explore how students and families may benefit from integrated and coordinated service delivery

This brief is part of a series highlighting exemplary strategies and approaches to service delivery that AIR observed in Illinois, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Washington. Each brief resulting from the study summarizes key findings based on an initial center survey or a series of interviews and focus groups with 21st CCLC project directors, site coordinators, program staff, school administrators, partners, and teachers in a subset of centers demonstrating enhanced levels of service coordination and integration.

This brief describes one such 21st CCLC program, located in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, that has demonstrated success in sustaining key programming for students and families and highlights key strategies and considerations for 21st CCLC grantees for developing a sustainable and comprehensive system of supports for students and families. Additionally, we examine the success of another 21st CCLC program managed by the East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) in Rhode Island, which similarly leveraged its grant to create a comprehensive system of service delivery. By exploring these two cases, we aim to provide valuable insights and best practices for sustaining and expanding the impact of 21st CCLC programs.²

TAHLEQUAH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The story of Tahlequah Public Schools (TPS) illustrates how a district can create concrete structures for holistically meeting students' and families' needs. Located in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains and in the heart of the Cherokee Nation, the small city of Tahlequah is home to Tahlequah Public Schools. The area is predominantly rural, with many multigenerational homes, a poverty rate affecting 20% of families, and pockets of homes lacking broadband internet. Approximately 60% of the student population identifies as Native American. Additionally, the district has observed a slight increase in the number of English learners.



Currently, in 2024, TPS manages two 21st CCLC grants serving four schools. Notably, TPS has benefitted from a variety of unique and long-standing partnerships with community-based organizations, including the Boys & Girls Club (BGC) of Tahlequah and the Cherokee Nation. Due to its partnership with the BGC of Tahlequah, which started in the 1990s, TPS has also been able to offer afterschool programming at each of its school sites. With the first 21st CCLC grant awarded in 2017, the district enhanced its afterschool and summer programming to incorporate both school-day aligned instruction and extensive enrichment opportunities.

TPS's 21st CCLC programs represent only one facet of the district's broader commitment to meeting families' comprehensive needs. Starting during the COVID-19 pandemic, TPS evolved its approach to family and community engagement with a focus on connecting families to the district and to the broader resources available in the community.

21st CCLC Grant as the catalyst for community connections and family support

Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional afterschool and summer programming, compelling 21st CCLC grantees to rethink how to serve their students and families. Before the pandemic, TPS staff conducted limited home visits through its Backpack program, delivering food to families facing food insecurity. In summer 2020, TPS expanded these efforts by allocating 21st CCLC funds toward “curbside connections,” or home visits to 21st CCLC students and families. During these visits, 21st CCLC and school staff, using funds from the grant and from other sources, brought school supplies, books, food, and other resources, along with arts and crafts and enrichment activities that could be done outdoors with social distancing. These visits served to foster trust and relationship building between families and the district by creating deliberate touch points with caregivers. Thus, the district strategically leveraged its 21st CCLC funds to not only meet families' and students' immediate needs during the pandemic but build foundational relationships with local families that could be sustained over time.

“

So that June, we did over 2,500 visits, we call [them] curbside connections and home visits, and we took food, and we took books and we took art and we took fun things and we brought the [CCLC] program to them. People sat outside away from the kids and talked to them, did bubbles with them . . . **There were many [district] people that did that that summer and they got to see a whole other side of education and of relationship building with families. The trust that was built in that time skyrocketed.**

— *Superintendent, TPS*

In addition to fostering positive relationships with families, these home visits highlighted the need for a streamlined method of gathering information about available resources and wraparound services in their community. To address this need, the district established the Outreach Center, a resource hub located in a small house the district owned. The Outreach Center houses grant-funded staff and social workers and includes an informal clothing and school supply pantry, as well as a washing machine for individuals in need. District staff at the Outreach Center assist students, families, and community members by connecting them to additional community agencies and resources. Building on this infrastructure, the district has also invested in an information system to better match specific community requests with appropriate solutions.

“

It is a system, a literal system that's going to be put in place for our entire community, whether it's our Chamber of Commerce that wants to help people, our ministerial alliance that wants to help people. It's the outreach center that wants to help people . . . So we have a family that loses everything in a fire, we can get right in that system. We can immediately have some needs out there, and then we can find someone that can fill the need and get that quickly.

— *Special services & family and community engagement director, TPS*



The Outreach Center aims to complement existing initiatives, such as the 21st CCLC program, to more comprehensively engage and address community needs. The family and community engagement director based at the Outreach Center frequently collaborates with 21st CCLC site coordinators to organize events and create programming for the whole family. Additionally, both the 21st CCLC program and the Outreach Center consistently share resources and information with each other and their partners to ensure a streamlined referral process and a thorough understanding of available supports and programming. This collaboration allows for adjustments to meet emerging needs effectively.

TPS has strategically adjusted to the new realities the pandemic created, building a system of more integrated support throughout the community. Both TPS's 21st CCLC program and the Outreach Center serve to expand the role of the school beyond traditional academic instruction and provide an access point for key supports while working in concert to strengthen relationships with students and families.

The sustainability of both its 21st CCLC-funded programming and the Outreach Center remains a priority for the district. Several structures have facilitated the district's approach to sustainability, including (a) a shared vision and commitment among district and school leaders to serve students and families; (b) the presence of strong, supportive partnerships with a history of supporting the district; and (c) the district's ability to blend and braid diverse funding streams for sustainable programming. We explore each of these structures in the sections that follow.

SHARED VISION

TPS leaders understand that providing all students with a quality education requires creating a safe and supportive environment, removing obstacles to learning, and engaging parents and the community in the educational process. Aligned with this vision, district and school leaders advocate for afterschool programming to ensure student safety during afterschool hours while also supporting students' academic, social, and emotional well-being. All district and school leaders support the 21st CCLC program, with one student advocate notably serving as the 21st CCLC Coordinator for her district, while the Superintendent and the Executive Director bring prior experience from coordinating the 21st CCLC program at their elementary schools and at the district level. From the top down, district and school leaders actively promote the 21st CCLC program among school staff and encourage coordination with 21st CCLC staff to ensure **academic programming extends and complements school-day instruction.**

Similarly, the superintendent emphasized the importance of a shared vision and mission for engaging families and holistically meeting their needs. She explains that both the 21st CCLC program and the Outreach Center align with this vision by removing barriers for students and families while expanding their access to enrichment and academic opportunities. To achieve this vision, the superintendent also recognizes deliberate creation of positive relationships and trust building are necessary to counter historical mistrust and barriers that have existed between the community and the school.

“

I think they [need] to have a **personal vision and mission that they're willing to do whatever it takes to start it** [a quality program] . . . I think **that mission and that passion** have to be there, it has to be the right people because these people that you're trying to help, if you are seen as threatening or unfriendly, they're not going to talk to you. You're not going to be able to help them. So, you've got to be approachable. So, the right people is imperative. **And then I think you've got to just start digging for funding sources and you just take every little thing that you can, you start going to every community group that you have.**

— Superintendent, TPS



Although the Outreach Center is currently funded through a combination of resources, district leaders have committed to sustaining the Center even in the absence of external grants. To do so, the district recognizes the importance of **sharing and generating support for its vision** with the wider community. For example, the district is actively working to generate community support through a positive relationship with Tahlequah's *Daily Press*. Through the Superintendent's Corner, a weekly column, the superintendent, other district leaders, or the CEO of the BGC highlight the work of their afterschool and summer programming and the Outreach Center. The district will also make sure to invite new businesses to tour the Outreach Center.

Like TPS, other 21st CCLC grantees are adopting similar strategies that rely on using the school as a platform for broader service delivery, building relationships with school and district staff, and improving coordination efforts within the organization itself. An additional example of an exemplary nonprofit organization administering 21st CCLC programming is highlighted in the text box below.

21st CCLC Grantee Spotlight: East Bay Community Action Program

Nonprofits and community-based organizations are also rethinking the use of 21st CCLC grants as gateways to broadening access to family services. A promising example is the East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) in Rhode Island, which has developed systems and structures to strategically leverage resources and streamline access for its 21st CCLC sites. The sites with 21st CCLC programming benefit by accessing the variety of other supports and services available through EBCAP, such as food assistance or health care.

One division director who is responsible for a variety of programs, including 21st CCLC, described how she ensures intentional communication to staff from different programs so they are aware of available supports and services through their organization and staff are trained on how to properly refer students and families to those services:



“

We're sharing intelligence and information with each other all the time to figure out how we can strengthen what we're doing and maybe have some new opportunities. [For example, the 21st CCLC program director] has family service coordinators that are funded through the school and our department of education and **some of my other staff are going to train them to be able to dig in deeper with the families to do applications for various benefits and whatnot. Why do 21st CCLC staff have to refer to another team? They're the ones with the relationships with families, so let's build their capacity to have the conversations and support the families from soup to nuts.**

— Vice president of family development, EBCAP

positive relationships and trust building are
necessary to counter historical mistrust and barriers

EBCAP has also strategically leveraged its 21st CCLC programming to build relationships with families, school staff, and district leaders helping expand access to resources. Families who form relationships with 21st CCLC coordinators often feel more comfortable accessing additional wraparound services available through EBCAP. Likewise, by fostering positive connections with school districts through 21st CCLC programming, EBCAP has expanded its reach of services, including expanding an early childhood family education program into one district. In another district, EBCAP has also coordinated with kindergarten teachers at a 21st CCLC site and EBCAP's Head Start Program, which has facilitated student transitions.

As the vice president of family development at EBCAP explained, integration within a large, complex organization requires deliberate relationship building and a collaborative mindset among program staff. In her department, she has aimed to break down communication silos by convening program directors monthly through a collaborative agenda which includes program updates, facilitating peer support to problem-solve challenges, and identifying potential opportunities to share resources and streamline service delivery.

“

Just facilitating the process and trying to influence how people think about things and supporting effective communication and all of that is a job in and of itself. But when that doesn't happen, the integration doesn't happen. Someone has to be willing to take charge of that. And team members have to buy into an integrated, collaborative approach.

— Vice president of family development, EBCAP

Through deliberate relationship building and integration of service delivery, EBCAP has striven to ensure their presence within the schools they serve will outlast any specific grant or funding stream.

STRONG, SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Although partnerships are a crucial component of any successful 21st CCLC program, TPS's intentional relationship-building efforts with the BGC of Tahlequah and the Cherokee Nation highlight the role partner organizations can play in ensuring sustainability. By structuring partnerships to be mutually beneficial, establishing continuous lines of communication for ongoing needs assessment, and prioritizing strong relationships with genuine appreciation for each other's efforts, TPS has successfully cultivated partnerships that have become vital to its integrated system of supports for students and families.

Since the mid-1990s, the BGC of Tahlequah has provided afterschool programming to TPS schools. Unlike other afterschool providers with separate facilities, the BGC of Tahlequah relies on TPS to provide physical space for its programs. As the superintendent explained, “We are dependent on them, and they are dependent on us.” **Both the BGC and the district prioritize relationship building and maintaining open lines of communication.** For instance, the BGC's chief executive officer (CEO) has an office located on the district's campus. Additionally, the superintendent and the director of family and community engagement serve on the BGC board to stay attuned to the organization's needs and resources.

Similarly, the Cherokee Nation and TPS have maintained a long-standing and mutually supportive partnership. For example, the Cherokee Nation actively supports the 21st CCLC program by hosting events and providing culturally responsive programming and activities. The district assists the Cherokee Nation by directing resources to Native students and families in need. As one district leader explained, “Cherokee Nation is an untapped resource for many people.” The Outreach Center helps identify the needs of Native students and families, facilitating appropriate connections to the Cherokee Nation and providing guidance on effective resource allocation to create beneficial programming that aligns to existing needs.

“

So, you've got to build the relationship. You've got to have a line of communication to make sure that you're meeting their needs. And [for] any of your partners, just like with Cherokee Nation, we have to make sure that we're doing everything that they would like for us to do so we can keep that money coming . . . and it's hard work. It's a big task.

— *Executive director of elementary education & special programs, TPS*

As illustrated by the quote above, district leaders recognize nurturing partnerships requires **dedicated time and structures to support communication and continuous needs assessment**. District and organizational leaders emphasized the importance of demonstrating appreciation and celebrating each other's contributions to show they value the partnership. These partnerships are also mutually beneficial, as both the district and its partners seek opportunities to address each other's needs. Strong, supportive partnerships with the BGC of Tahlequah and the Cherokee Nation ensure the sustainability of afterschool programming beyond the 21st CCLC grant period. These partners are united by a common vision and actively collaborate to identify additional resources to maintain the necessary level of support for the community and ensure students' and families' needs are met.

BLENDING AND BRAIDING FUNDING

In a landscape dominated by resource scarcity, TPS has addressed the challenge of securing funding by tapping into every available resource at the local, state, and federal levels. Approximately 30% of the district's budget comes from federal funding, including various formula funds (e.g., Title I, IDEA) and discretionary grants (e.g., 21st CCLC, [School Climate Transformation](#), [Mental Health Awareness Training](#), [Innovative Approaches to Literacy](#)).³ At the state level, the district has secured approximately 18 state-funded grant programs, nearing the maximum of 20 allowed for a single district. Locally, the district receives support from the TPS Foundation, which engages in rigorous fundraising activities. Additionally, partners like the BGC continuously seek additional funding sources to supplement their in-school programming. For example, the CEO of the BGC mentioned they are “always on the lookout for more money,” including having a lobbyist work to secure legislative funds, applying for federal grants such as the [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#) mentoring program, and seeking grants from local foundations like the Cox Foundation. The CEO described how the 21st CCLC grant fund timeline both ensured a buffer for funding and gave the community partners a schedule for seeking funding to sustain programs and resources:



“

We are always looking for another way to find new ways for money. And then you got to find ways to sustain that money. And so, it's a very big work in progress to always be looking for something new, because a lot of times when you get a grant, you bring people on. Within three to five years, you've got to find a way to keep them.

— *Executive director of elementary education & special programs, TPS*

In addition to securing new grant funding, sustaining programs beyond their initial funding period requires strategic planning and dedicated staff capable of managing administrative aspects, such as grant compliance and monitoring. To address these challenges, the district has dedicated staff who manage special programs, including an executive director of elementary education & special programs and a federal & state programs and grants director.

Additionally, the district adopts a proactive approach to identify opportunities to integrate multiple funding streams toward common goals. The superintendent, the federal & state programs and grants director, and the director of finance regularly collaborate to identify diverse funding streams and integrate those funding streams to support and sustain programs or initiatives. This not only enhances financial stability but also ensures programs can persist and thrive beyond the initial grant cycle.



Regarding the 21st CCLC program, the district and the BGC reported collaborating to blend different funding sources into cohesive programming. For example, a significant portion of TPS's Indian Education Formula Grant money is allocated toward OST programming and events celebrating Native American culture. Additionally, the district frequently applies for supplementary grants that can be used at least partly toward afterschool or summer programs. By identifying and integrating multiple funding streams to support its OST programming, TPS has built in protections against having to discontinue programs once the initial grant expires.

“

I will say Tahlequah does a really good job of whatever grants that they might write, if there's a possibility, and in a lot of the grants that they do write there is a possibility, to put some funding in for out-of-school time. And it could be for afterschool, it could be summer, or it could be through their Cox program . . . But almost every grant that they write for, they're going to include it in some way, if they possibly can.

— *CEO, The BGC of Tahlequah*

By blending and braiding various local, state, and federal funding sources and engaging in rigorous planning and dedicated grant management, TPS has strategically planned for the sustainability and success of its programs. For more information and resources on sustaining 21st CCLC programming, we encourage you to explore AIR's [Sustainability and Continuity in Expansion of Resources webpage](#), along with the resources in Appendices A and B.

CONCLUSION

The TPS and EBCAP case studies highlight the transformative potential of using 21st CCLC programming as a gateway to providing sustainable and comprehensive support systems for students and families. Establishing lasting and sustainable support systems requires intentionality, long-term thinking, and a foundation of trust and strong communication. For 21st CCLC programs aiming to expand and sustain their impact, the following strategies or lessons learned are essential:



Build a foundation of trust through intentional relationship building and transparency within the organization or district, with parents and community members, and between partner organizations.



Demonstrate a deep understanding of local community needs and culture.



Develop mechanisms to ensure a shared vision and effectively communicate that vision to the community.



Continuously identify opportunities for collaboration, integration, and strategic sustainability.

By embracing these strategies, 21st CCLC programs can create a robust framework that not only meets immediate needs but also secures long-term success for the students, families, and communities they serve.

Establishing lasting and sustainable support systems requires **intentionality, long-term thinking, and a foundation of trust and strong communication.**



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Appendix A: Resource Guide

Resource title	Authoring/sponsoring organization(s)	Description
An Updated Roadmap to Sustainability 2023	Afterschool Alliance	This workbook from the Afterschool Alliance outlines how to build collaboration for your program, advocate for support, and identify funding.
Braiding and Blending Federal Funds: A Step-by-Step Guide for Illinois Schools	Illinois State Board of Education and the Region 9 Comprehensive Center Network	This guide, created by the Comprehensive Center Network, outlines the process for blending and braiding federal funding.
Braiding and Blending Federal Funds: A Step-by-Step Guide for Illinois Schools	The Wallace Foundation	This guide identifies a variety of federal funding streams for summer learning and after-school programs as well as their accompanying statutes and grant-making agencies.
Building, Sustaining, & Improving: Using Federal Funds for Summer Learning and Afterschool	Afterschool Alliance	This page from the Afterschool Alliance compiles relevant resources and tools to begin the process of finding funds.
Funding Out-of-School Time Programs- Now and in the Future	Afterschool Alliance, Children's Funding Project, and Grantmakers for Education	This fact sheet highlights some potential funding sources at the federal, state, and local levels that can be used to support out-of-school-time programs.
State Examples: Funding Afterschool and Summer Programs	Afterschool Alliance	This table presents different strategies and funding streams used by states to fund afterschool and summer programs.
Supporting California's Children Through a Whole Child Approach: A Field Guide for Creating Integrated, School-Based Systems of Care	Breaking Barriers, Santa Clara County Office of Education, California Alliance of Child and Family Services, and WestEd	This guide, published by WestEd, provides information for local education agencies (LEAs) about various whole-child initiatives, including community schools, and lists various funding streams available to support these initiatives.
White House Toolkit: Federal Resources to Support Community Schools	The White House	This toolkit identifies federal resources that can support one or more of the four pillars of the evidence-based community schools strategy: (a) integrated student supports; (b) active family and community engagement; (c) expanded and enriched learning time opportunities; and (d) collaborative leadership practices.

Appendix B: Major Funding Sources to Support Out-of-School Time Programming

Program	Funding mechanism	Description
Title IU	Formula grant	These funds are based on enrollment of students who are economically disadvantaged and can be used for effective, evidence-based strategies that reduce achievement gaps. These can include a wide range of strategies and programs that aim to serve the whole child, including early learning, academic interventions, creating safe and supportive learning environments (e.g., through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS] or social-emotional learning [SEL]), mental health services, and expanded learning.
Title III- Limited English Proficient and Immigrant	Formula grant	The purpose of Title III Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Immigrant funding is to help ensure that LEP and immigrant students develop high levels of academic attainment in English and meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet. Funds can be used towards extended-day school and summer programs.
Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE)	Formula grant	LEAs can use these funds for learning supports, creating safe and supportive learning environments (e.g., through PBIS or SEL), school-based health and mental health services, and expanded learning
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B	Formula grant	This funding provides for the excess cost of providing special education and related services to students with disabilities (SWDs). Funds may be used both during the school day and after school to increase the participation of SWDs.
Indian Education Formula Grant	Formula grant	This program is designed to address the unique cultural, language, and educationally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Funds can be used to support such activities as culturally responsive afterschool programs, Native language classes, early childhood education, reading/math/STEM and/or general academic tutoring, wellness, career and college awareness, improving attendance and graduation rates, American Indian/Alaska Native cultural workshops, and dropout prevention.
Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) Grants	Discretionary/ competitive grant	FSCS provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students' family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children. These pipeline services fall under the four pillars of community school: 1) Integrated student supports; 2) Expanded and enriched learning time opportunities; 3) Active family and community engagement; and 4) Collaborative leadership and practices.

Appendix B: Major Funding Sources to Support Out-of-School Time Programming

Program	Funding mechanism	Description
Promise Neighborhoods Grants	Discretionary/ competitive grant	The purpose of the Promise Neighborhoods program is to significantly improve the academic and developmental outcomes of children living in the most distressed communities of the United States, including ensuring school readiness, high school graduation, and access to a community-based continuum of high-quality services.
Defense Department Education Programs Funding Opportunities	Discretionary/ Competitive grant	Defense Department STEM awards grants to a variety of organizations including pre-K–12 and higher education institutions, nonprofits, and industry that share the department’s STEM mission: to provide innovative learning opportunities in STEM education and outreach for students, teachers and other educators.
Military-Connected Local Educational Agencies for Academic and Support Programs and the World Language Advancement and Readiness Program	Discretionary/ competitive grant	Funds may be used to support the hiring or salary of a community school coordinator/director and academic enrichment programming if a community’s school has greater than 10% military-connected population and is therefore eligible for Department of Defense Education Activity grants.
Workforce Pathways for Youth Grants	Competitive/ discretionary grant	These grants aim to increase opportunities for youth to participate in high-quality, work-based learning programs that incorporate both academic and occupational skills training.
Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities	Competitive/ discretionary grant	This grant program is administered cooperatively with the Appalachian Regional Commission, Delta Regional Authority, and Northern Border Regional Commission and can be used to provide workforce development programming and supportive services to family members of students.
AmeriCorps State and National Grants	Discretionary/ competitive grant	Awarded to eligible organizations, including schools and LEAs, proposing to engage AmeriCorps members in evidence-based or evidence-informed interventions/practices to strengthen communities.
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), U.S. Department of Health	Formula grant	CCDF is the primary federal funding source for child care subsidies to help eligible low-income working families access child care and to improve the quality of child care for all children. Eligible applicants may include schools and community-based organizations.