



An Evaluation of the 2023-24 Idaho Out-of-School Time Network Grants in Partnership with the Idaho STEM Action Center and the Idaho Commission for Libraries



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Introduction

The [Idaho Out-of-School Network](#) (ION) is one of 50 state afterschool networks partially funded and supported by the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation. ION was founded in October 2014 with the mission to ensure Idaho's youth have access to high-quality out-of-school time (OST) programs. ION's team of OST specialists focuses on statewide advocacy and promotion of the benefits of OST programming, while also supporting OST program teams with resources and tools to enhance their services for youth and families. ION is managed under the JANNUS Organization, a not-for-profit health and human services organization that serves over 55,000 people across the state. The sections that follow outline the history of UEPC's partnership with ION to conduct statewide OST evaluations over the past three years, the current OST landscape in Idaho, and the organization of this report.

History of ION & UEPC Partnership

2021-22 Idaho Community Programs for Youth Grant Evaluation

ION initially contracted with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) in 2021 to evaluate the Idaho Community Programs for Youth (ICPFY) grant. This OST grant was funded by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) through ION and was authorized under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSAA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The ICPfY grant was designed to support OST programs in improving access, quality, and equity through evidence-based programs focusing on academic and interpersonal skills for students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to the [full evaluation report for the 2021-22 ICPfY grant](#) for more details on the specific evaluation methods, data, and findings (McDowell, Wisham, Groth, & Doane, 2023).

2022-23 OST Enrichment and Idaho Community Program Grants Evaluation

During the 2022-23 school year, ION again contracted with the UEPC to conduct an external evaluation of their OST Enrichment and Idaho Community Program grants. These OST grant programs were funded through the federal *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund* (ESSER). Through a unique partnership funded by the Idaho State Board of Education, ESSER grant funds were distributed to the Idaho Out-of-School Network (ION), Idaho STEM Action Center (STEM AC) and the Idaho Commission for Libraries (ICfL), with all three of these organizations facilitating their own grant competitions to distribute funds to OST program teams throughout the state. The completed 2022-23 evaluation briefs for ION, STEM AC, and the ICfL are included in the links below.

- [An Evaluation of the 2022-2023 Idaho Out-of-School Network OST Enrichment & Idaho Community Program Grants](#)
- [Idaho Commission for Libraries Out-of-School-Time Planning & Programming Grants 2022-23: External Evaluation Summary](#)
- [Idaho STEM Action Center Out-of-School Time School Year Programs 2022-23: External Evaluation Summary](#)

2023-24 OST Enrichment, Planning and Programming Grants Evaluation

The UEPC continued this statewide OST evaluation for the 2023-24 school year, collecting and analyzing data from OST programs that were granted Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds through ION directly, or through the STEM AC or ICfL grant competitions. Table 1 below shows the various grant types that were offered by each organization, as well as the number of grants awarded, the range of individual award amounts, and the number of youth served by each grant (self-reported on end-of-year reports by program managers). While all of these grants were awarded during the 2023-24 school year, some of the funds supported programs and activities that occurred partially or entirely during the summer of 2024. These summer 2024 programs will be discussed in more detail in a separate evaluation brief.

Table 1. Idaho organizations and grant types for the 2023-24 school year

Grant Type	Description	Number of Grantees	Range of Award Amounts	Number of Unduplicated Youth Served (ages 5-18)
Idaho Out-of-School Network				
OST Enrichment Grant – Full Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded in September 2023 Funded OST programs for the full 2023-24 school year 	19	\$40,000-\$80,000	6,400
OST Enrichment Grant – Single Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded in January 2024 Funded OST programs for the spring 2024 semester 	20	\$13,500-\$39,979	3,252
Idaho STEM Action Center				
School Year Grant – Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded in September 2023 Funded STEM-focused OST programs for the full 2023-24 school year, including those that operated partially or entirely during summer 2024 	42	\$2,450-\$250,000	37,689
School Year Grant – Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded in January 2024 Funded STEM-focused OST programs for the spring 2024 semester, including those that that operated partially or entirely during summer 2024 	27	\$6,500-\$47,200	11,733
Idaho Commission for Libraries				
OST Planning Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded in October 2023 Funded library-based OST programs for the 2023-24 school year, including those that continued through summer 2024 	8	\$8,000-\$15,000	10,690
OST Programming Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded in October 2023 Funded library systems and school districts to strategically develop and expand their library-based OST programming during the 2023-24 school year and summer 2024 	21	\$1,000-\$3,000	7,969

Current Idaho OST Landscape

The following section offers a brief overview of the current OST landscape in Idaho, starting with a list of the 2023-24 OST grant goals for each of the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL OST grants. We then briefly discuss the *Building Blocks for Out-of-School-Time Quality* self-assessment tool as a statewide resource used by most of the OST teams to strengthen program quality. We highlight the ongoing relationships between Idaho and other western states in their sharing of OST resources, as well as the increased need for OST programs throughout Idaho, particularly with the population increases in recent years and the switch to four-day school weeks for the majority of Idaho school districts. Finally, we discuss the opportunity for Idaho OST leaders to leverage the data, findings, and considerations within this report to facilitate pivotal state and regional conversations around OST priorities and future opportunities.

Idaho OST Grant Goals

With the unique opportunity to distribute nearly \$8 million in OST grant funds to schools and community organizations providing OST services for youth and families throughout Idaho, the partnership between the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL teams involved frequent communication and intentional alignment of OST grant timelines, resources, and data collection processes. While the overall purpose of these federal grant funds was to enhance and expand the capacity of Idaho organizations to implement quality OST programming to meet the needs within their communities, each of the three organizations had slightly different areas of focus for their own grant competitions. The specific 2023-24 OST grant goals for ION, STEM AC, and ICfL are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. 2023-24 Idaho OST grant goals for the Idaho Out-of-School Network, STEM Action Center, and Idaho Commission for Libraries

State Organization	Goals for OST Grant Funds
Idaho Out-of-School Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address unfinished learning and improve the quality of OST opportunities for Idaho youth in grades K-12 Provide evidenced-based programming that delivers academic, social and emotional learning for youth
Idaho STEM Action Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement OST activities to address student learning loss Utilize evidence-based STEM education practices in OST programming Implement family engagement activities aligned with STEM and other academic enrichment focus areas
Idaho Commission for Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the role of libraries as community educators addressing learning loss by implementing high-quality, evidence-based OST learning and/or summer programs Build the institutional capacity of libraries by increasing staff participation in training and professional development opportunities focused on OST and/or summer program best practices Address the academic, social, and emotional needs of Idaho’s K-12 students facing learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with special emphasis on the disproportionate impact on underrepresented student subgroups

Source: [Idaho Out-of-School Network](#), [Idaho STEM Action Center](#), and [Idaho Commission for Libraries](#) websites.

Building Blocks for Out-of-School Time Quality

Despite the differences in OST focus areas across the three organizations, all three organizations collaborated to provide resources and support for programs receiving these grant funds in a united effort to promote high-quality OST services across the state. One resource promoted by all three organizations is the [*Building Blocks for Out-of-School Time Quality*](#) (“Building Blocks”). Developed by the ION team, this statewide tool is a resource for OST teams to self-assess their program quality in eight areas: Intentional Program Design; Supportive Relationships and Environments; Youth Voice, Leadership, and Engagement; Responsiveness to Culture and Identity; Community, School, and Family Engagement; Organizational and Leadership Management; Ongoing Staff Support and Volunteer Development; and Youth Safety and Wellness. This self-assessment tool was specifically designed to help Idaho OST program teams identify areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement. The Building Blocks tool is particularly important to include in the context of the Idaho OST landscape, as it is the primary resource used by OST teams and grant funders to promote, assess, and document ongoing efforts to strengthen and maintain program quality.

Partnerships with Neighboring States

Another important component of the current Idaho OST landscape includes the emerging partnerships between ION and the state networks in neighboring western states, particularly Utah and Wyoming. These three organizations share many resources that have proven to be successful in their respective states, such as OST youth and family resources, professional learning content, and organizational tools (e.g., Board of Director processes, Human Resource policies). As these three states have relatively similar demographics, political climate, and OST challenges, the state network teams appreciate the opportunities to learn from each other’s successes and challenges. These collaborative relationships among the state teams have enhanced opportunities for Idaho’s OST leaders to focus on areas such as program quality, professional learning, and continuous program improvement.

Need for Expanded OST Services

According to the Idaho Department of Labor, the state has experienced a significant population increase in the past several years, growing from 1,778,684 people in 2019 to 1,868,201 in 2023. A similar growth pattern is forecast through 2029 at a rate of approximately 1.1% each year (Idaho Department of Labor, 2020). As many families with school age children relocate to Idaho seeking more affordable housing, small-town lifestyles, and outdoor recreational opportunities, the demand for OST programs inevitably increases, both during the school year and in the summer.

Families in Idaho are very interested in having their children participate in OST programs, with four children waiting to participate for every child participating in an Idaho OST program. Families are also supportive of funding for OST programs, with 90% of families in Idaho backing public OST program funding. Additionally, 99% of Idaho families are satisfied with the OST program their child attends (Afterschool Alliance, 2024). Idaho has a strong history of community-based and school organizations coming together to understand local-level needs around youth development programs, including OST programs. Many of the OST programs that received 2023-24 school year grant funds from ION, STEM AC, and ICfL also received summer OST grant funds for 2023 and 2024. These summer programs and their impact on youth and families will be discussed in more detail in a separate evaluation brief.

Another factor that has expanded the need for OST services in Idaho includes the change to a four-day school week for many school districts. During the 2023-24 school year, 94 Idaho school districts and charter schools operated on a four-day school week (Idaho Department of Education, 2025) for various reasons, such as increasing teacher retention, responding to family preferences, and in some cases, attempting to cut operational costs. The change to four-day school weeks can have a significant impact on youth and families, particularly those families with adults who work outside of the home. In response to this recent trend, many OST programs have expanded their services to ensure that youth within their communities have opportunities for enriching activities as well as safe, nurturing environments on the fifth day in which school is no longer in session. This expansion of program services was also addressed and studied specifically as part of the data collection activities for this evaluation, discussed in the *Evaluation Methods* section of this report.

Leveraging Evaluation Results for Future Opportunities

Idaho OST leaders have opportunities to leverage the data, findings, and considerations shared within this report as they initiate timely conversations with other state leaders regarding future OST opportunities. These conversations could also grow to include state and regional considerations as leaders discuss specific community data, regional OST success and challenges, and the unique OST contexts within various communities.

Report Organization

In the remaining sections of this report, we first provide a brief literature review to summarize research on out-of-school time programs for youth, best practices to achieve the desired outcomes, and factors that contribute to program quality and sustainability. We then describe the evaluation methods, including the evaluation questions, data sources, data collection procedures, and analysis approaches. Next, we describe the findings identified across all three organizations related to the six evaluation questions using aggregate qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, we provide overall conclusions and considerations for ongoing improvement based on the findings shared within the report. As a supplement to this report, we also provide a brief specifically describing the summer OST programs across all three organizations and their impacts on youth and families throughout the state.

Intended Audience

The intended audience for this evaluation report includes out-of-school time state agency funders and policymakers, including the ION, STEM AC and ICfL teams, as well as their community partners. We encourage all state funders and policymakers to review the findings and considerations in this report as the need for out-of-school time programs across Idaho continues to grow. We also encourage OST administrators and their staff to review this report and consider the implications for their individual OST programs and communities.

Common Terms and Definitions

We use the term *out-of-school time* (OST) programs to refer to services provided at any time that school is not in session, including before school, after school, summer, and school holidays. Across OST programs, administrative and staff roles and titles vary. For the purposes of this evaluation, we

refer to those who lead individual OST programs as *program managers*. We refer to youth who attend these programs as *students*, and their adult caregivers as their *families*, which may include parents, stepparents, grandparents, and other family members or guardians.

Literature Review

In the following section, we offer a summary of national research on OST programs, including the benefits that many of these programs offer youth and families, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We also provide an overview of Idaho's OST landscape, and the increased demand for OST programs with the population increase and the transition to four-day school weeks in many school districts.

The Benefits of Quality OST Programs

The gap between the end of the school day and the end of the workday often leaves children and youth unsupervised during these hours (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Extracurricular activities, such as structured out-of-school time (OST) programs, can offer a safe and engaging environment during this time. OST programs can be customized to meet the needs of each unique community by providing supplemental academic support in various formats, as well as other enrichment activities focused on STEM, social skill development, college and career readiness, physical activity, and art.

The benefits of OST programs have been well documented by researchers over the past few decades. Ongoing and consistent attendance in structured extracurricular activities, such as OST programs, is related to higher academic scores in reading and math for participating children and youth compared to those who do not participate in OST programs (Vandell et al., 2007; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Vandell, et al., 2020). For example, in a recent study examining the collective impacts of both early childhood and OST programs through the teenage years, researchers found that participation in high-quality early childhood programs and ongoing participation in OST programs was related to better academic outcomes for participants at age 15, including reading comprehension and math skills (Vandell, et al., 2020). OST programs can also support positive gains in social skills and prosocial skills, as well as reductions in problem behaviors (Vandell et al., 2007).

For OST programs to be successful in supporting these positive outcomes for children and youth, they must be intentionally designed in a high-quality manner, including having well-trained and supported OST staff who can implement needs-based activities with an emphasis on active learning for participants to develop new skills (Durlak et al., 2010). In addition to ensuring that OST programs are designed well, partnerships with schools and other community-based organizations can also strengthen the quality OST program implementation by aligning the OST services with the content of the school day and offering additional services to youth and families that may not be available during the traditional school day (Singer et al., 2018).

OST Programs and the COVID-19 Pandemic

On a worldwide scale, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everyday life, including schools and work. In the United States, schools shifted to virtual learning in the Spring of 2020, and some parents adapted to work-from-home schedules. Schools provided virtual learning options, with food pick-ups and

deliveries, as well as innovative approaches to provide wireless internet (WiFi) access. Children and youth were required to quickly adapt to a new learning style, with many families doing their best to support these new virtual learning activities (Bansak & Starr, 2021; Swartz, 2020). OST programs also supported the shift to virtual learning options during the pandemic, as 78% of OST programs nationwide provided virtual programming and 37% of programs distributed meals to families in their communities (Afterschool Alliance, 2020).

While many efforts were made to continue to support student learning during the spread of COVID-19, the pandemic had a negative impact on both the academic and social-emotional wellbeing of children and youth across the United States. Academic progress was stunted, and achievement gaps continued to widen (Khufeld et al, 2022). The pandemic led to widespread learning loss, particularly for low-achieving students, students of color, and students who attend high-poverty schools (Callen, et al., 2024; Fahle, Kane, Patterson, Reardon, Staiger, & Stuart, 2023; Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2022; Kuhfeld, Soland, & Lewis, 2022). Students' mental health also declined, with increases in reported anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation (Viner et al., 2022).

To help combat student learning loss, the United States Congress, starting in 2020, passed a series of pandemic funding acts to support school communities in addressing the impact of the pandemic (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.). The funding flowed from the United States Department of Education to all states, and each state developed its own process for appropriately distributing the pandemic relief funds, considering the unique needs of each community and addressing unfinished learning related to the pandemic.

In Idaho, the statewide partnership team quickly mobilized to support recovery efforts in the OST space around student learning loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The statewide partnership team worked closely with various Idaho state agencies, including the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and the Idaho State Department of Education, to develop statewide OST grant programs funded with COVID-19 pandemic relief funds to accelerate student learning.

Idaho's OST Partnership Approach

As described earlier in this report, ION, ICfL, and STEM AC developed a unique and innovative partnership to support both summer and OST learning across the state with COVID-19 funding sources. The statewide partnership allowed for various funding opportunities for youth-serving organizations to access COVID-19 OST program funds to address the effects of lost school time and to help accelerate learning (Idaho Learns Everywhere, n.d.).

When developing requirements for the various OST program funding opportunities related to the pandemic, the Idaho OST statewide team considered the components of quality OST programming. Embedded in the grant requirements was the importance of understanding and meeting the needs of local communities in program design and implementation, as well as participating in ongoing technical assistance and professional learning provided by the Idaho statewide OST team. All OST grant programs using COVID-19 relief funds included requirements focused on building the capacity and quality of OST programs across the state of Idaho. For example, ION programs were required to use the *Building Blocks for Out-of-School Time Quality* as a guiding tool for the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of program services to best meet the needs of children, youth, and families during the difficult and dynamic times of the pandemic. Grant

requirements also included an emphasis on professional learning of staff to implement quality programs with academic and social-emotional learning activities, and to understand community needs using asset mapping to support partnership building and sustainability efforts.

ION also partnered with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) starting in 2021 to serve as an external evaluator for the OST programs receiving COVID-19 funds. The UEPC worked collaboratively with ION and other key state partners, including ICfL and STEM AC, to develop program staff and family surveys, conduct interviews and focus groups with OST program managers, and to track the implementation and impact of the OST programs. The evaluation was guided by the co-developed evaluation questions that are presented later in this report. The first year of the evaluation was focused on the Idaho Community Programs for Youth (ICPFY) grant in the 2021-2022 school year. Findings from this evaluation showed that funded OST programs were developing and implementing program services around supplemental academic activities and social-emotional supports to meet the needs of youth and families in the face of a constantly changing landscape during the height of the pandemic. Across the programs funded by the ICPfY grant, 87% of families of participating youth felt that the OST programs were helping their children succeed academically, and 71% of families reported that the programs were helping their children develop skills to overcome challenges related to COVID-19. Additionally, the ICPfY evaluation found that 98% of OST staff knew their program's mission and goals, and 96% of staff felt that they knew how to accomplish the program goals (McDowell et al., 2023).

The most recent evaluation included COVID-19 OST grant programs from ION, ICfL, and STEM AC during the 2022-2023 school year. The evaluation found that OST programs receiving the ION OST Enrichment grant were continuing to meet the needs of youth and families, with 98% of families reporting that the program provided new experiences for their child. Furthermore, 94% of OST staff reported improvement in participating students' responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. Although ICfL programs did not participate in the staff or family surveys due to the unique nature of their programs, and STEM AC programs had limited participation in the staff and family surveys, the evaluation highlighted promising practices and evidence of these grantees working to provide quality OST opportunities around academic and social-emotional supports. Notably, ICfL-funded programs (OST Planning and OST Programming Grantees) served 18,920 community members in the 2022-2023 school year through various activities focused on mitigating unfinished learning, including tutoring programs and support for youth and families in communities with four-day school weeks (Wisham et al., 2024). STEM AC-funded programs provided hands-on experiences and program options focused on increasing STEM awareness and exposure with activities such as Lego League, Robotics Club, and Droneology (coding and flying drones). In the 2022-2023 school year, these programs served 3,391 youth and families, and 60% of families reported attending at least one family engagement event hosted by these programs (Wisham et al., 2024).

Overall, strong partnerships at the state level have supported OST programs in utilizing COVID-19 relief funds for program design, implementation, and ongoing quality improvement efforts. As shown in the results of the external evaluation, this innovative approach and coordination among ION, ICfL, and STEM AC has provided important supplemental support to address the academic and social-emotional needs of Idaho's youth.

The Idaho Landscape and the Four-Day School Week

Idaho, like many western states, is experiencing population growth and changing demographics (Vos, 2022). These changes have contributed to an evolving landscape when considering the needs of youth and families, and the Idaho statewide OST team took this into account when developing the various COVID-19 OST grant programs. One of the most prominent considerations for OST programs in Idaho is the growing shift toward four-day school weeks. While four-day school weeks were historically more common in rural communities as a cost-saving measure, the rise of four-day school weeks in Idaho and other states coincided with the Great Recession of 2008-2009. Since then, many more school districts across the U.S. have transitioned to four-day weeks, including urban communities (Heyward, 2018; Thompson et al., 2021).

In addition to potential financial savings for schools, some anecdotal evidence has suggested that four-day school weeks can support higher school attendance among students, as well as fewer absences among teachers (Kingsbury, 2008; Turner, 2010; Donis-Keller & Silvertail, 2009; Heyward, 2018). However, the results are mixed when considering the impact on learning for students. Most studies of four-day school weeks have used a non-experimental design (e.g., case studies), limiting the ability to make casual connections between four-day school weeks and student outcomes (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Heyward, 2018; Thompson et al., 2021). One study that used school-level data from Colorado found a positive relationship between a four-day school week and students' academic performance, but this effect only held true for the first two years of implementing a four-day week (Anderson & Walker, 2015).

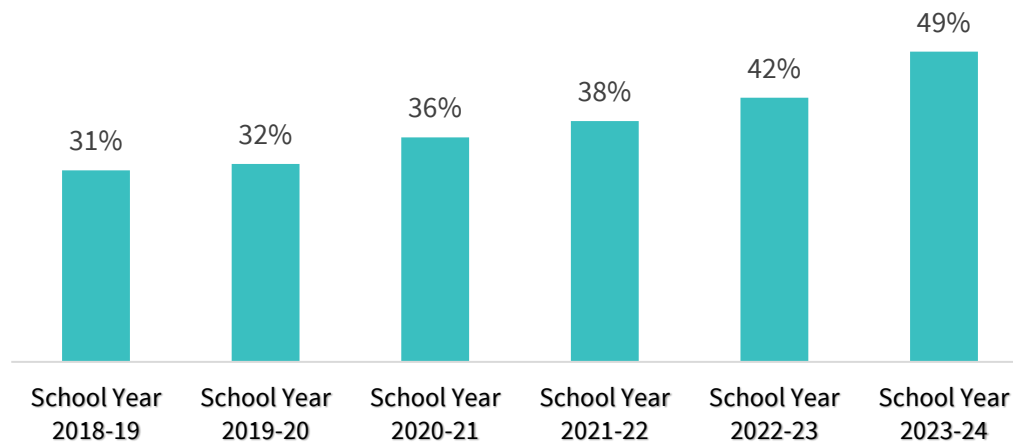
There are also various implementation challenges to consider in communities that transition to a four-day school week, including childcare options for families when school is not in session, longer days for younger students, and the possibility of food insecurity for families from low-income backgrounds (Donis-Keller & Silvertail, 2009; Kilburn et al., 2021). Little is known about the impact of four-day school weeks on families and the larger community, and more research is needed to address this gap in the literature (Heyward, 2018). For example, while some feel that there is untapped potential for schools implementing four-day weeks to use the fifth day of the week for student enrichment activities, there is currently no research on this topic (Heyward, 2018).

In Idaho, many school communities have recently switched, or are planning to switch, to a four-day school week. Some rural communities have been implementing a four-day school week for over 20 years, including Butte County School District. For the 2024-25 school year, close to 100,000 students in Idaho will attend a school with a four-day week. Idaho's fourth-largest school district, Nampa School District, made this transition for the 2024-25 school year, representing the most urban district in the state to implement a four-day school week. Currently, 40 of Idaho's 44 counties include districts with four-day school weeks (Richert, 2024). Given this growing trend, the 2023-2024 OST grant evaluation included questions for families and program managers about four-day school weeks to better understand how funded OST programs across Idaho are considering the four-day school week landscape. Evaluation findings also provide some ideas and strategies for how OST programs can partner with local schools to support students and families in communities with four-day weeks.

For the 2023-24 School Year in Idaho, 49% of Idaho's public-school districts and charter schools were planning on a four-day school week (Idaho Department of Education, n.d.). Figure 1 shows the

increase over the past six years in Idaho’s public schools and charter schools planning on offering a four-day school week.

Figure 1. Percentage of Idaho public schools and charter schools planning a four-day school week



Source: [Data](#) from the [Idaho Department of Education website](#)

Evaluation Methods

The 2023-24 statewide evaluation of the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL out-of-school time grants used a variety of data sources to address six evaluation questions related to program implementation, quality, benefits, and sustainability:

- *To what degree were the programs implemented as intended and aligned with quality program standards (e.g., Building Blocks)?*
- *To what degree were the desired outcomes achieved?*
- *What factors supported or served as barriers to successful program implementation and progress toward outcomes?*
- *What were the lessons learned about supporting successful implementation and outcomes?*
- *To what extent is the program, or aspects of its content, design or delivery, likely to be valuable in other settings? How exportable is it?*
- *What is the likelihood that the programs can be sustained or expanded/scaled in the future with limited additional resources?*

These evaluation questions were developed collaboratively by the UEPC and ION teams and guided both the development of the data collection instruments and the analysis of the data. To address these questions, data were collected through surveys of ION funded OST program staff and participating students, interviews and focus groups with program managers from ION, ICfL, and STEM AC funded programs, and a review of documents/data collected by the three funding organizations. STEM AC and ICfL leaders decided not to administer surveys to their funded OST program staff and families, as they believed the focus group and interview questions would provide the data they sought regarding program implementation, outcomes, and future program sustainability.

Data Sources & Participants

This evaluation included a variety of qualitative and quantitative data from the three organizations and their respective OST grant awardees. These data sources, along with the number of respondents for each, are listed in Table 3 and described in further detail below.

Table 3. Idaho 2023-24 OST evaluation data sources

Data Source	Number of Participants
ION Funded OST Program Staff Survey Respondents	59
ION Funded OST Program Family Survey Respondents	70
ION Funded OST Program Manager Interviews	26
ICfL Funded OST Program Manager Focus Groups/Interviews	19
STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager Focus Groups/Interviews	23

Document Review and Secondary Data (ION, ICfL, STEM AC)
Approved OST grant applications
Mid-year and end-of-year progress reports
Review of ION site visit documentation (only programs identified for on-site visits by ION team)

To increase response rates for the staff and family surveys (ION grantees), as well as focus group and interview participation (ION, STEM AC, and ICfL grantees), the UEPC team discussed the data collection plan with program managers during grant orientation meetings, sent reminder emails to program managers during the months of data collection, and discussed the family and staff surveys with ION program managers at the end of the focus groups and interviews. In addition, the UEPC provided the family survey in both English and Spanish and made a paper version available for program managers to print for families who did not have access to online versions. For the focus groups and interviews, the UEPC sent emails to program managers requesting their participation,

along with a list of possible days and times for them to select. If none of the options listed worked with program managers' schedules, the UPEC coordinated with individual program managers to find a day and time that worked for each of them.

ION Grant Recipient School Year Enrichment Program Staff Survey

The UEPC administered an online survey to staff members of programs receiving ION's School Year Enrichment (SYE) grant. The survey focused on program staff's experiences, professional development needs, perceptions of program services, communication with families, and perceived impact on students' academic and social-emotional learning. The staff survey was programmed in Qualtrics to be completed on a computer or mobile device, and the UEPC sent the staff survey link to each ION School Year Enrichment program manager in the spring of 2024 as the program year was ending. Program managers were asked to distribute the link to all staff who work directly with students during the program, including other program leaders, classroom teachers, and volunteers. Across all ION programs, there were 59 completed staff surveys representing 11 of the 19 programs (58%). The number of responses for each program ranged from 0 to 13. The number of completed staff surveys by program is included in Appendix A.

Staff survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented visually to best represent response patterns and comparisons. Frequencies for Likert-scale items include the "I don't know" option because it can be informative to understand what staff may not know about their program or participating students. In some cases, staff survey questions were identical to family survey questions to allow for a comparison of perceptions between the two groups. Responses to open-ended staff survey items were coded using focused methods (Saldaña, 2016) and were thematically integrated into this report.

ION Grant Recipient School Year Enrichment Program Family Survey

The UEPC also administered an online survey to family members of students who participated in ION's School Year Enrichment (SYE) OST programs. The survey focused on family perceptions of program services, staff, communication, benefits for students, and family involvement in the program. The family survey was programmed in Qualtrics to be completed on a computer or mobile device, and it was available in both English and Spanish. Some program managers requested a paper version of the survey so that they could print copies for families who did not have access to the internet. The UEPC sent the family survey link to each program manager in the Spring of 2024 and asked them to disseminate the link to families of their registered students. Across all ION programs, there were 70 completed family surveys representing 16 of the 19 programs (84%). The number of responses for each program ranged from 0 to 15. The number of completed family surveys by program is included in Appendix A.

Family survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented visually to best represent response patterns and comparisons. Frequencies for Likert-scale items include the "I don't know" option because it can be informative to understand what families may not know about their students or the program. Similar to the staff survey, responses to open-ended survey items were coded using focused methods (Saldaña, 2016) and were thematically integrated into this report.

ION, ICfL, and STEM Action Center Grant Recipient Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to the quantitative data collected through the staff and family surveys, the UEPC team conducted focus groups and interviews with OST program managers receiving grant funds from the three organizations. The UEPC conducted individual interviews with the program managers from the ION School Year Enrichment programs and focus groups with program managers from ION Single Semester Enrichment programs. To coordinate the individual interviews, the UEPC provided blocks of time during the work week that they were available for 30-minute interviews and asked the program managers to select a time slot that best suited their schedules. For the ION Single Semester Enrichment Grant focus groups, the UEPC team provided several 45-minute focus group options for the program managers to select one to attend. If the focus group options did not align with their availability, the UEPC coordinated with these program managers to schedule an individual interview. These interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, audio recorded, and transcribed, and transcripts were coded deductively and inductively using initial and focused methods (Saldaña, 2016). A codebook was developed based on concepts from the evaluation questions and OST grant objectives. Data that did not align with these concepts were coded inductively, using program managers' language and experiences. Codes were then organized into categories and themes in relation to the evaluation questions.

For the ICfL programs, the UEPC conducted individual interviews with the program managers for the ICfL planning grants and scheduled focus groups with the program managers from the ICfL programming grants. The grant awards for the ICfL planning grants were substantially higher, ranging from \$8,000 to \$15,000, while the programming grants were all \$3,000. The UEPC also used the grant budgets to determine which STEM AC school year OST program managers were asked to participate in individual interviews or focus groups. Most STEM AC program managers were invited to participate in focus groups, while those with combined STEM AC grant funds (from both STEM AC school year grants) over \$85,000 were asked to participate in individual interviews. Program managers from STEM AC and ICfL school year OST programs who were unable to participate in any of the focus group options were invited to participate in a brief individual interview at a time that aligned with their availability. These focus groups and interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, and UEPC interviewers recorded detailed notes throughout and after the conversations. These notes were analyzed to identify key insights and themes within and across ICfL and STEM AC grantees based on the evaluation questions.

All interviews and focus groups were designed to ask program managers about their specific uses of the OST grant funds and an explanation of the program services provided during the 2023-24 school year. Other topics for these discussions included successes and challenges of the OST programs related to both implementation and outcomes, lessons learned for the next school year, and opportunities or barriers with regard to sustaining, expanding, and scaling the OST programs to continue to meet the needs of students and families in their communities. A total of 68 OST program managers from programs funded by all three organizations participated in these focus groups and interviews. The qualitative data from focus groups and interviews across the organizations formed the basis for the overarching findings presented in this report. These findings are corroborated and supplemented by relevant quantitative data, as appropriate; however, the survey data is only representative of ION programs, as discussed previously.

Document Review and Secondary Data

In addition to the ION grant recipient staff and family surveys, and the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL grant recipient funded focus groups and interviews, the UEPC reviewed secondary data for this statewide evaluation. These secondary data included approved OST grant applications, mid-year progress reports, and end-of-year grant reports completed by OST program managers for their appropriate funding organizations. Finally, the UEPC reviewed program site visit reports completed by the ION team as they visited programs around the state throughout the school year. These site visit reports include notes on program observations, budget discussions with administrators, formative progress towards program goals, and student discussions (e.g., What do students enjoy about the program? How is the program helping them?)

Limitations of Data Collection

There were multiple limitations to the data that were collected as part of this evaluation. First, as determined during initial meetings with the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL Executive Directors, only the ION OST programs received family and staff survey links to distribute to their program managers. Additionally, because we did not have information on how many total families and staff were associated with each ION-funded OST program, we were not able to calculate response rates for these family and staff surveys. Therefore, we do not know how well the survey data represents all families and staff in each program. Furthermore, some OST programs had no responses to the family and/or staff surveys (see Appendix A), and we are unsure whether the low response was due to program managers not distributing the survey links, families and staff choosing not to engage in data collection activities, barriers related to survey accessibility (e.g., internet access), or other factors. Another limitation was that students' perspectives were not directly included in data collection activities. While ION staff were able to talk to some students during their site visits to select programs, these programs—as well as the students they talked to—were randomly selected or representative of all programs and students. Finally, the data collected for this evaluation were retrospective, as opposed to assessing program quality and student outcomes both before and after program implementation.

Evaluation Findings

The evaluation findings shared in this section reflect themes supported by multiple data sources across the ION, STEM Action Center, and ICfL OST programs during the 2023-24 school year. Organized by the six evaluation questions, the evaluation findings represent both qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout this past year. It is important to note that family and staff survey data were only collected from the ION OST programs, not for the STEM AC and ICfL programs, as explained above.

1) To what degree were the programs implemented as intended and aligned with quality standards?

To apply for the OST grants from ION, STEM AC, and/or ICfL, program managers submitted applications where they shared the needs in their communities that warranted the proposed OST programs and the specific services to be provided to youth and families using the grant funds. During the evaluation interviews and focus groups, the UEPC asked program managers from all three funding

organizations to describe their successes and challenges related to program implementation and how the implementation of their program services deviated from their original approved grant applications, if at all.

Below is a summary of the findings from the focus groups and interviews and a review of the approved grant applications regarding the degree to which the OST programs were implemented as intended. In addition to implementing their planned services, program teams were encouraged to align these OST services with the *Building Blocks for Out of School Time Quality* (discussed in the report introduction). The Building Blocks include eight key areas to assess OST program quality: (1) Intentional Program Design; (2) Supportive Relationships and Environments; (3) Youth Voice, Leadership, and Engagement; (4) Responsiveness to Culture and Identity; (5) Community, School, and Family Engagement; (6) Organizational and Leadership Management; (7) Ongoing Staff Support and Volunteer Development; and (8) Youth Safety and Wellness. (Please refer to the findings under *What Factors Supported or Served as Barriers to Successful Implementation and Progress Towards Outcomes* for additional information on how the Building Blocks were instrumental to successfully implementing many OST program services.) Throughout the findings shared below, we will refer to some of these Building Block areas to highlight the efforts of program teams to align their programs with this tool to strengthen the quality of their services.

1a) Most OST programs were implemented as planned, addressing academic learning loss, social-emotional needs, and exposing youth to new activities and experiences.

Most program teams receiving OST grants from ION, STEM AC, and ICfL generally implemented program services described in their original grant applications, reflecting attention to the Building Block: *Intentional Program Design*. While specific youth and program goals varied by program and funding organization, program teams aimed to provide some degree of academic activities to mitigate learning loss from the COVID-19 pandemic. These activities varied across programs, such as the Idaho Battle of the Books reading programs, literacy instruction for students who are English learners, and academic and homework support for program participants.

In addition to academic activities, several program teams offered services to support the social-emotional needs of program participants, including activities and lessons focusing on positive relationships and life skills. These intentional services also reflect the teams' awareness of the Building Block: *Supportive Relationships and Environments*. Finally, several OST programs representing all three funding organizations provided participants with new, engaging activities they might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience, such as winter outdoor camps, family STEM nights, and fine arts classes. Consistent with the Building Block: *Youth Voice, Leadership, and Engagement*, several program teams embraced the opportunities to offer these new experiences for their participants and their families. Exposing program participants to new experiences was also important to the families of program participants, as 98% of family survey respondents *agreed* that attending the OST program provided new experiences for their children.

While most OST program teams implemented program services as intended and described in their grant applications, the few that deviated from their original plans did so due to unavoidable challenges and rare circumstances, such as difficulties recruiting and retaining enough program staff. In these circumstances, the OST program managers worked closely with the funding organizations to

update their program service plan and implement those amended services as soon as possible. The following comments by ION, STEM AC, and ICfL program managers during interviews and focus groups illustrate how many OST teams intentionally provided program services to address these grant goals.

Academic Support and Literacy Activities

The grant-funded enrichment programs provided afterschool learning opportunities to support students' academic and personal growth, focusing on students needing additional support. Participants perceived programs like the Idaho Battle of the Books and the "Book Buddies" reading club as fostering engagement, strengthening literacy skills, and helping students feel connected and confident with reading. These initiatives addressed diverse needs, from foundational literacy for English learners to goal-based learning that ensured students met grade-level standards. Notably, the programs emphasized learning beyond the school day, with qualified, passionate staff guiding students in the OST learning opportunities.

- *I think it went really well for the first year of implementation. An important value that we hold at (school/program) is around equity, and I think that this addition to the school day with quality afterschool learning opportunities **really allows us to live out that vision of providing a little bit extra for the kids who need it the most.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *And then we also wanted to install the IBOB program, and so **we did the Idaho Battle of the Books**, and it was so much fun, and we were able to use the money for purchasing the books. And then we also were able to purchase next year's books, which is fantastic. We got a jumpstart on that. -ICFL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*
- *We have students who aren't able to meet their goals and grade level standards quite yet. So, we also use those monies to be able to support those types of afterschool programs that get our kids to be there and keep our kids there and actually progress monitor them through our essential standards **to make sure that every kid, when they leave our system or move grade to grade, that they have a sense of accomplishment that they can build upon for the next year.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *We have a big population of English learners and most of them are newcomers. **We are wanting to provide them with the literacy skills foundation that will help them to be successful in school.** Our goal was to help them to feel engaged in the learning process, to feel that they matter, and they're connected with the tutors and also with the language since it's really hard to bring in. We're trying to help them to be successful in the school. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *...Through the ICFL grant, we were able to set up an after school reading club, and we call it (School) Book Buddies, where we have about 55, 56 kids that were kind of selected through the teachers that needed some additional help with reading. **The overall goal of the program was to help them feel comfortable with books and reading.** And we partnered with the librarian here at (School) Elementary School. -ICFL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*

- *The biggest issue is, again, we want to make sure the kids' learning is not just taking place bell to bell. It is extraordinarily important that we have a highly qualified, highly passionate person in front of them. **However, the real learning takes place in application. It's how we work through the knowledge base that they create over time and how they develop it to be able to apply it in their real-world context.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

Social-Emotional Supports

Focus group and interview participants described several ways their OST teams implemented social-emotional supports for youth and families. These included partnering with local counselors to support the program participants as needed, providing youth with access to approved books on various social emotional topics, and developing a support network of local youth and families new to the educational system.

- *We already have a very well-established after-school program. And so, I use the funds ...to **provide books of a social and emotional nature** to those kids that attend the after-school program. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*
- *We just had a **counselor who was just readily available...** And so, the after-school program, she would just walk around to each of them and just **see if any of the kids needed any additional support.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *We did have some behavioral issues that we've never had before. And so, we have a community schools' partner that comes in with Central Idaho Counseling, and **he does private counseling on Tuesdays and now Mondays and Tuesdays, he's now up to two days.** And so, we contracted with **Central Idaho Counseling** to have him come in and observe the staff and tell us how we were triggering the kids, what we could do that would be different, giving us suggestions about exchanges we were having with particular students. So, it was very much a classroom management improvement, because we just kept thinking we were doing things that were obviously triggering the kids, and we didn't see them. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

This program is offering **social and educational support** for my daughter, who doesn't get many positive social opportunities with her peers.

-Family Survey Respondent

- *So, imagine the language barrier, the cultural barrier, just the multiple, multiple barriers... new school system that people are having to learn about. So that's kind of what provided the impetus for creating the (name of program) with the idea of **providing academic enrichment and social-emotional learning (SEL) support for children, for students, as well as provide a network where parents can also come in and be supported in supporting their students.** So, parents come in and learn about how to navigate the school system, how to deal with bullying, how to access school administrators, how to pretty much be more proactive in advocating for their children. So those were all lessons that resettled families needed to learn in order to build their capacity to better support their students. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

New Experiences and Activities

Focus group and interview participants described several ways in which their OST teams provided new experiences and activities for the youth and families of their programs. These included winter and spring break recreational trips, rock climbing, fly fishing, and other experiential activities. The program managers also described the lessons learned by the participants as part of the new experiences/skills, such as facing your fears, developing self-confidence, setting goals, and taking pride in learning new skills.



*98% of family survey respondents agreed that attending the OST program **provided new experiences for their child.***

- *...I teach at the lowest income middle school in Nampa. And then Nampa is also a Title I district, and it's pretty expensive to take kids up there (local recreational area). So, when more affluent schools go, their PTOs or the kids' parents just pay the 300-something dollars per student. **And we were hoping to not have to charge our kids at all, because we knew that the ones that needed it most would definitely not be able to cover that. And that's pretty much what we used it for.*** -STEM AC Funded OST Grant Manager
- *As part of our environmental education programs, we run a program, which is a **winter ecology and snow science field trip program.** And we wanted to expand this and provide more opportunities outside of school so that we could get groups up here on spring break. Last year, we started this (Program Name) spring break camp and we wanted to continue that this year. And we wanted to create a STEM focus with it...We used the funding to get **STEM equipment that we could use for the camp.*** -STEM AC Funded OST Grant Manager
- *To see how the kids improved in the numeric difficulty of the climbing that they were doing. And what was especially cool with that was that you could really see **self-confidence growing as the program progressed.** We had a number of kids who right at the beginning, jumped on the wall and were ready to go and into it. **And had some kids who were really afraid as it's going up high heights.** And maybe they would make it 10, 20 feet off the ground and then they wanted to come down. And so with those kids, it was really cool to see how by the end of the program, **they had been working on it for weeks and then they were able to get all the way up there...every one of the kids got up on the wall and progressed past where they had been previously.** It was really cool to see the **kids grow in confidence in their sense that, "Okay, I can do this even though it's scary."*** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager
- *When we took the kids out fishing, 24 kids, and **some of them have never caught a fish** before. And then some of the comments from the (participants) they're just like..."Oh, **now I got something to do when I'm bored.**" Or "Maybe I can start a business doing fly tying," ...And then the one that really, I thought was great, he goes, "**Oh, when I get home, I can go fishing with my grandpa.**" And I thought, "That's what it's about. **That is really what it's about.**"* -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager

1b) Several program teams used smaller OST grant awards (\$1,000-\$15,000) to purchase needed supplies, to increase staffing in order to serve more youth, and for targeted outreach to extend services to more youth and families in their communities.

Several programs received smaller OST grants from ION, STEM AC, and ICfL, ranging from \$1,000 to \$15,000. These funds allowed teams to expand OST services, reaching more youth and families, purchase essential STEM supplies and books, and hire additional staff to improve staff-to-student ratios. The following sections highlight representative quotes for each of the sub-themes.

Program Materials and Supplies

The grants enabled programs to purchase durable STEM supplies and educational materials, supporting hands-on learning and outreach for students with limited access to resources like microscopes and other STEM tools. These funds also enhanced library engagement through activities like book clubs and giveaways, fostering interest and involvement in library programs.

- ***And then I included some money to get some tools or things that could be put in place, so I'm not going and collecting bottle caps all the time. And we don't have any stores up here, really, that you can go get. We have a little hardware store or something, but usually you have to be ready in advance. So, I wanted to get some things to do additional STEM (activities) so people could fill in for me. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager***
- ***...With the (grant) money we were able to buy long-lasting STEM supplies that we were able to take to some places. For instance, you'd be surprised how many elementary kids have never used a microscope these days. So, to be able to purchase microscopes to take to outreach programs and things like that, for them to be able to experience there, as well as for some of our in-house programs, just improving the quality of the stuff that we're able to provide... -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager***
- ***I would say for us, we wanted to do more programming, other things to get our kids interested in the library, like with Battle the Books, and our book club, and giving away books. Just anything to get them in here and interested in some of our programs. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager***

Additional Program Staff

The grants enabled programs to expand. Funding was primarily used to hire and support staff, including tutors, peer mentors, and parent mentors who provided guidance and peer support. Additional funds were allocated for travel and professional development, ensuring well-trained personnel and resources to meet program goals.

- ***We expanded our program so that we didn't have to turn anyone away. And our original grant to run our 21st Century Program allowed us to have 36 students participate with the staff ratios and things like that, and we were able to serve over 320 students because we expanded. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager***

- *The rest of it (grant funding) was to pay tutors. So, **we had peer mentors...** We looked for children in higher grades that are doing very well in school, so like high school students and things like that to tutor the lower grades. And then we also had parent mentors, so parents who have successfully navigated the school system and are able to **walk other parents through this system, just creating that peer support network...** So a lot of that money went into paying the mentors. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *Most of it (OST grant funding) was to support staff (program positions). We had some travel dollars and for professional development. **Mostly it was for staff, a little bit supplies...** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

Targeted Outreach to Youth and Families

The grants supported more access to STEM activities by providing take-home kits for students to complete with family or at school. Additionally, funding expanded after-school programs for refugee youth, increasing the frequency of sessions from once a week to twice. Another grant allowed for an extension of program services from three to five days a week, enabling more consistent engagement with students.

- *We've been working on equity...and so we wanted every kid to be able to create one (STEM lab) either at home with their families or have the option to do it with us. And so, we provided them for our STEM night, so kids could either take home a kit that was ready to go, they just needed to have a glue gun at home...We had cut them so that they didn't need any other tools except a glue gun. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *So, for our funds, we were able to offer an after-school program for refugee youth... It's a partnership that we've been working on.... So, **we would see the students after school two days a week for two hours each time.** We were excited that **with this funding we could increase the dosage and the frequency that we were able to see the kids.** Last spring, it was just a one time a week situation for three weeks. So, this time we got to see them for a lot more, which was great. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *Yes, the grant helped us to extend what we've set in place with another grant. **So, we've extended our services to Monday through Friday rather than it was just three days.** So, the ION (grant) enabled us to add on two more days to our work week with the children. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

1c) Several OST programs receiving larger grant awards (\$20,000-\$250,000) used the grant funds to add additional hours/days to their existing programs or scale their current OST programs to other communities in response to specific youth and family needs.

Several OST programs received larger grants (\$20,000 to \$250,000) from ION, STEM AC, and ICfL, which they used to expand services by adding hours or full days to their schedules. This included morning open gyms, after-school meals, and full-day program services on non-school days. Some programs

addressed unmet needs in their communities, while others extended services to nearby areas.¹ The comments below offer some insight into how program teams used their larger grant funds to address these needs.

- *I think our most important goal was just **meeting the needs of the community**. So, there is no afterschool program or any kind of program out in (town), so **there is a need out there for students who need extra support, whether that be social, emotional or academic or really just a safe place to be**. And so, it was really just being able to provide that need and be in the community and kids having access to it. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *.. I used our (grant) funds to buy different supplies and different activities that we can take to elementary schools...the PTA provides food, because that's how you get people places, and then I bring the games and activities. So, **we're just engaging the parents in STEM, showing them what STEM is, what the career opportunities are, and we just start that conversation so they're aware with elementary groups**. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *Part of it (OST grant) was (used) to fund our Friday school program. We're a four-day school week here...and have been for 11 years. And that's funded three teachers and bought a lot of supplies and materials for them **to run a program from eight o'clock to two-thirty on most Fridays**. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *...It was a small, little weightlifting program and we expanded it to open up the gym and get students moving before school. That was the biggest impact on our program with how many students accessed it. Because the students were already coming to go to school...The before school option was... we have all of these students here already. They're coming to class, just kind of dragging and laying their head on the desk. **So, we engaged them before school, we did chess, we had a chess club, we had a breakfast club where they would eat breakfast and then do different games and social activities**. And then we had an activity, a physical activity in the gym. And it was amazing to see the difference. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *...When we start (OST program) in the fall, a normal day would be from about 3:00 to 5:15 {p.m.}, but in the fall we add, we call it the **Harvest Dinner for our students after program because a lot of the parents are working the harvest**. So, from about... we usually start the middle of September till that first week in November, we offer that Harvest Dinner, so our hours actually go from 3:00 to 6:00 {p.m.}. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

2) To what degree were the desired OST outcomes achieved?

In addition to describing the planned program services on their original applications for the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL OST grants, applicant teams were asked to outline specific program and/or youth outcomes that they hoped to achieve by implementing those specific services. During the evaluation interviews and focus groups, the UEPC asked program managers to describe their teams' progress

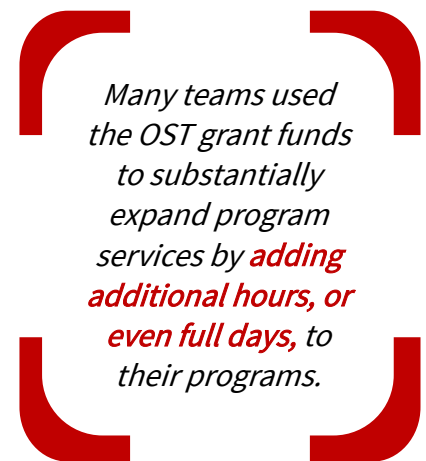
¹ Please refer to the findings under *To What Extent are the Programs, or Aspects of their Content, Design, or Delivery, Likely to be Valuable in Other Settings* for additional discussion regarding four-day school weeks.

toward their original program outcomes. Families were also surveyed about their perceptions of the degree to which program outcomes were met.

Below we describe the ways in which the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL OST program teams reported progress in meeting desired outcomes for the youth and families they served, including interview and survey responses about (1) the range of program outputs achieved and (2) the ways in which academic and social-emotional outcomes were achieved. This is followed by a summary of family survey responses about the academic and social-emotional outcomes achieved.

2a) Several OST program teams reported success in achieving goals that were focused on specific program outputs (e.g., expanding the number of program participants, providing more books to youth and families, expanding outreach of STEM activities to more families).

As program managers explained their team’s momentum towards achieving their desired OST program goals, several described their goals as focused on increasing numbers of youth participants, families, or outreach activities. This aligns with the implementation findings shared in the previous section about some OST programs using their grant funds to focus on targeted outreach to additional youth and families. These “output” goals for program teams receiving smaller grant awards to purchase additional books for the reading program or distribute STEM take-home kits to additional families in the community were generally reported by program managers as successful during the interviews and focus groups. The following illustrative comments reflect the range of successes reported by program managers and provide specific examples of such output goals.



*Many teams used the OST grant funds to substantially expand program services by **adding additional hours, or even full days**, to their programs.*

- *So (school name) is a small school, so I had 30 families come (to STEM Nights), which doesn't sound like a lot, but when that's over 60% of the school, I consider that a big win. (School name), I think I counted 80 families, roughly 80 students, and (school name) was roughly 70 as well. **So, we're getting right around 40 to 50% of the families to come, which has been really good.** I didn't think we'd get that high, but I think, like I said, the enticement of food helped, and then just that activity, that interaction. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *...Those (youth) who did participate in our education services in that 33-week cycle, we were able to help **31 students achieve their GED (General Education Diploma) and HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate).** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *...What I did with part of the money is made a **little free library type of situation where the kids can come and get books and be reading...** We're doing something along those lines that will just be right outside the school that the kids can come and exchange books all year. -ICfL Funded Programming Grant Manager*

2b) Several program managers and staff reported progress on planned outcomes related to academic support and social emotional growth for program participants.

As part of the OST staff survey for the ION School Year Enrichment (SYE) grantee teams, staff respondents were asked about their perceptions of participants’ progress related to academic and behavioral outcomes. Two-thirds (66%) of SYE staff respondents indicated that participants in their programs improved in homework and class participation, while almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents indicated the same improvements in student behavior.

As many OST program teams had program goals focused on social-emotional growth for program participants (also aligning with the grant goals for two of the funding organizations), data indicated that some progress was made in this area as well. SYE staff survey questions related to SEL were drawn from the [CASEL \(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning\) Framework](#), which highlights five SEL competencies and associated resources that are used throughout the country to study the connection between SEL and student success. SYE staff survey respondents were asked to identify whether or not participants in their OST programs had improved in each of the five SEL competencies. As shown in Figure 2 below, SYE staff survey respondents overwhelmingly reported participant improvement in each of the five SEL competencies.

Figure 2. Percentage of SYE staff survey respondents who reported improvement in participants’ social-emotional learning competencies



Source: ION Grant Recipient Staff Survey; N=58

While the STEM AC and ICfL OST program teams did not participate in the staff surveys, many of their program managers discussed their teams' progress towards their academic and social-emotional growth outcomes during the interviews and focus groups. Their perceived momentum towards achieving their desired goals is illustrated through the comments below, which also include the perspectives of SYE program managers.

Progress Towards Academic Outcomes

OST program managers described progress towards academic outcomes that included feedback from school day teachers about participant progress, improved student test scores, and increased reading fluency and grade-level accuracy. In addition, they described improvements in students' overall attitudes about attending school during the day.

- *The feedback that we've received, I polled the teachers that kind of provided those names of kids that could use a leg up, so to speak, and the **feedback that I've received from those teachers has been outstanding. Increased ISAT scores, more fluency with reading and not trying to sound out every word but having more fluency.** I talked with the (school) librarian, and she said that some of the kids are asking to check out books that they never would've checked out before and are more responsible in returning books. So yeah, we've had a really good response, I think, from it. -ICfL Funded Programming Grant Manager*
- *We have worked a lot with the deaf kids, helping them develop competence in things that they may have never even heard of before because so many of our kids are behind, they're not on grade level because they come to us with... They're on a lower grade level because of their lack of early communication, so they're coming here to learn. **We've got high school kids that are reading on a second-grade level. So, it's been so cool to work with them introducing these different things (STEM activities), and you can tell when they get it, it's... I get emotional. It's so cool because at first a lot of them are scared because they failed so often and they were told that they're a failure from their earliest days because they failed their hearing tests when they were first born, they can't hear or see like other kids and they're scared to try new things because they're just thinking, "This is going to be another thing I can't do. This is going to be another thing I don't understand." So, it's so cool to see them when they catch on and then they get so excited about it.** -ICfL Funded Planning Grant Manager*

“
 We've had some families share that now **their kids are more excited to go to school and they're more willing to go to school** because it means that they can **come to our program** afterwards.
 -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager
 ”

Progress Towards Social-Emotional Outcomes

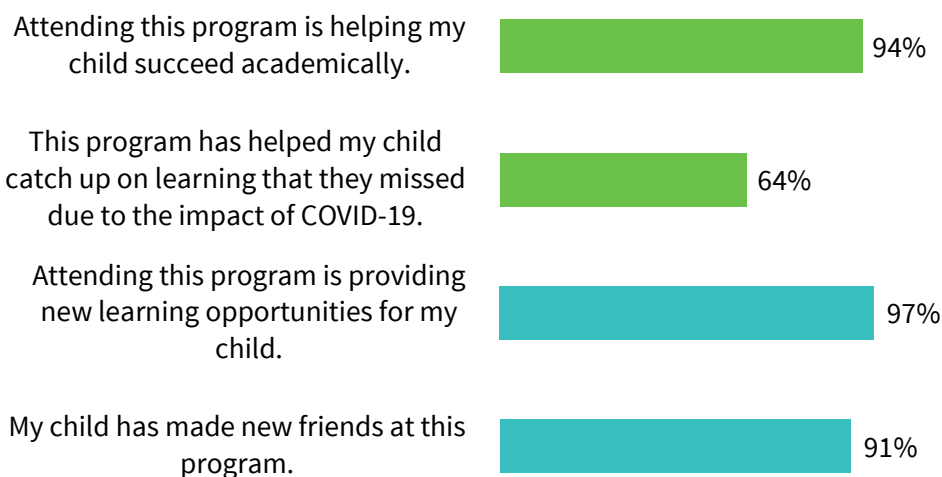
OST program managers described the progress towards social-emotional outcomes that they have observed in their programs. Examples of this progress includes improved positive behaviors and demonstration of respect for others, less aggression towards peers, and overall positive relationship skills.

- *We pick up youth who are 15 until 18, teach them how to behave well, staying away from deviant behavior, not to rush by driving without privilege and responsibility, how to respect authority figure. And some of them in middle, in high school, their school are the one who call us. Hey, we have two kiddos here, we have two youths who are not behaving well. Would you come and talk to them about what you do in the community? -STEM AC Funded OST Grant Manager*
- *For one thing, we have seen **significant behavioral changes**. I mean, we had some kids that were just high risk, high behavior type students. **We've seen quite a significant shift in their attitudes towards peer interactions and they're a lot less aggressive.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *Our target population is considered underserved youth, our at-risk youth, ages 14 to about 18 years old. Our primary targets are youth who are in the foster care system, **youth who are on juvenile probation, or just at-risk youth who might be prone to maybe getting involved in gangs or criminal activities** as well... (Staff) just spend quality time with our students, **build relationships** so that it goes far beyond just the teacher-student relationship. It turns into a mentor and family dynamic. I do believe that **what we're creating here is a family type dynamic and environment.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

2c) Family survey respondents of School Year Enrichment (SYE) programs reported progress toward academic and social emotional outcomes.

As part of the family survey administered within SYE programs, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a series of statements describing various desired program and youth outcomes, as shown in Figure 3 below.

*Figure 3. Percentage of SYE family survey respondents who agreed to the following items related to their student's **academic** and **social-emotional/life skills** outcomes*



Source: ION Grant Recipient Family Survey; N=68-69

Regarding academic outcomes, 94% of SYE family respondents agreed that the OST program helped their child academically, while 64% of SYE respondents agreed that the program helped their child catch up on learning that they missed due to the impact of COVID-19. It is important to note that 26% of SYE families reported not knowing whether the program helped their child catch up on learning or develop skills to overcome challenges from COVID-19. This suggests that four years after the onset of the pandemic, the ongoing connection between these OST program services and mitigating the long-term impacts of COVID-19 is not evident to some families. Overall, however, these data align with the intended goals of each funding organization's grant and support some of the academic progress described by several program managers during focus groups and interviews. Family survey respondents specifically highlighted students' progress in reading, mathematics, and classwork completion, as exemplified in the open-ended comments below.

- *It has really helped our daughter come to grade level in reading skills. We struggled with getting her to participate in reading activities at home, it became very stressful to both parent/child to address in our home. This program helped her improve her skills and confidence and she now enjoys reading.*
- *(The program provides) additional help in subjects- he struggles with math.*
- *Both of my kids have shown improvement in their classwork and in their classroom.*
- *It (OST program) was fun for him and helped him get better at math confidence and ability.*
- *Both of my children have done so well academically this year, I know that is because of the help they receive while they are there.*
- *My student learns math concepts in a different way and with older, "cool" students. He really thinks "math IS cool" because of the program.*

In addition to academic outcomes, ION family survey respondents also weighed in on the social-emotional/life skills experiences that the program provided for their children. These responses are also reflected in Figure 2 below. Overall, 97% of families strongly agreed or agreed that their OST program provided "new learning opportunities" for their child, while 91% reported that their child "made new friends while participating in the OST program." In open-ended comments, as shown below, family survey respondents described the importance of these outcomes, specifically noting their students' progress in self-expression, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills.

- *My child is learning new social skills, and how to control himself after a full day. He is also learning to express himself more fully.*
- *This program allows my child to excel in his communication skills and learning how to work with others.*
- *(My child has) Been building social connections in a smaller group which is very beneficial.*

3) What factors supported or served as barriers to successful program implementation and progress toward outcomes?

As OST programs were notified of their grant awards for the 2023-24 school year and began to provide services for youth and families, several factors impacted the implementation of these services. Guidance and technical assistance from ION, STEM AC, and the ICfL organization teams was a welcome support, particularly for new OST staff. The *ION Building Blocks* also served as a valuable resource for many ION and ICfL program teams focused on developing or enhancing program quality. However, some program teams discussed barriers to successful program implementation, such as providing transportation for program participants and staffing/personnel challenges. The following findings emerged from the program manager focus group and interview data, the ION family and staff survey data, and the end-of-year program manager reports regarding factors that supported and hindered successful OST program implementation.

3a) Most OST program teams reported being offered some degree of support by the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL organizational teams, such as initial grant planning and implementation guidance, finance and budgeting support, and/or ongoing technical assistance during the grant period, which they found beneficial in their efforts to implement quality program services.

Once program teams are awarded OST grants, it is typical for funding organizations to provide guidance and technical assistance during the grant period, particularly for new OST program managers and their staff. The guidance and support provided by the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL teams for these OST grants included resources such as virtual grant orientation webinars, guidance on setting up grant budgets according to the funding organizations' guidelines and allowable expenditures, scheduled site visits for program observations and technical assistance, and access to the ION online resource library. Program managers discussed their teams' experiences with the various support offered and provided by the grant funders in three specific areas, as described below: initial grant planning and implementation, finance and budgets, and ongoing program technical assistance.

Of all the grants I've had, this one was easiest and most helpful! This grant helped us to raise the bar for our program.

-ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager

Initial Grant Planning and Implementation

Program managers described their experiences regarding the support they received from the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL organization teams during their initial grant planning and implementation of program services. This support included ongoing accessibility and responsiveness of the funding teams, asset mapping discussions to help program teams identify strengths and opportunities, and ongoing encouragement to the program teams as they implemented new program services for youth and families.

- *I think that the support that they (ICfL organization team) have offered initially in the development stage of our program, they're very supportive in what we were trying to do and encouraging. -ICfL Funded Planning Grant Manager*

- *So, the ION (organization staff) were just wonderful. **They were very accessible.** I remember when we first started, **we literally were stuck, because so many things just fell apart.** And I, to go back, I had to go to them and go back to the drawing board and **just received so much support**, which I'm so grateful for. And **they just helped us recalibrate and do everything and, "Okay, try again. Try this again."** And then it worked the second time round. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *They've (ICfL organization team) been really supportive as far as when we had to change things. I know that (colleague) had to call them and explain them, and **they were really kind and understanding** about it. And then when we were doing the mapping... **the asset mapping (during planning and implementation) was really helpful.** -ICfL Funded Planning Grant Manager*
- *She (STEM AC administrator) **was super helpful in just laying out what would be available**, what we could use the funding for, and if I had questions...She was definitely very quick to answer them via email, **which was super helpful just as we were planning things out. So definitely a lot more help at the beginning ...but she was super helpful with that.** -STEM AC Funded Program Grant Manager*

Finance and Budgets

Some program managers described the support they received from the funding organizations around managing their grant finances. This included helping program teams to complete required budget forms according to funding organizations' guidelines, approving funds to a different allowable expense category, and appropriately spending excess grant funds. Regardless of the specific questions or needs, program managers appreciated the responsiveness and support of the funding teams.

- *I look back at the grant and **if I had any question marks or to fill out a budget section... something that allows you to move the funds from one category to a different category.** ...they (ICfL team) are on top of it. If I email either to (ICfL staff) they respond very quickly. Even if I get an email saying, "Hey, I'm out of the office until this date," and then two days later when it's still technically they're out of the office, I'll get a reply back saying, "Hey, this works," or "This doesn't work." **Whatever the question may be, they are really good at making me feel like I'm not alone, or in the dark.** -ICfL Funded Programming Grant Manager*
- *I've talked with them (ICfL organization team) because **we have some excess funds and how to use those** and maybe use those this summer to get ahead of next year's Battle of the Books to pre-purchase books for that sort of thing. **So, they've been supportive that way.** -ICfL Funded Planning Grant Manager*

Ongoing Program Technical Assistance

Program managers also shared their experiences with the ongoing technical assistance provided by the ION, STEM AC and ICfL organization teams. They discussed examples that included developing a program quality improvement plan, inviting and engaging funding staff in program events and accessing online tools and resources to strengthen their program services.

- *... I really, really appreciate going through the CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement) plan...I feel like we don't always sit down as professionals and really reflect the way that we should. And I felt like that was just a good time to sit down and reflect and to think about, "Okay, how are we doing?"... One of the other things that I've really appreciated, (ION organization staff) is just... the behavior trainings that she has done for (program name)... I've been able to ask her some specific questions about specific incidences and I've really appreciated her willingness to give me some ideas and thoughts and, "Here's some things that you could try with this particular youth." -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *She's (STEM AC organization staff) been amazing to work with, she actually comes to a lot of our nights if she's open. So, it's been great to work with her. She offers, "Hey, let me run a station." I bounced ideas off her. Just her availability and desire to see STEM grow in these areas has been amazing. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *We've had a site visit before. We've had a couple of check-ins virtually as well. I mean, the (online) Learning Academy is just wonderful. We've spent the last two weeks just going through some of the things and one of the things that we did that was very intentional was because we're working with a very nuanced population, we wanted to make sure that we're really going into this with a very curious mind... -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *Well, let me say that the ION team, they have such great resources... for the afterschool programs to be able to go through any type of training, any kind of questions. And of course, (ION organization staff) are great as far as consulting... -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

3b) Several ION program managers specifically referred to the Building Blocks as a valuable resource to help them identify areas for intentional improvement during program implementation.

During the interviews and focus groups, several ION program managers expanded on the resources and technical assistance provided by their funding organizations as they described the usefulness and impact of the Building Blocks tool during the initial implementation of program services. For some, it provided opportunities to identify where their team stood in relation to the eight areas, such as Youth Leadership. For others, it led their teams to focus on particular areas for program growth and develop actionable items leading to positive change. The following comments illustrate the impact that the Building Blocks tool had on some ION program teams during their implementation of OST program services.

- *Yeah, I was just going to say for (program name), the **Building Blocks** is a great thing to follow, and it really helps us know where we need to be more aware of. And the areas that we've really tried to improve on is that more parent involvement and then student voice. And those are two things that we've started to add more into our programs when we get a grant like this. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *...My staff, I think sometimes they think that it's like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I already know that stuff," but it's being able to give them... which ION does within those **Building Blocks**... is **tangible things to implement**. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *I wanted to go into **supportive relationships (Building Block)** and **environment (Building Block)** for my staff primarily. Something that I did this year that hasn't been done in years past is incorporating our fifth and sixth graders into the smaller groups, as those smaller age kids really respond to their cool upperclassmen as helping them engage, but that also empowers our fifth and sixth graders, so that **youth leadership and giving them voices to say, "Hey, I think we should do it this way," or, "We should add that,"** is definitely something that we can get better and better at, although this gives us a great platform to be able to tap into that a little bit more easy. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

3c) As part of their grant requirements, ICfL teams used the Building Blocks tool to identify areas for intentional continuous improvement during program implementation, setting SMART goals for the focus areas identified, and participating in targeted professional learning opportunities around these focus areas.

In their original grant applications and throughout their implementation of OST services for youth and families, the ICfL organizational team asked all their OST program teams to identify specific Building Blocks focus areas for self-assessment and reflection, development of goals for these focus areas, and participation in professional learning opportunities around these focus areas during the 2023-24 grant period. The ICfL program managers described their intentional use of the Building Blocks tool and the focus areas they addressed during the grant period on their end-of-year grant reports. The following comments from the year-end reports illustrate how ICfL program teams intentionally incorporated the *Building Blocks* tool into their implementation of OST program services. (For reference, the ICfL teams' specific Building Blocks focus area(s) are included in parentheses at the beginning of each comment.)

- ***(Intentional Program Design)** ...We purposely planned a variety of activities that covered many different subjects, we planned about 3 months ahead at a time, and we used visitors a lot so that the kids **heard different perspectives and were exposed to different ideas and teaching methods**. This worked very well for our program, and we plan on continuing using these ideas. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*
- ***(Intentional Program Design; Supportive Relationships and Environments)** ...The **Building Blocks for Out-Of-School** booklet gave me a **framework to develop a successful and all-inclusive program**. These tools gave me suggestions on the parameters I needed to explore to make this all work. **My population has so many unique needs**, as well as limited access to a wide range of learning in different STEM and physical education areas, so this **support was helpful as I worked to build my program**. - ICfL Funded OST Planning Grant Manager*

- ***(Intentional Program Design, Supportive Relationships and Environments)*** *With a clear focus with intentional programming, it helped to increase our program attendees as they had an idea each week what the program was going to be like. I will continue to keep a clear focus as to what we want teens and tweens to get out of our programs, that they are not only a safe place for teens but also a place for them to learn to take care of themselves and foster relationships with each other. As a result, I plan on keeping more continuity in teen programming, while I want to still provide activities that will appeal to a wide range of teens with different interests. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*
- ***(Youth Safety and Wellness, Supportive Relationships and Environments)*** *Our Building Block was a quality program that definitely enriched the active, social, and physical development of the students involved. It helped support relationships building by mixing age generations together while providing a very welcoming environment. It provided a secure place and helped establish belonging to a challenged youth. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*
- ***(Intentional Program Design, Responsiveness to Culture and Identity)*** *The Building Blocks are really helpful for planning, and then reflecting, on the programs. While I feel like we do a good job with this particular building block, the process helped me see where we can continue to grow... in the self-assessment summary I found that we fall short in recognizing and celebrating each other's heritage and culture, as well as training our staff for cultural competency and self-awareness of equity issues. While I really believe that we celebrate student differences, and welcome all students, I will provide more formal training on these building blocks for our program advisors... -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*

3d) Some program teams and families reported the lack of transportation for OST program participants as a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas. Others mentioned implementation challenges due to changes in program staff and grant/district personnel.

While several program managers identified factors that led to the successful implementation of OST program services, some mentioned specific barriers that impeded their implementation of program services. One of the main challenges identified by both program managers and families was transportation for program participants to and from the OST programs, particularly in rural communities. Some program managers also mentioned changes in program staff and/or grant personnel as a challenge to successful program implementation.

Transportation

Some program managers described various challenges in providing transportation for OST program participants due to the distances travelled, as well as the cost to provide this important service. These challenges are illustrated through the following comments from program managers.

- *Well, for us, we are a district library also, and we follow lines of the school district. And like I said, the middle school's a little far away, so our biggest challenge has been transportation for them (program participants). -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*

- *Then **transportation is always a big hurdle**. So, we used funds for busing so that the kiddos could go back to the temporary housing that they're at, and then we create, we call them take-home STEAM bags... -STEM AC Funded Program Grant Manager*
- *So, it's a **drop-off, pickup**, (our program) **can't afford to do transportation**. So, parents drop off their children around eight o'clock in front of the school...And they come in and they have a snack, or they're offered a snack because some students haven't had breakfast yet. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

In addition to data from the program manager interviews and focus groups, ION family survey data also illustrated the issues with transportation for program participants. Family members who completed the ION OST program family survey were asked to rate their agreement with various statements about OST program services. Only 48% of family survey respondents agreed that “This program provides transportation for my child,” while the remaining 52% of respondents disagreed or did not know whether their program provided transportation. These survey data highlight timely opportunities for OST funding organizations, program managers, and OST teams to reassess the transportation needs of families in their communities. The following open-ended comments by ION family survey respondents provide additional insight into how important transportation to and from OST programs is for their families.

- *We are used to the 4-day (school week) shift. **If buses were available for Fridays**, they would be happy and could participate (in the OST program) that day while I’m at work.*
- *Friday school (OST program) **does not provide transportation to and from**. **If they did my kids would be able to attend that while I’m at work**. But the start and end time are when I’m already at work and before I am off work. **So, I am unable to get them there and back**.*
- *Just the **added amount of fuel each week for making a second trip in the afternoon**, to pick up both of my students, one who did not attend the program, and one who did.*

“
Offer some sort of **transportation home or to a few closer central locations** for those of us that have no car... those that live way farther than walking distance from school.
”

-Family Survey Respondent

Personnel Challenges

Some program managers discussed various personnel challenges that were also barriers to implementation, such as changes to district assignments, staff resignations, and hiring challenges. These challenges are further described through the comments below.

- *Well, there's a couple of little challenges... We had a **grant coordinator in our district who we had to reassign due to budget concerns** about halfway through the year. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *And then during the time, or maybe right before I left before Christmas, **our director announced that she was leaving, which was a huge blow**... then I came back... and it was really hard to find an assistant actually, even though we were paying. -ICfL Funded Programming Grant Manager*
- *And so... **trying to find someone who's willing to put in that extra 20, 25 hours for robotics is a bit more. It was challenging because most teachers have a million other things on their plates already.** -STEM AC Funded Grant Manager*

4) What were the lessons learned about supporting successful implementation and outcomes?

During the interviews and focus groups, OST program managers were asked to describe successes and challenges they encountered as they implemented program services. As part of this discussion, they were also asked about any lessons learned for the next time they plan and implement an OST program. One lesson learned regarding successful program implementation was the importance of community partnerships in meeting the needs of youth and families within their communities. Another lesson program managers learned was how developing relationships with families, seeking and listening to their feedback, and adjusting program services based on that feedback can have a large impact on families. Finally, program managers shared the importance of investing grant funds in needed supplies and materials that can be used for multiple program years. These lessons learned are explained further in the findings below and are supported by program manager focus group and interview data and the SYE family and staff survey data.

4a) Strategic partnerships with community organizations, families, and high school students were invaluable for OST program teams as they implemented program services for youth and families.

As OST program teams implemented their services for youth and families, several teams reached out to the community for support, including family members and local high school students. During the interviews and focus groups, program managers described the various ways in which the community supported the program activities, such as teaching the participants new skills and outdoor activities such as fly fishing, camping, or snow sports. Others mentioned the partnerships with their local school districts to provide healthy snacks for their program participants. Several program managers also mentioned their partnerships with families and high school students to serve as program volunteers or mentors to the younger program participants. Some program managers also discussed partnerships with larger community organizations, such as local University of Idaho Extension offices,

municipality offices, police departments, and museums. These strategic partnerships are described in more detail through the program manager comments below.

Partnerships with Community Organizations

Community partnerships were a welcome support for many OST program teams, providing services such as nutrition programs and hands-on history and science lessons. Program managers expressed appreciation for community members who continued to support the program in various capacities.

- *We also have **Eat Smart Idaho** that comes in **once a week with the different age groups**, and so they'll do a program with them all year long on Wednesdays as well. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *There're always **people in the community** that want to help out. **The mayor's really on board**. She's a big advocate of the after-school program, and so she's always **enlisted all the support of the police department**... - ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *I got a paleontologist from the **Museum of Natural History in Pocatello**, and they're coming to do a whole presentation on fossils. And **another scientist from ISU** who studies lungs and heart is coming to do a Saturday STEM. So, we're trying **to pull people in from the community who have expertise and education**. -ICfL Funded OST Programming Grant Manager*
- *I'm really encouraged by **my new-found partnership with the Rec District**, so I'm going to be **reaching out to other community members** to see if they will help me quarterly next school year... And that is a **direct result of seeing what we can do with community partnerships**. And I'm excited about that. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*

Partnerships with Families

Some OST program teams strategically sought support from families to implement their program services. In the examples below, program managers partnered with families in the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to engage in STEM activities, while others sought parent mentors for families new to the school district and community.

- *I use our funds to buy different supplies and different activities that we can take to elementary schools. So, we bring the parents in, **I join with the PTA**. The PTA provides food, because that's how you get people places, and **then I bring the games and activities**. So, we're just **engaging the parents in STEM**, showing them what STEM is, what the career opportunities are, and we just start that conversation... -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *And then we also had **parent mentors**, so **parents who have successfully navigated the school system** and are able to **walk other parents through this system**, just creating that **peer support network**. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*

97% of family survey respondents agreed that the OST program staff talk to them in a **warm, respectful manner**, and **94%** agreed that the OST program team keeps them **informed of program policies or schedule changes that could affect their families**.

Partnerships with High School Students

Some OST program teams were also intentional in their partnerships with local high school students to provide implementation support. (In some programs, local high school students served as supervised program staff in exchange for work-study high school credits. These examples will be discussed in more detail in the findings section, *What is the likelihood that the programs can be sustained or expanded/scaled in the future with limited additional resources?*)

In the examples below, program managers partnered with high school students to judge various STEM competitions, serve as peer mentors for program participants, and tutor younger students in various academic content areas.

- *What's been really fun is we now have a learning coach, my position, in all of the buildings in (school district) schools. And so, I just reached out to (school) learning coach, and she was able to get their **computer science team (high school students)**, and that's who came. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *So, we had **peer mentors**...We looked for children in higher grades that are doing very well in school, so like **high school students and things like that to tutor the lower grades**. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

4b) Developing relationships with families and hearing their input regarding their specific needs contributed to the successful implementation of services for OST program teams.

During the interviews and focus groups, several program managers discussed the importance of developing relationships with families, which was a valuable lesson they learned as their teams implemented OST program services. One program manager explained that, in some small farming towns around the state, evening activities were not ideal for families, so she took the STEM supplies and facilitated hands-on STEM activities with the families during the afternoons when more youth and families could participate. Another program manager discussed the family listening sessions she hosted, leading to her expanding the OST program with a before-school hour for the youth. Additionally, families have also shared with program managers their needs for more evening and weekend family activities, which led to some positive changes in program structures and partnerships for some OST program teams. In the comments below, program managers described how their relationships with families and the feedback the families provided impacted their successful implementation of OST services.

- ***We've been talking to the parents.** And the response has been, "We have no choice. We have to go to work." **We are talking to the parents, attending some parenting classes.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *I've heard a little bit about just **how grateful they (families) were to be able to take one (STEM kit) home** and that they had fun putting it together or, "Oh, that's still buzzing around my house," kind of a thing. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*

“
They (families) were so excited. They said, **“We feel so heard and seen. Thank you for asking these questions.”**
”

-ION Funded School Year
Enrichment Program
Manager

- *We...had families that asked if there were more options earlier because they needed to go to work. And it really started ramping up when the weather started to change. So, when it was colder outside, nobody wanted to be outside, so we said, "Okay, well let's let them in, but let's do some specific programming with them."* -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager

In addition to the program managers talking about the value of their relationships with the families during interviews and focus groups, data from the ION family survey indicated that families also appreciate these positive relationships with the OST staff.

4c) Several OST program teams strategically used their grant funds to invest in non-consumable supplies that can be used for future program services beyond the grant period.

During the interviews and focus groups, program managers were asked to describe how they used the funds they received from the ION, ICfL, and STEM AC grants. Many program managers described their intentional purchases of supplies and resources that could be used for several years of OST program services. This strategic investment in high quality, non-consumable items was one way the program managers could start planning for future program opportunities during this period of OST funding uncertainty. Examples of these multi-use supplies and resources included books for library programs, STEM kits and tools, cricket cutters, and 3D printers. In the comments below, program managers described how being strategic with their grant funds led to successful program implementation, as well as investments in opportunities to provide future program services.

- *That was kind of the plan (using grant funds)...set us up for sustainability and for team use, team future, that kind of stuff.* -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager
- *Something we got from the grant was a **thermal camera so we could look at temperature, the gradient in the snowpack.** So, we're able to **talk about that in relation to the water and watersheds**, as well as animals and animal adaptations up here in the winter.* -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager
- *We were able to purchase **iPads that are much more useful...will actually convert to using our 3D modeling.** And so, **we can take it through from just the beginning of robotics all the way through how you can use 3D printing.**...to build and design and do those things.* -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager
- *When I realized that this grant would afford, literally, **afford me the opportunity to buy all of my iBot books for next school year**, that was a huge thing, because that's just under a thousand dollars usually, and **my budget doesn't support that.*** -ICfL Funded OST Program Manager
- *And we purchased a **Cricut, and the big press**, so we can make our own T-shirts now, and hats, and buttons, and lots of things...We started the **Literary Games Reading Program**...and so being able to create our own rewards for that too in the future is really exciting... **I'm set up for a couple of years anyway.*** -ICfL Funded OST Program Manager

- *With the (grant) money, we were able to **buy long-lasting STEM supplies** that we were able to take to some places...just **improving the quality of the stuff that we're able to provide**, and programs that we're able to do. -ICfL Funded OST Program Manager*

5) To what extent are the programs or aspects of their content, design, or delivery likely to be valuable in other settings?

As OST programs funded by ION, STEM AC, or ICfL implemented services for youth and families during the 2023-24 school year, it was important to understand which aspects of their program content, design, or delivery could be valuable in other settings. During the evaluation interviews and focus groups, the UEPC asked program managers to identify and discuss any aspects of their current program services they might consider valuable in other communities for program sustainability or expansion. The SYE family survey responses also provided insight into what families considered most valuable about their child's OST program. These data from both families and program managers highlighted the value of safe, nurturing environments for youth after school while their parents may be working, consistent OST services on Fridays when school may not be in session, and the inclusion of youth who are homeschooled in OST program activities and services.

5a) Safe, nurturing environments are needed for school-aged children during after-school hours, and many families rely on these programs while they finish their workdays.

When asked in the SYE family survey to describe some of the personal benefits of having their child participate in the OST programs, many family members mentioned how important it was for their child to have a safe place to go after school while they are still at work. This was also reflected in the frequency that families utilized OST program offerings, as 91% of family survey respondents stated that their child attended the program "all" or "most" of the days it was offered during the 2023-24 school year. Family members specifically mentioned their appreciation that their child has opportunities to socialize with peers, engage in productive activities, and express themselves freely within the program environment. Below are some examples of open-ended family survey responses that illustrate these benefits of OST grant recipient programs for family members.

- *Being able to take the kids to a place where they feel **safe and can express themselves**.*
- *I know she is in a **safe environment** getting exposed to new things that help her growth.*
- *It **allows me to work** and be able to pick up my kids when I get off at 5.*
- *I work at the school and my child goes straight from classes to the (program) **while I am still working**, and he gets to spend a few extra hours once I'm done. It's been extremely beneficial for allowing him socializing time outside of classroom instruction...*

*80% of family survey respondents agreed that their **OST program takes their work schedules into account when determining program schedules.***

- *It provides me a little extra time on the days offered and to which they attend, to complete necessary errands and tasks. It also teaches my children some things that I may not have been able to teach them. (Due to being homeless for the past 3 years and not having access to certain areas, things, or money)*
- *Helping my kids feel safe.*
- *My child does not have to be alone after school and keeps up on homework.*
- *I don't get off from work until 5, by them attending I know my kids are in a safe place and it allows me to pick them up when I get out.*
- *It works with my work schedule.*

5b) Several OST grant funded program teams are meeting increasing community needs on days when school is not in session, particularly on Fridays in school districts that operate on four-day weeks.

While many Idaho school districts transition to a four-day school week, OST leaders and their teams are recognizing the growing need within their communities to provide additional services for youth and their families on those days when school is not in session. When asked how OST programs can support families during the growing shift toward four-day school weeks, several SYE family survey respondents expressed their appreciation for already expanded OST services in school districts that have moved to four-day weeks. Other families expressed specific needs for consistent OST program services as their districts consider the transition to four-day weeks.

- *(School district) already has a 4-day school week. This (OST) program allows us parents to be able to still go to work full days and 5 days a week including Fridays when Friday (OST) program is going.*
- *They are doing a great job with after school programs, and with Friday programs.*
- *We already have the 4 day a week schooling. It's been very helpful for them to offer a Friday school.*
- *If we shifted to a 4-day week, it would be helpful if the (OST program) matched the school days.*
- *Being available Fridays from 8-5.*
- *Provide programs on Fridays.*
- *If there were program options during the day of the week with no school that would help keep the learning routine and accessible.*

Like family survey respondents, OST program managers also expressed the need for expanded OST services on Fridays when youth in the community are not attending school. In the comments below, program managers discuss how these additional OST days support program participants with their academic skills, while also supporting working families when school is not in session.

- *Kids were looking forward to those activities in the afternoon (Friday OST program activities), and as I've talked with our superintendent, **we really would like to tailor it (Friday program) more towards just a three-hour intervention, get the kids in, get something that's going to really help them, really tailor it towards kids that are a little bit behind academically.** You can't require them to come to it, but if you build it, if you get to the parents, and I'm not opposed to doing some home visits and saying, "Hey, here's what we're seeing with your student. We'd really like them to come to Friday. This is what we're working on," and just get the personal invite out there and we'll see what happens. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *We hoped that a half-day (OST program on Fridays when school is not in session) would kind of fit on those Fridays and it didn't. So, feedback was like, "**If you're going to be open, then we really need to serve the working families.**" And I think (OST program) sees a lot more of that. So yeah, **7:45 to 5:30 is what we do.** And then, yeah, **there's the Christmas break, there's spring break. Like I said, 35 days at 9.5 hours a day.** And I think that it really **transformed the program from an "afterschool" program into that "out-of-school time" program.** The wording became different, because we really are trying to **fill that gap with out-of-school time** rather than when we used to just be really after school. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*

5c) Several OST program teams have started providing OST services for homeschooled youth throughout the state.²

While OST programs have provided needed services for youth and families across Idaho for many years, several of the OST program teams identified a specific need for youth who are homeschooled throughout the state. In the comments below, OST program managers described their approaches to including homeschooled youth in their OST activities and services. While some program managers offered additional academic and STEM activities to supplement what the youth were already receiving at home, others offered social-emotional services and activities to homeschooled youth who attended the program. The comments below further illustrate how the OST program managers extended these services to homeschooled youth, particularly in rural areas.

*We love both **after school and Friday school.** My daughter has learned so much and she actually really enjoys it! I will definitely **keep her in the program for as long as it is offered,** and I hope the kiddos can be offered these programs **for many years to come.***

-Family Survey Respondent

² Please note that the Idaho State Constitution prevents STEM AC from funding private, parochial, and homeschool organizations, as well as out-of-state applicants.

- *So, we've really opened that door for the homeschoolers here in the community. And then as well, it helped us extend...our partnership with our afterschool students... then they would come to our library to do extension activities with what they had requested was the social-emotional piece. And so, **we were able to extend that service to them when they would come after school, and then as well, the science and math part on other days for the older children.** So that's what we were able to do with the grant. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *It (the OST grant) has been a blessing because without it we wouldn't have our after-school program. So, **our after-school program helped homeschooled kids and school students. We have a lot of homeschooled kids here.** Because we live in a rural area, and our school also has, it's a Title I school...We help a lot of those students... -ICfL Funded OST Planning Grant Manager*

6) What is the likelihood that the programs can be sustained or expanded/scaled in the future with limited additional resources?

The American Rescue Plan Act ESSER federal funds supporting the OST grants through ION, STEM AC and the ICfL expired on September 30, 2024. On the original grant applications, program managers were asked to describe ways in which they planned to maximize their proposed grant funds, as well as how they would use funds from other organizations to “braid and blend” funding for their OST program services. As OST program managers across all three funding organizations reflected on the services their teams provided for youth and families during the 2023-24 school year, the UEPC asked them about their ability to provide these same services next year without the grant funds. While a few program managers discussed various opportunities they had to replace these funds by seeking philanthropic contributions, applying for additional state and federal grants, and leveraging other funding sources, most of them expressed apprehension as they discussed their budgets for OST services during the 2024-25 school year. Despite the success of so many OST program teams in expanding their services to additional youth and families during this past year, they felt that the expiration of the grant funds brings them back to where they were prior to the 2023-24 school year, facing reductions in needed community services. One bright spot that was mentioned by several program managers was the promising strategy of employing local high school students as program staff (supervised by adult program personnel) to work in the elementary-aged OST programs. Below is a synthesis of findings from the interviews and focus groups with program managers, as well as from the ION staff survey data.

*We have gotten feedback that **parents in other schools are asking that a similar program be offered in other afterschool programs. We would need more personnel and resources to make this happen.***

-Staff Survey Respondent

6a) Many OST program teams remain uncertain about their capacity to provide future services for youth and families due to a lack of consistent OST funding after the expiration of the ARPA grant funds.

Many program managers discussed the steps they are taking to secure alternative resources in an effort to maintain program services for youth and families beyond the 2023-24 school year. However, they recognized that this would be a significant challenge, particularly given the number of OST program teams seeking similar resources and support. Several program managers mentioned that they applied for the ION Summer Enrichment Grant to continue their OST services through the summer of 2024 but were unsuccessful given the number of applications and the amount of funding available. Looking forward to the 2024-25 school year, some program managers were actively searching for new funding opportunities and hoping to secure additional resources to support their 2024-25 programming, while others were focused on preparing to reduce their services due to the forecasted limited resources. The following comments further illustrate their perspectives and plans to overcome these obstacles.

“

*We **won't be able to run** an academic afterschool program without ION (grant) support.*

”

-ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager

Actively searching for new funding opportunities

Several program directors described their efforts to secure new OST funding to sustain their existing program services. While some did not receive the grants that they applied for to support their summer programming, they were actively searching for additional resources within their communities by fundraising, identifying new grants to apply for, and seeking untapped OST resources.

- *...We have been working on **applying for other grants so far**, like this school year for the coming spring, **so that's definitely something that's on our mind**. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *I was **unable to get any grants for next year** so far as I know. So, I'm just going to keep **shopping around for grants**. That's my best and only option really. -ICfL Funded Programming Grant Manager*
- *We're trying to **look into other resources and see what other funding possibilities** are out there. We tried to apply for the Summer Enrichment program. But we didn't get that one (grant), so we were hoping that we could **continue this through the summer, but that didn't happen**. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *When I have somebody say, "**So when you don't get this funding next year, what are you going to do?**" Well, I just keep looking. Do I have a replacement in my pocket? No, I don't. **I just have to keep looking and hoping, and yeah, praying that something comes up**. Because our communities, we really don't have a lot of corporate donation possibilities. We live in small, rural communities that are either so corporate at the Walmart level, that you don't have relationships with, or they're like our local Main Street Payette businesses. -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*

- *We applied for ION (Summer Enrichment Grant) and we were not able to secure a grant for this summer because they receive a lot of requests and they had to... Yeah, it has been an issue. We tried to do a little fundraising with our community support, and we were able to get maybe \$6,000, which was helpful but was not enough of our major goal that we're anticipating to do.*
-STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager

Preparing for reductions in existing OST services due to limited resources

Other program directors described how the OST services they provided with the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL grants during the 2023-24 school year were in jeopardy due to limited OST resources moving forward. While their teams were able to expand access to youth and families during the 2023-24 school year with these grants, they explained that they would not be able to sustain the same level of program access as the grant funding comes to an end and other budgets for OST services are also cut.

- *...Some of the feedback I've received from the teachers is we hope to be able to do this again next year. And I don't know yet what the possibilities of getting an additional grant. The grant paid for the salaries for the paraprofessionals. So, the grant is crucial in making this work.*
-ICfL Funded OST Programming Manager

- *Well, so far, I have not heard of any grants for next year...I'm only funded 'till the summer... they (community partners) are already talking about their next year. And I always go to their meetings... they're like, "What's the library doing?" I said, "Nothing yet, because I don't have any money yet." We are just, we're going one semester at a time.*
-ICfL Funded OST Planning Grant Manager

- *The challenge is that this year we were able to expand access to them (youth and families), but next year, without ION (grant funds), we know that that may not be the case. So, we're already looking through some contingency right now to find out what we might be able to do to be able to still provide access. We still have not gotten there yet though.* -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager

“
During the school year we definitely need funds to run Friday programs for our students. Right now, we do not have funds to continue our Friday programming. Families really support and depend on the Friday program that we have offered them the last 5 years.
”

-Staff Survey Respondent

6b) Some program teams have secured a portion of the necessary resources for future OST services by leveraging other state and federal funds, seeking additional grant funds, and accepting philanthropic donations.

During the focus groups and interviews, some program managers expressed optimism in their efforts to secure a portion of the resources needed to continue providing OST services after their ION, STEM AC, or ICfL grants end. Some program managers secured these resources by working with local school

district staff to leverage additional state and federal funds (e.g., Title I, McKinney Vento, or Migrant Education funds) that can be used for OST programs, and by aligning their programs with schools or organizations that are applying for additional grants (e.g. Full-Service Community Schools grant, 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant). One program manager discussed her appreciation for philanthropic donations that will help to sustain their program's needed services, and others discussed their success in securing additional grants to support the necessary OST program services. These efforts to sustain the program services beyond the expiration of the grant funds are illustrated by the comments below.

- *We feel really excited and just so grateful that we got this first grant from ION and then that we had these **philanthropic funders** who are aligned with our beliefs and just vision for what we want to be true here and **hope that that long-term can be at least a piece of the puzzle.** We **also are thinking about just how we braid the Title I funds in a meaningful way.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *So, we've **applied for a few different grants** to cover the amount that we would have. Some places will use **some of their Title I funds to do this (provide OST services),** because really our **whole area is a Title I area.** So, almost every school has those Title I funds just because of where we live. **So, we're hoping to do that.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *Well, it turns out our community school center (OST program) is **starting to pay real dividends for our school program** because **we're now part of a federally funded full-service community schools grant.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*
- *We built **strong partnerships and community support.** We were able to obtain our biggest funder, which is the Idaho State Police. **We were able to obtain that grant again, and that's a grant that has a potential of three years.** That puts us in a really good spot to continue gathering support and **more funding to sustain what we've created with the money that we've gotten through this grant.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Grant Manager*

6c) Some program managers employed local high school students as supervised OST program staff for their elementary-aged programs, a promising practice that could lead to sustainable resources for future program services.

During interviews and focus groups, some program managers discussed ways they strategically staffed their programs with local high school students, particularly for elementary OST programs. Through work-study credits, volunteer hours, stipends, or other compensation arrangements, these partnerships benefited high school students while providing critical staff support in the OST programs. Program managers who implemented this innovative strategy in their 2023-24 programs highlighted a promising practice that could support program teams in providing future services for youth and families, regardless of state or federal OST grant funding trends. The following comments reflect how intentional collaboration with high school students could support future OST program services in many communities across Idaho.

- *This is our third year with **high schoolers tutoring**. And at first, when 21st (federal OST grant) had a supplementary grant that I could apply for, I got it for that reason and **brought high schoolers in to tutor our kids one-on-one**. And then I spoke with (school administrator) at the high school and she has a program where it's not called Work Study, but **it's like Work Study where the kids can apply if they want to go into education. They earn credits, they earn money, and they earn experience.** -ICfL Funded OST Planning Grant Manager*
- *So very little of that money was actually spent on curriculum development...the rest of it was to pay tutors. So, **we had peer mentors**. So, we looked for children in higher grades that are doing very well in school, **so like high school students and things like that to tutor the lower grades.** -ION Funded School Year Enrichment Program Manager*
- *So, Friday was it was attendance finals, so for any kid who hadn't had their three absences or were passing our classes, **instead of it being their first day of vacation, there were 15 high schoolers at the elementary (OST program)**. They were the ones, **they prepped all the work and then they were there to work with the kids**, and it was great. -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*
- *We teamed up with a dozen first LEGO League teams across Idaho and helped pay their registration and especially for the new teams, get them started and **used my high school students to facilitate that.** -STEM AC Funded OST Program Manager*

Conclusions, Considerations, & Next Steps

Conclusions

Overall, findings from this evaluation of Idaho OST programs that received grants for the 2023-24 school year from ION, STEM AC, or the ICfL suggest that these OST programs were implemented as originally intended and described in their approved grant applications. While the overall purpose of these COVID-19 federal grant funds was to enhance and expand the capacity of schools and community organizations to provide quality OST programming that met the specific needs of their communities, programs that received these OST grants achieved this purpose in various ways. Many program teams that received smaller grant awards used these funds to extend their program services to additional youth and families in their communities. Teams that received larger grant awards were able to expand their services by offering additional hours of programming each week or an additional day of OST services in school districts that operate on a 4-day school week. The findings from this evaluation suggest that many programs were successful in addressing unfinished learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing critical social-emotional needs of youth, and introducing youth to new experiences and activities. The findings also indicate that these grant funds were instrumental in supporting parents and families throughout Idaho by providing safe, nurturing environments for children while their parents or guardians finished the workday. The findings from the evaluation are briefly summarized below and represent key accomplishments of the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL OST grants.

Addressed unfinished learning

During interviews and focus groups, OST program managers described significant progress towards academic outcomes that included feedback from school day teachers about participant progress, improved student test scores, and increased reading fluency and grade-level accuracy. In addition, they described improvements in students' overall attitudes about attending school during the day. Based on data from the ION grant recipient staff survey, two-thirds (66%) of staff respondents reported that OST program participants improved in homework and class participation, while almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents indicated improvements in student behavior.

Extended OST services to more youth and families

Several programs received smaller OST grants from ION, STEM AC, and ICfL, ranging from \$1,000 to \$15,000. These funds allowed teams to extend their OST services by reaching more youth and families in their communities, purchase essential STEM supplies and books, and hire additional staff to improve staff-to-student ratios. For some programs, these OST grants supported more access to STEM activities by providing hands-on kits for students to complete at school or at home with their families. For other programs, these funds were used to hire and support staff, including tutors, peer mentors, and parent mentors, enabling the program teams to ultimately serve more youth and families in their communities.

Expanded OST services with additional program hours/days

Several OST programs received larger grants (\$20,000 to \$250,000) from ION, STEM AC, and ICfL, which they used to respond to specific youth and family needs within their communities. Many programs receiving these grants expanded their existing services by adding hours or full days to their schedules to provide services such as morning open gyms, after-school meals, and full-day programs on non-school days. Other programs used their larger grant funds to scale their existing programs to nearby communities that demonstrated a strong need for these services.

Addressed critical social emotional needs

OST program managers also described significant progress towards youth social-emotional outcomes as a result of these grant funds. Examples of progress included improved positive behaviors and demonstration of respect for others, less aggression towards peers, and overall positive relationship skills. Data from the ION grant recipient staff survey also indicated that progress was made in these areas, with at least 97% of survey respondents reporting youth participant improvement in self-awareness, social-awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship skills. Finally, 91% of family survey respondents reported that their child made new friends at their OST program, further demonstrating the impact of this grant-funded programming on students' social development.

Introduced youth to new experiences and activities

Several OST programs provided youth participants with new, engaging activities that they might not have otherwise experienced, such as winter outdoor camps, family STEM nights, and fine arts classes. Exposing youth to new experiences was also important to the families of program participants, as 98% of family survey respondents agreed that attending an OST program provided new experiences for

their children. During focus groups and interviews, OST program managers described several opportunities in which their OST teams provided new experiences and activities for youth and families, such as winter and spring break recreational trips, rock climbing, fly fishing, and other experiential activities. Program managers also described the lessons learned by participants through their new experiences, such as facing fears, developing self-confidence, setting goals, and taking pride in learning new skills.

Supported parents and families during working hours

The OST grant funds supported families throughout Idaho by providing a safe, nurturing environment for their children when school was not in session. Many family survey respondents mentioned how important it was for their child to have this safe place while they were still at work. This was also reflected in the frequency that families utilized OST program offerings, as 91% of family survey respondents stated that their child attended the program “all” or “most” of the days it was offered during the 2023-24 school year. When asked how OST programs can support families during the growing shift toward four-day school weeks, several family survey respondents expressed their appreciation for already expanded OST services in school districts that have moved to four-day weeks. Other families expressed specific needs for consistent OST program services as their districts consider the transition to four-day weeks. Similarly, OST program managers in districts with 4-day school weeks also expressed the need for expanded OST services on the fifth weekday when the youth in the community are not attending school.

Considerations

Based on the findings shared in this report, as well as the collaborative momentum that the ION, STEM AC, and ICfL leaders have developed and maintained over the past three years, we offer the following considerations for Idaho’s state OST leaders. These considerations are situated as timely opportunities for these OST state leaders to engage in generative conversations and consider alternative, innovative strategies, resources and tools to support OST program teams statewide as they continue to serve Idaho’s youth and families.

1) Examine State and Local Data to Allocate Resources for OST Programs

Given the recent expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funds and the uncertainty of future federal OST funding, Idaho state funders who oversee OST funding competitions are encouraged to use multiple sources of data to creatively and systematically allocate competitive OST grant resources for specific regions of the state. These allocations could be based on factors such as current program availability, community and family needs, existing gaps in OST program services, and grant funding history. This could be done through competitive priority points on OST funding applications, regional OST funding competitions, and tiered funding systems to support programs that are at various stages of development and sustainability.

This data-driven approach to funding OST programs also includes responding to changing needs of youth and families statewide, such as the increasing need for high quality OST services on days when school is not in session in school districts with 4-day school weeks. This intentionality of data-driven resource allocation will promote a more systematic approach to statewide OST resource allocation with the goal of ensuring access for all youth and families. As Idaho OST leaders mobilize and take

inventory of statewide data to allocate OST resources systematically, a statewide needs assessment to identify strengths and gaps in OST services, may be an appropriate next step.

2) Build Capacity of OST Program Leaders to Engage in Continuous Program Improvement

State OST leaders are encouraged to continue to build the capacity of OST program leaders around the importance of data collection and continuous program improvement. While there are many definitions of capacity building (e.g., see Kacou et al., 2022), one definition of capacity building is “an intervention that strengthens an organization’s ability to fulfill its mission by promoting sound management, strong governance, and persistent rededication to achieving results” (Lammert and Fiore, 2015, pp. 1). State leaders have the opportunity to support OST teams and organizations to achieve their goals by providing them with support and tools to (1) review formative data to determine how their current program processes, activities, or strategies are working to achieve their desired outcomes and (2) use this data to make any necessary adjustments to program services and processes that will increase the likelihood that the desired outcomes are achieved (Connolly and York, 2002).

While there are several versions of continuous improvement cycle frameworks available (Bertram et al., 2015; Bryk, 2015; Bryk et al, 2015), the UEPC developed one specific for capacity building discussions among OST funders, program teams, and community partners, located in Appendix A. Idaho state OST leaders are encouraged to model and facilitate OST discussions throughout the state around the four stages of this Continuous Improvement Cycle (Engage, Design, Implement, and Adjust). As OST leaders and their teams engage in each of the four components of the cycle, they collect and review timely data to monitor progress towards short and long-term goals, adjusting program services based on the formative data, and engaging partners in any necessary adjustments to program services. The Continuous Improvement Cycle is a foundational tool for OST program teams to guide their program planning, data analysis, and decisions related to program services for youth and families.

3) Mobilize and Empower OST Program Leaders in Leveraging Additional Financial and Staffing Resources to Support OST Programs

State OST leaders are encouraged to engage in collaborative discussions around opportunities to support OST program leaders in leveraging additional resources for OST programs. These opportunities might include exploring federal and state funding options, collaborating in work-study programs with local high schools, and engaging in OST workforce development research to study successful and sustainable recruitment and retention strategies for OST program staff. Some Idaho school districts are currently supplementing their OST budgets with additional state and federal funds, such as Title I, McKinney- Vento, and Migrant Education (when appropriate and allowed by state code and federal regulatory guidance). These strategic, intentional allocations of combined funds could be explored and discussed both at the state and local levels to learn from districts that have experienced success with this model, as well as support program leaders who are new to the process and interested in learning more.

While some OST program teams leveraged financial resources to support their programs, others worked with their local high schools to engage high school students as supervised staff in elementary-

aged OST programs. The specifics varied by OST program as the high school students earned stipends, work-study credits, or extra credit for specific classes. In each of these cases, OST program leaders expressed how valuable the experience was, both for program staffing support, as well as in providing the high school students with work experience in a supported environment. State OST leaders can encourage the use of these innovative approaches by engaging in discussions with school and district leaders about these unique opportunities, thus empowering OST program leaders and teams to think differently about staffing resources.

A third way in which state OST leaders can support program leaders in leveraging additional OST resources is by investing in a statewide OST workforce study. A comprehensive study of OST staffing patterns across the state, including successful recruitment and retention strategies as well as barriers to staffing program services, would provide critical insight into this challenge that many program teams have grappled with for years. A deeper exploration into the reasons that staff remain or leave OST program positions would provide timely data that state OST leaders can use to guide collaborative discussions with program leaders across the state as they explore new opportunities for sustainable staffing resources.

4) Continue to Strengthen and Expand Idaho's System of Support for Both New and Experienced OST Program Teams

Idaho has been working closely with OST state partners for many years to build their system of support for OST programs, including the ION Building Blocks self-assessment tool and accompanying professional learning opportunities and other resources related to quality improvement efforts. Programs must embed quality practices and strategies in every part of the program to support positive outcomes for children and youth who regularly participate in programs. Statewide standards, such as the Building Blocks, can provide a helpful framework for local programs to develop strong programming that both meet the needs of the children, youth, and families in the communities they serve and focus on quality improvement practices (American Institute of Research, 2020; Cummins, 2013; Simkin et al., 2021).

Funded programs utilized the Building Blocks as a guide to align their program services. Across multiple years of the evaluation, grantees mentioned their appreciation and support for tools such as the Building Blocks, as well as the other professional learning opportunities provided by ION, ICfL, and the STEM AC. Findings from the 2021-22 ION report mentioned some grantees' participation in various offerings through ION, but the participation was inconsistent. Findings from the 2023-24 report suggest grantees were more consistently utilizing both the quality improvement tools and attending the professional learning events provided by ION. ION and other OST state partners could leverage this ongoing participation in future years to continue to support quality improvement efforts on a statewide level, further building out their system of support for OST programs across the state. As part of statewide efforts to support OST professional learning in all settings, ION should also consider specific outreach to libraries and STEM-based programs offering OST services, as it was required in the ICfL grant program to intentionally engage in various quality improvement efforts, like completing the Building Blocks self-assessment and attending various ION professional learning events related to the Building Blocks. Current state funders, such as the Idaho Department of Education, could also incentivize OST grantees to complete the Building Blocks self-assessment on an annual basis and attend other professional learning opportunities provided by ION.

5) Develop a Statewide System to Document OST Community Partners and Successful Partnerships to Promote Program Quality and Sustainability

Community partnerships have been a critical component of OST program implementation and sustainability across Idaho over the past several years. In the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 evaluation reports, program managers representing grantees funded by ION, STEM AC, and ICfL shared increasingly robust examples of partnerships between their programs and local community organizations and schools. These partnerships supported program activities by providing specific services, staff, and resources that addressed existing gaps and enhanced program quality, and by increasing awareness and visibility of the program in the local community. Furthermore, as described by Koch and Penuel (2010), “achieving spread through partnerships” is one of the necessary conditions for program sustainability in OST settings. Grantees funded by ION, STEM AC, and ICfL leveraged community partnerships to support the sustainability of their programs in a variety of ways, including staffing solutions (e.g., hiring high school students as interns or volunteer staff) and diversified resource streams. Notably, cross-organization connections led to new funding opportunities by utilizing state and federal school funds for OST programming and collaborating with organizations applying for other grants (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers). These opportunities for additional funding were reported by program managers as particularly critical during the 2023-24 school year due to the expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funds in Fall 2024.

As ION, STEM AC, and ICfL have been increasingly promoting and facilitating partnerships between their grantees and local community partners, there are opportunities for enhanced coordination and leadership in these efforts at the state level. With many successful OST partnerships being developed across the state, it could be beneficial to create a process and database to document key OST partners and examples of successful partnerships. ION may be in the best position to coordinate this effort across state OST leaders, including STEM AC and ICfL. Consistent with recent research on afterschool systems (e.g., Simkin et al., 2021), a “coordinating entity” like ION can offer leadership that includes knowledge and facilitation of partnerships with state and local organizations, as well as relationships with external professional development providers that may support partnership development and capacity building. Furthermore, ION could build and model this community partnership database, in part, after the partner directory that they currently maintain for the state’s 21st Century Community Learning Center grant (<https://idahooutofschool.org/programsearch/>). Having centralized documentation of schools and community organizations that are interested and/or experienced in partnering with OST programs, as well as examples that highlight elements of and strategies for successful partnerships, would be a high-impact resource for programs across the state looking to establish and expand their own partnerships. Finally, this type of database would also provide ION and other state leaders with a greater understanding of OST community partnerships and networks at the state level, which may lead to opportunities to identify barriers or gaps in partnership development, increase involvement of other state entities in addressing these gaps, and leverage more coordinated community awareness and engagement to enhance OST program quality and sustainability.

Next Steps: Strengthened Collaboration and Alignment Among State Partners

In addition to the conclusions and considerations described above, it is imperative to highlight the impact of the ongoing collaboration among the Idaho Out-of-School Network, the Idaho State Board

of Education, the Idaho STEM Action Center, and the Idaho Commission for Libraries. The engagement of key staff from these four statewide agencies was both innovative and unique, as they collaborated around the grant application process, developed program requirements and professional learning opportunities for grant recipients, and coordinated data collection around grant expenditures and impacts.

While other states distributed similar federal COVID relief funds from their State Boards of Education directly to OST programs, Idaho's intentional systems approach to allocating these federal funds through ION, STEM AC, and ICfL enhanced the consistency and quality of the OST services provided by program teams receiving these grants. The state teams' deep content knowledge and expertise, awareness of community needs throughout the state, and responsiveness to emerging challenges enhanced the capacities of funded OST program teams to provide critical services for youth and families to address unfinished learning. Since 2020, these state partners have worked closely to co-design professional learning opportunities for OST staff throughout the state, serving on professional learning planning committees, facilitating conference sessions, and promoting and attending each other's events. Moving forward, an exciting opportunity exists to not only maintain these state partnerships but to engage in further collaboration as a coordinated "state OST leadership team" given the shared vision, standards of quality, collective experience, and capacity to collect and use data for assessment and planning (Simkin et al., 2021). As this team reflects on the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from the 2023-24 school year grant processes and OST programs, they have a unique opportunity to mobilize their resources and systematically address the ever-changing needs of Idaho's unique communities.

A possible next step for this state OST leadership team could include investing in a statewide OST needs assessment to identify specific areas of OST program saturation, as well as OST service "gaps" in certain regions of the state. Other steps might include the development of a statewide template for local OST program needs assessments, aligned OST grant applications across state agencies, and centralized OST data collection systems and databases that include all programs, regardless of their funding source. Idaho's state OST leaders and the UEPC evaluation team are currently planning an in-person collaboration day in early January 2025 to consider the data collected and the lessons learned over the past three years and discuss such opportunities for the state moving forward.

Finally, this state OST leadership team might consider additional alignment of professional learning opportunities across organizations, such as virtual OST Communities of Practice based on specific program challenges or needs, regional "Roundtable" professional learning opportunities for OST teams from all funding agencies, and ongoing statewide and regional discussions around data-driven continuous program improvement. As representatives from each statewide agency share their unique contexts, this state OST leadership team is poised to leverage their collective experiences and resources to address common challenges described in this evaluation report and more effectively serve Idaho's youth and families.

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Appendix A

Table 4. Number of staff survey responses for ION School Year Enrichment Programs

ION School Year Enrichment Programs	Number of Staff Survey Responses (N = 59)
ABC: Above and Beyond the Classroom (Teton County)	0
American Falls School District	11
Boys and Girls Club of Western Treasure Valley	0
Breaking Chains Academy of Development	0
Cascade School District #422: Cascade After School Program	0
Children's Museum of Magic Valley: CMMV on the Go!	3
Coeur d'Alene School District 271: Out of School Time Enrichments	1
Cornerstone Teen Center	0
Emmett School District Afterschool Clubs	9
Future Public School: Rocket to The Moon! Engineer Enrichment Center	3
Growing The STEM	13
Lee Pesky Learning Center, LP Literacy Pods: Finishing Unfinished Learning	1
Marsing School District: Academies STEAM Academic Plan (ASAP)	6
Music Conservatory of Sandpoint: Music Matters! Outreach Classes	2
TANTA, Inc.: Beyond Study Hall	8
Treasure Valley YMCA: Wilder Kids	0
University of Idaho Coeur d'Alene Reservation Extension, School Enrichment	0
University of Idaho Extension, Canyon County 4H: Creating a Spark in Canyon County Youth	2
UpRiver Panthers: Kootenai/Shoshone 4H Youth Development Program	0

Source: ION SYE Grant Staff Survey

Table 5. Number of family survey responses for ION School Year Enrichment Programs

ION School Year Enrichment Programs	Number of Family Survey Responses (N = 70)
ABC: Above and Beyond the Classroom (Teton County)	1
American Falls School District	9
Boys and Girls Club of Western Treasure Valley	1
Breaking Chains Academy of Development	1
Cascade School District #422: Cascade After School Program	1
Children's Museum of Magic Valley: CMMV on the Go!	1
Coeur d'Alene School District 271: Out of School Time Enrichments	4
Cornerstone Teen Center	0
Emmett School District Afterschool Clubs	4
Future Public School: Rocket to The Moon! Engineer Enrichment Center	15
Growing The STEM	7
Lee Pesky Learning Center, LP Literacy Pods: Finishing Unfinished Learning	1
Marsing School District: Academies STEAM Academic Plan (ASAP)	14
Music Conservatory of Sandpoint: Music Matters! Outreach Classes	7
TANTA, Inc.: Beyond Study Hall	2
Treasure Valley YMCA: Wilder Kids	1
University of Idaho Coeur d'Alene Reservation Extension, School Enrichment	1
University of Idaho Extension, Canyon County 4H: Creating a Spark in Canyon County Youth	0
UpRiver Panthers: Kootenai/Shoshone 4H Youth Development Program	0

Source: ION SYE Grant Family Survey