

# American Rescue Plan Program Highlight & Year 1 Results:

## Massachusetts Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Rebound Grants

Research Brief, May 2023

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## Overview

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021, Public Law 117-2, was enacted on March 11, 2021. The ARP Act provides additional funding for school districts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Education portion of ARP is known as the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III or ARP ESSER) Fund. The purpose of the ESSER III fund is to support the safe reopening and sustaining safe operations of schools while meeting students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) offered a competitive grant titled "The Afterschool & Out-of-School Time Rebound (ASOST-R Subgrant)" to fund several regional or statewide non-profit entities with the ability to subgrant and provide wraparound support to afterschool and out-of-school time (ASOST) programs. The overall goal of the grant was to help ASOST programs rebound and strengthen the quality of services from impacts of COVID-19 and thereby improve learning and social-emotional outcomes and access to enrichment opportunities for youth impacted as well.<sup>1</sup>

The priorities of the grant program were: (1) For regional or statewide grantees to provide support, coaching, training, technical assistance, professional development, fiscal management, evaluation, and oversight to ASOST subgrantee programs; and (2) For regional or statewide grantees to make subgrant awards to ASOST programs that met a determined criterion (see page 6).

Massachusetts based non-profit organizations were eligible to apply. The seven organizations chosen demonstrated substantial experience working with and providing training and technical assistance to ASOST programs as well as demonstrated they would be able to meet all federal funding requirements and fiscally manage a high volume of subgrants. During Rebound Year 1, DESE awarded \$10 million total funds to the seven grantees for re-awarding to program sites (\$4M in Afterschool funding and \$6M in Summer program funding). At least 94% of funds had to be awarded as subgrants to ASOST programs. Grantees received 585 applications for funding and awarded grants to 406 programs. Requests for funding from the awardees actually exceeded the amount funded by approximately \$18M (see Figures 1 and 2). The recommended range of yearly awards for each subgrant was \$15,000- 100,000, depending on size, scope of program, and duration (e.g., if a summer component is included).

Figure 1. Grant Applications Received & Awarded

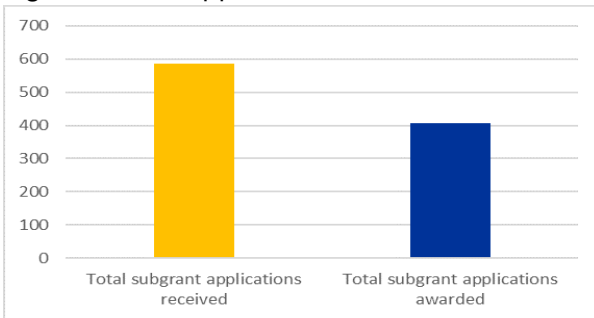
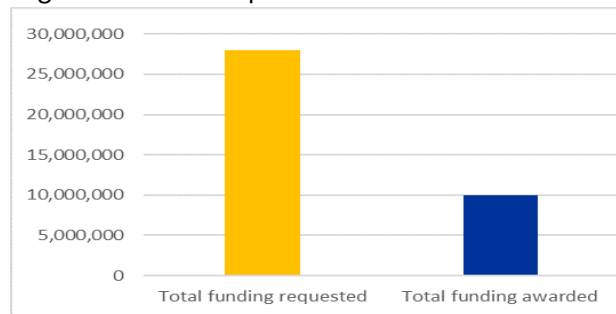


Figure 2. Funds Requested & Awarded



Funds awarded to subgrantees could be directed towards: (a) staff costs for administration and oversight of subgrants, (b) staff and/or contractual costs for professional development/training/technical assistance and evaluation activities, (c) supplies/materials (including technology needed), and mileage reimbursement for staff for on-site visits; (d) program coordination and programmatic staff costs (including increasing rates/incentives and costs for recruitment efforts as needed to fill staffing gaps), (e) scholarships for economically disadvantaged students/families on voucher wait lists or unable to afford programming, (f) transportation, (g) materials/supplies for program activities, (h) food/snacks for participants, (i) mental/behavioral health services or counselors, (j) social-emotional learning supports, (k) school/community partner specialist, (l) family engagement liaison; and (m) enrichment/extracurricular opportunities.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/2022/409-410/>

## Sub-Award Process

Upon receiving funding, the selected organizations (see side panel) engaged in a subgrant process open to programs within their traditional service areas. Several of the grantee organizations collaborated to refine their Request for Proposals and coordinate efforts to ensure coverage of the entire state in their promotion of the funding opportunity. Two of the organizations, Massachusetts Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs and Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs, Inc. included special priorities in their grant application approach. Based on previous feedback and needs analysis from clubs, Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs requested applications focused on select elements of the ASOST priority list. Applicants were required to confirm one staff member participating in community of practice (COP) efforts associated with each enhancement area selected.

YMCA applications with the following areas of focus were given priority in funding awards: (a) offering year-round programming (school and summer); (b) operating in economically disadvantaged areas as well as offering mental health supports and culturally responsive and anti-racist practices; (c) demonstrating achievement of "Best Practice" on the YMCA After School Framework, and (d) aligning learning with companion school districts.

Most of the seven grantee organizations had extensive experience in managing subgrants and were able to streamline the subgrant proposal process in order to minimize the burden on program applicants. Many programs were less experienced in applying for highly competitive grants and federal funding. Several grantees used existing mechanisms to support the application process while a few created some new tools including a Letter of Intent. Systems used in the process included Google/Microsoft Forms, Formstack, and e-Cimpact.

"I think overall this was a really good experience. Children and families benefited in ways that they just simply have not in years past. Organizations were able to scale up and serve more children than they have in the past. A few new organizations were able to get up off the ground and show really promising outcomes for kids."

Grantee Organization

One partner noted that a significant amount of coaching and instruction was necessary to help applicants understand the budget categories, record keeping, and accounting requirements involved with the receipt of federal funds. Coaching and support was not limited to smaller or newer organizations, but also extended to long-term established organizations as well. The experience level and quality of the partners brought together for this "Rebound" effort certainly contributed to the effectiveness of support that was made available to subgrantees. One grantee commented that the funding support for the intermediate organizations allowed them to leverage their position as a trusted convener to raise awareness of traditional and non-traditional programming alike, drive enrollment numbers for spring and summer programming, promote models of summer learning that blend academics and enrichment, keep vital programs afloat that had plummeted during the pandemic, and on-board new programs to the larger network.

### Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Rebound (ASOST-R) Partners

Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs Inc.  
Boston After School & Beyond  
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership  
Massachusetts Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs  
Springfield Empowerment Zone United  
Way of Central MA  
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley

"It's been a great experience, being able to work with these programs and support them. As they came out of the pandemic, a lot of programs were really struggling to find resources to help them kind of backfill that hole that was left from a financial point of view - wait lists, staffing issues, etc. Giving them this opportunity to build something really unique, with a lot of different options for what they could spend their money on... they were happy."

-Grantee Organization

Five of the organizations implemented an open RFP process while the remaining two offered the grant opportunity to members of their existing over-arching organization. All of those using an open RFP utilized selection committees with implementation of a scoring rubric. All of the grantees offered some combination menu of coaching, office hours, informational webinars, and Q&A sessions as part of the subgrant application cycle.

## Collaborating Programs (subgrantees)

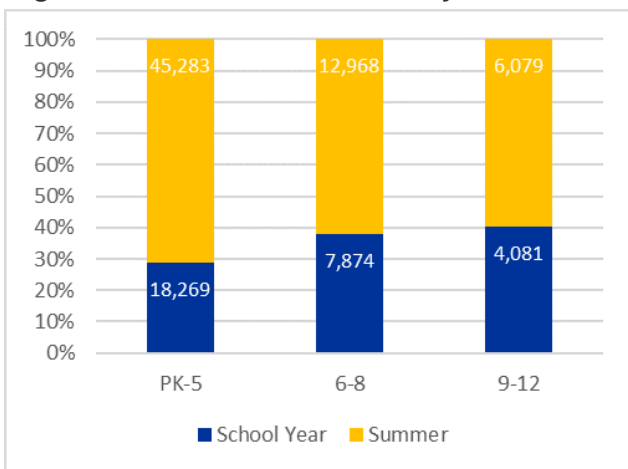
Collectively, the seven grantees awarded 406 applications and served 95,554 youth; 30,224 in the school year and 65,330 in the summer. Sixty-six percent (66%) of students were in elementary school (PK-5th), 23% in middle school (6th-8th), and 11% in high school (9th-12th). Aligning to DESE priority areas, programs served a variety of special populations including students who were identified as low-income (74%), English Language Learners (20%), have disabilities (12%), are in foster care (4%), migratory students (1%), students experiencing homelessness (>1%), and BIPOC students (50%). See Table 1 and Figures 3 and 4 for student details.

**Table 1. Year 1 Student Populations Served**

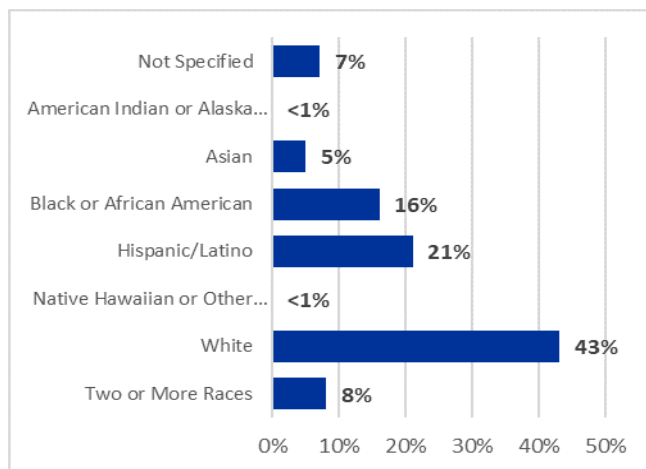
Special Populations	# of Students	% of Students	Statewide %
Low Income	71,036	74%	44%
English Language Learners	18,734	20%	11%
Students with Disabilities	11,300	12%	19%
Students in Foster Care	3,894	4%	*
Migratory Students	1,011	1%	*
Students Experiencing Homelessness	795	<1%	*

\*State percent not available

**Figure 3. Year 1 Students Served by Grade Level**



**Figure 4. Year 1 Students Served by Race/Ethnicity**



## Grantee Successes and Challenges of Implementation

To gather information on the implementation of the ASOST-R funding both for the seven grantees and the subgrantee program providers, researchers from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) interviewed representatives from the seven grantee organizations about their experiences managing the ASOST-R grant funding and working with their collaborative program partners. Semi-structured 40 minute interviews were conducted virtually by Zoom, transcribed, reviewed by the research team, and then summarized according to emerging themes. The purpose of these interviews was to capture successes and challenges and gather information to inform further implementation of the grant. Interviews were conducted with Executive Directors, Managing Directors, Grant Managers, Directors, and Program Managers.

“There are a lot of students who are ELL, have learning disabilities, a low socioeconomic status, BIPOC, and then a lot of refugees that we’re serving now. And so we really stressed in our RFP that those are the types of students we want to support with this funding. So I think we did a good job of finding programs that do serve those students. That was a definite success. In my site visits I really saw engaged, happy, enriched students in all levels of school. I was really excited about what I saw and what I heard. This grant has provided a great opportunity for kids to, you know, like the word says, rebound!”

-Grantee Organization

During the interviews grantees were asked to share some of the successes or challenges that came along with administration of the grant program. One grantee reported that utilizing a multifaceted approach to the grant application process such as having an LOI (Letter of Intent), information sessions, and an RFP (Request for Proposal) process improved interest and engagement from potential subgrantees. Some of the grantees commented how organizationally they were prepared "to manage federal and state grants" and so came into the work well positioned to implement federal guidelines with support from a specific organization department.

"We analyzed everything at an organization level. We're turning it back around to them. We're looking at the specific indicators that align with what enhancements they're working on...things that we knew that were directly aligned to how people were implementing, so that they could actually see if they were moving along the continuum of best practice. So their data collection efforts are very targeted toward their grant application and their focus."

— Grantee Organization

"We got really positive feedback from program staff on the quality of programming... the enjoyment level of program participants...the thought that was put behind the enrichment and academic integration part of it. Those are the most fun days when you get to go out there and kind of see what you're supporting."

— Grantee Organization

Having this expertise and experience was an asset in guiding subgrantees through the financial aspects of grant management administration. For other grantees, this was their first endeavor in being a disperser of grant funds. However, taking on this role opened up new partnerships and expanded the grantee's convening role to knit together a support system that was more cohesive and responsive to the needs of children and families in their service communities.

Grantees supported their subgrantee programs by sharing a variety of data collection strategies and tools including APAS tools (A Program Assessment System) developed by DESE and NIOST along with existing organization embedded tools such as the Annual National Youth Outcomes Initiative Survey (Boys & Girls Clubs). Program staff (79) who were connected to each of the seven grantees voluntarily participated in online trainings on the APAS tools, specifically APT (A Program Assessment Tool), and staff and youth versions of the SAYO (Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes) offered by NIOST during six training windows.

Other tools such as the YPQA (Youth Program Quality Assessment) developed by the Weikart Center and the Afterschool Framework Assessment created by the YMCA of the USA were also used.<sup>2</sup> Youth outcome and program quality data collection was managed by the grantee organizations. Some of the grantee organizations had deep experience in managing data collection processes and were able to coach and support other grantees exploring mechanisms and processes for broad data collection for the first time. In general, the requirements for program data collection necessitated much communication and oversight from the grantee organizations. Grantees used a variety of strategies to stay connected to subgrantee program sites including program observation visits, communities of practice, office hours, and direct check-in phone calls. For those grantees that were able to conduct program observations, the number of observations conducted ranged from 6 to 42 visits. Observation results reported by grantees were overwhelmingly positive and suggested that many of the grantee programs found success in building out both partnership and their membership base.

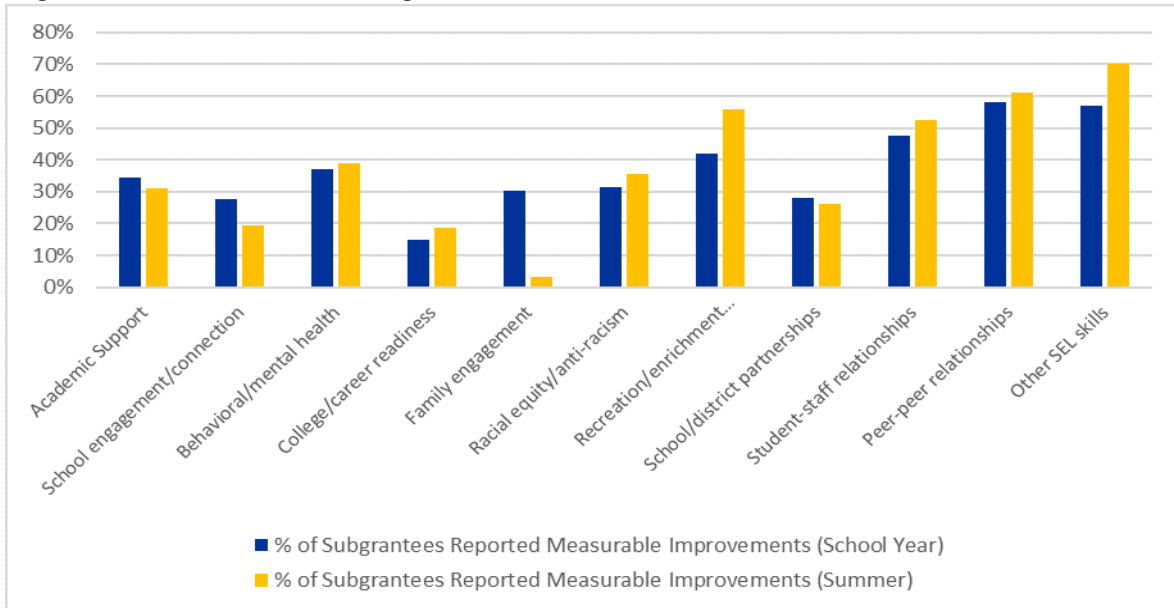
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<sup>2</sup> <https://forumfyi.org/weikartcenter/assessments>

## Outcomes

Rebound Year 1 grantees were required to work with their subgrantees to track improvement in selected social-emotional learning (SEL) outcomes. Some of the grantees already had in place field-tested measures and approaches to ongoing data collection. Other grantees and subgrantees chose to utilize the tools developed by DESE 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program such as the SAYO. Subgrantees reported progress toward a variety of program outcomes with success varying between the school year and summer (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. FY2022 ASOST-R Subgrantee Outcomes**



SAYO tools are reliable and validated staff, teacher, and youth surveys that measure selected SEL competencies, research-based, and scientifically tested. Psychometric testing of the SAYO demonstrates that the scales have strong scale structure, internal consistency, and adequate scale distribution; show change over time for sub-sets of youth; and detect differences between sites in responses to measures of program experience for youth. NIOST provided training on the implementation of the tools at the start of the summer and during the school year. All grantees reporting for their programs provided data to indicate the percent of students enrolled with pre/post enrollment data that showed improvement over time.

Areas where the largest percent of students improved include: (a) student/staff relationships (48%SY, 52% Sum); (b) peer-to-peer relationships (58% SY, 61% Sum); and (c) general social-emotional skills (57% SY, 70% Sum) such as communication, self-regulation, and perseverance.

Additional data gathered through the youth version of the SAYO tool (SAYO-Y, completed by students) showed that students generally found programs to provide a supportive and engaging experience. Youth enrolled in programs funded through the United Way of Central Massachusetts gave positive ratings to their program experience during the summer and school-year programming (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Student Ratings on SAYO-Y**

Item	SUM	SY
Youth Enjoy and Feel Engaged	3.39	3.59
Youth Have Choice & Autonomy	2.96	3.13
Youth Feel Challenged	3.33	3.54
Youth Feel they Have a Supportive Adult	3.37	3.48
Youth Believe Program Participation Has Helped	3.14	3.31

N=758, Scale 1-4 (high)

## Training, Technical Assistance, and Professional Development

Grantees provided training and technical assistance related to the RFP process, invoicing, data collection, and reporting. Some of the grantees also contracted with other nonprofit training providers to offer a menu of topics that aligned with subgrantee program and staffing development needs. Subgrantees were also invited to participate in professional development webinars offered and managed by NIOST, some in partnership with other national partners covering the following topics:

- Behavior Management: Training that Sticks
- Trauma and Youth Programs
- Building Literacy Rich Environment in Elementary Summer Learning Programs
- Utilizing the APAS Tools
- Re-imagining Belonging
- Understanding the Moment from a Mental Health Perspective
- Building More Inclusive, Culturally Competent Programming
- Creating Disability Inclusive After-School Programs by Employing Universal Design for Learning

Grantee	Innovative Highlight
Alliance of Massachusetts YMCAs, Inc.	Created a framework for OST so programs are working toward the same goals
Boston After School & Beyond	Implemented monthly data reviews with grantees
Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership	Created a diversity, equity, and inclusion course approved for CE units
Massachusetts Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs	Held Community of Practice meetings for subgrantee sharing and learning
Springfield Empowerment Zone	Community Partner-Principal Meetings
United Way of Central Massachusetts	Partnered to provide a series of three trauma trainings
United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley	Included AmeriCorps members working in the community on their selection committee

"I was blown away at the staff, and how appreciative they were of the grant. They've realized, relevant needs of the students, and they're able to address that with the additional funding. The staff just constantly were telling me, thank you, thank you, this has made a world of a difference. So that was really, really nice to see. The other things I saw were students engaged. They were very happy with the routine of things."

—Grantee Organization

### Criteria for Sub-Grant Awards

- Programs that are operated by community-based organizations (CBOs); however, districts may be eligible if need is demonstrated that other funding available (particularly Fund Code 119 ARP-ESSER awarded directly to districts) is insufficient or being utilized for other initiatives (*APR-ESSER is the American Rescue Plan Act: Elementary and Secondary Education Emergency Relief III*);
- Programs in communities or where at least 25% of students served are considered economically disadvantaged and/or are in schools in chronically underperforming status;
- Programs that specifically aim to support historically marginalized students, including but not limited to, English learners, students on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), students experiencing homelessness, in foster care and/or who are migratory;
- Programs that offer engaging and interactive programming that support deeper learning and access to enrichment opportunities;
- Programs that offer mental health services and a focus on social and emotional learning outcomes;
- Programs that incorporate applicable elements of the Department's Acceleration Roadmap;
- Programs that promote culturally responsive and anti-racist practices that contribute to creating a welcoming environment;
- Programs that engage and leverage knowledge and strengths of students, families, staff and community to inform programming design and decisions;
- Programs that offer comprehensive programming at least 3-5 days a week; and
- Programs that have or want to strengthen partnerships with local schools and/or other community-based organizations.

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