

Every Child, Every Neighborhood

Out-of-School Time (OST) Access in Philadelphia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Philadelphia OST Access Report

Before school, afterschool, and summer programs—known together as out-of-school time, or OST—help children stay safe, build friendships, and stay on track in school. Research links high-quality OST programs to stronger social and emotional skills, better school attendance, higher graduation and college-going rates, and fewer risky behaviors.¹

But too many families who want an OST program cannot find one that is affordable, available, or the right fit—and that shortage falls hardest on historically under-resourced communities, widening educational opportunity gaps that already exist.²

This report, funded by the **William Penn Foundation**, is the most complete picture yet of where OST programs exist for children from Pre-K through grade 8 in Philadelphia, where they fall short, and who is missing out. It draws on 18 datasets estimated to cover 79–91% of the city's regularly scheduled (4–5 day/week) OST programs.

**90,000–
125,000**

additional OST seats needed
citywide

33–67%

of Philadelphia children lack access
to OST

17

zip codes flagged as top investment
priorities

How Big Is the Gap?

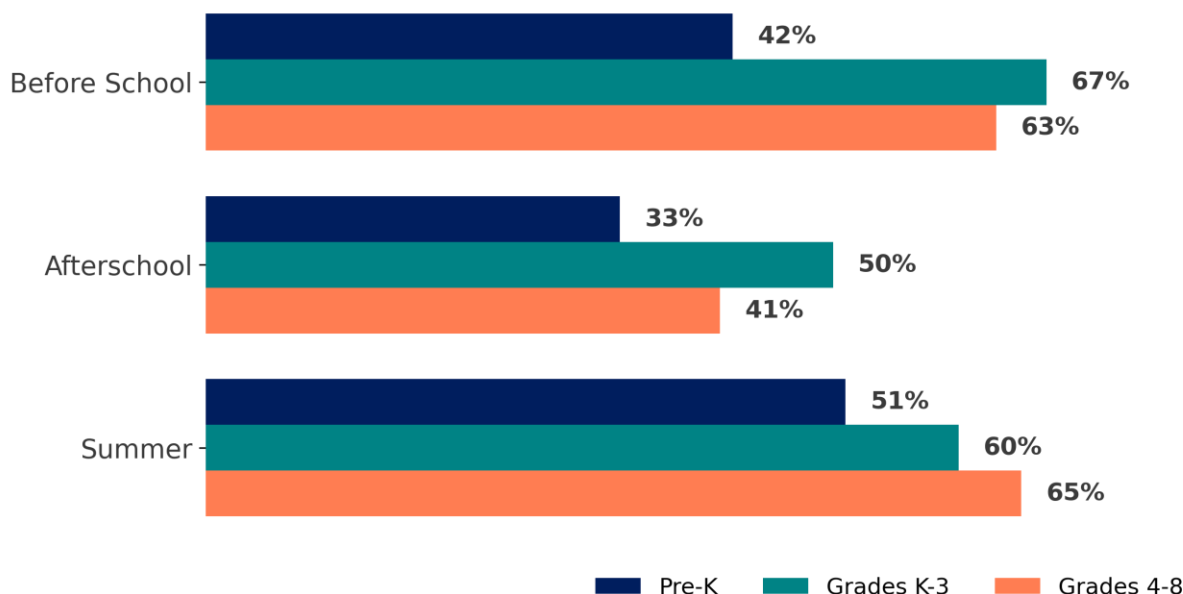
Philadelphia does not have enough OST capacity to meet potential demand, in any age group, at any time of day. Figure ES-1 shows that if every family that might want a seat sought one, 33–67% of children would be left without access, a shortfall of 90,000–125,000 seats citywide.

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2025. *The Future of Youth Development: Building Systems and Strengthening Programs*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/27833>.

² Afterschool Alliance. (2025). *Lost opportunity: Afterschool in demand, but out of reach for many: America After 3PM* (5th ed.). <https://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/>



Figure ES-1. Share of children without access to OST programming, by age group



***Note:** Percentages show the share of children in each age group who would lack access to OST if every family sought a seat. Source: Table 3, full report.*

School-aged children face the steepest shortfalls: 60–67% of children in grades K-3 and 4-8 lack access to before school and summer programs. Even Pre-K OST, the best-served age group, is not available for roughly a third to half of families who might want it.

The gap does not close for kids in poverty

Half of Philadelphia's children live in poverty, and making sure they can access OST is a citywide priority. But even when the analysis looks only at children in poverty, large gaps remain: 14,000 to nearly 35,000 seats for grades K through 8, across every program time.

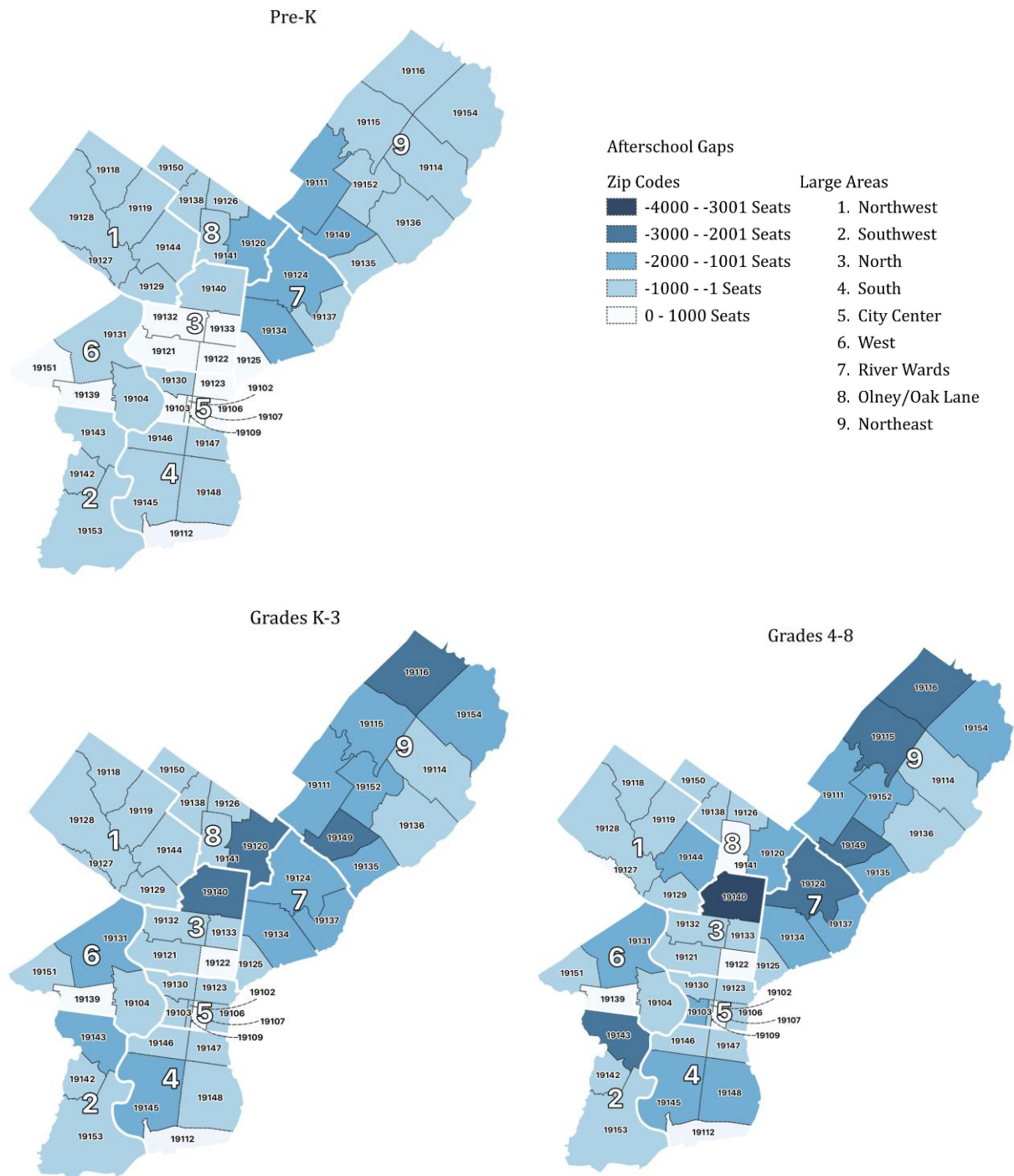
One bright spot: if only Pre-K children in poverty sought OST programming, existing citywide supply would be enough to meet demand.

But that citywide average hides real differences by neighborhood — children of all income levels seek Pre-K programming, and some sections of the city do not have enough Pre-K seats even for low-income families alone.

Where the Gaps Are

Gaps show up in almost every part of Philadelphia, but some neighborhoods are missing far more afterschool seats than others, and the pattern differs by age group. Figure ES-2, on the following page, maps these gaps by zip code for each age group for afterschool programs.

Figure ES-2. Afterschool OST access gaps by zip code and age group



***Note:** Darker shading indicates a bigger shortfall between potential demand and available seats; the lightest shading indicates enough seats to meet demand. Numbers 1–9 identify the large sections of the city shown in the legend above.*

Seventeen Places to Prioritize

The study ranks zip codes on two criteria: the size of their OST access gap, and whether that gap overlaps with communities facing added barriers—high poverty, a large share of English Language Learners, or a large share of system-involved youth (three "equity factors" in all). The table below lists the 17 zip codes that score highest on one or both measures.

TIER 1 — Largest gaps across every age group			
Zip code	Neighborhood	Where the gap is largest	Equity indicators
19140	North	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19134	River Wards	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ● (2-3)
19111	Northeast	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19135	Northeast	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19149	Northeast	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19120	Olney / Oak Lane	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19124	River Wards	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19143	Southwest	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
TIER 2 — Largest gaps in a subset of age groups			
19136	Northeast	Pre-K	● ● ● ●
19148	South	Grades 4-8	● ● ● ●
19131	West	Grades K-3	● ● ● ●
19137	River Wards	Grades K-3 and 4-8	● ● ● ●
TIER 3 — Significant, more targeted gaps			
19142	Southwest	Pre-K (partial: K-3, 4-8)	● ● ● ● (2-3)
19152	Northeast	Pre-K, K-3, and 4-8	● ● ● ●
19144	Northwest	Pre-K and 4-8 (partial: K-3)	● ● ● ● (1-2)
19145	South	Pre-K (partial: K-3, 4-8)	● ● ● ● (1-2)
19151	West	Partial grades K-3 and 4-8	● ● ● ●

Note: Equity indicators were scored separately for Pre-K–grade 3 and grades 4–8, which is why some zip codes show a range (e.g., 2–3). Dots reflect the higher value in that range.



Poverty only



Poverty + 1 more indicator



Poverty + both indicators

Five Ways to Close the Gap

This study is a foundation for both advocacy and strategic decision-making. It points to five actions that can help Philadelphia strengthen its OST system and expand equitable access to high-quality programs.

1 Grow public and private investment

Recent public and philanthropic investment has helped, but Philadelphia's OST system still does not have enough capacity to meet demand.

- Sustain and expand local public investment in OST
- Leverage philanthropy to complement public investment
- Advocate for increases in dedicated state OST funding

2 Target investment where it matters most

Limited dollars go furthest where the biggest access gaps overlap with the highest concentrations of children facing added barriers.

- Prioritize the 17 zip codes identified in this report
- Coordinate public and philanthropic investment around shared priorities
- Use zip code-level data to guide expansion decisions

3 Match investment to children's ages and needs

Different age groups are served by different systems, with different funding and rules; investment should reflect that and be shaped by youth input.

- Expand summer options for grades 4–8 and afterschool for grades K–3
- Strengthen the early-childhood system to grow Pre-K access

4 Build stronger OST infrastructure

This study combined 18 separate data sets to build a citywide picture, demonstrating both the value of shared data and how fragmented the current system is.

- Maintain one comprehensive, centralized database for school-aged OST programs
- Strengthen coordination across early-childhood and school-age systems
- Create a long-term citywide school-aged OST coordinating structure to guide planning and investment



5

Keep building the evidence base

Important questions remain about family demand, program quality, and the role of different providers; continued research should keep improving how the city invests.

- Gather youth and caregiver perspectives on demand for OST, barriers to accessing programs, and preferences
- Better understand licensed school-age childcare's role in the broader OST system
- Develop practical ways to weigh program quality in future citywide planning

The Path Forward

Philadelphia now has its clearest picture yet of where OST opportunities exist, where they fall short, and who is most affected. The gaps are large, but the path forward is clear.

By aligning public and philanthropic investment around shared data, prioritizing neighborhoods where access gaps and equity barriers overlap, and expanding access to high-quality programs, Philadelphia can build an OST system that gives every child the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive — one where a child's neighborhood does not determine the opportunities available to them.

Source: Full report funded by the William Penn Foundation. Complete findings, methodology, and citations are available in the full report.