



PRACTICAL PATHWAYS

FOR SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES THROUGH OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

JANUARY 2026

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South Dakota Association for the Education of Young Children

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INTRODUCTION

South Dakota's Child Care Task Force convened in 2023 to better understand and strengthen the systems that support child care in the state. After producing a report, "Sustainable Solutions For Transforming Child Care in South Dakota" in partnership with the Hunt Institute, the Task Force recognized the importance of taking a deeper dive into the needs of school-age children and youth beyond the traditional school day. Out-of-school time (OST), while similar to early child care in many ways, is distinctly unique in others.

In 2025, the Task Force dedicated its work to the state's OST landscape. Eighty percent of school-age children's waking hours are spent outside of school (after school, weekends, summer), making school-age care, in addition to early child care, essential for working families. This is particularly true in South Dakota, where, in most counties, a majority of children live in households where all available parents are in the workforce¹.

Supported by the South Dakota Afterschool Network, the Task Force held three in person convenings with practitioners, policy makers, and researchers from South Dakota and around the country, drawing on their expertise as well as the knowledge and expertise of Task Force members to formulate this report. The Afterschool Alliance, a 25-year-old non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all children and youth have access to high-quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities, served as a national partner, compiling information from those meetings into this final report. The Alliance collaborates with over 28,000 afterschool programs, 50 state afterschool networks, and national organizations that focus on education, youth development, child development, and juvenile justice.



We recognize that OST programs, also referred to generally as afterschool programs, provide safe places for children when out of school and help parents stay in the workforce. These programs also support academic, social, and physical development and provide a variety of engaging learning and skill-building opportunities for school-age children. Their dual generational approach to supporting both parents to maintain family economic stability, and youth as they navigate their own paths to career and adult success is well-documented.

Yet, access to high-quality OST programming in South Dakota is currently insufficient to meet demand. There are 42,000 children from Kindergarten through 12th grade in the state who are not in an afterschool program but would be if one was available, accessible, and/or affordable². Several factors limit access to OST programs, including geographical disparities, workforce shortages, insufficient funding, and policy barriers. If we can better understand and address these factors, we can collectively work toward the goal of providing high-quality OST care for all children and families in South Dakota.

Task Force members were charged with examining the state of OST programming to better understand these challenges and to identify solutions. The series of meetings allowed members to discuss existing data on OST programs in South Dakota, workforce barriers, program availability, program quality supports, and sustainability. The final meeting allowed Task Force members to formulate and prioritize policy solutions to help the state advance school-age and OST care to more fully meet its potential as an economic and educational engine of development. This report summarizes each of these topics, organized into five sections:

- The Out-of-School Time Landscape
- Youth Outcomes and Community Impact
- Regulation and Quality in Out-of-School Time
- The Unique Out-of-School Time Workforce
- Partnerships and Policy

In addition to addressing the unmet need for OST programs in South Dakota, Task Force members recommend the development of a clear vision that prioritizes high-quality, relevant programming responsive to local contexts led by well-trained staff. As society rapidly evolves, with advances in technology and a growing demand for diverse skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving, OST programs must adapt to prepare children for today's and tomorrow's challenges. As one Task Force member stated, "It's important to invest in programs we want to see today instead of programs we had in our childhood."

INTRODUCTION ENDNOTES

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2024). Children with all available parents in the labor force by age: Kids Count Data Center. KIDS COUNT Data Center. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/10788-children-age-birth-to-17-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force?loc=43&loc=2#detailed/2/any/false/2606/any/20634,20635>

² Afterschool Alliance. (2025). Afterschool in South Dakota Programs in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many [Fact Sheet]. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/SD-AA3PM-2025-Fact-Sheet.pdf>



I. THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME LANDSCAPE

This section presents a picture of Out-of-School Time (OST) programs in South Dakota, utilizing state-specific and national data from sources including the Afterschool Alliance, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the South Dakota OST Task Force meetings, including presentations and discussions. The primary challenges facing OST programs in South Dakota are affordability, accessibility, and availability, resulting in significant unmet demand for these services.

Out-of-School Time Programs: An Overview

The OST field has evolved considerably in recent decades, with increased public awareness and recognition of the benefits of OST programs to youth, families, and communities. These organized programs, held outside of the school day, provide a safe and enriching environment for school-aged youth. OST programs fill a child care gap for working parents and families while offering a variety of academic, extracurricular, and social opportunities. These OST programs encompass a wide range of models and approaches. In this report, OST programs refer to [comprehensive afterschool programs](#)¹ as defined by the Afterschool Alliance. While many activities may take place after school, comprehensive afterschool programs often feature a variety of elements to support students, including a mix of enrichment, academic support, opportunities for hands-on learning, and integration of student voice and choice (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Comprehensive Afterschool Programs



The South Dakota OST Task Force developed the following definition of OST programs to use in this report and for their work moving forward:

“Organized programs that youth regularly attend occurring before and after school and/or during summer and school breaks, that provide safe environments for children and promote holistic youth development, economic growth, and family prosperity.”

This definition of OST programming includes afterschool and summer programs for all K-12 youth ages 5 to 18. Subsets of these programs might also be classified as “school-age child care”. School-age care programs primarily serve younger children, typically ages 5–13, and focus on holistic learning and development beyond basic supervision.



The Task Force wanted to be clear about what the Out of School Time Program definition does not include. Art, single-focused sports, music, and other recreational and extracurricular activities (e.g., violin classes, karate programs, traveling soccer) that take place after school and over the summer can be important and effective components in youth development. However, this report covers only comprehensive afterschool programs on regularly occurring schedules where students attend multiple days a week offering holistic programming with elements of academic, social, and emotional enrichment.

OST programs in the U.S. demonstrate remarkable diversity in their providers, locations, and staffing. These programs are delivered by a range of organizations including schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, community-based groups, nonprofits, religious providers, libraries, museums, housing complexes, and higher education institutions, ensuring that families have multiple access points for participation. Despite this variety, many communities face significant gaps in OST program availability. The challenges may look different for different parts of the state. For example, challenges in a tribal community may be distinct from those in an urban one. What is clear, is across all settings, the existence of these OST “deserts” leave families without reliable options for afterschool care and enrichment.

OST programs are staffed by a broad spectrum of professionals and volunteers, who are essential to program success. (See Section 4 on The Unique OST Workforce for more on the link between program staff and quality.) Program staff vary by site, based on program focus and size among other factors, and include: youth development specialists, school-day teachers, college students, museum specialists, subject-specific educators (e.g., STEM, technology, arts), high school students, and community volunteers.



South Dakota's OST Supply and Demand: Assessing Unmet Needs

OST programs play a crucial role in supporting children and families in South Dakota, offering a diverse range of opportunities that promote both educational and personal growth². However, the unmet demand for OST programs is extremely high. There are 42,000 children in the state who are waiting for access or cannot find programs that are available, accessible and/or affordable³. [Nationally](#), 29.6 million kids want afterschool programs, and 22.6 million kids still lack access⁴. According to data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, as reported in the [Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota report](#)⁵, there are about 151,664 youth aged 6-17 years in South Dakota, and roughly 81 percent of these children have all parents within the household working. To alleviate this need for care, South Dakota has 117 licensed OST programs, which is not nearly enough to provide for all children in need of before and after-school care and education⁶.

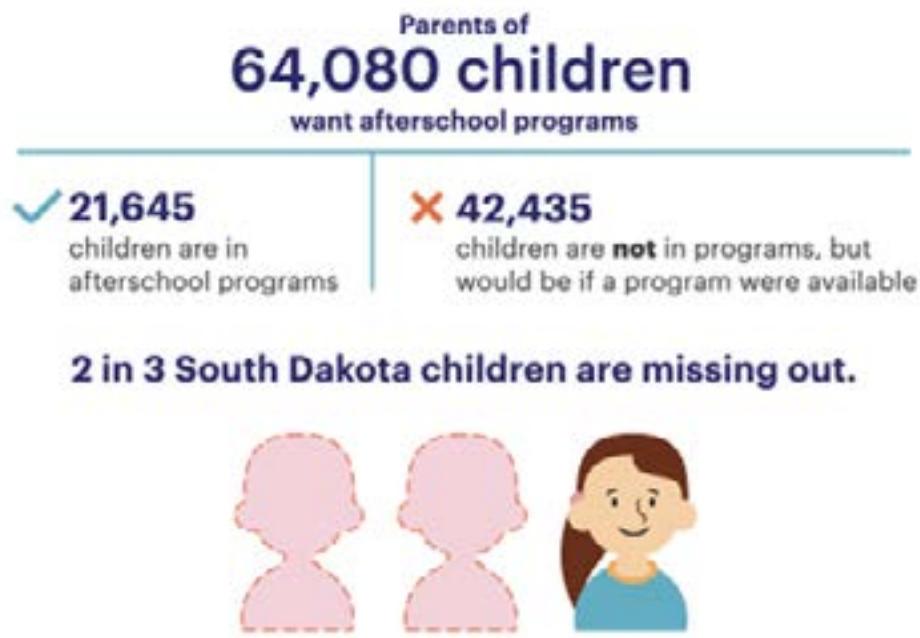
State level data from the Afterschool Alliance's recent [America After 3PM](#) report that polls parents in every state across the nation, further confirms this high level of demand⁷. In 2025, there were 21,645 kids enrolled in afterschool programs in South Dakota, but for every child in an afterschool program, 2 more would participate if a program were available. That represents 42,000 youth across South Dakota that want but lack access to a program (See Image 2). Additionally, the poll found over 32,000 children in South Dakota are looking after themselves without adult supervision between the hours of 3:00pm and 6:00pm⁸.



South Dakota parents report that program costs, program availability (whether any program exists and or has room for new students), transportation, and program location are their greatest barriers to access. The most frequently cited barrier is cost, which affects nearly 1 in 2 families looking for afterschool access across the state. South Dakota parents cite the following barriers to enrolling their children in afterschool programs:

- Afterschool programs are too expensive (46%);
- Afterschool programs are unavailable in their community (39%);
- Afterschool programs take place in inconvenient locations (42%); and
- [Their child/children lack a safe way to get to and from afterschool programs \(42%\)⁹](#).

Figure 2: Unmet need for afterschool programs in South Dakota



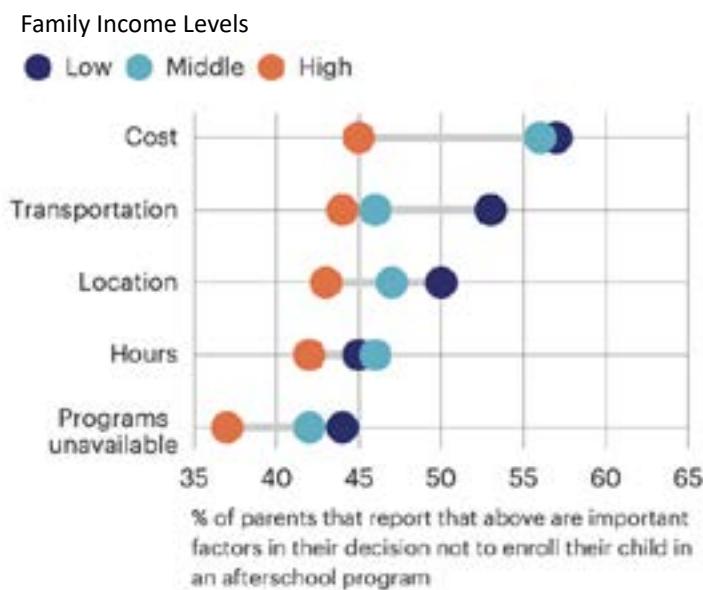
Low and Middle Income Families Struggle the Most With Program Costs

Nationally, the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) reports the annual cost of school-age care ranges from \$5,943 to \$9,211, which comprises 8.1% to 9.4% of median family income¹⁰. Unmet demand for OST programs is highest among children in low- and middle-income families, with four out of five children in low-income families and three out of four in middle-income families missing out on afterschool programs.

In contrast, families with high incomes spend nine times more on OST activities than those with low incomes (\$6,588 versus \$734 per year), highlighting significant disparities in access to school-age care and enrichment opportunities (such as music classes, karate courses, STEM etc)¹¹. (See Image 3 for a breakdown of barriers faced by families based on income level.)

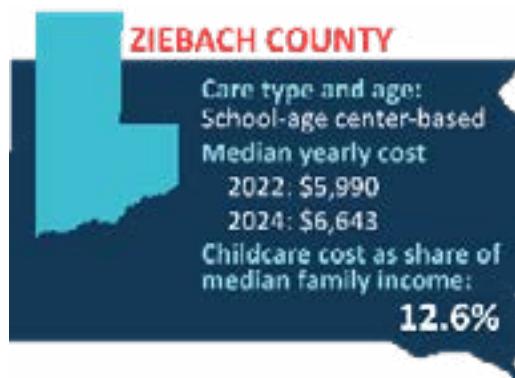


Figure 3: Family Barriers to OST participation



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers a child care program affordable if it costs no more than [7% of a family's income](#). Unfortunately, the cost of many programs exceeds this ratio, especially for single-parent households and those earning below the median income¹². The average annual cost of center-based programs in South Dakota is \$7,862, and school-based programs are \$3,306, which are 23% and 10% respectively, of a median income-single parent household. Center-based programs are also above the median income-married households. Locally in Ziebach County, the median yearly price of center-based school-age care is 12.6% of median family income¹³ (see Image 4).

Figure 4: Childcare Prices in Ziebach County, South Dakota



The Task Force confirmed that access to afterschool programs in South Dakota varies dramatically across rural and tribal areas in particular, and that families may travel 30-60 miles for afterschool care. Lack of staff and waitlists students are also barriers for families seeking afterschool care in many communities. Recent national level data shows the lack of afterschool programs is greater in certain areas, in particular for families living in urban and rural communities compared to their suburban counterparts (49% and 44%, respectively vs. 38%)¹⁴. While data for 2025 is not yet available specific to rural afterschool demand, the [most recent detailed national data](#) showed a 43% increase in families in rural areas needing access from 2014 to 2019 and Native American parents were more likely than rural parents overall to report their children lack a safe way to get to and from programs¹⁵.



Summer Programming

Summer is a distinct challenge for families of school-age children. With children out of school, the need for OST programming increases drastically. Similar to OST programming during the school year, children and families reap benefits from summer programs, but access is limited¹⁶. A survey of 2000 adults¹⁷ found that 40% of parents raising children worry most about their finances over the summer. The same amount (40%) cited that summer camp wasn't an option due to costs. These untenable costs have led to reduced work hours and career sacrifices for parents.

Parents in the summer appreciate a different array of activities for their children than during the school year, looking for opportunities to help students experience the outdoors, engage in physical activity, participate in a wide variety of activities and gain life skills. Families in low-income households were more likely to prioritize reducing risky behaviors, providing snacks and meals, and ensuring their children did not lose academic ground than higher income families. They also were more likely to look for specific focus on music, the arts, and STEM as part of a wide variety of activities. Data from 2019 found that "higher income children are nearly three times more likely to participate in a structured summer experience than children from lower income families¹⁸."

Provider Perspectives

Nationally, OST program providers echo parents' concerns about the lack of access to afterschool programs for children in their communities.

According to a 2025 Afterschool Alliance provider survey, 53% of providers report having waitlists due to insufficient capacity, while 82% believe that children in their communities need afterschool programs but may be unable to access them¹⁹. They also expressed concerns for what a lack of access could mean for the youth they serve, including the mental and emotional health of youth (73% very concerned, 93% concerned overall); unproductive screen time (63% very concerned and 87% concerned overall); food insecurity (51% very concerned, and 81% concerned overall) and missing social opportunities with peers and caring adults (51% very concerned and 78% concerned overall)²⁰.

182%
of providers believe
that children in their
communities need
afterschool programs
but may be unable to
access them¹⁹

Funding of OST Programs in South Dakota

Funding sources for OST programs in South Dakota stem from two main federal sources: the 21st CCLC Program and the Federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). These sources support a basic infrastructure for field development (including data collections, and workforce and quality supports) at the state level, and support access to programs for some low-income families. While 28 states currently offer some state-level funding for afterschool and summer programs, South Dakota does not currently provide state-level funding for afterschool programs. Providers are concerned about how limited access to funding affects staffing and sustainability. Nationally, 47% of providers mentioned difficulty recruiting or retaining staff, 75% reported increased staff stress, and 81% were worried about their programs' long term funding and future²¹. (See Section 5 on Partnerships and Policy for more information on state-level funding for OST programs.) Programs are also funded by participant fees and other local or regional sources, such as private donations and philanthropic funding.



21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (21st CCLC)

The federally funded [21st CCLC Program](#) provided [\\$6.5 million](#) to South Dakota in 2024 and 2025 for comprehensive afterschool and summer programs. The 21st CCLC Program [began in the 1990's](#) and has grown with strong bi-partisan support over the last 25 years. It now operates as a federal formula grant to state departments of education. States can retain up to 2% of their allocations for administrative costs, and another 5% for investments to support the field, including technical assistance, professional development, and quality investment. States then run competitive grant competitions for district-based or community-based programs in areas of high economic need. Grants have a minimum annual allocation of \$50,000 and are provided for 3-5 years after which the provider must re-apply. Programs must use research-based best practices to provide comprehensive afterschool programming including academic components, enrichment components, and family engagement. The grants can also fund summer enrichment. Program data is collected and reported annually, including areas such as student attendance, academics, and teacher-reported student engagement. In South Dakota, 12,762 children in 84 communities take part in a 21st CCLC, with providers that currently range from Volunteers of America - Dakotas in Sioux Falls to the Oglala Lakota County School District. Demand for programming is so great that in South Dakota two out of every three applications were not funded during the most recent competition²². Additionally, smaller providers and rural providers often struggle with the capacity and demographics to make them competitive applicants for these grants. For those that do receive the grants, the short grant period is a challenge to many programs in designing long term sustainability. At the federal level as Congressional and administrative priorities fluctuate, providers also share some concern about the long term availability of these funds.



Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)/Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)

[The Child Care and Development Block Grant](#) legislation provides funding as part of the Child Care and Development Fund to allow states to support low-income working families with child care for their children from infancy to early adolescence (age 13). The law emphasizes family choice, safety and quality. The South Dakota Department of Social Services operates the Child Care Assistance Program to administer these funds. Funds are mostly made available to families as a subsidy, however they can also be distributed to programs through grants and contracts. States by law must invest 3% of their total allocation for quality investments toward infants and toddlers and another 9% toward quality investments more generally. South Dakota received [approximately \\$32 million](#) in federal funds for CCDF in 2024. [Data published in 2024 from the Office of Child Care](#)²³ shows 44% of those in South Dakota using the subsidy program in 2021 were school-aged children, amounting to an average of 1,429 school-aged children served each month. Seventy-three percent of those young people are served in centers, 26% are in family child care centers, and 1% are in the child's home.



Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Federal [Temporary Assistance for Needy Family Funds \(TANF\)](#) can also help support child care and afterschool programming. Up to 30% of TANF can be transferred to CCDF funds, and TANF non-assistance supports include Services for Children and Youth including “afterschool programs and mentoring and tutoring programs”. In 2023, South Dakota [spent or transferred 2.6%](#) of its TANF allocation to child care.

With a patchwork of funding streams under multiple state agencies, private providers, and no coordinating entity, the universe of afterschool programs across South Dakota can be challenging to gauge. The 21st CCLC programs are relatively easy to identify. Child Care data more often reports on licensed providers' capacity to serve children in different age categories, but not real time data on enrollment and whether they actively accept subsidies and have available slots. Additionally, as certain programs can operate as exempt under child care licensing, they may not be captured by the state licensing data systems. Furthermore, most afterschool and summer programs in the state operate on a private pay model, and collecting data from each individual provider requires coordination, resources, and on-going outreach as enrollments change and businesses open and close in the dynamic private market.

Federal Funding Streams for OST Programs in South Dakota

Funding Stream	Amount*	Purpose and Use	Administering Agency
21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC)	\$6.5 million (2024–2025)	Supports comprehensive afterschool and summer programs for 3-5 year cycles; academic enrichment; family engagement; summer enrichment	U.S. Dept. of Education → State Dept. of Education
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) / Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)	~\$32 million (2024)	Child care subsidies or low-income working families; some grants/ contracts to programs; quality investments for infants/ toddlers (3%) and general quality (9%)	South Dakota Dept. of Social Services
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	% of allocation (2.6% spent or transferred to child care in 2023)	Can fund child care, afterschool, tutoring, and mentoring; up to 30% may be transferred to CCDF	South Dakota Dept. of Social Services

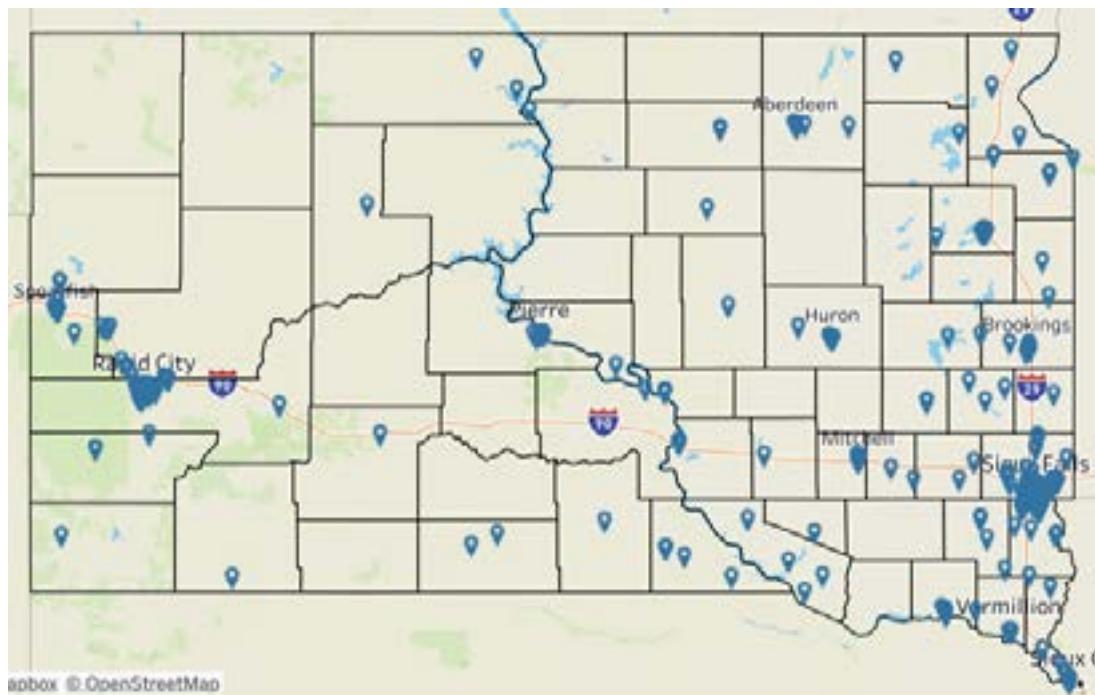
*Based on the most recent data available of amount provided to the state



Mapping the need for OST in South Dakota

The South Dakota Afterschool Network (SDAN), a [statewide afterschool network](#), created an [afterschool program map](#) in 2021 (see figure 5). The map identified over 300 programs across the state. Viewers could search for programs by funding stream (21st CCLC, Child Care Assistance), age, and activity (e.g. career exploration, special needs supports, STEM learning). The map also included an [assessment of out-of-school-time programs](#) by county and legislative district.

Figure 5: South Dakota Afterschool Program Map



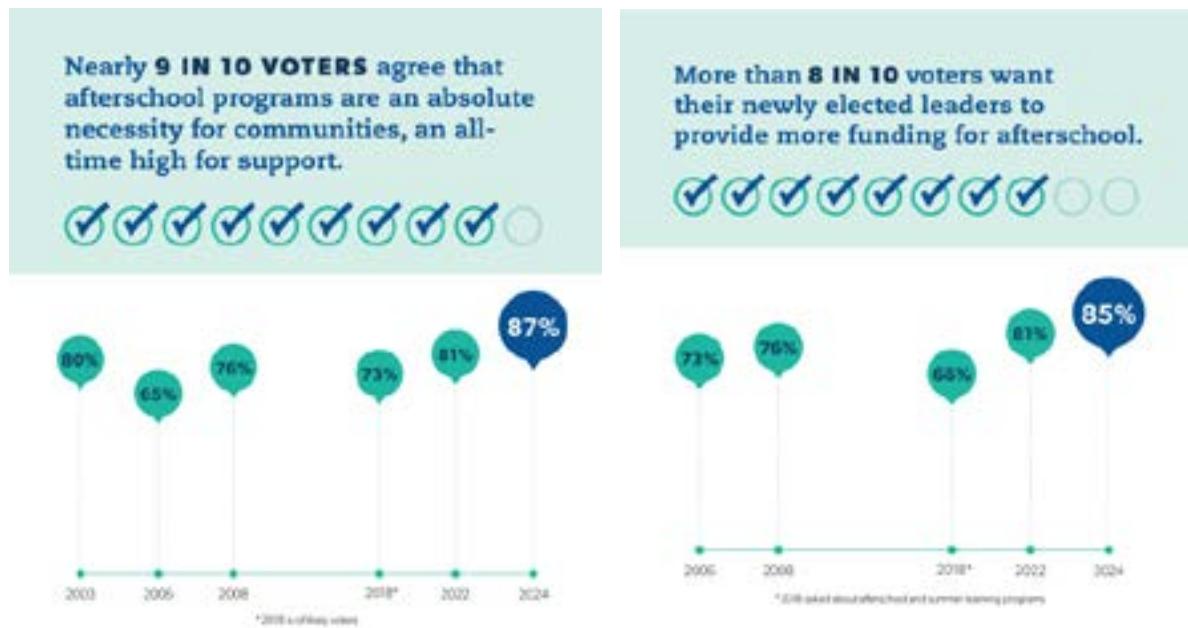
The Task Force designated significant attention to the value of maps to better understand access and barriers, at the local level, across the state. Development of an updated map could help further understand the recent data from national program provider surveys on their serious concerns surrounding youth access and substantial waitlists, as well as the 2025 parent demand data showcasing the need for 42,000 additional slots across the state. Significant gaps in afterschool program access remain. Supporting the 66% percent of South Dakota families who report wanting afterschool care but are unable to obtain it would mean digging down to the urban, rural, suburban and tribal areas where they live to identify key concerns.

Voter Opinions

While parents and providers are most directly impacted, voters as a whole are increasingly recognizing the community value of afterschool programs. A [nation-wide survey](#)²⁴ shows 9 in 10 voters agree that afterschool programs are an absolute necessity for their communities; and 85% of voters would like to see more public funding for afterschool programs (see Image 6). These numbers are only slightly lower than the support seen by parents. South Dakota's parent polling data show 87% agree that all young people deserve access to quality afterschool and summer programming; and 88% support public funding for afterschool (a breakdown of 90% Democrats, 92% Independents, and 88% Republicans in the state)²⁵.



Figure 6: Voters' Support of Afterschool



Across the board, these persistent challenges of affordability, accessibility, and availability paired with the high support and demand for programs highlight the urgent need for expanded, affordable afterschool options to better support families across the state. In some areas (see the Sioux Falls Case Study), innovative new models are expanding access through coordinating data, provider and community offerings, and funding sources. While each community has its own strengths to build on, understanding how models like these have supported parent and community needs for programs may provide insights in filling additional gaps at the local level and across the state.

Sioux Falls Community Learning Centers Case Study

In 2022, the Argus Leader reported that Sioux Falls Schools were developing a comprehensive plan to expand accessible, affordable afterschool programming. A 2018 Augustana Research Institute study had already shown that more than 4,000 elementary students were going home unsupervised, underscoring the need for broader community involvement.

The new plan established a districtwide model of “Community Learning Centers (CLCs)” to blend federal and philanthropic funds, coordinate community partners, and offer diverse activities on school sites. This system streamlines administrative and transportation costs and expands affordable services. A community board guides programming and budgeting. Director Rebecca Wimmer notes that the unified model ensures all students receive the same opportunities, regardless of background or need.

CLCs intentionally connect school-day learning with afterschool activities through fun, engaging academic reinforcement. A districtwide evaluation process supports consistent quality using the South Dakota Afterschool Network rubric. Early results are strong: targeted 21st CCLC sites use low-ratio tutors and voluntary supports to boost math and reading, with one cohort showing significant proficiency gains. Districtwide, at 21st CCLC funded sites and non-21st CCLC sites, chronic absenteeism is down and academic scores are improving. Enrichment programs provide experiences in theater, scouting, gardening, sports, and fine arts.



Family engagement is central. CLCs help families connect to services such as medical, mental health, and dental care. Staffing improvements also contribute to success. Three partner agencies (Volunteers of America, Boys & Girls Clubs, and the YMCA) hire and train staff, and the collaborative, on-school-site model has enabled more funding to be directed to competitive wages. The model also makes use of the school's part-time staff, creating roles for some educational assistants to extend their work into afterschool. This model provides access to full time hours and benefits, establishing more sustainable workforce positions.

A key staffing innovation is the "Connections Coordinator," a full-time role at each site that supports teachers during the school day and leads afterschool programming, strengthening continuity for students. For example, sites are able to extend and reinforce the school's work on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports through the afterschool program.

Challenges persist: about 500 students remain on a waitlist, and more resources are needed to support youth with significant special needs. The district also believes it could benefit from stronger statewide systems for staff training and youth development career pathways. To keep programs affordable, CLCs braid 21st CCLC funds, donations, parent fees, and scholarship dollars, and the district encourages the state to make coordinated use of multiple funding sources as simple as possible as well as coordination between state and local regulatory systems to ensure safety while streamlining regulatory burdens. Even with challenges, the program has shown an ability to serve almost 500 additional children since restructuring, with almost 40% on scholarship and is providing a fun space where students want to come and learn.



“

“When you walk in there, you will have no idea which staff belong to a nonprofit, or which staff belong to the school district,” Wimmer said. “You’ll have no idea which children ... have their parents paying for the program. You have no idea which children are behind in their academics, which children have behaviors. All you see is kids engaged in after-school programming that are getting the same opportunities as every other child should get.” Director Rebecca Wimmer reported.

”



I. ENDNOTES

¹ Afterschool Alliance (2021). Comprehensive Afterschool Programs. https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Comprehensive-Afterschool_National-12-17-21.pdf

² The Hunt Institute. (2025). Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota. South Dakota Child Care Task Force. https://sdpcm.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/News_ECCS_SDChildcareTaskforce_Report.pdf

³ Afterschool Alliance. (2025). Afterschool in South Dakota Programs in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many [Fact Sheet]. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/SD-AA3PM-2025-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

⁴ Afterschool Alliance. (2025). Lost Opportunity Afterschool Programs in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many [Fact Sheet]. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/National-AA3PM-Fact-Sheet-2025.pdf>

⁵ The Hunt Institute. (2025). Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota. South Dakota Child Care Task Force. https://sdpcm.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/News_ECCS_SDChildcareTaskforce_Report.pdf

⁶ The Hunt Institute. (2025). Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota. South Dakota Child Care Task Force. https://sdpcm.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/News_ECCS_SDChildcareTaskforce_Report.pdf

⁷ Afterschool Alliance. (2025). Afterschool in South Dakota Programs in Demand, But Out of Reach for Many [Fact Sheet]. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/SD-AA3PM-2025-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

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II. YOUTH OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Out-of-school time (OST) programs play a vital role in facilitating positive holistic outcomes for children in South Dakota, providing structured, safe, and engaging environments where students can grow academically and socially. These programs also play an essential role supporting parents and families, keeping children safe and enabling parents to participate fully in the workforce. This section describes the impact of OST programs on children and families, and offers an economic case for investing in OST in the state.

Similar to the substantial evidence for early childhood education, research shows that investments in OST yield measurable benefits for students, families, and communities, ultimately supporting broader educational outcomes. Research on the impacts of high quality early childhood settings and afterschool settings are also linked. A recent study out of UC Irvine¹, found that while high quality early childhood settings (0-5 years) show a positive long term impact on the child's math and reading performance while in 9th grade, high quality afterschool programs during elementary school have approximately equal and additive effects. This means that while each alone has a powerful effect, ensuring a student who has had high quality early childhood experiences can also connect with high quality afterschool programming in grades K-5 will not only sustain the effects of the early childhood program but double them.

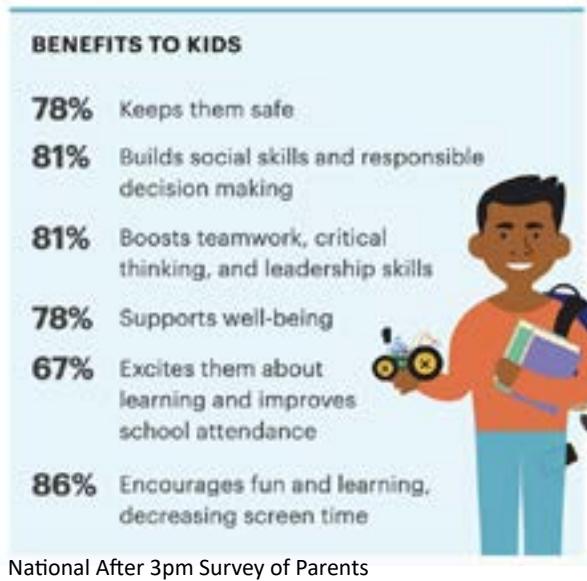
Academic Supports and Skill Development

[South Dakota data²](#) demonstrate that OST programs across the state provide robust educational, life and durable skills, accelerating student learning and facilitating the development of important 21st century skills. Parents report their children participating in afterschool programs across the state engaged in reading and writing activities (72%), STEM learning opportunities (73%), homework assistance (74%), and structured physical activities

(87%). Parents also see the value these programs provide in fostering peer interaction and social skill development (99%), as well as self-confidence (80%) which contribute to a positive learning experience³. About eight in ten parents say that afterschool programs provide two major benefits: keeping kids safe (78%) and supporting their overall well-being (78%). A large majority of parents (81%) report that afterschool programs build social skills and responsible decision-making, and the same proportion say these programs also boost teamwork, critical thinking, and leadership skills. About two-thirds of parents (67%) report that afterschool programs excite their children about learning and improve school attendance. Most parents (86%) also say these programs encourage fun and learning while reducing screen time⁴ (see Image 7).



Figure 7: Out-of-School Time Program Benefits to Kids



The U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) Program evaluation data complements these impacts. South Dakota students participating in 21st CCLC programs experienced both academic and behavioral gains⁵:

- 53% of students with a GPA below 3.0 the prior year improved their averages
- 48% demonstrated growth in reading and language arts
- 44% showed math improvement.

Teachers also reported that:

- 64% of students attending 21st CCLC programs improved their engagement in learning
- 40% of previously chronically absent students improved attendance
- Nearly one in four (23%) reduced in-school suspensions.

By supporting literacy development and overall engagement in learning, OST programs help address South Dakota's statewide focus on the science of reading. National research supports these findings, showing that regular participation in OST programs across multiple states is associated with higher GPAs, increased school engagement, and reductions in suspensions and absenteeism⁶.

“By focusing on providing high quality programming that aligns with school-day lessons and objectives, Community Learning Centers reported positive student impact consistently higher than overall state rates. This trend was evident in other areas as well with 90% of students improving math performance along with significant improvement in school day attendance and learning behaviors.”

Rebecca Wimmer, Sioux Falls School District

”



Developmental Relationships and Durable Skills Learning. Beyond academics, OST programs cultivate developmental relationships and foster valuable skills that are foundational to student growth.

[Research conducted by the Search Institute](#)⁷ shows the importance of youth developing positive relationships with and connections to caring adults, and describes how mentors, teachers, and program leaders at OST programs can fill that role for young people. Youth experience many benefits from these strong developmental relationships, including being more likely to report a wide range of life and workplace skill competencies such as self-regulation, empathy and collaboration as well as other indicators of well-being that can especially support students who've had negative experiences of stress and trauma. Additionally, young people do better when they experience a strong web of relationships with many people.

Mental and Physical Well-Being

OST participation also supports mental and physical health. The [Centers for Disease Control](#)⁸ and [American Public Health Association \(APHA\)](#)⁹ both note that before and afterschool programs can be key to youth getting sufficient physical activity and nutrition to lead a healthy lifestyle. APHA connects physical activity with “with lower levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety as well as increased self-image, self-esteem, and life satisfaction” while also mentioning how improved physical activity supports lower health care costs from diseases associated with inactivity.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers food programs that often operate through OST programs, providing an additional benefit to participating children. The [Child and Adult Care Food program \(CACFP\)](#) serves healthy snacks to school-age children through programs in areas where 50% or more of the students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, and the [Summer Food Service Program](#) provides meals and snacks to kids of all ages during the summer. Through these programs, children who attend OST programs are less likely to experience food insecurity which is associated with [absenteeism, depression, and poor social functioning](#),¹⁰ as well as [negative learning outcomes](#)¹¹.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey data from across the U.S.¹² demonstrate that students who participate in extracurricular activities experience a variety of mental health benefits. In Alaska, regular OST participants were 18% less likely to use alcohol, 39% less likely to use marijuana, and 28% less likely to have an unexcused absence, providing additional evidence for OST programs to enhance students' well-being.

Summer Learning

Summer programs fill an essential gap for children and families while school is out and help students maintain academic growth. [Research](#)¹³ has shown that gaps in student learning by 9th grade between higher and lower income families can be traced back to the types of learning experiences students did or didn't have over the summer months. A [RAND randomized control study](#)¹⁴ on voluntary summer learning programs with academic components found that participation for a single year yielded negligible effects, but multiple year participation saw students advance in math and reading beyond non-participants. A greater impact on student summer achievement was seen by increasing student dosage in a single summer from 3 weeks to 5 weeks, mixing 3 hours of instruction with engaging enrichment activities.

[Strong summer programming](#)¹⁵ also ensures students have access to food, physical activity, and engaging activities over the summer break, and supports educators who often must reteach forgotten material when students not engaged in enrichment and learning opportunities return to school. Teachers also find strong summer programs can be a testing ground for innovating new curricular approaches such as project based learning that supports student engagement all year long.



Parental Workforce Participation and Family Support

OST programs provide critical support for families and communities when school is not in session, including before and afterschool, school vacation, schools with 4-day weeks, and summer vacation (see Image 8). Programming during the summer is especially critical for supporting working families. [One analysis¹⁶](#) found 57% of families with a school age child would have to make a shift in the work hours resulting in less family income due to an absence of care.

Figure 8: How OST programs help parents



Afterschool programs also provide significant support to South Dakota families, particularly by enabling parents to participate more fully in the workforce and maintain family stability. South Dakota parents report that afterschool programs help them keep their jobs (78%) and offer peace of mind regarding their children's safety (95%)¹⁷. Nearly all parents (99%) express satisfaction with their child's program, and 85% support public funding for afterschool and summer learning initiatives¹⁸. For these reasons, the Task Force emphasized the importance of working families in South Dakota having access to affordable and dependable care in their communities.

South Dakota parents report that afterschool programs...

78% help them keep their job

95% offer peace of mind regarding their children's safety



Pathways to Career Exposure and Skill Development

OST programs in South Dakota also serve as pathways for career exploration and skill-building. Eighty-one percent of parents report that afterschool programs help young people develop skills that are relevant to the workplace (teamwork, critical thinking, leadership)¹⁹ and an [article in Advance CTE](#)²⁰ provides examples of middle school students gaining experience in afterschool programs that lead them to choose career and technical high school pathways towards in-demand careers. Early career exposure and feelings of capability and efficacy can be critical in ensuring all students see a wide variety of career pathways as options. [For example](#), supporting students between ages 10-14 to have positive experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) can be especially impactful²¹. At the South Dakota Discovery Center, students in 10th grade and older have the opportunity to become paid [summer STEM educators](#) creating curriculum, developing leadership skills and working with younger students. Students can also learn about careers through the [South Dakota State University Extension 4-H Workforce Development Program](#).

Nationally, opportunities exist for high school students to engage with younger learners in OST programs, gaining work-based experience and earning credentials. [Michigan's Youth Development Credential \(MiYDA\)](#) allows students to receive a credential that prepares them for roles as site supervisors, recreation leaders, teaching assistants, or youth development workers.



“

[South Dakota Afterschool Ambassador](#) Madelyn Hinkleman explained “ My afterschool program let me experience all types of job options, including business. We had a class on entrepreneurship, where we learned interview skills, how to run an effective business, and even got to run a real business ourselves...Afterschool programs taught me the importance of goals and my dreams. Now, after I graduate high school, my dream is to attend the University of South Dakota, major in Criminal Justice, and eventually get a Master’s degree in Social Work.”

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Reducing Juvenile Justice Risk and Promoting Long-Term Outcomes

OST programs have also been shown to be a protective factor against juvenile delinquency. [South Dakota research](#)²² indicates that youth placed in community-based supervision and services experience more positive outcomes than incarcerated youth, including staying in school, being employed, and being less likely to reoffend. This is critical not only for the youth, but for the state, given that incarceration costs an average of \$88,000 per youth per year²³.

Watertown Boys & Girls Club Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) Case Study

Begun in 2017, as part of an initiative to reduce the high numbers of youth in detention centers in South Dakota relative to other states, the Watertown Boys & Girls Club Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) program supports serving youth who have violated the law. Youth are given 90 to 120 hours of programming as an alternative to being placed in state facilities. Operating in the school buildings, the Boys & Girls Club (JDAI) team has the ability to build relationships with students and establish supports and programming serve those referred to the program alongside other students at the school as well. Students in the program may also make use of specific targeted interventions from support with chemical dependency, to connecting with mental health professionals, to a behavioral modification group which helps students who may have engaged in physical altercations. Director Louis Canfield, mentioned that students who are connected to activities in the community are not often the ones he sees in his referral program. "Youth need anything in a community that provides positive outlets, but a lot of families can't afford outlets to be productive", he reflected. In the diversion program students find positive peer relationships, caring adult mentors and opportunities for enrichment. Last year, they were able to take students horseback riding, an engaging and culturally affirming activity. Each year, the program evolves to better serve youth and communities, including having recently established a collaborative with partners and families to help advise on programmatic initiatives. In the future, the program hopes to be able to connect staff, especially part time and summer staff with more local opportunities for training and professional development especially in the areas of behavior management, and to garner more financial support for parenting programs. The program success has led to both social and economic returns. In 2024, the county was awarded \$82,750 awarded from the state for supporting 331 youth in completing the program and is keeping kids out of jail.

**Afterschool programs cost families an average of
\$3,306 per year per youth
while it costs taxpayers
\$91,126 to incarcerate
a youth**



Economic and Return-on-Investment Evidence

These academic, social, and health outcomes not only benefit children and families today, but also translate into measurable long-term economic returns for communities and the state. Research across states consistently demonstrates that every \$1 invested generates at least \$3 in societal benefits, including increased lifetime earnings, improved academic performance, and reductions in crime and juvenile delinquency²⁴. For example, [Georgia](#) estimates that for every \$1.00 invested in afterschool Georgia taxpayers would save \$2.64, finding that if the state invested \$25 million it would see \$154 million in returns to taxpayers²⁵. The state found that:



- Participating in Georgia's afterschool programs increases the probability of graduating high school by 11.6%;
- Afterschool programs cost an average of \$3,306 per year per youth while it costs \$91,126 to incarcerate a youth;
- Afterschool programs reduce the risk of addiction during the teen years from 11% to 5.5% for those regularly participating. Every dependent teen costs taxpayers an estimated \$7,469.33 per year.

This data illustrates that investments in OST programs reap many benefits, not only for children and families, but for state economies as well.

For every
\$1 invested in
afterschool
there is a
return-on-investment



Economic Development in Rural Communities Case Study

From 2023–2024, Jones County, supported by Klein Visioneering Group and the South Dakota Afterschool Network, surveyed families about child-care needs. Half of respondents had missed work due to child-care challenges, losing \$246–\$735 in wages over six months. The county had 243 children under 13, including 115 ages 6–13; 96% lived in working families, yet only four used the child-care subsidy. Limited, unaffordable options strained both families and the local economy. Local employers agreed: 86.6% said affordable, quality child care was essential to productivity.

Afterschool programming emerged as a major gap. Parents reported concerns over children's excessive screen time and lack of supervision, and or feeling forced into part-time work due to 3:30pm release times. Some children were left watching younger siblings, including a 5-year-old found riding a bike near the highway. Nearly two-thirds of parents said afterschool options would be useful, and some families had left the community due to limited child care. Local providers also faced staffing shortages, low wages, waitlists, and rising costs.

Seeing child-care deficits as a barrier to growth, the City of Murdo's economic development office began coordinating solutions. The office noted that zoning, housing, and child care were essential to attracting new businesses. With technical assistance—including from the statewide afterschool network—the school district joined a cooperative partnership with nearby schools to strengthen its application for a 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grant.

With the grant, a new afterschool program launched for K–6 students, with plans for K–8. It offered competitive wages, built trust with families, and adapted programming for older students. Support from the statewide network helped stabilize operations.

Today, the program serves 25–30 students daily with academic support, enrichment, snacks, social time, and 20 minutes of reading. Teachers and paraprofessionals provide targeted assistance, and older students have leadership roles. Families appreciate the structure and completed reading time.

Sustainability remains a concern. The 21st CCLC grant does not fund nutritious food, prohibits charging fees, and lasts only 3–5 years. Still, Murdo's collaborative approach is strengthening the community. Even the economic development director now uses the program, allowing her children a safe, enriching space to learn and grow while she works to build the local economy.

South Dakota's OST programs significantly contribute to the overall well-being of children and families in a myriad of ways. The Task Force discussed the value of OST programs to South Dakota, from keeping kids safe and less likely to engage in risky behaviors when not in school, to helping schools promote academic outcomes, and building the workforce of tomorrow, outcomes that are critical to the success of families and the state overall.



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III. REGULATION AND QUALITY IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Recently an increasing number of states have been restructuring their local governmental agencies with a greater focus on creating and consolidating child care and wraparound educational and developmental services, such as Michigan's Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential; Missouri's Office of Childhood; Ohio's Department of Children and Youth; and Indiana's Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Time Learning¹. South Dakota currently operates under multiple entities that require coordination across systems.

Child Care Regulatory System in South Dakota

South Dakota's child care governance structure involves coordination across a number of entities and agencies. The [child care licensing](#) and child care subsidy office fall under the Department of Social Services Division of Economic Assistance, while other programs fall under the Department of Education and Department of Health². South Dakota requires licensing for many child care providers, exempting two categories of school-age providers: those with fewer than 13 children in their care or those in which the program "is providing educational or recreational activities for children who come and go in the program at their own discretion". Despite the limited exemptions, the state reports only 117 licensed OST programs.

The Task Force charge did not include reviewing those providers operating as unlicensed, and makes no statement on the value or lack of value to being licensed. It is reasonable to assume that OST programs wanting to avoid licensing burdens could maintain the number of children served at below the maximum of 13, or design their attendance policy as come and go to receive an exemption. This could have implications for the access and quality issues the Task Force is working to address.



Data from a statewide study referenced in the

[Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota report](#)³ showed that among both licensed and unlicensed programs, two in five were not accepting subsidies (page 28). This affects access for families who are eligible for vouchers, but cannot find an eligible location for child care. To address this issue, the Task Force discussed incentives and disincentives to the licensing and subsidy process for school-age before and after school programs, considering implications policies may have on program access (the number of children served) and program experience (the health, safety, and quality of the program).

Task Force members considered the following questions:

- What are the advantages and challenges of operating a licensed OST program?
- What would make licensing more accessible and realistic for providers?
- Which elements of OST should align with early childhood standards, and which require a distinct framework?



Task Force members found that licensing can bring important benefits such as consistent safety standards, appropriate staff-to-child ratios, and more predictable program quality. They noted these benefits can boost parent confidence and also open doors to state, federal and other funding streams. There are also challenges such as the costs and complexities of compliance (paperwork and fees), especially for small, rural, or part-time programs. These programs may find these regulatory costs too high to meet requirements, designed with full-day early childhood centers in mind, misaligned and unnecessarily high or burdensome. In identifying areas of alignment with early childhood systems serving children 0-5, Task Force members noted that the ECE and OST workforce serve the same families at different stages in their children's development and a number of providers serve children across the early care and school-age continuum. This creates natural areas of collaboration, even as each age grouping also holds its own distinctive attributes as well. While the Task Force members applauded on-going state efforts to adjust requirements to better reflect the realities of school-age care environments, including those in school based settings, there was still a sentiment that current regulations often overlook the unique nature of OST—its flexible schedules, seasonal staffing patterns, and close connection to schools. OST programs often fall between systems, not fully aligned with early childhood regulations, but also not firmly supported within formal K-12 educational structures. This is one of the strengths of the field, allowing innovative youth centered spaces for school-aged youth from early elementary to adolescence, and creates complexity when the field is asked to align too closely with a specific system rather than occupy a unique space. The Task Force considered the need for additional ways to understand the cost model structures and operational decisions of licensed and unlicensed OST providers, including the implications on program accessibility, quality, and parent choice.

Access to quality programming is another key element to increasing real choices for families. The Task Force emphasized that all programs should be supported with mechanisms for voluntarily increasing levels of quality and that no family should have to settle for a low-quality care environment.

The [Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota report](#)⁴ referenced an South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension survey⁵ which found “47% of parents and caregivers disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with the quality of care in their area” (page 36).

Out-of-School Time Quality Standards

Quality school-age and OST programming has some parallels to quality early education but also involves distinct quality standards and trainings. The work spans everything from integrating youth voice and choice, hands-on learning, and school-day connections to understanding mental health, navigating the behavioral changes 9- and 10-year-olds face as they enter pre-adolescence, creating supportive, bully-free spaces, and promoting safe, informed use of social media. The Task Force discussed how quality, while desirable, could also be challenging due to lack of funding for materials, limited training opportunities, and staff turnover.

Afterschool quality standards have emerged as a norm for states, whether through statewide afterschool networks or adoption by state education or child care agencies or a mix of the above, to support programs to build higher levels of quality programming. Currently, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) reported in the Sept 16, 2025 presentation to the Task Force, 47 states have afterschool quality standards. South Dakota is one of 3 states to not have statewide quality standards designed.

South Dakota is one of only 3 states that currently do not have statewide out-of-school-time quality standards.



AIR's presentation defined quality standards as "a foundational aspect of an afterschool system, where the goal is to ensure all youth have access to high quality programs. Quality standards can unite a diverse afterschool community by establishing a shared vision of quality that matches the unique resources of the state and advance a common language to discuss elements of quality. With a shared vision and common language, the afterschool community can offer supports - professional development, observational tools and more- that are designed to support quality afterschool programs."

These quality standards are often designed and supported by field supporting Statewide Afterschool Networks and can be adopted by states for use in the quality systems for afterschool and child care settings.

In 2023, the National Center for Afterschool and Summer Learning brought together the South Dakota Afterschool Network and State Child Care Office alongside stakeholders in the field to jointly create a voluntary Program [Quality Self-Assessment Tool](#). The tool is designed to provide stakeholders with a framework for expectations, evaluation of practices, identification of strengths, and target areas for growth. This helps families identify quality programming. The Task Force discussed how the self-assessment tool could form the foundation for a set of state voluntary standards, which they agreed is needed, but noted the importance of quality tools being optional due to the varied nature of afterschool programs. For programs operating at high levels of quality, it would allow them to communicate what they do and see themselves as part of a broader field and for those with less established quality systems, it would provide a language and vision for how to establish programming that serves children and drives intended outcomes in the short and long term for families and the greater community.

South Dakota Quality Systems and Support

Currently, the state offers supports for school-age program quality through the [Quality Care South Dakota](#) and the Child and Family Resource Network. The Quality Care system was described by project lead, Rachel Bussman, in her conversation with the Task Force "as a means to allow programs to receive support beyond the basics of regulations and licensing and establish accessible, child centered spaces with responsive educators". Between 2022 and 2024, her office was able to establish a pilot program for a South Dakota Quality Recognition and Information System. SDSU provided a [report of the program](#)⁶. The program included specific quality systems and supports for child care centers, group family child care, family child care homes, and school-age programs across the state's five regional service areas. The school-age programs were observed using the school-age environmental rating scale known as SACERS-U. Participants had access to coaching and professional development through the Cypherworx system, as well as quality improvement grants. Communities of practice provided support and participants provided feedback to the state on the continuous quality improvement system. Quality coaches observed "more improved child centered environments, increased intentionality with learning activities, high quality interactions with children and a stronger focus on program administration (page 15). **Over 4 in 5 participants mentioned the experience provided growth opportunities, helped them to get excited to learn and implement change in their program, and would continue to participate in the program, if available.** One provider mentioned in her 28 year career she had never felt better supported. As a result of the positive outcomes, the Quality Care office has now extended their current support from 68 programs to 82 statewide.

Participants in the South Dakota Quality Recognition System pilot reported they would continue to participate if the program continued to be available.



The state agency has also worked to support school-age career pathways, with a professional development career ladder. The Task Force learned the state would be updating and relaunching both a school-age certificate and credential. The certificate aligns with the National Afterschool Association's Core Knowledge and Competencies for Out-of-School-Time Professionals; and the OST credential represents an additional level of professionalism, mirroring the expectations of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

State-level Models of Quality Systems and Support

The Task Force presentations also highlighted models of quality and professional development support taking place around the country, including examples from Utah and Indiana.

Utah

Utah's school-age child care and OST workforce approach offers an example of a fully integrated quality system. The state has established aligned program standards, assessment tools, professional development resources, and a coaching network for grant-funded programs. A key feature is the state's afterschool credential, which is aligned with child care licensing requirements and embedded within a tiered "Afterschool Incentive" program. Utah's system is supported through a combination of 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) pass-through funds and Workforce Services funding, creating a sustainable structure for continuous improvement.

Indiana

Indiana's Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Time Learning (OECOSL) has also built a strong statewide system centered on quality and workforce development. Working with its statewide afterschool network, the state has implemented clear standards, a self-assessment tool, and multiple professional learning opportunities for OST providers. Indiana uses a learner-directed coaching model, enabling staff to set goals and receive tailored support. A statewide resource library and job board further strengthen the network, while the administration of Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) sub-grants for school-age programs positions Indiana as a key connector between OST providers, families, and state systems.

Access and quality operate hand in hand to ensure parents have meaningful options for their children's development and these options lead to the outcomes OST programs are designed to deliver for participating youth. Understanding how the state regulatory system and state support system shape these programs, and how they can evolve to best support the field is a foundation to expanding high quality access.



III. ENDNOTES

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IV. THE UNIQUE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME WORKFORCE

The Out-of-School Time (OST) workforce is vital to delivering high-quality programs for school-age youth, yet according to [Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota](#) approximately 78% of the workforce in the state is turning over annually. This section presents an overview of the unique OST workforce, challenges they face, and potential approaches for addressing these challenges.

Insight from Afterschool Alliance

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“Research shows a strong afterschool and summer workforce is key to providing young people with the experiences, connections, and outcomes they deserve. However, the well-documented workforce challenges faced by afterschool and summer programs are negatively impacting programs’ ability to meet the needs of children, youth, and families.”

”



Current Landscape of OST Workforce

The OST workforce occupies a unique position between early child care and formal education. Staff members come from diverse backgrounds, fill a wide range of roles within OST programs, and are critical to providing high-quality experiences for the young people they serve. Task Force members highlight several unique characteristics of OST work:

Unique characteristics of the OST workforce include a large number of part-time positions, particularly in frontline roles. While these roles can appeal to some staff, they often limit salary and benefits, making it important to consider part-time staff when establishing workforce support policies. The parent need for non-school hour care requires non-traditional staffing schedules, with staff expected to work during school vacations and professional development days, often with limited replacements. Task Force members acknowledged this can take a toll on staff's personal lives. Career pathways in OST are still nascent, aligning with education and child welfare while also representing a distinct workforce that requires specialization and retention.

Despite the challenges, the South Dakota [Child Care Workforce Study](#)¹ found that an overwhelming majority of providers report their work is satisfying, important, and that they are making a significant difference in children's lives. Similarly, the data from the [Power of Us Workforce Survey](#)² shows that nationally, many OST professionals enjoy their work and consider it mission-driven.



Key Challenges Facing the OST Workforce

OST professionals play a vital role in delivering quality programs for children and are deeply committed to their work. However, low pay, limited benefits, and few options for education or career growth cause high turnover and staff shortages nationwide. Task Force input confirms that these issues significantly impact OST staff in South Dakota, mirroring national trends and contributing to workforce instability in the state. The Task Force emphasized that program quality is inextricably linked to the workforce and investing in the OST workforce – through better training, compensation, and support – directly enhances the quality of programs for children and families.

Compensation and Benefits

Low compensation is widely recognized as the primary barrier to recruiting and retaining OST staff. Low salaries and limited access to essential benefits, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid leave, make it difficult for programs to attract and keep qualified professionals. Nationally, 69% of youth-serving professionals cite improved benefits as the most desired change to their jobs. Eighty-three percent of providers are concerned about their ability to pay staff a livable wage and benefits and 47% report difficulty hiring or retaining staff³.

83%
of providers are concerned about their ability to pay staff.

These trends are reflected in South Dakota, with recruitment and retention being difficult for programs given that staff are often part-time, seasonal, or split across multiple jobs, and low compensation makes it challenging to compete with other industries for workers. According to [Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota](#)⁴, the average OST program staff in South Dakota in 2022 earned \$11.00 per hour, which is well below the living wage, estimated at \$19.58 per hour. This low pay

78%
of the workforce in the state turns over annually.

contributes to high turnover rates, with approximately 78% of the workforce in the state turning over annually. This high rate of turnover significantly impacts availability of care, potentially leaving programs suddenly understaffed and unable to serve current participants, and disrupts the continuity of care, inhibiting programs' abilities to develop strong bonds and consistency with the children and families they serve.

Salaries of OST Program Staff in South Dakota

Job Title	Median Starting Wage	Median Maximum Wage
Director	\$39,000 (\$18.75/hr)	\$56,430
Assistant Director	\$35,360 (\$17.00/hr)	\$41,600
Lead Teacher	\$30,680 (\$14.75/hr)	\$35,360
Assistant Teacher	\$24,960 (\$12.00/hr)	\$29,120
Site Coordinator	\$33,280 (\$16.00/hr)	\$37,440
Administrative Staff	\$36,400 (\$17.50/hr)	\$39,520



Educational and Career Pathways

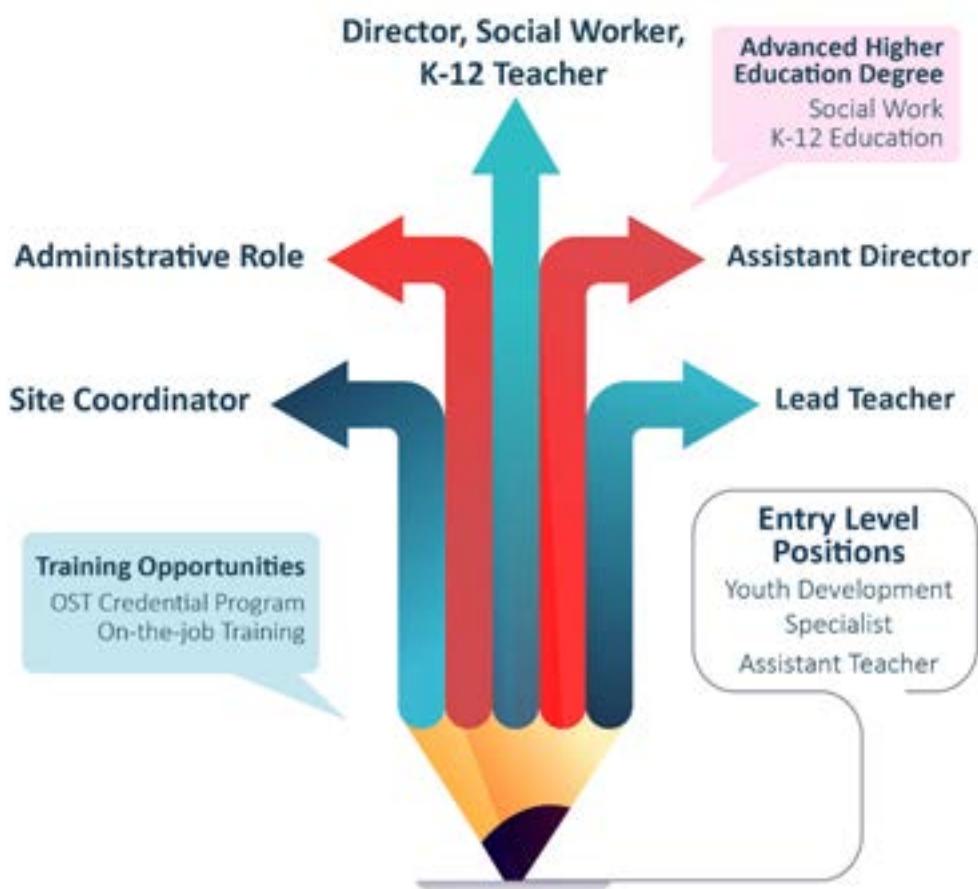
Data shows that many OST staff see their work as mission-driven, but they often do not view themselves as part of a larger profession and lack formal recognition as a professional field⁵. A standard educational pathway into the OST field does not exist, and educational backgrounds and access to professional learning among staff vary greatly. The flexibility and low barrier to entry may be seen as a benefit to attracting new staff who may not have otherwise considered youth development as their career field, however it also makes it necessary for programs to provide the time, space, and guidance for on-the-job training. While 84% of youth-serving professionals report having access to learning through their organization, younger, part-time, and frontline staff all experience less access to these opportunities⁶.

There are

career pathways and credential programs emerging in the field, but they are inconsistent and not widely accessible.

South Dakota offers an [OST credential program](#) that is currently being updated. Task Force members stressed the importance of providing certificates or credentials for training and education, as these not only enhance staff skills but also offer tangible benefits for future career advancement and increase the likelihood of professionals remaining in the field. To strengthen retention, members recommend framing OST positions as professional pathways in their own right as well as entry points into education and other youth development and social service careers, and expanding access to professional development opportunities. Currently, education and training for OST professionals vary by location, leading to inequitable opportunities for staff and programs. Addressing these disparities is essential for building a stable, skilled OST workforce.

Figure 9: OST Career Pathways



As South Dakota updates its OST credential program and explores additional ways to increase workforce stability, it can leverage established OST credential, educational, and career pathway programs from other states. For example:

- The [Vermont Afterschool Network](#) provides a host of professional development and career pathway opportunities for OST staff in the state, including an Afterschool and Youth Work Certificate offered by the Community College of Vermont and an afterschool credential and on-the-job training provided in collaboration with Vermont's Agency of Human Services.
- The [Utah Afterschool Network's School-Age Credential](#) is available for OST staff in the state to pursue. It is aligned with the National Afterschool Association Core Knowledge Skills and Competencies for Afterschool and Youth Development and helps professionals in the field learn skills, knowledge and best practices to positively impact program quality and the children they serve.
- The [Michigan Department of Education](#) offers a Child Development Associate Credential and a Michigan Youth Development Associate (MI-YDA) Credential for high school students as part of the states Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways, providing field-based experience and training that prepares students for employment after graduation in the child care or youth development fields.

OST Workforce Morale and Burnout

The OST workforce is made up of professionals with diverse backgrounds and educational experiences who serve in a wide range of roles. They are deeply committed to their work and know they make a meaningful impact on children's lives. While most youth workers report feeling valued (87%) and a sense of belonging at work (89%), nearly half (47%) say they are experiencing burnout which could directly affect quality and access⁷. Providers echo these concerns, noting several challenges among their staff: 75% report higher stress levels, 50% observe declining staff morale, and 44% believe guidance on managing burnout would be helpful⁸. Low pay, limited career pathways, and few opportunities for educational advancement are key drivers of burnout, turnover, and staffing shortages. These challenges ultimately affect program quality, availability, and the number of youth programs can serve. [A report on student safety in OST in Sioux Falls](#)⁹ found that stakeholders' primary concern regarding program sustainability is staffing. Providers recognize the importance of consistent staff for program quality, but they struggle to recruit and retain staff, sometimes having to reduce the number of children served due to insufficient staff.

Strengthening the OST Workforce

Workforce shortages are a major barrier to both access and quality in South Dakota's OST programs. While some programs have managed to address this issue, most struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff which threatens program stability and service delivery. Through case studies and Task Force meetings in the creation of this report, a number of programs mentioned a variety of staffing roles that provided key support to their programs. Some of those roles included "Connections Coordinators", full-time positions in the Sioux Falls Community Learning Center Model existing at every school site that split their day between the school day and after school, providing teacher relief and additional student support during the day and building connections across both settings. Staff in these positions are able to offer consistent application of the school's Positive Behavioral Support System (PBIS) in both settings, and to understand the context of student academic needs and behavioral supports during afterschool.



Programs also made use of behavioral support specialists to ensure all students received positive redirection, helping programs to provide safe, constructive environments for all participants. Another program has a staff position that includes working in the office and providing coverage in an early childhood center during the school day and working with middle school students after school. This type of position benefits staff by providing a full-time salary and benefits and a diverse professional experience.

Task Force members recommend positioning the overlap OST roles can also have as entry points into education or human services careers to attract new talent, while recognizing the field as a meaningful profession with its own opportunities for career growth. They also emphasize the importance of state-supported training and credentialing programs to help stabilize the workforce. Additionally, members highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the true costs of OST staff turnover—both in terms of financial impact on programs and the disruption of consistency for children.

Insight from American Institutes for Research (AIR)

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“The American Institutes for Research (AIR) emphasized the importance of including workforce development, professional identity, and recognition into South Dakota’s overall OST strategy to ensure staff receive the training, support, and compensation necessary to sustain programs over time.”

”



Addressing the compensation, benefits, and career development challenges that OST programs and professionals experience in South Dakota is critical to empowering and stabilizing the field. OST professionals show considerable commitment to their roles and care deeply about the impact they have on children’s lives. Investing in the OST workforce and the systems that support it will not only improve staff retention and satisfaction, but also ensure that OST programs are well-positioned to provide high-quality experiences for all children and families across the state.



IV. ENDNOTES

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V. PARTNERSHIPS AND POLICY

Nationally, OST providers report serious concerns about the funding of their programs¹. Eighty-one percent of providers report being concerned about the sustainability and future of programs, with 55% being very concerned, and 44% of providers are worried about the possibility of having to close their programs. Many programs have used pandemic relief funds to staff programs, serve more students, expand offerings, and extend program hours. As this funding ends, providers are concerned about potential staff reductions (36%), the amount of programming offered (35%), and number of students served (29%).

State-level Funding for OST

There is an opportunity for South Dakota to identify a state level funding stream to support program access. Historically, OST programs have relied on limited funding streams to support programming, including the federal 21st CCLC program, local school district budgets, and philanthropy. In recent years, to meet the growing need for access, there has been a surge in state support for child care and afterschool program funding. There are 27 states and the District of Columbia contributing state funds to support afterschool and summer learning. Sixteen of those states established new funding or expanded their funding streams over the past five years. (See Image 9.) The task force would like to consider building on the momentum of other states to expand opportunities locally in South Dakota.

Figure 10: States with Afterschool + Summer Funding



States utilize a variety of funding mechanisms to direct state funds to OST, including state budget appropriations, state lottery funds, cannabis tax revenue, ballot initiatives, and school funding formulas. These investments focus on key priorities of each state which has included: keeping children safe, providing academic enrichment, building literacy, mental health support, and workforce development skills as well as their important role in supporting working families and facilitating economic development. These diverse approaches help states tailor OST support to their specific needs and resources. Case studies of state pathways to OST and summer funding streams are available from the Afterschool Alliance including for states such as [Alabama](#), [Georgia](#), [Texas](#), and [Pennsylvania](#).



States have also seen significant funding progress in establishing designated revenue for child care funding inclusive of both early and school-age care. [New Mexico](#) is leading the way by fully funding child care in the state, defined as including “child care centers, home-based providers, before- and after-school programs, and summer programs” licensed or registered by the Early Childhood Education and Care Department. Recent ECE/OST funding advances have also come from neighboring Montana which, through [HB 924](#), established a “Growth and Opportunities Trust” with a specific Early Childhood Special Revenue Account that would allow account funds to be used to expand access in early learning and afterschool.

Task Force members discussed the need for South Dakota to develop flexible, braided funding models, combining state, federal, and private sources. They also recognize the need to highlight philanthropic, business, and educational partnerships as funding collaborators.

OST Task Force Policy Priorities

The Task Force Discussions concluded with an analysis of how some of the strengths of the OST field identified in the meetings could be built upon and which challenges could be better supported through recommended policy and field based actions.

Working from areas of alignment to the Sustainable Solutions for Transforming Child Care in South Dakota Task Force Report (see Appendix), and conscious of the need not to unnecessarily repeat any clear areas of alignment, the Task Force developed a list of policy recommendations that either built upon the prior recommendations from a school-age/afterschool perspective or added a new policy request specific to the needs of the OST field that surfaced over the course of the content meetings and fact gathering stages. They also took the time to elevate a few critical areas as the highest priorities: Establishing a new governance structure focused on childhood in the state; ensuring designated state funding for ECE and afterschool; and developing statewide quality afterschool standards emerged as the top three.

Top Legislative Priorities

- 1. Create a consolidated state governance structure for child care and afterschool programs.** The Task Force sees an opportunity for the legislature and state agencies to redesign the current system to better support child development. A model—similar to those emerging in other states such as [Missouri's Office of Childhood](#) which consolidated child care governance that had been spread between departments of social services, health and senior services and education—could improve funding alignment, streamline regulations, strengthen data systems, and ensure more consistent administration. The [Pre-natal to 3 Policy Impact Center](#) state governance structures' maps may be used to gain insights into how states are restructuring.
- 2. Establish a designated, ongoing funding stream for ECE and OST programs.** Providers face insufficient and hard-to-access federal funding, rising operating costs, workforce shortages, and growing waitlists. Twenty-eight states, including Alabama and Texas, now have state funding streams for afterschool and summer programs, and others (e.g., Vermont and New Mexico) fund both early care and school-age care. Public voter and parent support for these investments is strong across demographic and ideological groups, and additional state investments will be necessary to expand access especially in high-need communities.



3. **Partner with higher education or research organizations to conduct a return-on-investment (ROI) study of afterschool programs.** Research shows OST programs can generate long-term savings through better student outcomes, increased future earnings, and reduced spending on health and justice systems. South Dakota would benefit from its own state level ROI analysis for out of school time programs. This study could be carried out by the state or supported through philanthropic partners within the next 1–2 years to inform future funding decisions.
4. **Create a legislative caucus or coalition focused on children and youth.** A caucus would ensure ongoing legislative attention to data, research, and the realities facing today's families from early care through school-age development. Task Force discussions highlighted that outdated assumptions about care needs and program offerings are common. A parallel community coalition could help unify early care and afterschool partners around shared priorities.

Administrative Agency Recommendations

5. **Establish a regular feedback loop with OST providers to review licensing requirements.** Providers value licensing for funding access, safety assurances, and workforce support, some requirements are burdensome and limit enrollment, which leads to unlicensed programs that are unable to accept child care assistance. Ongoing feedback can help improve clarity, ensure regulatory standards are right-sized and age-appropriate, streamline processes, and support consistent monitoring and technical assistance, including for smaller providers in rural or tribal areas.
6. **Strengthen outreach and access to school-age training including a coordinated training database.** Staff are the most critical element in OST program quality. The updated school-age credential is an important step. The Task Force recommends continuing this work with expanded outreach, additional investments to increase participation, and exploration of a broader workforce registry.

Field-Led Recommendations (may require support from any sector)

7. **Develop voluntary statewide afterschool quality standards.** The state's existing School-Age Quality Self-Assessment provides a strong foundation. Yet, South Dakota is one of only three states without voluntary OST quality standards. Establishing them could help unify the field, support workforce recruitment, and ensure programs understand the components of high-quality youth experiences which lead to beneficial outcomes for youth, families and the broader community.
8. **Update mapping of school-age program to identify supply, demand, and areas with waitlists.** Survey data shows that 42,000 South Dakota youth would like to participate in afterschool programs but cannot. An updated and current, detailed map—building on the 2021 effort by the SD Afterschool Network—would help policymakers and other stakeholders better understand the landscape and help target resources to areas of greatest need.
9. **Develop an afterschool cost model.** Effective funding strategies require clear understanding of cost structures across different OST settings (school-based, rural, tribal, etc.). OST requires different staff roles, such as part time positions, and school connections coordinators that an early care cost model would not effectively capture. Additionally, cost models account for what providers need to support a sustainable high quality program, an important step beyond cost surveys which contain a snapshot of what providers are currently able to offer. Emerging national OST cost-model cohorts, such as those underway through the Children's Funding Project, may offer partnership opportunities. The state and field should look to participate in an updated cost model study for the OST field.



V. ENDNOTES

¹ Afterschool Alliance. (2025). A Mix of Highs and Lows for Afterschool Program Providers. <https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/A-Mix-of-Highs-and-Lows-Wave-11.pdf>



APPENDIX

The Task Force reviewed the recommendations of last year's Child Care Task Force in order to build on the prior work and identify which areas aligned with the conversations about OST needs in the state that might require modified policy changes, or separate policy recommendations.

The 2024 work fell into three main categories: Improving Access; Affordability; and Workforce. Areas of Alignment with the Hunt Child Care Report:

Improving Access

- Partnerships for braided funding to supplement child care revenue and provide competitive wages.
 - The OST Task force aligned with this priority, expanding it further in recognizing the need for a new governance structure focused on childhood development.
- Grant programs for program operations and pay increases to educators.
 - The OST Task force aligned with this recommendation. It also promoted continued support for HB 1132 to allow child care workers to be eligible for child care assistance. The task force noted that the school-age workforce benefits from the allowability of part-time workers (ie 15-20 hours a week).
 - The task force also recognized a need for a state supplement to federal funding for ECE and OST to meet the identified needs.
- Improve rates of reimbursement
 - The OST task force aligned with SB 126 to support program stability by increasing reimbursement rates to the 90th percentile.

Affordability

- True cost of care models
 - The OST task force felt understanding the true cost of care for a diversity of providers including school-age community based, school-based, rural, tribal, suburban and urban providers would be critical.
- Partnerships for cost sharing programs
 - The OST task force sees the benefits of state cost sharing models to support providers to reach the true cost of care and help families with affordability. Any cost share should ensure inclusion of families needing care for children 0-13.
- Scholarship funds for low and middle income family access
 - The OST task force aligned with this recommendation, noting the new America After 3 PM data showing the growing access gap in care for not just low income, but also middle income families.



Workforce

- Maintaining ratios
 - The OST task force recognizes the different ratio needs of early care and school-age providers. The state is currently assessing its school-age ratio requirements and the task force did not take a position from a school-age standpoint, but hopes the state carefully considers all feedback from the field.
- Philanthropic partnerships for braided funding for workforce retention
 - The OST Task Force aligns with this recommendation and highlights that philanthropy may be able to support innovative solutions to the specific challenges of OST's part time workforce including low wages, limited benefits and hooks into sustainable career pathways.
- Partnerships with IHE on career lattices and career entry pathways
 - The OST Task force expanded this beyond IHE to other educational partners, recognizing the need for professional development to be broadly advertised, accessible, affordable, and transferable.
 - The OST Task force also specified the opportunity to build upon the state's newly updated OST Certificate and Credential program.

