

# NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON UNIVERSAL AFTER-SCHOOL

## Interim Report

DECEMBER 2025



**NYC**

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# OPENING LETTER

In April 2025, Mayor Eric Adams announced a historic new \$331 million commitment toward a bold vision: “After-School for All” for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. This investment brings the City’s total annual investment in after-school to \$755 million.

This moment represented more than an expansion of seats. It marks a shift toward building a true universal after-school system—one that ensures every child has access to enriching, reliable, high-quality learning opportunities beyond the school day.

The City’s investment to add 20,000 new K-5 seats over the next 3 years is a critical down-payment toward that goal. But building a universal system requires a long-term strategy that accounts for the needs of all stakeholders - youth, families, school communities and non-profit partners.

To help shape that plan, the administration established the Commission on Universal After-School via Executive Order 54. Filled with the City’s foremost experts in youth and educational programming, as well as stakeholders from the business, labor and philanthropic sectors, the Commission was charged with imagining a system that meets the needs of all New York City students and outlining the strategies to build that system.

Over the latter half of 2025, the Commission explored what it would take to make this vision real: a system where families have easy access to programs; where nonprofit providers have the stability and workforce they need to deliver consistent, high-quality experiences; and where participation is treated as a guaranteed public good, not a matter of luck or access to limited seats. The work focused not just on defining the scale, but defining the key elements of high-quality programs and the essential components of a well-functioning system.

The vision and initial recommendations that follow are grounded in five key areas of system improvement. They reflect the foundational conditions needed to deliver on universality: 1) sustainable, reliable long-term funding; 2) a skilled and supported workforce; 3) a seamless, student-centered experience; 4) delivery of consistent, high-quality programming; and 5) inclusive programming and priority access for high-need students.

These recommendations represent the beginning, not the end, of our process to help the City build the system and the programs that New York City’s youth and families need. The Commission will continue its work and deliver a full roadmap by August 2026, charting the course toward a universal system that every New York City student deserves.

**Grace Bonilla**, Co-chair

**Dennis Walcott**, Co-chair

# THE COMMISSION

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Photo: Courtesy of South Asian Youth Action

# VISION

**We believe every child, in every New York City neighborhood, deserves access to a free, high-quality after-school program.**

**We envision a universal after-school system that is accessible to every child and grounded in positive youth development. The system should be designed to support each child's holistic growth and provide families with options that meet their needs.**



## 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



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

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

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.

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

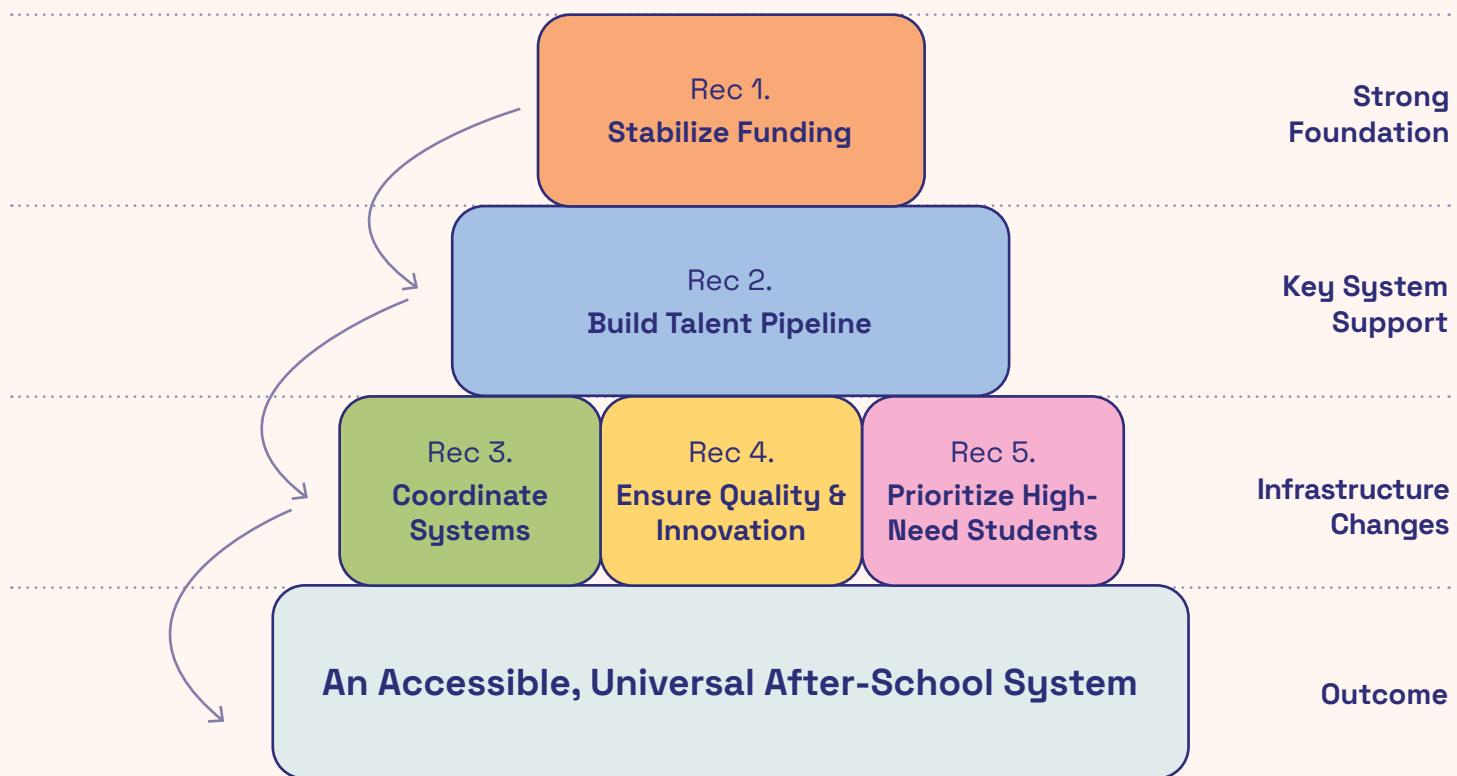
By ensuring high-need students can access and benefit from after-school, the system will become stronger and improve services for all youth.

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.

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.

**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.**

## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



# KEY TERMS

For the purposes of this document, the following terms are defined as:

**Beacon:** Community center programs funded by DYCD that operate in public school buildings, providing a wide range of youth, family, and adult services, including academic support, recreation, leadership development, and adult education during non-school hours.

**Comprehensive Afterschool System of NYC (COMPASS):** The largest after-school system in the nation, operated by DYCD and serving 100,000+ K-8 students in after-school programs offering enrichment, academic support, and a safe environment for youth; includes COMPASS Elementary and SONYC.

**COMPASS Elementary:** The comprehensive DYCD after-school program model dedicated to students in Kindergarten through 5th grade.

**Cornerstone:** A DYCD-funded community center program operating during non-school hours; Cornerstones offer a similar model and programming to Beacons, but are located within and primarily serve residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments.

**Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):** Nonprofit organizations that act as the primary operators of publicly funded after-school programs with DYCD contracts.

**New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD):** A central city agency overseeing funding, program design, contracts, capacity-building, and data management for a variety of programs in New York City, including after-school.

**Multilingual Learners (MLs):** Students who use or are developing proficiency in more than one language, including those who are learning English in addition to their home language(s). This term includes—but is not limited to—students also referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs) or Emergent Bilinguals.

**New York City Public Schools (NYCPS):** The City's school system, which partners with DYCD and after-school providers. Many after-school programs are school-based, making NYCPS a crucial partner for facilities and aligning program content with the school-day curriculum.

**Provider:** Refers to the entities (often nonprofit organizations) contracted by the City and responsible for implementing after-school programs and services.

**Priority Populations:** High-need populations, including students in temporary housing, students in foster care, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners (MLs). Systemic barriers currently disproportionately affect these groups.

**Positive Youth Development (PYD):** A research- and strengths-based approach and an underlying philosophy of high-quality after-school programming, that prioritizes fostering relationships, interests and youth voice.

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** The developmental process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for managing emotions, establishing supportive relationships, and making responsible decisions. SEL approaches reinforce these competencies while integrating support for mental health and overall youth development.

**School's Out New York City (SONYC):** DYCD's comprehensive after-school program model dedicated to middle school students in grades 6 to 8.

**Universal:** A vision for the after-school system where high-quality programming is universally available and all families have access to a program if they are interested. The goal is a system that is free, high-quality, and grounded in positive youth development. While striving for universal access, the Commission recommends a “targeted universal” approach, prioritizing targeted investment for higher-need students first.



Photo: Courtesy of DYCD

## CHAPTER I

# THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF AFTER- SCHOOL IN NYC

After-school sits at the heart of what makes a great city for working families: child care, education, and affordability.

# AFTER-SCHOOL BENEFITS YOUTH, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES

After-school programs deliver powerful benefits that start with the young people they serve and extend to their families and immediate communities. They also sit at the heart of the City's larger goals around increasing affordability, expanding child care and improving educational outcomes.

## Benefits for Youth



1. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT



2. CARING  
ADULTS



3. ACADEMIC  
SUCCESS



4. HEALTHY  
BEHAVIORS



5. EXPLORATION  
& IDENTITY  
FORMATION

Extensive research for over two decades demonstrates that consistent, high-quality after-school has a deep and powerful positive impact on youth participants. Structured after-school programs with clear standards and intentional goals provide students with age-appropriate social and emotional development. These programs complement and enhance a student's school day education with enrichment activities and hands-on learning.

In particular, the foundational research and approach of this report are strongly reinforced by the authoritative conclusions of the 2025 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine consensus study, *The Future of Youth Development: Building Systems and Strengthening Programs*, which reviewed the evidence base for after-school programming particularly for low-income and marginalized youth. This prestigious national study confirms the critical developmental role that after-school programs play in the lives of young people.

The study further emphasizes that providing high-quality programs supports parental and caregiver work and addresses the persistent access gap between affluent and low-income families.

**“Programs help develop responsibility, positive work ethics, social skills, and interest in civic activities. They provide structured environments outside the traditional school day for young people to engage in meaningful activities, build relationships, and help develop essential life skills”**

— National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine



Photo: Courtesy of DYCD

The following represent some of the primary benefits of high-quality after-school programs:

## I. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Young people report that after-school activities provide skill development like emotional regulation, teamwork, and a sense of initiative, crucial for social-emotional development.<sup>1</sup> Participation is linked to more positive social behavior, development of stronger personal and social skills,<sup>2</sup> and a greater sense of self-confidence.<sup>3</sup> Regular participation can bolster emotional engagement—such as feeling a sense of belonging and perceiving staff as supportive—leading to better social and personal skills, including the ability to control emotions.<sup>4</sup> Far from “soft skills” or nice-to-haves, these are characteristics closely linked with future health and well-being and economic and personal stability.

## 2. CARING ADULTS

After-school programs are instrumental in facilitating strong and supportive relationships with caring adults and peers.<sup>5</sup> These relationships, often cited as the “active ingredient” in cultivating positive outcomes, are characterized by youth feeling encouraged, supported, and safe, frequently leading youth to view staff as important role models or even a “second home.” Youth who perceived program staff as supportive reported having better social skills and improved emotional control, and said they thought more about their future. The intentional design of programs to foster deeper bonds and strong relationships with staff is particularly critical for impacting youth’s social and personal skills development.

### **3. ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

Participation in after-school programs is related to improved school attendance and academic success. While after-school programs generally do not offer intensive tutoring, they reinforce school-day learning through academic enrichment activities, often introducing academic concepts through engaging activities like skill-building programs, with the goal of fostering interest and excitement to learn.<sup>6</sup>

### **4. HEALTHY BEHAVIORS**

After-school programs play a crucial role in promoting physical health and healthy behaviors. They achieve this by offering a broad range of activities, including sports, that allow youth to engage in physical activity and recreation. Studies indicate that participation is associated with improved physical fitness, healthier body composition, and positive changes in eating habits.<sup>7</sup> These programs also keep youth safe during the “prime hours” for juvenile crime and serve as a deterrent for engaging in delinquency and substance use.<sup>8</sup>

At a time when parents and educators are understandably worried about the impact of social media and excessive screen time on students, after-school programs present a clear positive alternative. They offer kids fun, engaging activities that allow for physical activity and positive social engagement with their peers.<sup>9</sup>

### **5. EXPLORATION & IDENTITY FORMATION**

After-school activities serve as spaces for exploration and identity formation. By offering youth “voice and choice” in selecting from a broad range of activities, programs nurture a sense of agency, safe space to try new things, and the ability to safely travel away from school grounds.<sup>10</sup> That sense of agency and safety offers fertile ground for youth to be curious, too, allowing them the flexibility to follow a particular question, interest, or sense of wonder in ways the school day does not always allow. For marginalized youth, specialty programs, such as writing or theater clubs, offer a culturally responsive space where they can explore their racial/ethnic identities, develop a positive sense of self, and affirm their cultural values.<sup>11</sup>

These are key benefits for all kids, but particularly for low-income and high-need populations, who tend to benefit disproportionately from after-school programming. And young people in New York City, and across the country, need these types of structured, engaging and supportive programs now more than ever. Youth are facing mounting mental health challenges, with a high prevalence of anxiety, depression and sadness.<sup>12</sup> Currently, while most programs are not able to offer clinical support services, they support mental health through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and enrichment activities. They also offer the consistent relationships with caring adults and peers that are critical for building resilience against challenges like bullying, poverty, and academic pressures.



Photo: Courtesy of New York Junior Tennis & Learning

## Benefits for Families

For families, free high-quality after-school provides reliable child care, enables parents to work and increase household income, and strengthens parents' engagement with their child's school.

While the school day ends at 3 p.m., parents' workdays can continue until 6 p.m. or later, often in another part of the city. As a result, after-school care of some kind is a "must have" for most families. Parents want their children to be in safe and supervised settings, engaged in enrichment and learning. These programs benefit the parents, too, offering essential child care that allows parents to work.<sup>13,14</sup> Yet families often have too few free or affordable options. This is particularly true for low-income families who do not have the luxury of paying for fee-based after-school.<sup>15</sup>

Publicly funded after-school programs not only save families money, but they make it easier for families to stay in the communities they live in, and where their children are growing up. They can be a lifeline for the many families who want to stay in the city, but may otherwise be pushed out by unaffordability.<sup>16</sup>

These programs are essential child care that allows parents to work, directly benefitting employers through improved staff retention and increased productivity.

### Market Rate Cost of After-School for Parents

Center-Based Care in NYC:  
**\$12,900 - \$16,900 annually**

Home-Based Care in NYC:  
**\$11,290 - \$15,028 annually**

Notes: Data from NYS Child Care Market Rate Survey Report 2024, NYS Office of Children and Family Services

## QUALITY AFTER-SCHOOL PRODUCES A RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

STATE	SAVINGS	IMPACT AREAS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ROI	
Georgia	Increase savings to <b>\$2.64 for each \$1 invested</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in juvenile crime</li> <li>Higher graduation rates</li> <li>Higher lifetime earnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced reliance on public welfare</li> <li>Increased tax payments</li> </ul>
Maryland	Increase savings to <b>\$3.36 for each \$1 invested</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in high school dropouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower participation in risky behavior and juvenile crime</li> </ul>
Oklahoma	Increase savings to <b>\$8 - \$12 for each \$1 invested</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unemployment reduction and workforce development</li> <li>Crime Prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adolescent Pregnancy reduction</li> <li>Increase in lifetime earnings</li> </ul>

Sources: Oklahoma Afterschool Network, Maryland Out of School Time Network, Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network.

## Benefits for Communities

In addition to providing immediate and tangible benefits to youth and families, after-school programs also support the broader communities in which they operate. Local employers experience higher staff retention and increased productivity<sup>17</sup> when their employees' child care needs are met. When parents have reliable child care, they report avoiding up to 13 work absences a year.<sup>18</sup> Local nonprofits, contracted by the City, have funds to support community efforts. Public facilities like schools and community centers become integral local resources and contribute to civic engagement when they are funded to be open for extended hours.

Free, high-quality after-school programs are also a crucial contributor to the economic stability and growth of local communities in New York City.

They generate substantial economic returns, with evidence that for every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood programs, the returns often range from \$4 to over \$16 in benefits to the participant and society over their lifetime; driven by improved academic outcomes, reduced crime, and stronger long-term workforce participation. Studies across states such as Oklahoma, Maryland, Georgia, and Vermont further reinforce that consistent investment in after-school yields

significant public savings through reduced dropout rates, higher lifetime earnings, and decreased reliance on public welfare systems.

In addition to supporting working parents and their employers, after-school programs are “job creators” themselves and contribute to the strength and impact of the nonprofit sector. The city’s after-school system is sustained by a strong network of community-based organizations (CBOs) that are foundational to the city’s economy and social safety net.<sup>19</sup> New York City’s 46,000+ nonprofit organizations collectively contribute \$77.7 billion to the economy, accounting for 18% of all New York City workers.<sup>20</sup>

After-school programs offer significant employment pathways, particularly for people of color, and contribute substantially to the City’s human capital.<sup>21</sup> For some, they offer on-the-job training and skill-building; for others, a long-term career path. After-school jobs are often crucial entry-level jobs for young people and some adults in the poorest communities and can be “gateway jobs” into youth development, formal education jobs, human services, or other related fields. Across all publicly funded programs, the after-school system employs roughly 20,000 individuals in part-time and full-time roles.<sup>22</sup>



Photo: Courtesy of New York Junior Tennis & Learning



Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for After School Education

# 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.



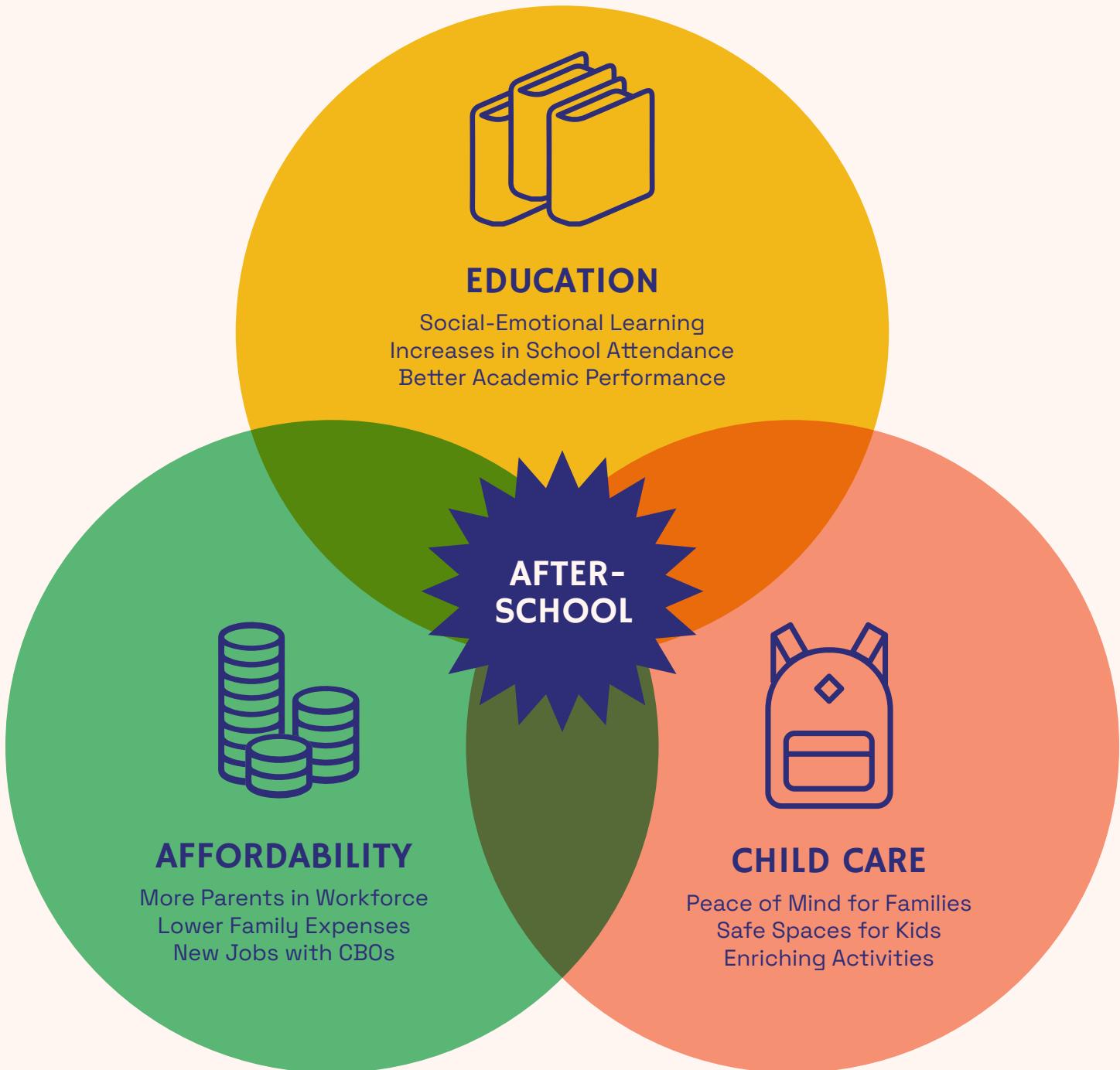
## Education

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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup>

Longer-term involvement has demonstrated academic benefits, including academic skill-building and higher grades.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> When families keep their children in the public school system and enrollment remains stable, state and federal funding for NYCPS is sustained.



# WHAT MAKES A HIGH-QUALITY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM?

High-quality after-school programs share several core components that together create safe, enriching, and equitable environments for youth:

1

**Safe and Supportive Spaces** that promote both physical and psychological well-being, fostering a positive and inclusive climate.<sup>28</sup>

2

**Strong Relationships** between well-trained staff and youth that build trust, social skills, and belonging.<sup>29</sup>

3

**Enrichment Activities** that engage and build skills, emphasizing hands-on, project-based learning that nurtures creativity, leadership, and youth voice and choice.<sup>30</sup>

4

**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** that is integrated through evidence-based approaches that strengthen self-awareness, decision-making, and relationship skills.<sup>31</sup>

5

**Academic Enhancements** that reinforce school-day learning through project-based and hands-on learning.<sup>32</sup>

6

**Family and Community Engagement** that deepens impact by creating strong connections between home, school, and local organizations.<sup>33</sup>

Achieving reliable system quality requires the seamless implementation of these components, ensuring all students receive an affirming experience tailored to the varied needs of diverse populations. And government entities need to set standards grounded in research, monitor for accountability, and provide support to CBO providers so that all programs can meet standards.<sup>34</sup>



Photo: Courtesy of DYCD



Photo: Courtesy of DYCD

## CHAPTER 2

# GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF NYC'S AFTER-SCHOOL SYSTEM

New York City's after-school ecosystem has grown immensely over the past half-century, evolving from small, disparate youth organizations to the complex network of programs and organizations that we have today.

# A BROAD ECOSYSTEM

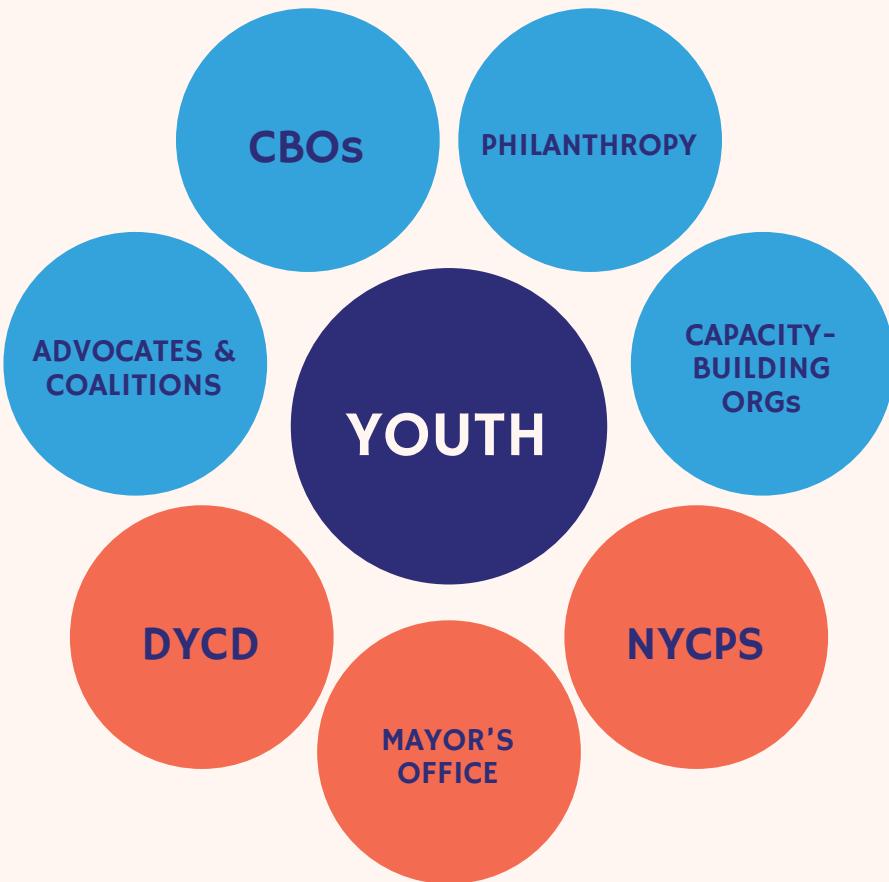
New York City's after-school ecosystem is the largest, most complex, and most comprehensive in the nation. It has grown and changed immensely over the past half-century, starting with a handful of small organizations offering services in their local neighborhoods and evolving into a robust network of both government-supported and private programs that reach hundreds of thousands of students each day.

The phrase "after-school" means different things to different families in New York City. Some individuals may think of a child's music lessons, sports program or participation in a local recreation program or community center. Others may think of an informal after-school arrangement organized by local families. These are all valuable services that meet the needs of many New York City families at different points in time.

For the purposes of this report, the Commission is primarily focused on the publicly funded set of comprehensive school-year and summer programs, most of which are overseen by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

DYCD operates the nation's largest after-school system, the Comprehensive Afterschool System of NYC (COMPASS), which includes COMPASS Elementary for K-5 students and School's Out New York City (SONYC) for middle school students. DYCD also operates two community-center program models that offer a comparable type of after-school service: the Beacons, which operate in public school buildings; and Cornerstones, which operate in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) facilities.

## KEY PLAYERS IN NYC



This system of programs operates as a partnership in which the City of New York (via DYCD) invests in a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide enrichment, academic support, and essential child care for students in kindergarten through 8th grade.

Central to the success of these programs is the collaboration between DYCD and New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), as most programs operate within public school buildings. This partnership requires deep coordination on student access and enrollment, program content, and key operations issues such as facilities usage, permitting, and safety protocols, alongside opportunities for collaboration to create an engaging learning day for children.

Complementing the public funding streams (which totaled about \$420 million in FY2024 for COMPASS), private philanthropy and foundations play a critical role by supporting innovation, research, evaluation, and capacity building for the field. Nonprofit intermediary organizations like ExpandED Schools and the Partnership for After School Education (PASE) act as system builders, providing necessary support, research, and advocacy.

The system's foundation is also profoundly shaped by advocacy from coalitions who have spent decades fighting for sustainable public funding and securing critical access to public school facilities. They continue today to serve a crucial role in securing resources and advancing equity goals.



Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for After School Education

# A BRIEF HISTORY

It is important to put the New York City after-school system into historical context to understand how it operates, how it has grown and evolved, and to identify areas for future development and expansion.

The history of New York City's after-school system is a story of community-based efforts evolving into a major municipal movement, often against significant structural odds.<sup>35</sup> The summary below draws heavily on Jane Quinn and Sister Paulette LoMonaco's retrospective *From Stumbling Blocks to Building Blocks: A History of Afterschool in New York City*, published earlier this year.

Youth programs trace their roots back to the philanthropic settlement houses established in the 1880s, which supported immigrant families with voluntary services.<sup>36</sup> By the following

century, as child labor decreased, the focus of these programs shifted primarily toward child care for working-class families, keeping children safe during non-school hours.<sup>37</sup>

This focus on school-age care outside of school hours represented an early predecessor to after-school programs, although there was no legal requirement for these services during non-school hours.<sup>38</sup> Around the middle of the 20th century, there were efforts to institutionalize after-school opportunities, including the pilot All-Day Neighborhood Schools (ADNS) program (1936–1971), a partnership between the NYC Board of Education and philanthropists that extended the school day in fourteen public schools; and the NYC Board of Education's school-based recreation programs. But these largely vanished amid the city's 1970s fiscal crisis.<sup>39</sup>



Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for After School Education

# HISTORY OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL MOVEMENT IN NYC

1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
<p><b>MINDSET SHIFT ABOUT YOUTH</b> Away from risk factors, toward growth</p> <p><b>TURNING POINT</b> Youth orgs respond to new demand with new programs</p>	<p><b>"OPEN THE SCHOOLS FOR REAL"</b> by Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC)</p>	<p><b>BEACONS LAUNCH</b> Initially aimed at crime prevention, these Community Centers offer safe spaces outside school hours</p> <p><b>THE AFTER-SCHOOL CORPORATION ESTABLISHED</b> Focused on expanding after-school programs to scale within schools</p>	<p><b>OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME (OST) INITIATIVE LAUNCHED</b> DYCD leads consolidation of scattered funding, program quality improvement, focus on access and equity</p> <p><b>CORNERSTONES LAUNCH</b> Modeled after Beacons, these programs operate in NYCHA community centers</p>	<p><b>COMPASS REPLACES OST</b> Meanwhile, Schools Out New York City (SONYC) expands programs for middle schoolers.</p> <p><b>COMMUNITY CENTER GROWTH</b> Both Beacons and Cornerstones continued to expand into new communities</p>	<p><b>SUMMER RISING LAUNCHES</b> Combines elements of summer school and camp in a K-8 enrichment program</p> <p><b>AFTER-SCHOOL FOR ALL</b> Expansion of COMPASS seats plus a plan to achieve universal after-school programming</p>
<p>Source: From Stumbling Blocks to Building Blocks: A History of After School in New York City by Jane Quinn and Sister Paulette LoMonaco</p>					

In the 1970s and 1980s, advocates focused on keeping schools open in the after-school hours. They formed the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition (NFSC) in 1981 and launched a 15-year campaign centered on the rallying cry, “Open the Schools for Real,” and including major policy reports to educate policymakers and the public about the barriers to keeping schools open.<sup>40</sup> By 1992, public pressure began to mount, and reform enabled nonprofits and community groups to use public school buildings after the school day ended.<sup>41</sup>

The early 1990s also aligned with a national shift from a “deficit” view (seeing young people as “problems to be fixed”) toward focusing on Positive Youth Development (PYD), viewing youth as assets to be nurtured.<sup>42</sup> Mayor David Dinkins’ administration capitalized on this momentum, funding the first ten school-based youth

services centers, known as Beacons, in 1991. Placed in high-crime, low-income neighborhoods, the Beacons served as a breakthrough model, extending learning, offering leadership opportunities, and involving youth development innovators.<sup>43</sup> The institutional architecture of the city’s youth services system was solidified in 1996 with the merger of the Department of Youth Services and the Community Development Agency, forming the modern DYCD. This integration created systemic coherence, and combined youth services and anti-poverty funds to support marginalized communities, all aligned with the PYD philosophy.

In 1998, the newly revamped City government system was complemented by the creation of The After-School Corporation (TASC), a nonprofit intermediary organization (now known as Expanded Schools). TASC utilized a monumental



Photo: Courtesy of New York Edge

(at the time) \$125 million challenge grant from the Open Society Institute to develop an evidence-based program and cost model for expansion, leveraging more than \$490 million in public and private funds, which set the template for the City of New York's eventual system.<sup>44</sup>

By the close of the 20th century, these foundational efforts – the creation of the Beacons, the establishment of DYCD and the launch of TASC – provided the architecture of what would become the nation's largest municipal after-school system.

The first watershed moment of the 2000s came under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who created the Out-of-School Time (OST) Initiative in 2005. DYCD was charged with implementing OST, which was a clear priority for Bloomberg's City Hall. The OST initiative provided the after-school field with a unified focus and a coherent identity, moving away from a collection of programs towards a unified system organized under a

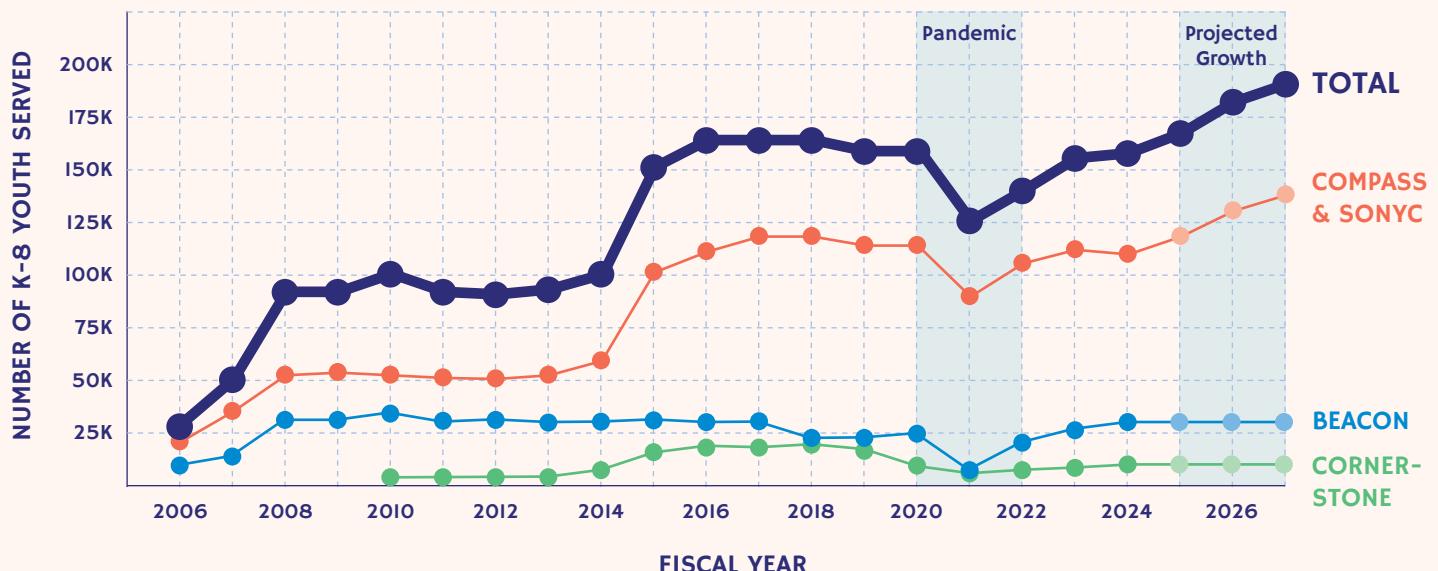
single designated City agency. More importantly, the initiative provided an infusion of public funding, which rose from \$46.4 million in 2005 to \$105.3 million in 2007.<sup>45</sup>

The establishment of OST was complemented by an increase in the number of Beacon programs to 80 during the Bloomberg years. Additionally, DYCD established 25 initial Cornerstone Community Centers, which operated in NYCHA campuses and are modeled after the Beacons.

The relatively new city system suffered cuts in 2011 as the city and country managed the recession, and service levels dipped slightly from their initial investment.

The second key expansion occurred in 2014 under Mayor Bill de Blasio, who focused on expanding programs for middle school students, recognizing the significant brain development that occurs in adolescence and the need for engaging programming for all middle school

## GROWTH TRAJECTORY OF DYCD K-8 AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES



Notes: Data is from the Mayor's Management Report (MMR). Service levels before 2008 represent estimates based on other data.

students. This expansion occurred alongside a rebranding of the K-8 system as COMPASS, and the subsequent launch of SONYC, the system's dedicated middle school component serving grades 6-8. This expansion represented the city's largest-ever increase in middle school programming.<sup>46</sup>

In that same year, the system extended its reach further into public housing with the launch of 45 new Cornerstone Community Centers on NYCHA campuses. The following year, the administration invested in the Beacon system, increasing the footprint from 80 sites to 92 community centers operating in public school buildings. In the summer of 2021, the de Blasio administration established Summer Rising, a collaboration between DYCD and NYCPS, which serves as the summer component for after-school programs.

After experiencing a decade of very little growth in school-year programming, the after-school system became a City Hall priority again in 2025 when Mayor Eric Adams announced a bold effort to build towards a universal system, expanding access for K-5 students. The Adams administration invested \$331 million in the K-8 COMPASS system, increasing the funding to contracted CBO providers and adding 20,000 more seats for K-5 students over the next three years.

# CURRENT STATE

## Landscape of Comprehensive Programs

New York City features several comprehensive publicly funded after-school programs that operate during the school year, among them COMPASS, Beacon, Cornerstone, and Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports (LEAPS).

COMPASS (including its middle school component, SONYC) serves over 100,000 K-8 students in both schools and center-based locations.<sup>47</sup> COMPASS programs aim to provide engaging enrichment activities to help students thrive and support families with child care.

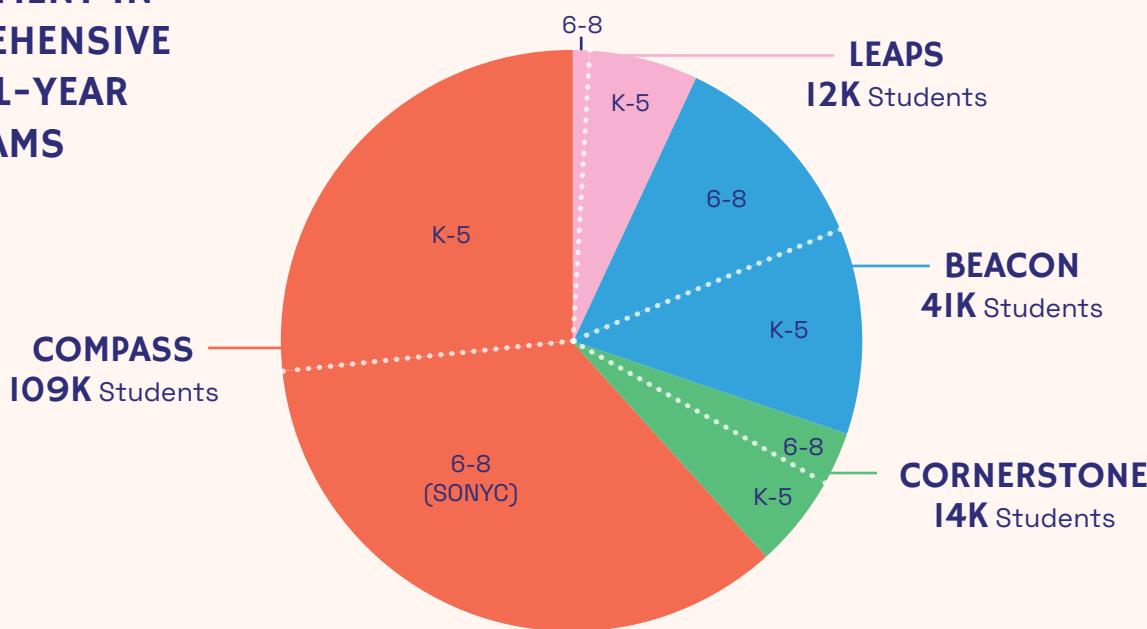
Distinctive features for COMPASS Elementary programs (grades K-5) include STEM and Literacy activities. SONYC programs feature content in SEL and Leadership Development, with STEM and Literacy. DYCD emphasizes strengths-based approaches, incorporating participant “voice and choice” and civic engagement. A holistic approach is crucial, where programs connect participants and

families to a broad range of additional services through partnerships and referrals. Programs are also now expected to add college and career programming starting in kindergarten, which might include learning names of different careers, visiting local businesses and talking to staff, exploring personal assets and interests, and touring college campuses.

Beacons and Cornerstones represent varied approaches to providing comprehensive after-school supports. The Beacon Community Centers and Cornerstone Community Centers are long-standing DYCD-coordinated models defined by their comprehensive scope, which extends beyond typical after-school services for youth to serve entire communities and families year-round.

Beacon programs are based in local school buildings (often middle schools), functioning as community hubs that offer after-school and evening activities, academic assistance, as well as adult education programs like General Educational Development (GED) and English as a Second Language (ESL).

## ENROLLMENT IN COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL-YEAR PROGRAMS



Notes: Data from DYCD and NYCPS for the 2024-2025 school year

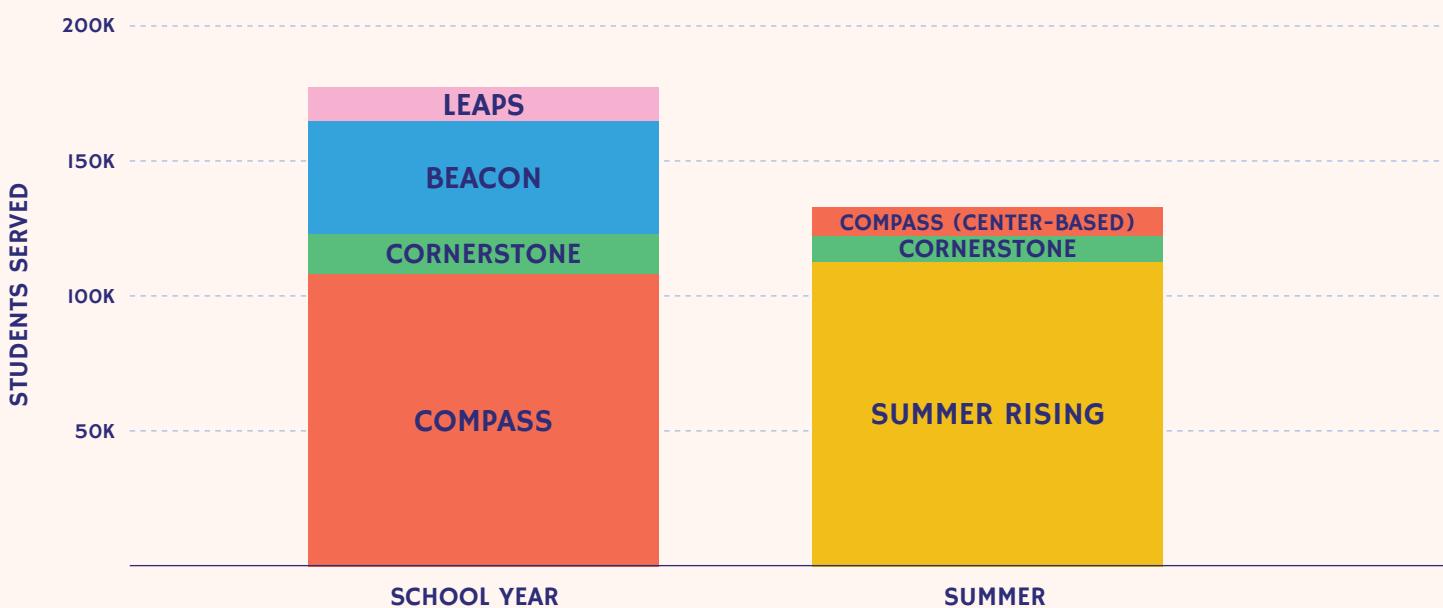
In contrast, the Cornerstone model focuses its comprehensive services specifically within NYCHA public housing developments. Both models leverage their physical location to provide vital multi-generational support, fostering strong community connections.

While their participants are primarily public school students, COMPASS, SONYC, Beacon, and Cornerstone all enroll students from charter and private schools, too. And some programs funded by DYCD operate within charter schools.

Apart from these DYCD-managed community center models, the LEAPS program is unique because it is administered at the New York State level by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), distinguishing it from the city-funded DYCD programs like COMPASS/SONYC. LEAPS provides funding for K-8 enrichment and learning support, offering thousands of slots.

The Summer Rising initiative extends the comprehensive after-school system more robustly into the summer months. Launched in 2021, Summer Rising provides a full-day summer learning experience for K-8 students, most of whom are enrolled in COMPASS, SONYC or Beacon during the school year. Summer Rising is operated through a partnership between DYCD and NYCPS, which facilitates the integration of resources to combine academics and social enrichment into each day of programming. In its first several years, the program has become an important platform for developing inclusive programming, including pioneering the Summer Rising IEP model to ensure specialized accommodations and access for students with disabilities.

## COMPREHENSIVE K-8 PROGRAMS IN SCHOOL YEAR VS. SUMMER



Notes: Data from DYCD and NYCPS for the 2024-2025 school year and summer 2025



Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for After School Education

## Other Publicly Funded Programming

In addition to the comprehensive programs outlined above, there are other offerings for families, depending on their school and/or financial situation. These offerings are not centrally managed in the same manner as the comprehensive programs, but they provide important services to families and students.

Community Schools incorporate expanded learning opportunities, such as after-school programming, as a core part of their model by leveraging their collaborative leadership and integrated support pillars.

Beyond Cornerstone and Beacon community centers, numerous settlement houses and other independent community centers operated by nonprofit CBOs provide important services for youth during non-school hours. These are an important part of the ecosystem, as research

has shown that some students are especially comfortable at programs in community center settings.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, a number of charter schools offer some version of extended-day (and extended-year) models that blend academics with extracurricular programs, free of charge, during traditional after-school hours.

Lastly, families who meet eligibility requirements can use child care vouchers to cover all or part of the cost of private after-school programs or informal friend, family, and neighbor care.

Additional analysis is forthcoming on the scale and scope of these offerings.



Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for After School Education

## Fee-Based Programs

A wide variety of fee-based programs make up the remainder of the city's after-school landscape. Some of these operate in public schools (some of them alongside publicly funded programs) and others operate in private settings. This segment includes a vast array of large and small organizations, as well as specialty programs focused on activities like athletics or music lessons.

While they provide important services for many families, the cost of private programs poses a significant access hurdle for many students and reinforces significant economic disparities, with affluent families spending some five times more on enrichment opportunities for their children than families in the lowest income bracket.<sup>49</sup>

This is an area where more research is needed to understand the full scale of programs, where they are operating, and how they are serving families.

# NEW INVESTMENT AND EXPANSION

In May 2025, Mayor Eric Adams made a major new investment in New York City's after-school system, adding \$331 million in annual baselined funding to DYCD's COMPASS system.

With this new investment, COMPASS will expand to reach 20,000 more K-5 students by fall of 2027. The expansion began with the addition of 5,000 new after-school seats in 40 new schools and 3 community centers in September 2025. Schools were chosen based on economic need and where there was a dearth of existing free programming, prioritizing schools with a high number of students experiencing poverty and those with disabilities, living in temporary housing, or who are multilingual learners. The same methodology was used to select which community districts would host center-based programs, and to help fill in geographic service gaps.

In October 2025, DYCD released a new RFP to reprocure the COMPASS Elementary and SONYC programs, the first time in over a decade that the City had done so. This will add another 10,000 students across 75 new schools and 11 center-based locations in September 2026, and another 5,000 students in 2027. The new procurement includes programmatic updates and increases provider rates. Expansion was again focused on areas of greatest need using the same methodology as the initial new programs - students in poverty, the number of students with disabilities, the number of children living in temporary housing, and locations that currently do not have a DYCD or similar City-funded programs.

## COMPASS K-5 EXPANSION PHASED OVER 3 YEARS





Photo: Courtesy of DYCD



Photo: Peter Dressel Photography, courtesy of the Partnership for After School Education

## ALL K-8 DYCD AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS — SEPTEMBER 2024

- COMPASS K-5 Programs (Prior to Expansion)
- SONYC
- Beacon
- Cornerstone
- All Other Elementary Public Schools
- School Districts



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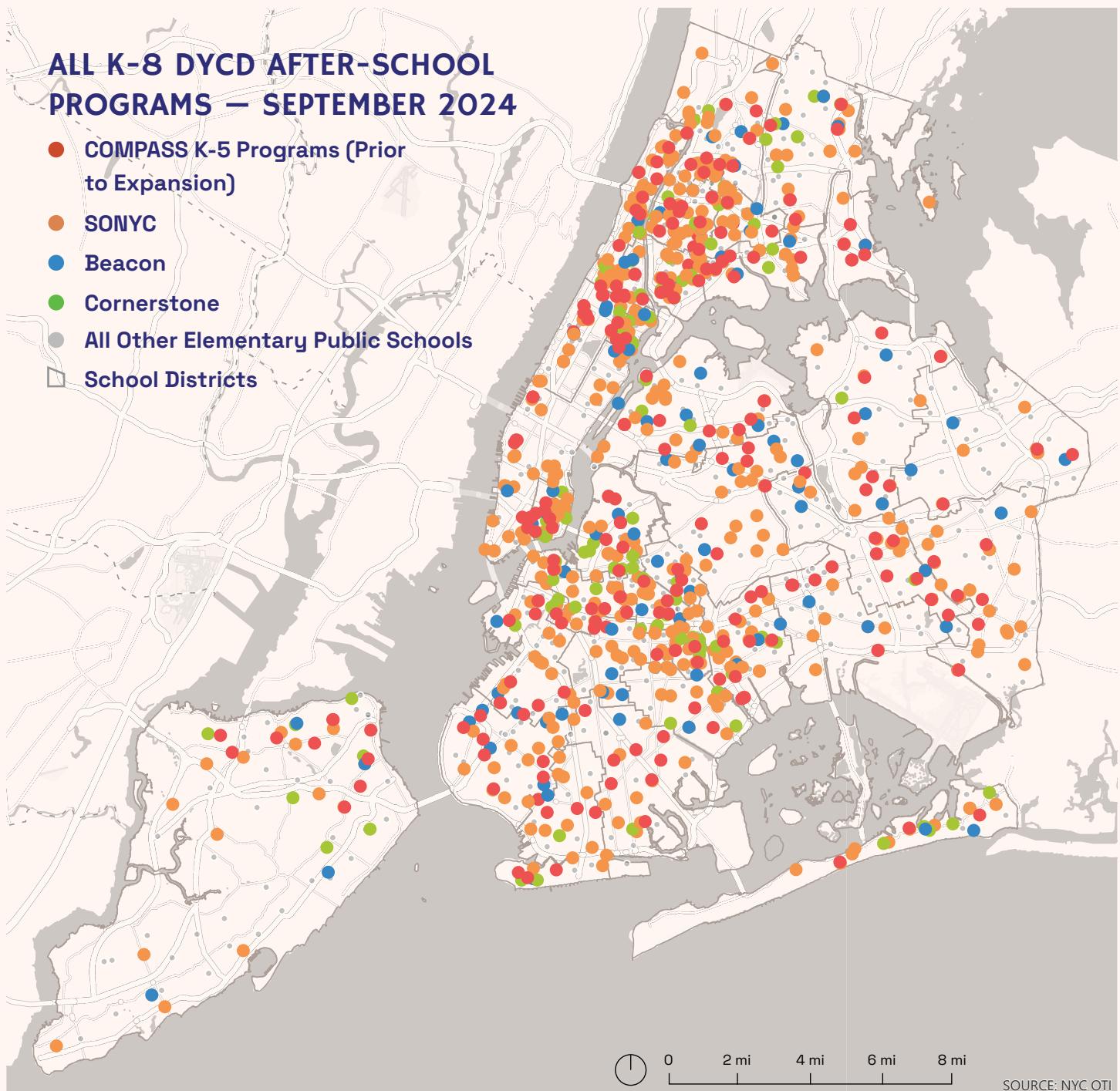
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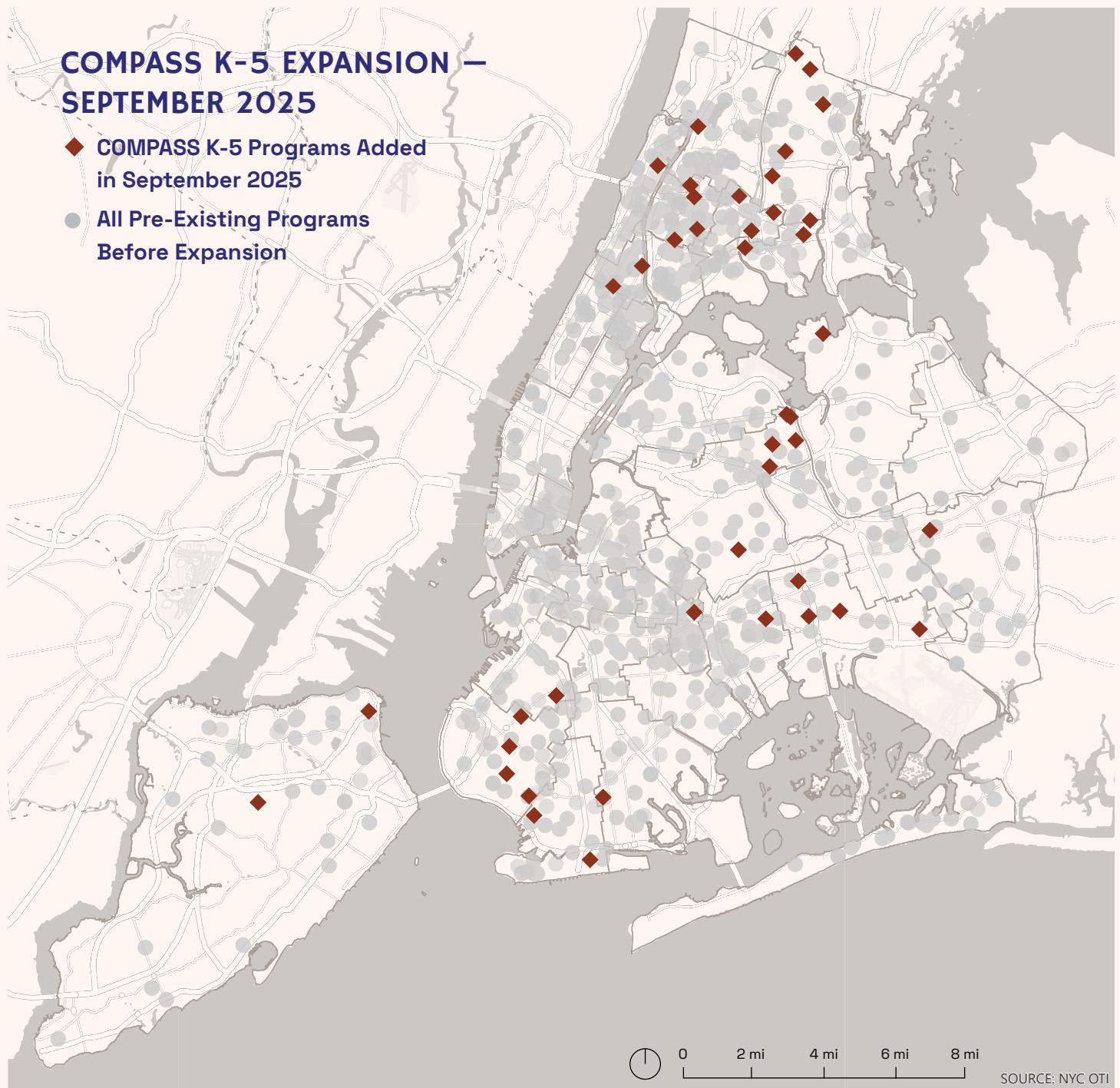


As of September 2024, DYCD programs had broad coverage in low-income communities around the city, but many elementary schools still did not have programs.

Data courtesy of DYCD.

## COMPASS K-5 EXPANSION – SEPTEMBER 2025

- ◆ COMPASS K-5 Programs Added  
in September 2025
- All Pre-Existing Programs  
Before Expansion



To expand coverage, in September 2025 DYCD added 5,000 seats at 40 schools and 3 community centers across all five boroughs.

Data courtesy of DYCD.



Photo: Courtesy of ExpandEd Schools

## CHAPTER 3

# THE COMMISSION'S WORK AND FINDINGS

We envision a universal after-school system that is accessible to every child and grounded in positive youth development. The system should be designed to support each child's holistic growth and provide families with options that meet their needs.

# ABOUT THE COMMISSION

While the initial expansion of the after-school system is already underway, a long-term strategy is needed to make it “universal.”

To develop this strategy, the City established the Commission on Universal After-School by [Executive Order 54](#), selecting members from CBO providers, advocates, philanthropy, labor, business, and education to create an initial set of recommendations for New York City’s after-school system. The Commission met monthly in the latter half of 2025, working closely with the Department of Youth and Community Development, New York City Public Schools, and the Mayor’s Office, to document key components and envision the system’s future.

The vision and initial recommendations outlined in this document represent a preliminary report. This consensus document reflects input and discussion from the group but is not representative of direct approval of each and every finding or recommendation from each and every Commission member. The Commission will continue meeting in 2026 and deliver a full roadmap by August 2026.

# PROCESS AND METHODS

Over the last half of 2025, the Commission met monthly for five workshops to develop recommendations and a shared vision for a universal after-school system. DYCD and the NYC Innovation Team conducted additional research – engaging families, youth, program providers, philanthropists, and school leaders, and shared findings with the Commission to inform its work.



## The overall process included the following research methods:

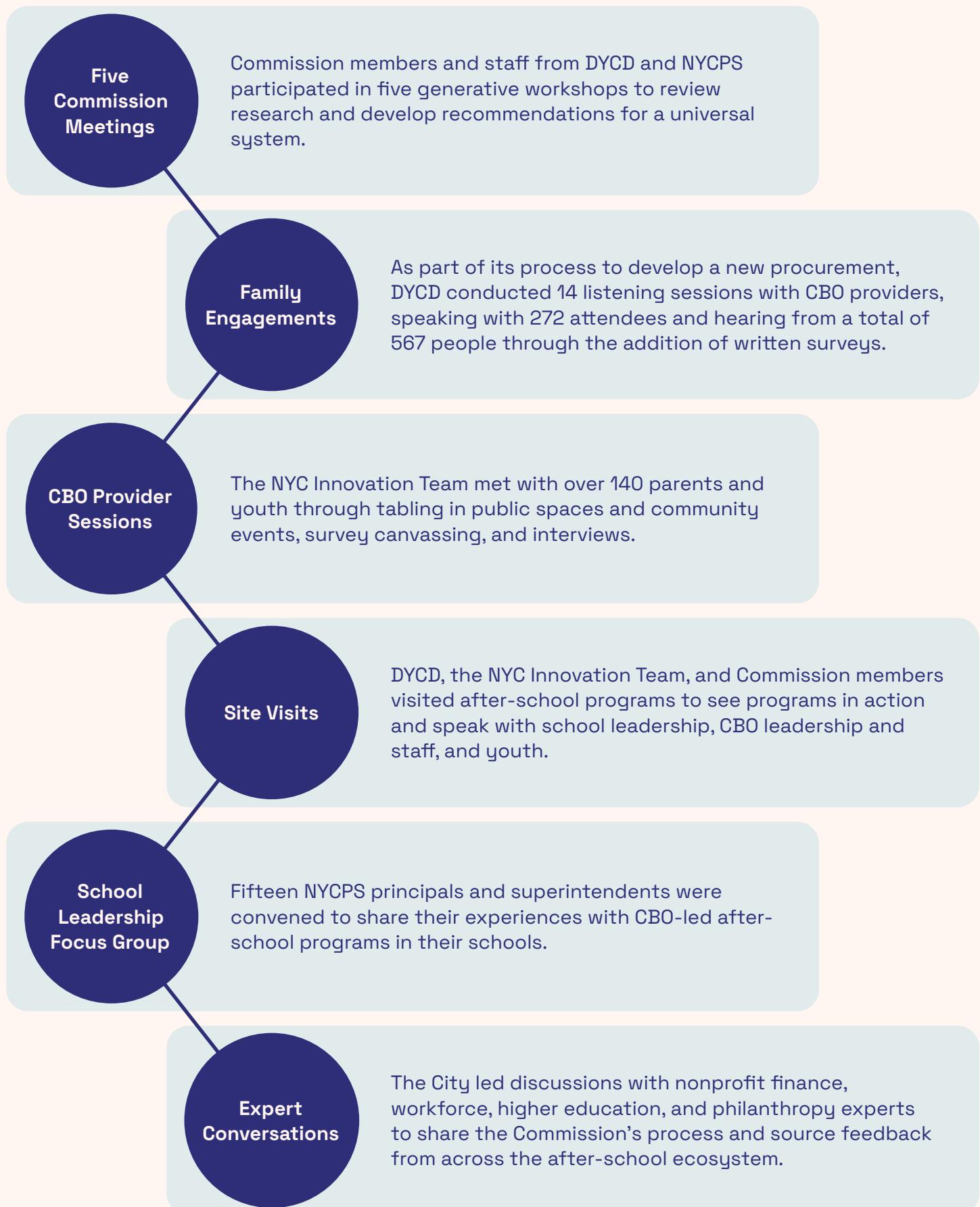




Photo: Courtesy of New York Junior Tennis & Learning

# COMMISSION'S FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

The Commission's work confirms that the City has a tremendous opportunity to expand and improve after-school programming and meet the needs of working families. In the past three decades, the City has built a robust, but somewhat piecemeal, after-school system. As it grows in the coming years, that system will need to be prioritized by City government, supporting its expansion into a truly universal, high-quality, and equitable system.

The Commission's key findings identify challenges and gaps in several areas of the after-school system. These findings point the way towards common-sense solutions, both small and large, and directly inform the recommendations in Chapter 4. Each pair of finding and recommendation fit a common topic area:

Universal Access	Nonprofit Workforce	System Coordination	Program Quality	High-Need Students
Significant unmet demand for K-5 programs confirms the need for future expansion and the related resource investment.	Quality after-school programs rely on dedicated and skilled staff who will need support and investment as the system grows.	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.	To maintain high-quality programming, the system will need to account for the varying needs of new and existing programs, balancing oversight and flexibility.	By ensuring high-need students can access and benefit from after-school, the system will become stronger and improve services for all youth.

**The good news is that both the City agencies and the network of nonprofit providers have demonstrated that with investment and support, they are ready to seize the opportunity to better serve youth and families in the years ahead.**

## FINDING I

# The System Requires a Strategic Growth Plan to Meet Demand for Programs



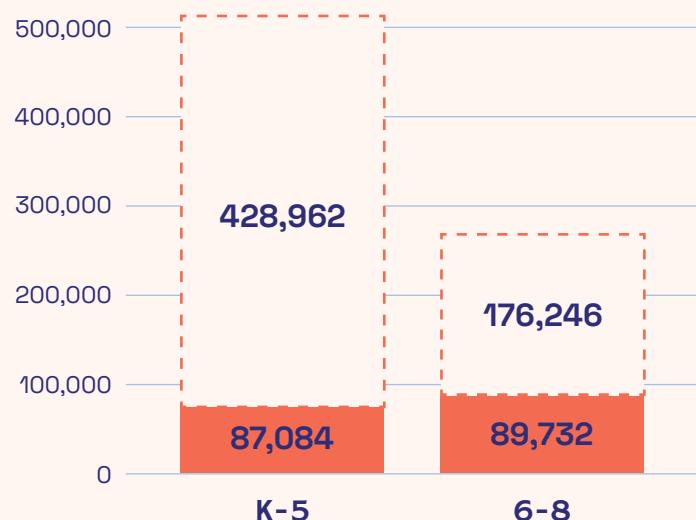
## There is high unmet demand for K-5 programs

If there is one crystal clear finding from the Commission's work, it is that parents, families, youth, school communities, and local CBOs want more after-school programming. In conversation after conversation, the message is consistent: more programming is needed across the city, particularly at the K-5 level.

Due to a lack of growth over the past ten years, the system's current capacity remains severely strained, with demand far surpassing available seats. K-5 programs in particular are in high demand and short supply, with wait lists at programs all over the city. Currently, only 1 in 5 elementary students can access a publicly funded after-school program. Citywide, 87% of DYCD K-5 programs are over-enrolled.<sup>50</sup>

## ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL SERVICE LEVELS, 2024-25

  Not served by publicly-funded comprehensive programs  
  Served by publicly-funded comprehensive programs



Notes: Student population for public, charter, and private schools.  
Data courtesy of DYCD and NYCPS.

It is not surprising that parents are clamoring to enroll their elementary-school-age-students in programs. Parents and caregivers of K-5 students (compared to those of middle school students) are much more likely to consider after-school programs a form of child care during the workday and to consider it a more urgent need.

## Universal access is the North Star

The Commission agrees that universal access to after-school simultaneously advances equity, supports family economic stability across the income spectrum, and builds broad public support to sustain and improve the system over time.

The universal approach recognizes that after-school programs are an essential piece of economic infrastructure for the city, particularly for low-income families. At the same time, it is clear that families at many income levels struggle with the cost and logistics of child care when the school day ends, especially as housing and other family costs rise.

A universal approach to after-school avoids stigmatizing low-income participants, and it helps ensure that programs are seen as a valuable public good that can and should benefit all students and families.

## **Expansion should be progressive and targeted**

The Commission is committed to equity and recognizes that growing to a universal system will require addressing an increased need for resources.

To that end, the Commission supports a strategic growth plan that initially prioritizes high-need students and communities as the City expands access in phases. The Commission is aligned with the method that DYCD recently employed to identify new sites for expansion in September 2025 and in the new procurement.

This method prioritizes the selection of schools with significant numbers of high-need students, specifically accounting for students in poverty, students with disabilities, multilingual learners and students in temporary housing. By adding new programs to these schools in the first round of expansion, the City is helping to ensure that the highest-need students are able to easily access an after-school seat. This “targeted universal” approach should be continued as part of any future expansion that builds on the initial growth of 20,000 K-5 seats, which is slated to be fully implemented by September 2027.

Looking ahead, the Commission has outlined a scenario for the next priorities for potential expansion, which would employ the same approach:

**Priority 1, adding 20,000 more seats to the next set of 167 highest-need schools that do not yet have a publicly funded after-school program**

**Priority 2, adding 20,000 more seats; 17,000 at all 142 remaining schools with above-average student need, and an additional 3,000 at community center-based sites**

## **Long-term growth requires better data on demand**

In order to establish universal access to after-school – providing a seat to every student who wants one – the City needs a strong understanding of demand for programs across the all five boroughs.

There are clear data points to demonstrate the need for significant growth for elementary programs. DYCD has years of data on enrollment patterns and demand for current elementary programs, which show that programs are at or beyond current capacity. Even for the 40 new programs that launched in September, they were fully enrolled within months and already have waiting lists.

However, to strategically expand in the coming years it is necessary to refine and develop tools for modeling demand. This would allow the City to understand demand at different ages and in different communities, including demand from charter and private school students.

To do that would require (1) more analysis of program-by-program demand at the local level; (2) parent and family surveys to indicate the scale of existing and latent demand outside of current programs; and (3) a deeper analysis of the fee-based and other offerings that are available around the city.

### **DEMAND TOOLS WE NEED**



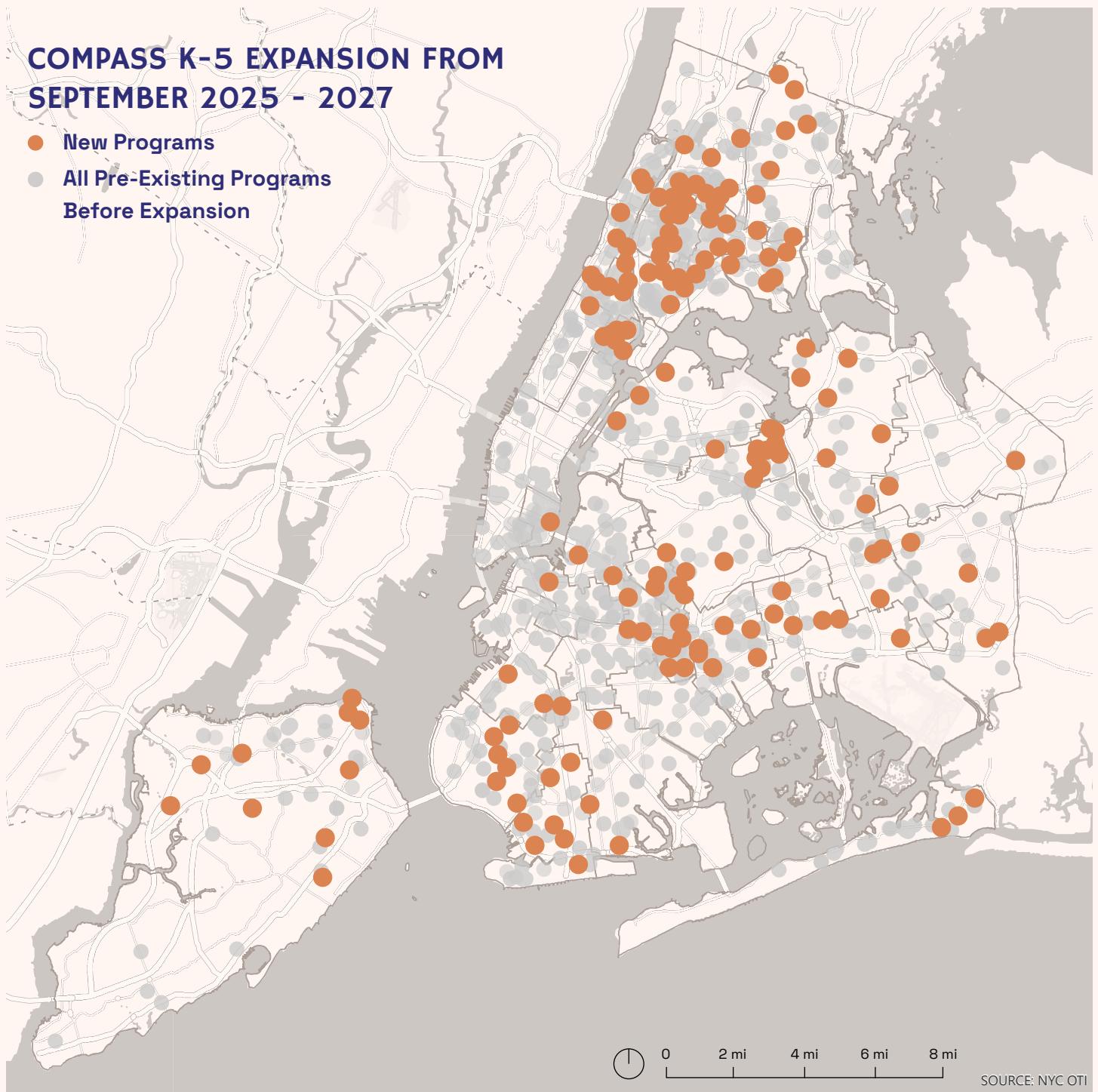
Further Analysis of Local Program-by-Program Demand



Parent and Family Surveys



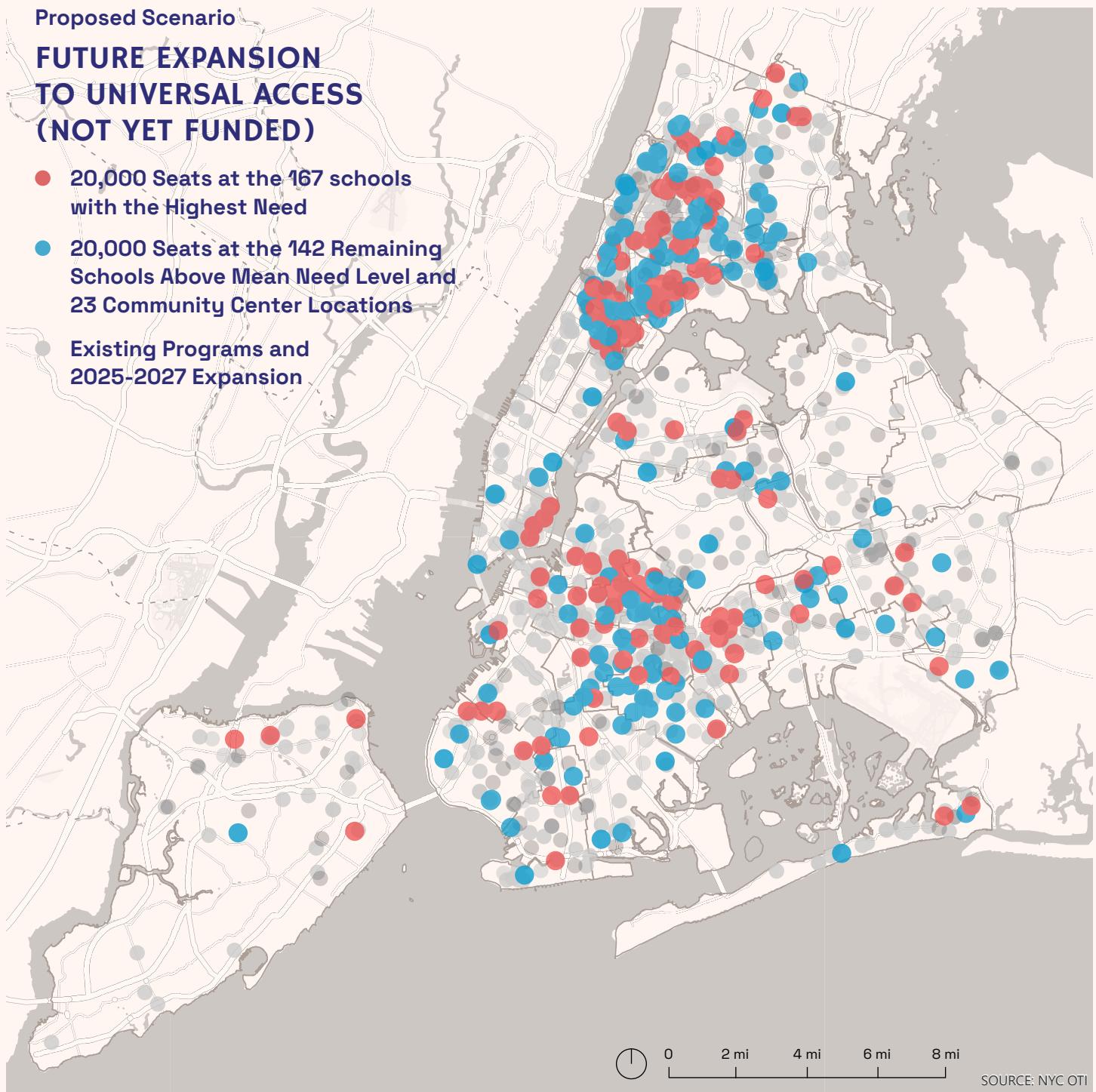
Deeper Analysis of Other Offerings in the City



The full implementation of the currently funded expansion will add 20,000 new seats, including the 5,000 seats already added this past September 2025, as well as the 10,000 new seats that will be added in September 2026, and the 5,000 more seats that will be added in September 2027.

Note that Sept 2026 and Sept 2027 sites are projected, based on DYCD's previous methodology for new school selection; projected sites are for illustrative purposes only.

Data courtesy of DYCD.



If the City were to fund additional expansion, and continue to follow DYCD's current methodology, the above scenario projects where those programs would be located. Map includes an additional 3,000 seats that would be added to community center sites. Note that projected sites are for illustrative purposes only.

Projections based on data courtesy of DYCD.

## FINDING 2

# Successful Programs Depend on a Skilled and Valued Workforce



## Nonprofit providers' staff are the driver of quality programs

The benefits of after-school for youth – as outlined in Chapter 1 – flow directly from the staff members employed in each program. Quality program staff serve as caring adults who stay in children's lives over long periods of time. They develop original program content tailored to children's individual needs. They put in the hours and the care to make sure everything is running smoothly for their programs and its participants.

High-quality staff come in many forms – the site director who began as an after-school student in that same school, the specialist in multilingual learner literacy, the CUNY student training to become a social worker. Each role – and the individual who fills it – is integral to creating a team of dedicated staff who engage and support youth and their families during the after-school hours and beyond. Staff at all levels indicated that careers in after-school can be rewarding, but they also communicated their desire to be valued as professionals, to be fairly compensated, and to have long-term career paths in the sector.

## Program expansion requires an increase in skilled and committed staff members

The success of each after-school program is directly tied to its ability to recruit, train, develop, and retain high-quality staff. As such, the growth of the sector is innately tied to expansion and support of the workforce, both for current programs and new programs starting in the coming years. However, presently CBOs report consistent challenges with keeping their programs fully staffed throughout the school year and summer. The reasons are varied but consistent: low compensation and benefits, inconsistent work schedules, lack of recognition and respect for the sector, and lack of a clear career trajectory.<sup>51</sup> These issues require attention and solutions as part of improving and enhancing the system.

## The workforce thrives with training and professional growth opportunities

Beyond compensation, the after-school workforce would be stronger and more appealing if the system better supported it with opportunities for career growth. Currently, there is no standardized educational pathway or professional credential for entry into the after-school field – instead, CBO providers do their best to provide time, space, and guidance for on-the-job training. Clearer pathways for growth within the field would attract and retain high-quality talent, solidify the career trajectory of practitioners, and offer career longevity.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, there are significant opportunities to support this workforce by reducing stress and burnout, particularly for frontline and part-time staff.

## Smaller organizations and their staff need support in order to help grow the system

The Commission noted that capacity building and leadership development in smaller CBOs are essential for workforce and system growth. Expanding the pool of diverse, qualified, local after-school providers is paramount to increasing services in key communities.

Yet some small, grassroots organizations face unique challenges, from securing contracts to hiring and retention of staff. They often lack the administrative and financial infrastructure needed to qualify for or access major government contracts. When they are able to secure government grants, they typically face “start up” challenges due to limited capacity on the human resources side. All of these obstacles point to the need for additional support and capacity building from government funders.<sup>53,54</sup>



Photo: Courtesy of South Asian Youth Action

## FINDING 3

# Strong Partnerships Between CBOs and Schools Lead to Better Results for Students



## There are inconsistencies in program quality across the system; current best practices need scaling

The Commission found that when schools and after-school programs are coordinated and aligned they can meet the needs of the entire child. As schools focus on academic growth, after-school programs help children explore their individual interests through enrichment and experiential learning in a low-pressure environment. When schools and CBOs have shared objectives, homework help and academic support during after-school can be aligned with NYCPS goals. Since schools and after-school programs take their cues from City agencies, DYCD and NYCPS have a responsibility to foster strong collaboration.

## Effective partnerships are often the best indicators of program success

Strong partnerships between CBOs providing after-school and public schools are foundational to program access and success. To be effective, these partnerships must be intentional and fostered through clear leadership and structured planning. Without seamless communication and coordination between schools and CBOs, particularly regarding student information, the system's ability to provide appropriate support, especially for high-need students, can be compromised.

Activities and goals between the school day and after-school should be aligned, as schools and CBOs are serving the same students in the same building, for school-based programs, and sometimes with the same staff. When collaborative practices are not part of the school and CBO's standard operating procedures, school systems and protocols do not carry forward to after-school, and student supports can become inconsistent.

## Shared data can facilitate collaboration

Effective standardization and sharing of information on students and their needs also depends on successful relationships between CBOs and school leadership.<sup>55</sup> The Commission noted that collaboration is sometimes difficult due to the lack of a unified student data system or infrastructure to share critical information between NYCPS and CBOs. After-school staff often lack the data and context necessary to meet students' individualized needs, such as IEPs, temporary housing or foster care status, or literacy levels, which are critical for effective support.<sup>56</sup>

To facilitate continuous support and development, the Commission acknowledges the need to explore ways to share more in-depth data between schools and CBOs, such as individualized academic and personal student information, with parent permission. Leaders in other cities recognize that formal information sharing agreements are a crucial component of data systems, as they articulate who can access the management information system (MIS) and its data.<sup>57</sup>

## FINDING 4

# Scaling Strategies Need to Incorporate Both Quality Assurance and Innovation



## There are inconsistencies in program quality across the system; current best practices need scaling

Quality programming is essential to ensure positive outcomes for youth, and to ensure youth continue to attend and participate in the programs themselves. Quality also needs to be consistent across programs to ensure that all youth benefit from the positive impacts of after-school programs, regardless of where they attend them.

DYCD has strong quality standards. Contracted providers, especially new ones, need support to ensure they understand the standards and have the capacity to meet them. There are also many programs that exemplify DYCD's quality standards, and there is an opportunity to highlight them to ensure that valuable strategies and tools are exported across the sector.

## The infrastructure for data collection, monitoring and evaluation needs to be strengthened

The Commission agrees that to scale quality programming, the system requires improved infrastructure to measure effectiveness and facilitate evidence-based decision-making. Building on DYCD's current system and structures, there are opportunities to develop data and evaluation literacy among CBO providers to support them in measuring impact, interpreting outcomes, and making evaluation actionable. Evaluation of program quality often depends on the assessment of youth development principles,<sup>58</sup> with acknowledgement of the growing need for mental health and SEL content and approaches.

## Innovation is key to program quality and can be integrated into the system

A substantial expansion requires not only a standardization of quality but an ability to grow, adapt, and respond to the evolving needs of New York City and its families. This means that innovation—the ability to test, learn from, and iterate upon new approaches—is a critical system capacity that must be supported and expanded.

The Commission believes it is essential to provide a degree of flexibility and incentives for CBOs to test new ideas and methods, and to develop innovative practices and programs that should be shared and scaled throughout the system. Philanthropy has historically played an important role in facilitating and supporting innovation and should continue to do so moving forward. CBOs also need support to incorporate new practices. Change management must be intentional, with outside support, professional and leadership development, and capacity building to operationalize best practice within an organization.



Commission convening NYC philanthropy partners, hosted by Robin Hood. Photo: Courtesy of DYCD

## FINDING 5

# The After-School System Should Prioritize High-Need Students



## After-school can positively impact the highest-need and most vulnerable students when programs and systems are intentional about addressing their unique needs

After-school programs present a significant opportunity to serve high-need students, many of whom can benefit the most from this type of intervention. This is especially true when services are intentionally structured to address these students' specific needs. In practical terms, this means the system needs to be reshaped to prioritize these students in enrollment processes, siting decisions, staff recruitment and training, and programming. It also means that systemic and operational barriers that limit access must be addressed.

## Priority populations should be students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students in temporary housing, and students in foster care

The Commission acknowledges that there are many populations with their own specific needs who can benefit greatly from after-school programming. All programs should be welcoming and inclusive for all students. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the following groups have been identified as those with the highest needs for these programs and some of the greatest access gaps.

**Students with disabilities** – After-school programs offer a valuable service for a wide variety of students with special needs. The after-school system offers opportunities for additional support, caring adults, integration

with peers, and social-emotional development. Parents indicate a clear interest in these types of programs but mention obstacles that limit their students' full participation.

**Multilingual learners** – New arrivals to New York City who recently migrated have specific needs, requiring support as students and families integrate into new schools and communities. This often includes learning English, which parents prioritize to ensure their children don't fall behind in their schoolwork. Parents see after-school as an opportunity for their children to focus on learning English and getting additional academic support.

**Students in temporary housing** – Over 154,000 children in New York City (1 in 7 public school children) do not have a permanent home.<sup>59</sup> After-school programs offer a unique opportunity for these students to receive additional attention and support from caring adults, contributing to a sense of safety and security.

**Students in foster care** – Students in foster care have been placed away from their parents or guardians by a child welfare agency. Foster children face many of the same challenges as students in temporary housing and also stand to benefit significantly from access to programs.

## There are barriers to access for these student populations which can be addressed

The Commission emphasized the need for a clear path for the participation and inclusion of both students with disabilities and those living in temporary housing or foster care. The lack of school bus transportation when after-school programs end creates a barrier to student participation. Some students who have disabilities and require special accommodations must travel to after-school programs that

can address their specific needs, but have to arrange for their own transportation back home after their after-school programs. Children living in temporary housing or in foster care are often not attending school in their original home communities. Consequently, many of these children are bused to their schools and must leave immediately when school is dismissed to catch the school bus back to their residence.

The Commission recognizes the challenges facing the City's school busing system, which primarily stem from a complicated contracting system. While there are no easy solutions, it is imperative to start a dialogue about the need to minimize these barriers to enrollment for the very students who are most in need of services.

That said, this is one topic where more research and engagement are needed, and the Commission anticipates delving deeper in 2026.

## Creating inclusive programming benefits all youth

The Commission noted that creating inclusive, differentiated programs for high-need students, namely students in temporary housing, students in foster care, students with disabilities and multilingual learners, also builds system capacity to better support the individual needs of all students.

Students with disabilities, who constitute approximately one-fifth of all New York City public school students,<sup>60</sup> sometimes find it difficult to participate in after-school programs. These challenges may stem from programming, structure, or staff that are not equipped to meet these students' unique physical and behavioral needs, which often require specific plans and accommodations.

As the system is scaled, recruitment and training efforts must emphasize staff capacity; similar to the school day, additional resources are necessary to hire staff who are certified to support students with disabilities, provide physical accommodations when necessary and help provide differentiated programming.



Photo: Courtesy of DYCD

## CHAPTER 4

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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The New York City after-school system has many positive elements as the City embarks on this expansion. It has a network of CBO provider organizations that are deeply embedded in their communities. It has a robust workforce of dedicated staff. It has strong partnerships between City agency staff. It has sufficient public space for programming in schools and community centers. And it has a new infusion of funding that is supporting a system-wide procurement that will put the system on solid ground.

The after-school system also benefits from consistent parent and family interest. There is no need to do extensive engagement and recruitment; programs quickly fill up to capacity when they are made available.

The challenge before us is to build on these positive elements, address deficiencies and continue to innovate at both the system level and the program level.

We must increase the number of programs to meet the needs of working families, while continuing to ensure program quality at scale and meet the needs of high-need populations.

And we must ensure the necessary resources are available in the face of competing priorities and fluctuating public investments in social services.

To do that, we need to focus on five key recommendations:

- 1 Ensure Stable Funding to Scale Toward a Universal System**
- 2 Build and Support a Sustainable Talent Pipeline to Enable Program Expansion**
- 3 Coordinate Systems and Policies to Better Meet Student Needs**
- 4 Create a Virtuous Cycle of Quality Standards, Capacity Building, Evaluation and Innovation**
- 5 Design Inclusive Programming for Priority Populations\***

\*Note: Strategies for Recommendation 5 have been integrated throughout the other four recommendations to demonstrate their intrinsic importance and prioritization within all other system actions.

# 1

# ENSURE STABLE FUNDING TO SCALE TOWARD A UNIVERSAL SYSTEM

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Confirmed annual funding is key to successfully scaling quality programs in the years ahead, with the goal of eventually being able to offer a seat to every student who wants to participate. Funding should cover core program costs, as well as system-building needs such as CBO capacity building, quality standards and evaluation. Extensive research and analysis show the benefit of this public investment for youth, families and communities.

## GOALS

**For Families:** Every family that wants an after-school program has access to one, meeting critical child care needs and providing valuable enrichment to students.

**For Program Staff:** CBOs have consistent and predictable funding streams, allowing them to plan ahead for their human capital needs.

**For the City:** Consistent investment will spur positive outcomes across students (SEL, improved academic performance), families (child care, parents working), and communities (CBO jobs, public safety).

## CURRENT STATE

- DYCD's newly increased budget of \$755 million for after-school will serve over 67,000 K-5 students and raises CBO provider rates.
- DYCD programs have a defined cost model tied to program components and expected outcomes. Higher provider rates start FY27.
- Demand for after-school programs is great, particularly at the K-5 level with wait-lists already filling up for new slots.
- DYCD selected new schools and community center locations based on highest economic need and geographic gaps in services.



## Strategy 1

### **Commit to long-term, year-round public funding of universal after-school**

Confirmed multi-year funding allows CBOs, as well as City agencies, to plan ahead and scale strategically.

- **Commit city tax levy to after-school:** Ensure after-school has increased funding in future years to sustainably grow the system to meet family demand. In future years, provider reimbursement rates should keep pace with rising costs.
- **Explore opportunities for state cost-sharing:** Work with the state to further support the after-school system as a part of child care funding, including options to generate new revenue.

## Strategy 2

### **Prioritize high-need students while scaling**

Initial program expansion should be prioritized for high-need communities and then scaled in a manner that balances CBO capacity, system capacity and increases in available funding.

- **Focus expansion on K-5:** Expand at the K-5 level where the largest service gap is for youngest students most in need of care after school.
- **Prioritize highest economic need when scaling:** Continue to use the same methodology to expand after-school programming, prioritizing schools and communities with the highest share of students in poverty.
- **Fill geographic gaps in service:** Select sites (schools and community centers) for new programs in highest-need communities that do not have program options.
- **Conduct ongoing analysis for demand and need:** Understand unmet demand and the current ecosystem of fee-based after-school programs to plan expansion for a universal system. Account for impact of other public funding streams that provide some alternative type of after-school services (e.g. state LEAP funding, vouchers used for child care services during non-school hours).

## Strategy 3

### Leverage all DYCD after-school models and available facilities to scale programs

While a bulk of the current after-school K-5 expansion is happening in school-based settings, leveraging all DYCD models and locations will allow for more rapid and accessible scaling to universal.

- **Balance program expansion between schools and community centers:** Continue to focus expansion in schools, while ensuring inclusion of and funding for non-school facilities (e.g. community centers, NYCHA facilities, and shelters).
- **Integrate Beacons and Cornerstones into future expansion:** Expand additional DYCD models to increase after-school programs in school-based community centers and NYCHA facilities.

## Strategy 4

### Explore public-private partnerships for system-building and innovation

Scaling to meet universal quality and accessibility will require creative, sustainable, and ambitious funding solutions that include strong new public-private partnerships.

- **Engage philanthropy to support system-building:** Create opportunities for partnerships with philanthropy to support the growing after-school system.
- **Partner with the business sector:** Work with the business sector to generate support to fund and meet the child care needs of their employees.

#### CASE STUDY

The [Vermont Child Care Contribution tax](#), combined with state resources, funds child care through a tax paid mainly by employers, greatly increasing state funding for the child care sector.

#### Considerations for Priority Populations

#### Ensure inclusive access and enrollment

- **Ensure sustainable funding for priority populations:** Reflect needs of students in temporary housing and foster care, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners in funding for after-school.
- **Prioritize enrollment of highest-need populations:** Explore ways to prioritize enrollment for highest-need populations.

# BUILD AND SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE TALENT PIPELINE TO ENABLE PROGRAM EXPANSION

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

The quality and impact of after-school programs are directly linked to the quality of the CBO staff working across all levels in those programs. CBOs need to be able to attract, retain and develop top talent for all roles, which will directly benefit participants. The infusion of CBO jobs tied to new programs also provides positive economic benefits to communities.

## GOALS

**For Families:** Well-prepared staff mean high-quality programming, providing families with peace of mind and a desire to have their children in after-school programming.

**For Program Staff:** Robust recruitment pipelines, stronger careers with longevity, living wages, ongoing supervision and mentorship, and organizational and leadership support, attract, and retain top talent.

**For the City:** Lower turnover, clear accountability, and stronger CBO leadership lead to higher overall system quality.

## CURRENT STATE

- The after-school ecosystem has many dedicated, talented staff at all levels, but more needs to be done to provide growth opportunities and salaries that retain and grow this talent.
- These CBO positions are purpose-driven jobs that offer leadership and management skills, which can be a strong selling point.
- Providers indicate challenges with recruitment and hiring processes to onboard staff; if focused actions are not taken, these challenges will only intensify as the system grows.
- Gaps exist in capacity building and DYCD resources to provide ongoing training for CBOs.



## Strategy 1

### Establish a City-led recruitment effort for CBO staff

The ability to recruit, retain, and grow high-quality after-school staff is a key component of ensuring consistent quality programming. By centralizing and intentionally expanding the staff recruitment pipeline, the City can ensure there are quality staff and leadership for providers across the system.

- Streamline and centralize recruitment process:** Improve efficiency of hiring by creating a centralized recruitment process and one-stop shop for after-school job postings, decreasing clearance system barriers for onboarding to support CBOs in their hiring (e.g., fingerprinting). The effort should be additive and not replace each provider's ability to recruit candidates and make final hiring decisions.

#### CASE STUDY

A current platform, [Afterschool Pathfinder](#), maintains a jobs list for after-school, expanded learning, and other youth programs in the state.

- Build staff and leadership pipeline:** Leverage partnerships with educational institutions (e.g., CUNY, SUNY, private institutions, and high schools) and other youth employment programs to offer paid and/or credit-bearing opportunities to enter the after-school workforce, including paid work-study, apprenticeships, and tuition waivers.

#### CASE STUDY

Example partnerships include [the Child Development Associate \(CDA\) Certificate at the CUNY School of Professional Studies](#), offered in partnership with the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute (PDI), which offers a comprehensive credit-bearing Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate.

- Expand recruitment of activities specialists:** Continue to build new partnerships with groups that can provide unique services to programs (e.g. arts and culture groups, businesses).
- Launch career awareness campaign:** Increase profile of after-school career pathways through a comprehensive marketing campaign that highlights the benefits of after-school jobs.
- Increase stability and attractiveness of after-school roles:** Develop strategies that support providers to offer more full-time, year-round roles with living wages to increase staff retention and decrease need to rehire yearly.
- Explore more flexible roles for staff:** Create and invest in roles that allow staff to work across the school day and after-school, particularly for part-time workers, para professionals, or those with split/non-traditional hours.

## Strategy 2

### Increase opportunities for staff growth

Staff retention and performance depend upon employees' ability to see the after-school sector as a place to grow and develop a meaningful career. There is a need to develop dedicated, explicit opportunities and time for professional development; mentorship; and career progression throughout the sector.

- **Provide clear career lattice:** Map out pathways for after-school staff growth both through the organization (youth worker, site director, program director) and beyond (teaching, social work, nonprofit leadership, community development).
- **Connect the after-school pipeline to teacher pathways:** Establish teacher pipeline opportunities for after-school workers, which will help address the City's teacher shortage, and create better synergy and alignment between the two sectors.

- **Increase professional development opportunities within NYCPS:** Provide training opportunities and experiential learning for after-school staff to co-train with NYCPS staff.
- **Partner with education institutions to support professional development:** Utilize resources through CUNY and other educational institutions (e.g. [Relay Graduate School of Education](#), [Teaching Lab](#), [Teaching Matters](#)) to provide evidence-based professional development and training opportunities. Investigate options for tuition waivers, academic credits and certificates for developing specialized skills.
- **Leverage existing professional development providers and intermediaries to support staff:** Work with experts in the field to train staff and implement best practices in professional development.
- **Build out mentorship and support infrastructure:** Expand opportunities for staff to learn from peers and leadership across different organizations, including cohort models.



Photo: Courtesy of Children's Aid

## Strategy 3

### Support CBO leadership and organizational capacity

To ensure consistent quality across the after-school system, the City must provide support, infrastructure, and capacity building that allow all CBO providers to meet standards of excellence, no matter their size or experience level.

- **Support new/emerging CBOs:** Provide targeted capacity building to new providers entering DYCD's after-school network (e.g., through new provider peer cohorts, matching with experienced CBO mentors).
- **Invest in CBO leadership development:** Provide learning opportunities for program directors in organizational management, finance, communication, budgeting, and adaptive leadership competencies through cohort models (e.g., through partnerships with [Coro](#), [PASE](#), [FCNY](#), [ExpandEd](#), [DYCD](#))
- **Support recruitment of staff for organizational capacity:** Engage professionals in fields such as finance that are crucial to organizational operations.



Photo: Courtesy of South Asian Youth Action

#### Considerations for Priority Populations

#### Build, train, and maintain a workforce with specific capabilities in working with priority populations

- **Prioritize Specialized Staff:** Recruit and appropriately compensate specialized and multilingual staff to support high-need students.
- **Enhance Expertise:** Provide consistent training and build partnerships with specialists to improve staff capabilities to serve diverse populations.
- **Integrate Support:** Strengthen connections with shelter/foster care agencies to ensure continuous student support.

# 3

# COORDINATE SYSTEMS AND POLICIES TO BETTER MEET STUDENT NEEDS

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Across the landscape of City-funded services, families need a comprehensive and coordinated set of in-school and after-school offerings that have shared goals. The most successful after-school programs are often the result of a strong partnership between the host school and the CBO, leading to a more integrated experience centered on students and their families.

## GOALS

**For Families:** Seamless and reliable experience, needs for all children are met across ecosystem, with complementary content across a student's day.

**For Program Staff:** Strong relationships between school and CBO staff improve ability to provide quality programming; more consistent professional development and learning provide robust support.

**For the City:** Clear accountability, stronger partnerships, stronger community support.

## CURRENT STATE

- There is a strong partnership between DYCD and NYCPS, with committed staff at both agencies working toward shared goals.
- The agency partnership is not formalized; there is an opportunity to codify and institutionalize roles and responsibilities.
- There are examples of positive CBO-school relationships that can be mined for best practices to be exported and systematized.
- Across City government there are examples of ways that CBOs and City agencies can share information to inform better programs.



## Strategy 1

### **Codify and strengthen city agency coordination**

A system that feels seamless for families, with fewer opportunities to “fall through the cracks,” begins with system leadership and processes that are comprehensive and integrated by design. System success requires better leadership coordination, shared accountability systems, and clearly delegated roles and responsibilities across City agencies.

- **Align leadership goals:** Support success of after-school through top-down leadership agreement on prioritization and goals, including Mayor’s Office, DYCD, and NYCPS.
- **Institutionalize clear roles and responsibilities:** Dedicate staff to supporting after-school from NYCPS and DYCD, creating clear roles and responsibilities between agency staff to ensure successful transitions between school-day and after-school.
- **Harmonize differing rules and regulations between school, after-school, and early care:** Create a shared understanding of the different regulatory and administrative requirements between school day, after-school, and early care and education and explore ways to align them.
- **Create parallel accountability mechanisms:** Create strong infrastructure, guidance, and frameworks around shared goals and coordination to ensure equal accountability and decision-making power impacting both schools and CBOs.
- **Institutionalize partnerships at the school district level:** Build infrastructure for DYCD and superintendents to collaborate to support CBOs and schools.

## Strategy 2

### **Strengthen CBO-school coordination**

The partnership between schools and after-school providers is one of the key indicators of program success; developing infrastructure to ensure that these relationships are successful is key to system quality and sustainability.

- **Standardize orientation for principals and superintendents on after-school:** Dedicate time to ensure principals and superintendents understand after-school’s value, including the extensive research on youth development and community benefits that undergirds high-quality after-school programs and their operations, such as budget, staffing, and programming.
- **Create continuous collaboration opportunities:** Include after-school staff and leadership in relevant school staff meetings and trainings; leverage after-school staff to support the school community (e.g. expand School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings to include after-school staff and specialists to ensure knowledge transfer and seamless communication).
- **Lift up strong collaborations and best practices:** Highlight models of successful school-CBO partnerships and share best practices widely through regular convenings and video and written communications.

#### **CASE STUDY**

The Partnership for Afterschool Education (PASE) connects the after-school community, hosting professional development events, delivering trainings, providing resources and knowledge-sharing, and lifting up best examples from the field.

- **Strengthen “partnership agreements” and accountability structures:** Develop stronger, clearer guidance between program directors and principals to create interdependent success metrics and goals, stronger ongoing communication, and escalation protocols.
- **Obtain space for CBO operations within schools:** Provide after-school staff with maximum access to school facilities, including office space within schools and access to facilities (gyms, auditoriums, swimming pools, computer labs) for programming.



## Strategy 3

### **Design after-school objectives and activities to complement the school day**

Youth, parents, and after-school experts agree on the importance of maintaining distinct and complementary focus areas for school and after-school. Providing dedicated time for non-academic activities and enrichment is one of after-school’s greatest strengths. After-school also represents an opportunity to work toward shared objectives between school and after-school in creative ways (such as literacy games, debate clubs, poetry slams, robotics, and other hands-on STEM activities). Infrastructure is needed that allows school staff, after-school staff, and families to align on shared goals and set expectations.

- **Use CBO-School planning sessions to foster shared objectives:** Use required planning sessions to align on shared objectives for the school community and how school and after-school staff can work together to achieve them.
- **Implement best practices for after-school to support the City’s academic goals:** Use experiential and hands-on learning opportunities in after-school to support students around city-wide academic efforts, namely NYC Reads and NYC Solves.
- **Communicate shared objectives with school community:** Ensure parents and families understand benefits of after-school and set expectations.

## Strategy 4

### Use data and technology to share critical information

Achieving universality requires meeting the needs of all students, especially those with the highest needs. Data and technology are key levers for ensuring all staff are equipped with the information necessary to understand the specific challenges and needs of their student populations. New data-sharing infrastructure is needed that provides a minimum standard of student data to all providers throughout the system. Data is also a valuable communication tool to ensure families are kept abreast of the logistics, information sharing, and program availability within the after-school system.

- **Create data-sharing infrastructure between CBOs and NYCPS:** Ensure that principals, superintendents, and school staff know which students are enrolled and attending after-school and that after-school staff have information on school population (e.g., MLs, students with disabilities, IEPs, students in temporary housing and foster care) at a minimum.

#### CASE STUDY

The City's after-school system could build on the existing [New Visions portal](#), a student planning and school management software tool that leverages data to empower the work of schools and their partners.

- **Explore ways to share more in-depth data:** Encourage schools and CBOs to share additional information to support student growth and development (e.g., individual IEPs with parent permission, academic data).
- **Explore more coordinated methods of communicating with families:** Identify the current communication pain points for families and consider the development of analog and digital methods to provide families with more seamless, consistent communication and information.

#### Considerations for Priority Populations

### Create comprehensive infrastructure to facilitate access, enrollment, and accommodations

- **Improve Access and Enrollment:** Streamline enrollment and provide flexible options for students with special needs, and optimize program locations near the homes and shelters of priority populations.
- **Ensure Support and Transportation:** Develop reliable transportation for priority students and integrate the accommodation process for students with IEPs and 504 plans into after-school programs.

# 4

# CREATE A VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF QUALITY STANDARDS, CAPACITY BUILDING, EVALUATION AND INNOVATION

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

As the after-school system scales, it is essential that new and current programs be of high quality. When quality standards are clearly communicated and providers are supported, program outcomes increase. The system must also encourage innovation so that programs can more easily and efficiently meet the evolving needs of students and families.

## GOALS

**For Families:** Parents know that high quality is a standard throughout the systems and all students benefit from consistent implementation.

**For Program Staff:** Capacity and support for CBOs allow them to deliver high-quality programs and the system and building innovation into the system allows for new best practices to be created and shared.

**For the City:** Robustly implemented quality standards, opportunities for innovation and regular evaluation create more impactful programs with demonstrated results.

## CURRENT STATE

- DYCD has clearly defined program expectations, safety protocols, and quality standards that CBOs are required to meet.
- DYCD has an established evaluation and monitoring system to implement quality standards. Additional capacity and resources will be needed to scale this infrastructure and ensure consistency.
- Contracted CBO providers have opportunities to innovate their program offerings, but they often need to independently raise funds and their innovations do not necessarily reach beyond their own programs.



## Strategy 1

### **Support programs to meet quality standards**

Because the after-school system depends on so many providers with their own processes, models, and capacities, the City must develop infrastructure to ensure that each provider is able to meet (and ideally exceed) consistent quality standards.

- **Invest in capacity building:** Support DYCD's capacity building efforts for new providers to ensure they are set up for success.
- **Train new providers on quality standards:** Ensure new providers entering the system have the information and support they need to provide quality programming.
- **Train and support CBOs to use data to improve programs:** Ensure CBOs have the knowledge and capacity to use data and evaluation to foster continuous loops for improvement.

## Strategy 2

### **Monitor and evaluate to ensure impact**

Evaluation mechanisms are vital to ensure successful new approaches and programs are identified so they can be scaled more broadly, to identify what we can learn from new initiatives and to generate feedback from family, staff, and students in determining measures of success.

- **Ensure consistency in monitoring:** Train new DYCD staff on program quality standards and best practices.
- **Expand external evaluation oversight and accountability:** Ensure resources for external partners to support system-wide evaluation.
- **Continue to leverage students and families in evaluation:** Source feedback from students and families to ensure programming meets and adapts to needs (e.g. include after-school in family and student school surveys).



Photo: Courtesy of New York Junior Tennis & Learning

## Strategy 3

### Integrate innovation into the system

As the needs and challenges of the city's youth change, the after-school system must be able to adapt and grow to meet them. By building infrastructure that encourages novel approaches and models, we can support providers in iterating upon and creating new best practices.

- **Create innovation standards:** Establish clear standards and opportunities for providers trying new programming.
- **Allow for flexibility and opportunities to innovate:** Create proposals, scopes of work, and funding streams that allow providers to deliver new quality programming.
- **Create dedicated opportunities for innovation:** Pilot innovation challenges and incubators dedicated to developing, designing and implementing innovative ideas in after-school programming with input from students, families and other stakeholders.

#### CASE STUDY

Through [the Partnership for NYC Innovation Labs](#), public sector agencies identify a specific challenge and entrepreneurs work to test a proof of concept solution. Agency staff assess and provide feedback, and successful ideas become pilots.

#### CASE STUDY

The DYCD [Exploring Futures](#) program began as a pilot tested during DYCD's summer after-school programming, Summer Rising. The program now offers career exploration to middle school students during the school year, including early exposure to careers in STEM.

## Strategy 4

### Share and scale best practices

The complexity and scale of the New York City after-school system require development of infrastructure that allows best practices and successful new approaches to be identified, adapted, and scaled from one program, school, or provider throughout the city.

- **Support convening spaces to share best practices:** Create physical and digital spaces for best practice sharing (e.g. host district- and borough-level meetings to share results of innovation across the network).
- **Develop infrastructure for best practice adoption:** Provide professional development, coaching and mentorship, to ensure best practices are successfully implemented by providers.
- **Establish successful innovations as standard in future procurement:** Update future procurements and standards to scale successful innovations.



Photo: Courtesy of New York Edge

### Considerations for Priority Populations

### Deliver inclusive programming

- **Design for Inclusion:** Conduct needs assessments and integrate universal design principles to ensure all programming is accessible from the outset, including social-emotional support and specialized options (e.g., District 75 students).
- **Support Diverse Learners:** Reduce language barriers by using project-based learning in students' preferred languages and offering English Language Learning through enrichment activities.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Identify and scale promising special education practices, while actively engaging families and high-needs students to co-design and ensure programs are meeting their needs.

# 5

# DESIGN INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING FOR PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Strategies for this Recommendation have been integrated throughout the other four recommendations to demonstrate their intrinsic importance and prioritization within all other system actions.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

After-school programs can provide tremendous benefits to youth facing a variety of barriers, including students in temporary housing, students in foster care, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners. Given the high numbers of New York City youth who fall into one or more of these categories, the after-school system needs to be built to be inclusive and accessible to all.

## GOALS

**For Families:** All youth are given the opportunity to thrive; families of all backgrounds see New York City's after-school ecosystem as a desirable option.

**For Program Staff:** Staff are given the appropriate training and support to meet the needs of all youth.

**For the City:** Fewer youth and families fall through system gaps; City addresses the needs of its highest need populations leading to positive longer-term outcomes.

## PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Students in temporary housing, students in foster care, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners.

## CURRENT STATE

- Programs are provided in a variety of settings to reach youth of all needs (e.g., DHS shelters).
- DYCD partners closely with NYCPS to serve high-need students, but there are opportunities to strengthen and codify policies.
- DYCD funds technical assistance to support CBOs to serve students with special needs and provides additional staffing support to accommodate special need students (e.g. paraprofessionals and nurses).
- CBOs have articulated the need for resources to hire trained and certified staff to fully support and accommodate specific needs.
- Transportation is a consistent issue that limits participation for students with special needs and accommodations.



## Strategy 1

### Ensure inclusive access and enrollment

Scaling and program growth need to be based on equity, program quality, and sustainability. Initial program expansion should be prioritized for high-need populations, and then scaled, ensuring there is infrastructure to support these families in finding the right program to meet their needs and in having the appropriate transportation and accommodations to attend.

- **Prioritize enrollment of highest-need populations:** Explore ways to prioritize enrollment for highest-need populations.
- **Support families through the enrollment process:** Provide dedicated parent coordinators to help priority students enroll, including translation and interpretation support for multilingual students and help for students in temporary housing and foster care moving to a new school.
- **Conduct needs assessments and explore specialized programs:** Develop a systemwide understanding of gaps in staff capacity and programming for high-need populations, and consider specialized programs for high-need populations.
- **Develop a transportation strategy for priority populations:** Work with stakeholders to ensure that students can attend the program that best meets their needs with reliable transportation.
- **Allow for flexibility in enrollment to best match students:** Support students with special needs in enrolling in programs that are best suited to meet their needs.
- **Integrate accommodation process:** Explore ways for after-school programs to have insight into, and accommodate students with, additional needs (i.e., IEPs and 504s).

### CASE STUDY

Summer Rising is a program run through a collaboration between NYCPS and DYCD. During the program, schools use a NYCPS-managed dashboard to record students' summer accommodation needs. The dashboard facilitates communication between school staff and CBO staff, so there is a better understanding of student needs before and during the program.

- **Leverage NYCPS infrastructure for students in temporary housing and foster care to increase center-based programs:** Work with NYCPS to reassess program locations for center-based programs to serve high-need populations closer to their homes and shelters.

## Strategy 2

### Develop staff capacity to support high-need students

Universal, inclusive design requires staff who are appropriately trained and supported in meeting the specific needs of high-needs youth. Infrastructure is required to ensure that all programs are equipped, whether by training existing staff, hiring new staff, or partnering with specialists.

- **Recruit staff and leadership with expertise in serving diverse, high-needs populations:** Build career pathways specifically for specialists and multilingual staff who can offer support across the ecosystem or in programs with highest need, ensuring appropriate pay for specialized staff.
- **Train staff to serve special needs populations:** Build out more robust and consistent training on specific best practices for working with multilingual learners, students in temporary housing, students in foster care, and students with disabilities.

- **Develop partnerships with specialists:** Build a network of providers with specific expertise in serving priority populations, to fill in knowledge gaps and support training.
- **Leverage older students who are multilingual to support programs:** Build a pipeline to employ age-eligible multilingual students in after-school programs.
- **Continue to foster connections between after-school staff and shelter and foster care staff:** Integrate DHS and ACS and staff into the after-school ecosystem to ensure continuous support for students in temporary housing and foster care.



Photo: Courtesy of ExpandedED Schools

## Strategy 3

### Deliver inclusive programming for all students

A system that can meet the needs of our highest-need youth can better meet the needs of all our youth. By following universal design principles, we can build a truly universal system.

- **Integrate universal design principles into programming:** Create programming that is most accessible to all from the outset to reduce the need for adaptation or special accommodations and provide social-emotional and academic growth opportunities to all students.
- **Identify and scale promising special education practices:** Develop and share data-driven practices in special education to improve student outcomes and support educators in planning targeted interventions.
- **Leverage facility and program resources to support students in temporary housing:** Allow students to use facility spaces for laundry and other personal needs.
- **Reduce language barriers:** Use project-based learning to reduce language barriers and engage multilingual students in their preferred language.

- **Provide English language learning opportunities:** Use after-school enrichment activities to support English language learning.
- **Engage families and high-need students to co-design programs:** Seek input and feedback from students and families to ensure programs address their needs and interests.
- **Continue to provide support for social-emotional wellness:** Provide trauma-informed programming and pay additional attention to the emotional needs of special need students and follow up with students and families where necessary.

#### CASE STUDY

The Every Child and Family is Known program makes use of data sharing between schools, shelters, and families in a Bronx pilot program that cultivates 1:1 mentor relationships between caring adults and students, and fosters inter-agency collaborations to offer students support and benefits access.

# HOW IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

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

## 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

# WHAT COMES NEXT

The Commission recognizes that this interim report represents only the beginning of the committed, sustained effort needed to reach truly universal and high-quality after-school for all New York City families. In 2026, the Commission will continue to meet and further develop this initial plan in partnership with the City of New York.

While the City's after-school expansion continues, with an additional 15,000 slots being added to the system in the next two years, the Commission will continue working in parallel on the long-term strategy for achieving universal access to after-school programs.

The Commission anticipates that second phase of work will include the following actions:

- Refining initial ideas represented in this report, such as developing better data-driven demand models and workforce pipeline strategies.

- Working with the City to implement some of the more actionable ideas, which can provide immediate benefits for programs and students; and
- Expanding analysis and ideation beyond K-5 school-year programs, and identifying challenges and opportunities across the larger after-school system.

We invite new partners from across the New York City after-school ecosystem to join this work – to champion the recommendations in this report, to share new ideas, and to support a better after-school system. We know that an effort at this scale is ambitious, complex, and well worth it; and we thank you for collaborating with us to achieve it. Together, we can create a universal system for all.



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Photo: Courtesy of New York Edge



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