

NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON UNIVERSAL AFTER-SCHOOL

Interim Report - Executive Summary

DECEMBER 2025



NYC

Cover Photo Credits

Top Left Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for Afterschool Education

Top Right Photo: Courtesy of the New York Junior Tennis League

Bottom Left Photo: Courtesy of Children's Aid

Bottom Right Photo: Courtesy of New York Edge



INTERIM REPORT OF THE NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON UNIVERSAL AFTER-SCHOOL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This interim report of the New York City Commission on Universal After-School sets forth a comprehensive strategy for expanding after-school programs and building a coordinated, equitable, and sustainable universal system.

The Commission's vision is for every child in every neighborhood to have access to a free, high-quality after-school program. Programs should be holistic and grounded in positive youth development principles, offering participants safe spaces to engage in enriching activities while connecting with peers and caring adults. At the same time, the after-school system as a whole should be flexible and innovative enough to address the needs of New York City's diverse youth and families.

The successful execution of this vision has the potential to transform the lives of New York City families and children. From a public policy perspective, after-school programs provide a dual benefit to the city and its residents:

- 1. In the short term, programs offer working families a free child care option, making it more affordable to raise children in the city.**
- 2. In the longer-term, regular participation in after-school provides youth with positive benefits that support their personal growth, educational outcomes and, ultimately, success in career and life.**

Given that appeal, it is not surprising that families are clamoring to enroll their children in these programs across New York City. However, the current supply of programs is significantly below the demand from families, and there are hundreds of school communities without a publicly funded program. The current expansion to add 20,000 slots for K-5 students will start to address that gap, but future growth is necessary. Fortunately, the system – made up of nonprofit providers, city agencies and outside intermediaries – is robust, resilient and ready to build a larger and stronger network of programs.



The Commission’s preliminary findings, drawn from extensive research and engagement with stakeholders, parents, and providers, identify five key areas that need attention and focus to expand and improve the after-school system.

These findings directly inform five corresponding recommendations for action, designed to align the system and solidify the ambitious goal of expanding to reach every child who wants or needs an after-school program.

OUR FOCUS AREAS

 **Universal Access**

Significant unmet demand for K-5 programs confirms the need for future expansion and the related resource investment.

 **Nonprofit Workforce**

Quality after-school programs rely on dedicated and skilled staff who will need support and investment as the system grows.

 **System Coordination**

Strong partnerships and collaboration between schools and CBOs providing after-school services contribute to quality programs and should be standardized and improved across the system.

 **Program Quality**

To maintain high-quality programming, the system will need to account for the varying needs of new and existing programs, balancing oversight and flexibility.

 **High-Need Students**

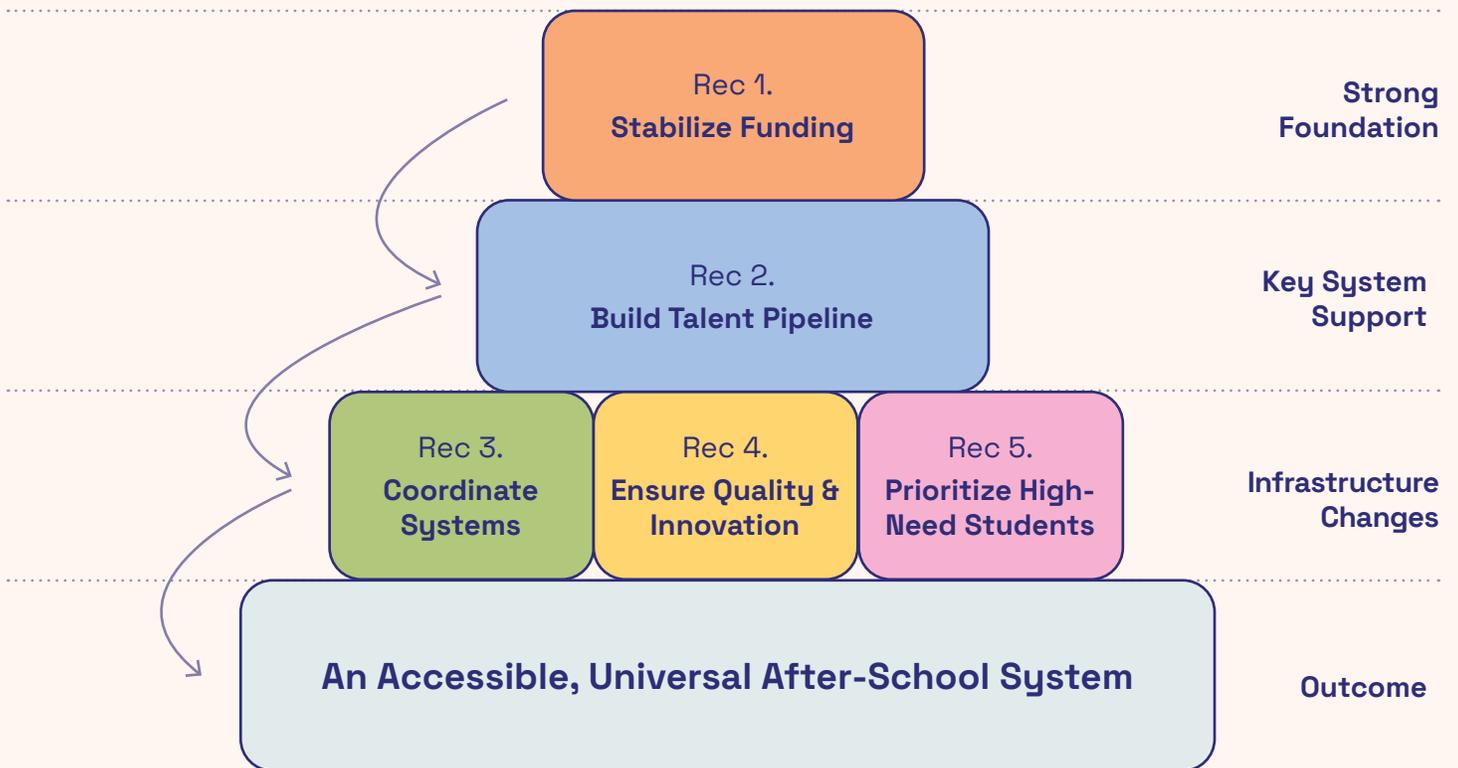
By ensuring high-need students can access and benefit from after-school, the system will become stronger and improve services for all youth.

The Commission’s five recommended changes, in the graphic below, work together to ensure all students have access to programming that meets their individual needs. The funding needed to expand after-school programs and support universal access is foundational and will help resource all the other proposed changes. This includes the funding needed to attract and support high-quality staff, which is the single most essential element for the entire system. High-quality staff enable all other aspects of program growth and quality.

These investments in expanding after-school, including developing high-quality staff and changing program infrastructure, will produce a universal system that meets the diverse needs of all students who want after-school.

In addition to resources for staff, infrastructure changes are necessary to help the system function more effectively. This includes stronger partnerships between schools and CBOs; enhancing how we develop, share and scale high quality programs and practices; and ensuring high-need students are able to enroll-in and access programming that meets their specific needs.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE CITY

In addition to meeting the needs of individual youth, families and communities, after-school programs are a valuable policy tool for addressing larger, systemic challenges facing New York City.



Child Care

New York City's after-school system is a valuable part of a continuum of child care and youth development programs that provide an invaluable service to the youngest New Yorkers and their families. These programs fill an important gap for many parents and caregivers in the hours between the end of the school day and the end of traditional work hours.

Many programs also offer full-day services during school holidays and the summer. This additional programming reduces the need for families to piece together the days off from work, family members pitching in to help, and private child care or camps that are otherwise necessary to fill the gaps.



Affordability

The provision of free, reliable after-school allows working parents to maintain employment, earn more and save money on child care costs.

Without access to universal free after-school, child care for youth under age 13 is deeply unaffordable for many families, with costs growing each year. In some communities, center-based care for one school-age child can cost more than one third of a family's income.¹ Low-income families are often forced to choose between reducing their work hours, or increasing their monthly outlays for child care and forgoing other basic needs.

At the same time, City-funded after-school programs provide employment to local community members, offering both full-time and part-time positions throughout the year. Nonprofit organizations that offer after-school are often key institutions in their neighborhoods, helping to support working families in myriad other ways such as benefits access, food distribution and job training.



Education

After-school programs have the power to support the City's educational goals by delivering educational support and reinforcing academics through project-based and hands-on learning.²

Consistent participation in after-school programs is directly associated with better school-related attitudes, behavior, and performance. Sustained participation can reduce student absences, motivating students to come to school more regularly.³

Longer-term involvement has demonstrated academic benefits, including academic skill-building and higher grades.⁴ Comprehensive programs provide enriching activities that enhance literacy skills, build background knowledge, and cultivate a love for learning outside of school.

The broader education system also benefits from the availability of free after-school. At a time when families with children are leaving the city and its school system at concerning levels, free after-school offers them an incentive to stay.⁵ When families keep their children in the public school system and enrollment remains stable, state and federal funding for NYCPS is sustained.



EDUCATION

Social-Emotional Learning
Increases in School Attendance
Better Academic Performance



AFTER-SCHOOL



AFFORDABILITY

More Parents in Workforce
Lower Family Expenses
New Jobs with CBOs



CHILD CARE

Peace of Mind for Families
Safe Spaces for Kids
Enriching Activities

HOW IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

#	FOCUS AREAS	KEY FINDINGS
1	Universal Access Significant unmet demand for K-5 programs confirms the need for future expansion and the related resource investment. 	The System Requires a Strategic Growth Plan to Meet Demand for Programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is high unmet demand for K-5 programs • Universal access is the North Star • Expansion should be progressive and targeted • Long-term growth requires better data on demand
2	Nonprofit Workforce Quality after-school programs rely on dedicated and skilled staff who will need support and investment as the system grows. 	Successful Programs Depend on a Skilled and Valued Workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit provider's staff are the driver of quality programs • Program expansion requires an increase in skilled and committed staff members • The workforce thrives with training and professional growth opportunities • Smaller organizations and their staff need support to help grow the system
3	System Coordination Strong partnerships and collaboration contribute to quality programs and should be standardized and improved across the system. 	Strong Partnerships Between CBOs and Schools Lead to Better Results for Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and after-school programs have distinct but complementary functions • Effective partnerships are often the best indicators of program success • Shared data can facilitate collaboration and increase impact
4	Program Quality To maintain high-quality programming, the system will need to account for the needs of new and existing programs, balancing oversight and flexibility. 	Scaling Strategies Need to Incorporate Both Quality Assurance and Innovation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are inconsistencies in program quality across the system; current best practices need scaling • The infrastructure for data collection, monitoring and evaluation needs to be strengthened • Innovation is key to program quality and can be integrated into the system
5	High-Need Students By ensuring high-need students can access and benefit from after-school, the system will become stronger and improve services for all youth. 	The After-School System Should Prioritize High-Need Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After-school can positively impact highest need and vulnerable students when programs and systems are intentional about addressing their unique needs • Priority populations should be students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students in temporary housing, and students in foster care • There are barriers to access for these student populations which must be addressed • Creating inclusive programming benefits all youth

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure Stable Funding to Scale Toward a Universal System

- Secure long-term, year-round public funding for universal access
- Prioritize high-need students and communities while scaling
- Leverage various procurements and facilities as part of growth
- Explore more public-private partnership for system-building

Build and Support a Sustainable Talent Pipeline to Enable Program Expansion

- Establish a City-led recruitment effort for CBO staff
- Increase opportunities for the career growth of staff
- Support CBO leadership and organizational capacity

Coordinate Systems and Policies to Better Meet Student Needs

- Codify and strengthen city agency coordination
- Strengthen and standardize CBO-school partnerships
- Design after-school activities and objectives to complement the school day
- Prioritize the use of data and technology to share critical information

Create a Virtuous Cycle of Quality Standards, Capacity Building, Evaluation and Innovation

- Support programs to meet quality standards
- Invest in monitoring and evaluation to ensure impact
- Integrate innovation into the system
- Identify new avenues to share and scale best practices

Design Inclusive Programming for Priority Populations

- Ensure inclusive access and priority enrollment for highest need youth
- Develop staff capacity to support high-need students
- Deliver inclusive programming for all students

ENDNOTES

1. United Neighborhood Houses, MAPPING THE GAP.
2. Quinn and LoMonaco, From Stumbling Blocks to Building Blocks.
3. Hedy N. Chang and Phyllis W. Jordan, "Building a Culture of Attendance: Schools and Afterschool Programs Together Can and Should Make a Difference!" in *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*, edited by Terry K. Peterson (Washington, DC: Collaborative Communications Group, 2013).
4. Deborah LaTorre et al., Long-Term Outcome Study: A Longitudinal Study of LA's BEST Students' Persistence and Graduation Rates, CRESST Report 862 (Los Angeles, CA: National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing [CRESST], 2019), 1-2.
5. Troy Closson, "[Among Mamdani's Many Upcoming Challenges: Fixing New York City's Schools](#)," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2025.

NYC

nyc.gov/afterschoolcommission