



# Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time

**BOOST GRANTS PROGRAM  
YEAR 2 – EVALUATION BRIEF**



**G·san**

GEORGIA STATEWIDE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK



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# Executive Summary

In 2021, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) partnered with the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) to develop the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grants program, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. **BOOST was developed to distribute approximately \$85 million to Georgia's communities over three years to expand access to and bolster the quality of summer enrichment opportunities and comprehensive afterschool programming for K-12 youth statewide.**

## Key Findings: Outreach and Impact

In its second year (2022-23), BOOST funding supported 93 community organizations and four statewide grantees across **112 of Georgia's 159 counties** and operating:

- **1,416 afterschool sites** serving **79,911 youth** during the 22-23 academic year
- **639 summer program** sites serving **86,924 youth** during the summer

BOOST grantees used a whole-child approach and focused on at least one of three program purposes:

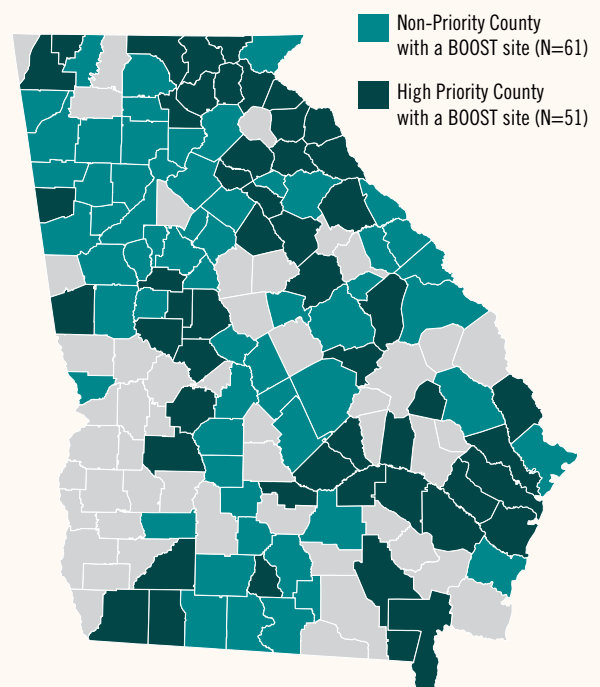
- **Expanding the number of youth served**
- **Reducing barriers to participation**
- **Strengthening program quality**

As reported by grantees, specific implementation successes included:

- **Improved mental health, well-being, and connectedness**
- **Exposing youth to new content or programs**
- **Improving academic learning**

## Key Findings: Youth Outcomes

BOOST grantees were required to develop three outcomes for youth participants: one for learning acceleration and two others in any of the four BOOST service areas: learning acceleration, enrichment, healthy eating/physical activity, and well-being and connectedness. The Year 2 BOOST evaluation showed that nearly all grantees met or exceeded at least one of their academic year outcomes (93%) or summer outcomes (99%).



*“The iReady diagnostic results along with grade reports allow teachers to establish collaborative groups to focus on reading and math...The data results show an 80% success rate with 170 students out of the target number of 213 on track to make an increase by one grade level in their academic performance.”*

– Augusta Richmond County Juvenile Court

- Learning acceleration outcomes were achieved for **46,945 youth** during the academic year and **48,587 youth** during the summer;
- Healthy eating and physical activity outcomes were achieved for **27,052 youth** during the academic year and **34,811 youth** during the summer;
- Well-being and connectedness outcomes were achieved for **11,692 youth** during the academic year and **31,088 youth** during the summer; and
- Enrichment outcomes were achieved for **8,534 youth** during the academic year and **13,264 youth** during the summer.

*“Agape is proud that 100% of our 11 high school seniors graduated in May 2023. Nine students will continue school (college or vocational school) and two students will enter the workforce.”*

– Agape Youth & Family Center

## Key Findings: Infrastructure and Sustainability

BOOST was perceived as positively influencing the state’s broader infrastructure of OST programming by developing sustainable public-private partnerships and cross-sector collaboration. Local program leaders and state and national stakeholders even considered how the BOOST program elevated perceptions of the quality and depth of Georgia’s OST programming infrastructure. Stakeholders agreed that BOOST (or a comparable form of support) should continue to support OST programs for Georgia youth.

## Recommendations

The Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network recommends the following:

- 1. Create and fund Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) 2.0 grant program, an out-of-school time (OST) grants program modeled after the Building Opportunities for Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grants program, at \$20 million housed at the Georgia Department of Education and building off the existing infrastructure and partnerships of BOOST.**

This will facilitate:

- a. Creation of a statewide framework that expands access to and assures quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities.
  - b. Prioritization of funding support to OST programs that serve vulnerable youth, such as those who are economically disadvantaged, have a disability, and English language learners.
  - c. Utilization of existing state infrastructure to provide training and technical assistance to OST providers in four targeted areas: fiscal administration, quality measurement, program effectiveness, and provider leadership.
  - d. Leveraging the program evaluation and evidence collection strategies embedded within the BOOST grant to determine how to best serve current and prospective afterschool and summer learning providers in the future.
- 2. Create and fund an interagency liaison to coordinate afterschool and summer programming between the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and Georgia Department of Education to ensure alignment and coordination of OST services provided to youth and families.**

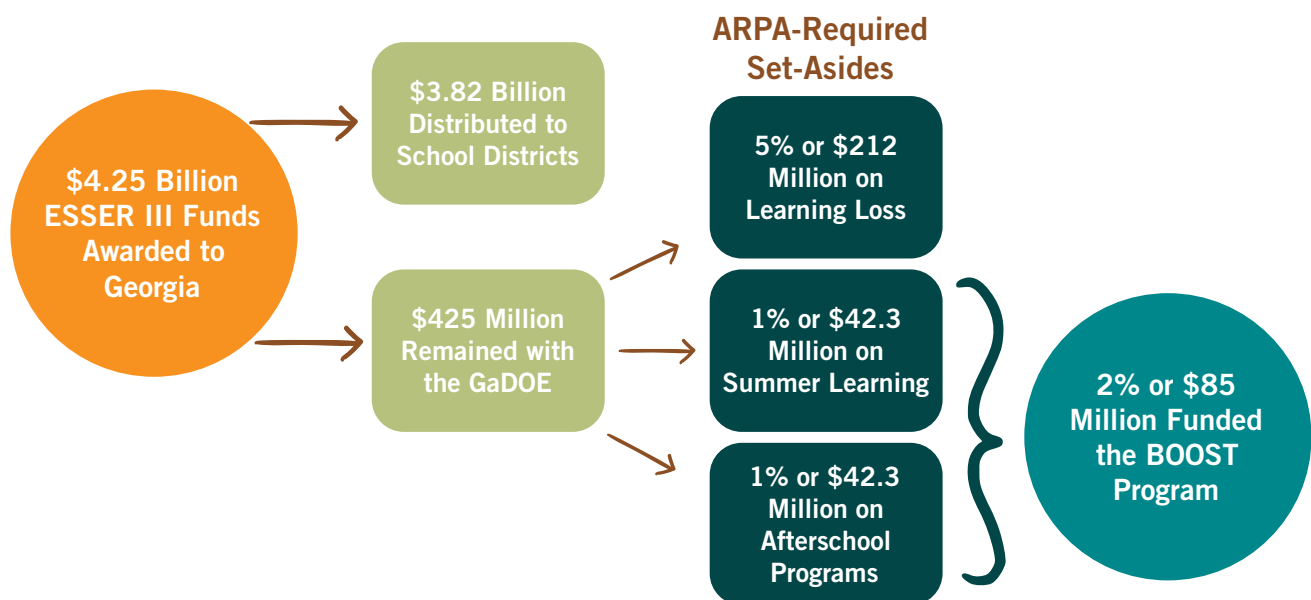
# Introduction

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), signed on March 11, 2021 set aside 10% of the \$122 billion Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER III) for state education agencies (SEAs). \$8.45 billion was directly allocated to support learning recovery, including out-of-school time (OST) programs. These funds were divided in three ways: 1% (\$1.2 billion) for comprehensive afterschool; 1% (\$1.2 billion) for summer enrichment; and 5% (\$6.1 billion) for learning recovery, which can include afterschool, summer, or extended school year programming.<sup>1</sup>

## Georgia's BOOST Grants Program

In July 2021, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) partnered with the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) a public-private collaborative that has worked alongside and supported Georgia's afterschool and summer learning field for over 15 years, to establish the Building Opportunities for Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Grants Program. GSAN administers this **three-year competitive grant to distribute approximately \$85 million** (Figure 1) to Georgia communities on behalf of GaDOE, which utilizes ESSER III funds to support the learning acceleration, connectedness, and well-being of Georgia's students, utilizing a whole child approach (e.g., ensuring students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged) to help remove non-academic learning barriers, focusing on students most impacted by COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

**FIGURE 1. ESSER III Funding Distribution**



<sup>1</sup> H.R.1319 - American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

<sup>2</sup> Georgia ARP-ESSER State Plan. July, 2021. <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/Georgia-ARP-ESSER-State-Plan.pdf>



Through BOOST, GSAN and GaDOE aim to expand access to and strengthen the quality of summer enrichment opportunities and comprehensive afterschool programming for K-12 youth statewide. The program prioritized specific populations, including programs that serve youth with disabilities, youth experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, English language learners, youth receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and migratory youth. Through BOOST grant awards, GSAN required all applicants to focus on at least one of the three program priorities:



**Expand Access**



**Reduce Barriers**



**Strengthen  
Program Quality**



*Georgia Recreation and Parks Association*



# Methods

## Evaluation Design

Metis Associates (Metis), the BOOST evaluation partner, designed the cross-site evaluation to include three components. The [Implementation Study](#) began in the program's first year and documented BOOST implementation, such as service delivery, youth satisfaction, challenges, success stories, and lessons learned.

The BOOST evaluation's two remaining components began in the program's second year: the [Outcomes Study](#) assesses youth's learning acceleration, connectedness, and well-being outcomes, and the [Systems Study](#) focuses on the quality and effectiveness of BOOST oversight, administration, and sustainability.

## Participatory Approach

In December 2022, Metis facilitated the first meeting of the BOOST Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG), a subcommittee of the BOOST Advisory Council. The group met quarterly through 2023, with 12 members, including GSAN staff and grantee representatives. The EAG provided invaluable feedback on the FLUX end-of-year grant reporting, data management tools, case study protocols, and implementation report findings, which were incorporated discerningly into the evaluation. Metis also convened and led a Youth Evaluation Advisory Group (YEAG) in the spring of 2023. The YEAG trained middle and high school students in evaluation methods and allowed youth to share their experiences with their BOOST program while contributing to a participatory evaluation process.

### DATA SOURCES

#### End-of-Year Grantee Reports



The grantee reports consist of 25 questions about services provided, successes and challenges experienced, and characteristics of youth served, as well as data on youth satisfaction, and progress toward meeting outcomes.



#### Key Stakeholder Interviews

To learn about BOOST's creation implementation, and sustainability, one-on-one interviews were done with 14 individuals. They represented 12 state and national organizations with education, afterschool, and grantmaking expertise.



#### Grantee Case Studies

For eight randomly selected BOOST grantees, Metis conducted virtual or in-person interviews or focus groups with organizational leadership, program staff, partners (if appropriate), students, and parents, as available.



#### Literature Review

Metis completed a two-phase literature review to identify states that use an ESSER III fund distribution model similar to Georgia and learn about similar evaluations of those efforts that might be underway.



#### Document Review

The Metis team reviewed different types of program documentation to inform the development of and updates to the evaluation plan, understand GSAN administrative activities in support of BOOST, and develop data collection tools.



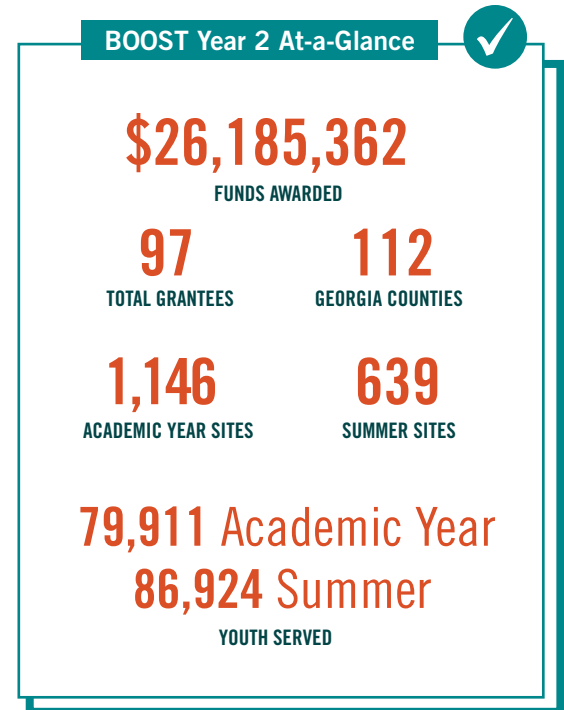
# Implementation Study

## BOOST Reach

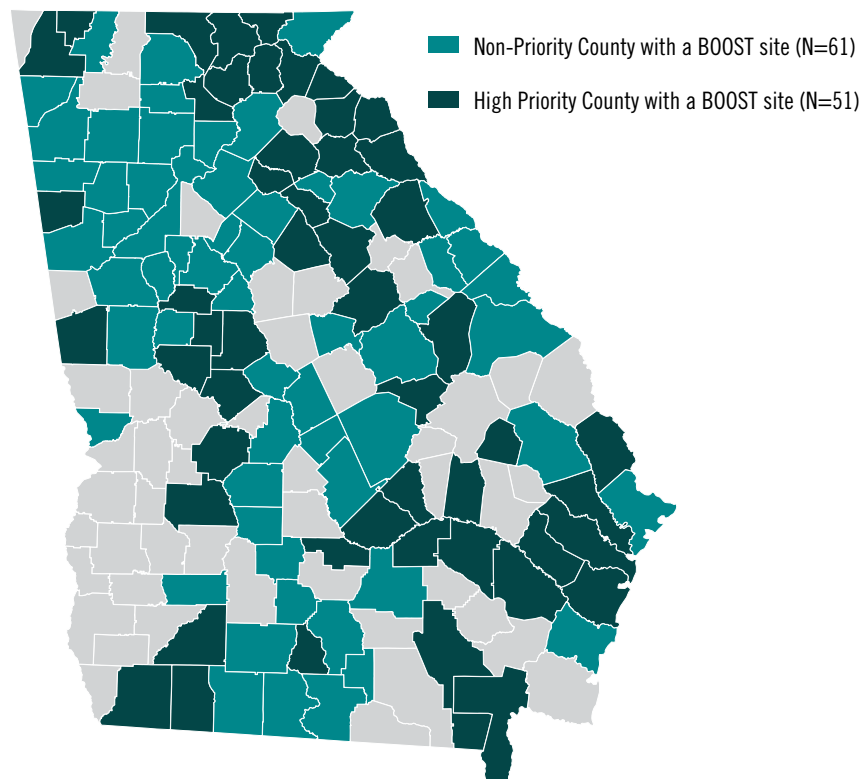
A total of 97 BOOST grantees (including 93 community organizations and four statewide organizations) implemented programming in Year 2. The statewide and community grantees operated **1,416 academic year sites**, serving **79,911 youth**. The majority (74%) operated at least five locations, and one grantee (Boy Scouts of America Atlanta Area Council) served 512 sites.

There were also **639 summer program sites** among the statewide and community grantees, with the majority (83%) operating fewer than five sites and one community grantee (Bread of Life Development Ministries, Inc.) operating 69 sites. Across all the BOOST-supported summer program sites, **86,924 youth** participated.

The BOOST-funded academic year and summer program sites served youth in **112 or 70% of Georgia's 159 counties** (Figure 2).



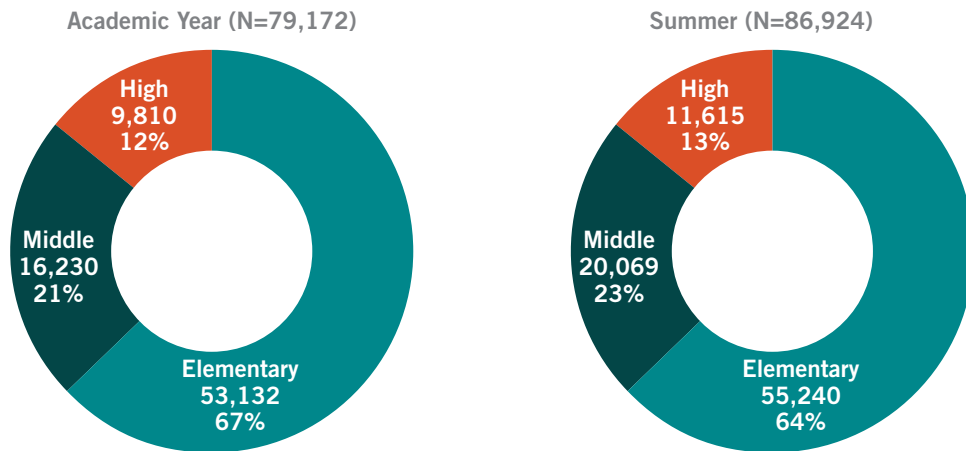
**FIGURE 2. BOOST Reach Across Georgia's 159 Counties**



## Youth Served

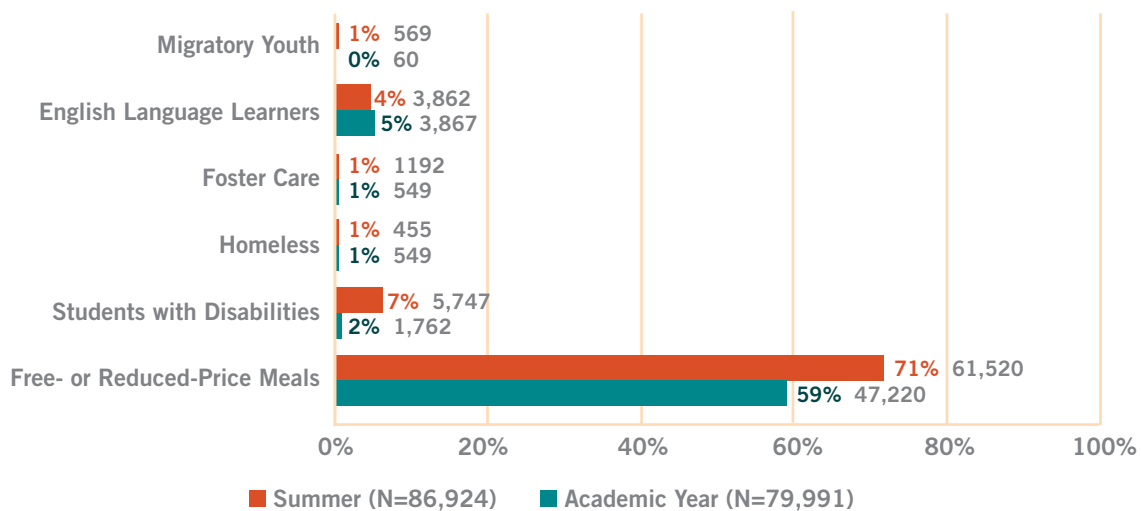
Most youth served by BOOST-funded sites were in elementary grades K through 5 (Figure 3). During the academic year, these students accounted for 67% of all participating youth, while during the summer, these youth accounted for just under two-thirds of the population served (64%).

**FIGURE 3. Grade Levels of Youth Served, Year 2**



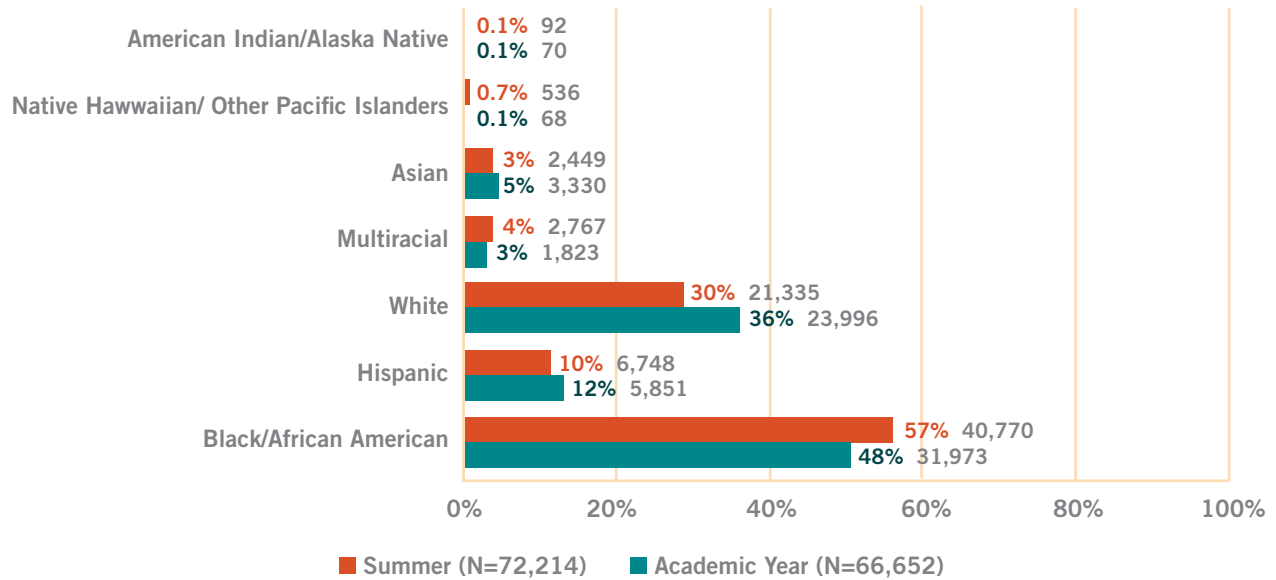
Year 2 BOOST grantees successfully targeted the priority youth populations outlined in the ARPA (Figure 4). Over two-thirds of the BOOST youth served were eligible for free- or reduced-price meals at school during the summer (61,520 or 71%). Conversely, only 59% of students (47,220) served during the academic year were eligible for free- or reduced-price meals.

**FIGURE 4. BOOST Priority Youth Served, Year 2**



Overall, grantees reported serving mostly Black youth, with the highest percentage of African American youth being served in the summer (57%) compared to the academic year (48%) (Figure 5). These proportions are substantially higher than the percentage of Black youth statewide (36% - not shown).<sup>3</sup>

**FIGURE 5. Racial/Ethnic Background of Youth Served, Year 2**



*Jessye Norman School of the Arts*

<sup>3</sup> Georgia Department of Education, 2023.

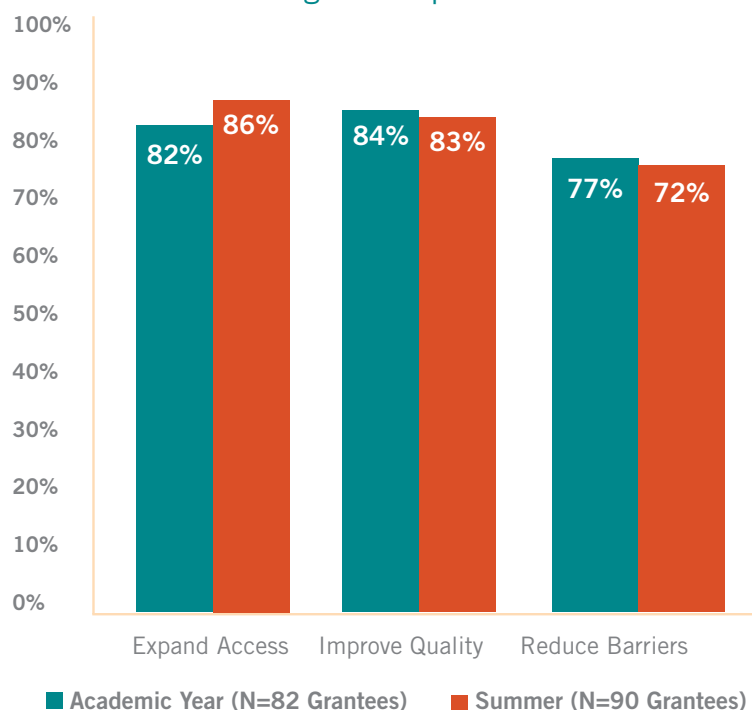
## Program Purposes

As described earlier in this report, BOOST grantees were required to focus on at least one of the three program purposes:

1. Expand the number of youth served
2. Reduce barriers to youth participation
3. Strengthen program quality

Figure 6 shows how many grantees addressed each purpose in Year 2 during the academic year and the summer. Both sets of grantees most frequently worked on expanding access (82% for the academic year and 86% for the summer) and strengthening program quality (84% for the academic year and 83% for the summer). About three-quarters of all grantees focused on reducing barriers to participation (77% for the academic year and 72% for the summer).

**FIGURE 6.**  
BOOST Program Purposes Addressed



*"We used BOOST funding, initially and ongoing, to expand our reach. We wanted to be able to operate in more school districts and be a little more intentional and excellent in the programs we offered."*

– BOOST Program Leader

*"We use our BOOST funding in addition to the other funding we get to offer this program for free. For that barrier of cost, we want to eliminate it for all our students in schools."*

– Key Stakeholder Informant

*"The BOOST funding has allowed us to have reading specialists who serve our kids one-on-one. These reading specialists have filled in some of the cracks or the foundation that was crumbling. They've been able to support those students and be there with them one-on-one, and nurture, and give them those skills and build their confidence."*

– BOOST Program Staff Member

## TOP 3 STRATEGIES UTILIZED FOR EACH PROGRAM PURPOSE



### EXPAND ACCESS

- **Serving more youth** (69% for the academic year; 32% for the summer) **or new youth populations** such as students with exceptional needs, English language learners, and homeless youth (44% for the academic year; 23% for the summer).
- **Expanded daily program hours or weekly days of operation** (33% for the academic year; 7% for the summer).
- **Opened new sites or locations**, such as at schools, local churches, or foster care facilities (35% for the academic year; 12% for the summer).



### REDUCE BARRIERS

- **Providing transportation services** (55% for the academic year; 48% for summer).
- **Continuing to offer free programming** (66% for the academic year; 46% for summer) **or waiving or reducing program fees** (41% for the academic year; 10% for summer).
- **Offering more accessible program locations**, such as those within walking distance of participants' homes or at more convenient locations for families (28% for the academic year only).



### STRENGTHEN PROGRAM QUALITY

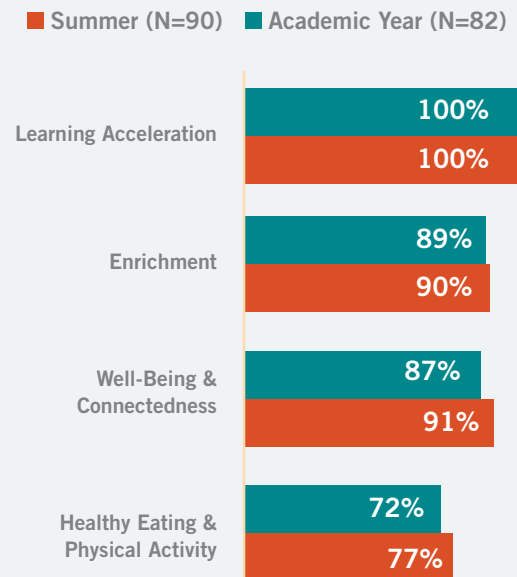
- **Providing youth with healthy meals or snacks on site** (61% for the academic year; 19% for the summer) or to take home (16% for the academic year; 2% for the summer).
- **Expand existing program services and activities**, such as offering new instructional levels, learning acceleration events, new student clubs, and increasing tutoring provisions (51% for the academic year; 35% for the summer).
- **Providing staff training** on leadership, trauma-informed service delivery, art therapy, phonics instruction, and ASYD quality standards (45% for the academic year; 12% for the summer).

## Program Activities

All grantees were to offer at least three of the following four service areas as part of their BOOST-supported programs (Figure 7):

- **Learning Acceleration** (required) was offered by all academic year and summer grantees. Literacy instruction and STEM/STEAM/STREAM (science, technology, reading, engineering, arts, and math) were offered most often among both academic year and summer grantees (85% and 75%, respectively; and (74% vs. 80%, respectively).
- **Enrichment** was provided by approximately 90% of the academic year and summer grantees. Crafts, visual and performing arts, and career exploration were the most commonly offered activities among BOOST grantees (68%-77% of academic year grantees and 64%-76% of summer grantees).
- **Well-being and connectedness** were provided by approximately 90% of academic year and summer grantees. At least half of the academic year and summer grantees offered team-building and problem-solving activities, well-being connectedness support, and mental health services. Nearly half of grantees provided mentoring (46% in the academic year and 44% in the summer).
- **Healthy eating and physical activity** were provided by about three-fourths of the academic year and summer grantees. Many grantees reported providing youth healthy meals and snacks during the academic year (84%) and summer programming (69%). Sports and other recreational activities were also offered by most academic year and summer grantees (78% and 85%, respectively).

**FIGURE 7.**  
BOOST Implementation –  
Service Areas Addressed







## Grantee Spotlights

**Los Niños Primero** (Fulton, Cherokee, Cobb, DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Hall Counties) Intragenerational Early Literacy Program seeks to improve Latino family literacy by inviting parents into the classroom and encouraging them to invest early in an academic relationship with their children. Children learn reading, writing, social, and language skills, while parents work alongside the children, improving their literacy and language skills.

Through BOOST funding, the **GENTS & GLAM** Take Flight program (Appling, Coffee, Jeff Davis, Telfair, and Wheeling Counties) provides 40 hours of ground school training and flight time for youth ages 12-18. The GENTS & GLAM afterschool programs also provided character education, mentoring, and college tours for their middle and high school students.

**LIFT Youth Center** (Catoosa County) increased youths' exposure to the outdoors through its Summer Adventure Education Program for 6th-12th grade students in Catoosa County, focusing on three goals: positive outdoor experiences to build confidence, outdoor/environmental education, and leadership development.

**Team Up Mentoring** (Walton County) serves youth between the ages of 3-21 who have experienced significant early childhood trauma. The afterschool program offers mentoring nights, transportation to the program, hot meals, and opportunities for STEAM, journaling, well-being, and physical movement activities in supportive, age-appropriate peer groups.



*GENTS & GLAM community, family, and youth services*

## Implementation Success

On the Year 2 end-of-program FLUXX reports, grantees conveyed their successes and provided numerous anecdotes of positive youth growth and development. Those mentioned most frequently by both summer and academic year grantees included:

- **Improved mental health, well-being, and connectedness**, focusing on mindfulness, respect, resilience, anti-bullying, adult-youth relationships, peer relationships, self-confidence, and coping skills.
- **Exposed youth to new content**, such as public speaking courses, STEM or STEAM instruction, and robotics curriculum **or offered them new programs, services, and initiatives**, such as educational field trips, workforce development, financial literacy, healthy eating and lifestyles, mental health support groups, SAT/ACT prep, and residential summer programs.
- **Improved youth academic learning**, as evidenced by students' report card grades, test scores, and observed reading/writing abilities.
- **Developed youth life skills**, such as becoming more college-ready, exhibiting leadership, learning problem-solving and communication, practicing teamwork, obtaining internships, demonstrating autonomy, engaging in community service, and life/future planning.
- **Developed strong youth-program adult/staff relationships.**
- **Improved youth school attendance.**
- **Increased parent/family and community program interest**, using strategies such as neighborhood canvassing.
- **Provided youth volunteer and community service opportunities**, such as organized Days of Service, the Emory University ACT NOW Summit, and local community service projects.



*Georgia Alliance of YMCA*

## Grantee Challenges

Grantees were asked to describe implementation challenges and unexpected difficulties during the BOOST program's second year. Summer and academic year grantees described the following obstacles most frequently:

- **Staff retention or recruitment**, resulting in staffing vacancies, higher than ideal staff-student ratios, hiring difficulties because of inadequate salaries for vacant positions, and serving fewer youth than planned.
- **Youth with mental health or behavioral issues**, including many students with adverse childhood experiences, such as witnessing family and community violence, living in high poverty, and incarcerated parents or other family members.
- **Youth with severe academic needs or learning loss**, such as students with limited English proficiency, students experiencing summer slide, lingering issues related to pandemic learning loss, and youth with below grade-level reading and math abilities.
- **Lack of or difficulties with transportation**, such as limited availability of bus drivers, unavailable buses, mechanical issues with older buses and vans, and affording the rising costs associated with providing transportation.
- **Data collection and analysis**, such as difficulties administering assessments due to student mobility and inconsistent student attendance, establishing data collection processes and identifying measurement tools.
- **Program recruitment or enrollment challenges**, particularly with enrolling and maintaining the engagement or enrollment of high school students.

## Grantee Administration

During the BOOST program's first and second years, GSAN completed extensive work dedicated to ensuring timely grantee communications, supporting grant compliance, and leading process improvement efforts. This occurred through substantial technical assistance through email, Zoom videoconference sessions, and phone calls. This assistance spanned a wide array of topics, including:

- Vendor management
- Budget amendments and modifications
- Program modifications
- Invoicing processes
- Program quality review
- Grant compliance
- State accounting systems set-ups



*Boys and Girls Club of Moultrie*



In Year 2, GSAN delivered 202 customized, one-on-one technical assistance sessions with grantees and responded to over 3,000 technical assistance inquiries from BOOST grantees quarterly. Examples of other grant administration responsibilities of GSAN included:

- Conducting grantee site visits to support the GaDOE overall monitoring plan.
- Analyzing grantee performance.
- Revising and updating annual grantee reporting templates in collaboration with the United Way of Greater Atlanta and Metis.
- Convening and chairing the BOOST Advisory Council comprised of grantee representatives to help inform BOOST implementation statewide.

In the program's second year, GSAN continued to use a multi-tiered approach to deliver comprehensive training and technical assistance (TTA) to all BOOST grantees. The overall goals of the TTA were to help meet grantees' organizational needs, bolster the quality of youth development services provided statewide, and strengthen grantee capacity and infrastructure.



*C5 Georgia*

# Outcomes Study

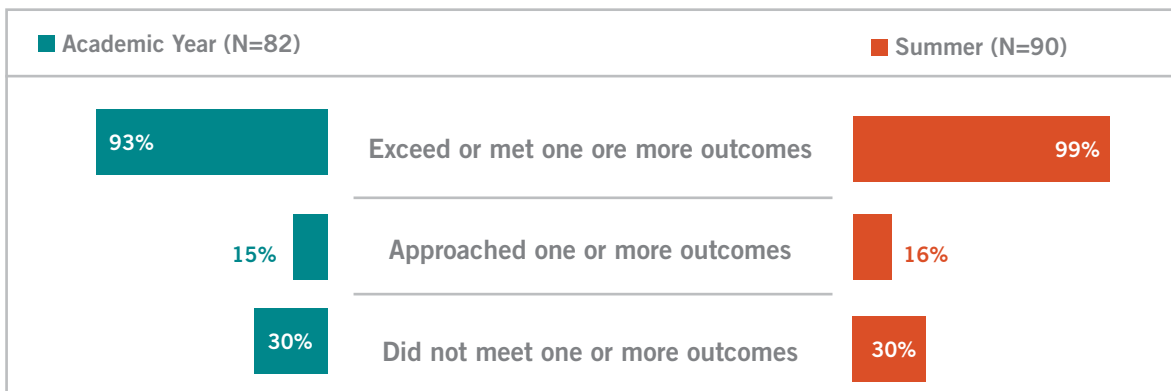
## Grantee Outcomes by Service Area

BOOST grantees were required to develop three outcomes for youth participants: one for learning acceleration and two others in any of the four BOOST service areas: learning acceleration, enrichment, healthy eating and physical activity, and well-being and connectedness. All grantees reported at least one learning acceleration outcome. More than half of academic year grantees (55%) and two-thirds of summer grantees (68%) proposed at least one well-being and connectedness outcome. Approximately one-third of grantees or fewer proposed outcomes in enrichment (33% of academic year grantees and 39% of summer grantees) and healthy eating and physical activity (21% in the academic year and 30% in the summer).

Overall, the great majority of grantees met or exceeded at least one of their outcomes during the academic year (93%) or the summer (99%) as shown in Figure 8. The following evaluation criteria were used:

- **Exceeded:** Greater than five percentage points above the target
- **Met:** Within five percentage points above or below the target
- **Approached:** Between six and ten percentage points below the target
- **Not met:** Greater than ten percentage points below the target

**FIGURE 8.**  
Percent of Grantees with Measured Outcomes by Attainment Level\*



\*Because grantees had multiple outcomes, it is feasible that a grantee could meet, exceed, approach, or not meet one or more outcomes. Therefore, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

## Learning Acceleration

While the requirement was to have at least one learning acceleration outcome, many grantees proposed more than one. As a result, 143 learning acceleration outcomes were proposed by the 82 grantees operating academic year programs, and the 90 summer grantees proposed 133. Below is a summary of the types of learning acceleration outcomes proposed by grantees and how they were assessed:

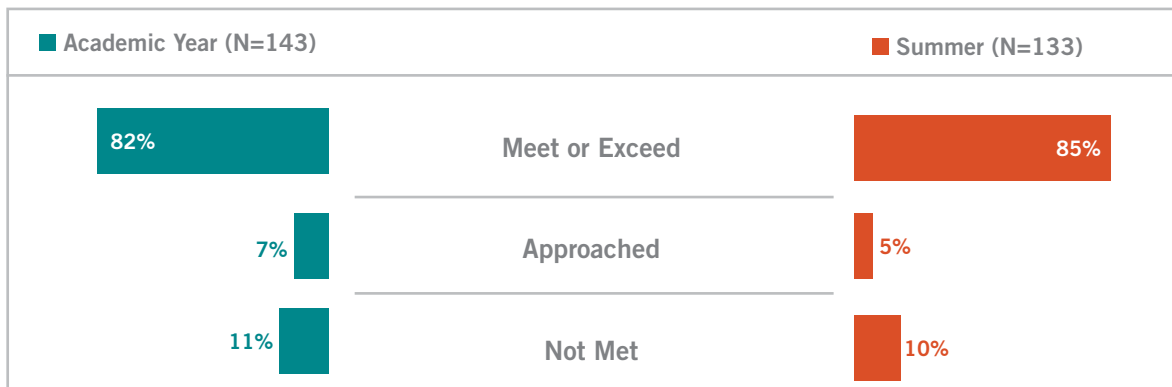
- **Academic gains** in literacy, math, or other core subjects were the focus of most learning acceleration outcomes (51% of the academic year learning acceleration outcomes and 40% of the summer learning acceleration outcomes). Tools used to measure academic gains primarily included report card grades and assessments, including Georgia Milestones assessments and diagnostic tests such as the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and iReady assessments.
- **Increased access to accelerated learning activities**, including increasing the numbers of students served and establishing program attendance and service delivery targets.
- **Improved college and career readiness**, including the numbers of students graduating/on track to graduate high school on time, who enrolled in a post-secondary program and/or reported increased awareness of college and career opportunities.
- **Gains in knowledge, confidence, and/or interest** in STEM/STEAM, water safety, music, financial literacy, and life skills.

*“Through the partnership with the Richmond County Board of Education, the THRIVE staff members are able to obtain iReady diagnostic data results for K-8 as well as quarterly report cards. The diagnostic results along with grade reports allow teachers and staff to establish collaborative groups to focus on reading and math strengths and weaknesses. The results have been encouraging. The data results show an 80% success rate with 170 students out of the target number of 213 on track to make an increase by one grade level in their academic performance.”*

– Augusta Richmond County Juvenile Court

Data were available for 94% of the proposed outcomes for the academic year and 98% for the summer. As shown in Figure 9, most grantees met or exceeded their learning acceleration outcomes during the academic year (82%) or the summer (85%). **Overall, learning acceleration outcomes were achieved for approximately 46,945 youth during the academic year and 48,587 during the summer.**

**FIGURE 9.** Status of Learning Acceleration Outcomes





## Enrichment

A total of 30 enrichment outcomes were proposed by 27 grantees operating academic year programs, and 39 enrichment outcomes were proposed by 35 grantees operating summer programs. Specific outcomes included:

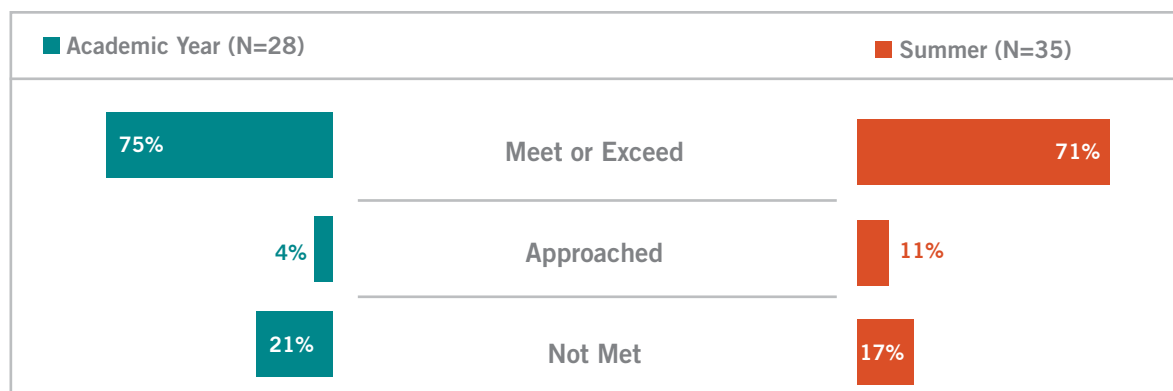
- **Increased student exposure** to new experiences or topics, such as entrepreneurship, arts programming and performances, and STEM enrichment activities.
- **Enhanced college and career readiness**, including increased interest in and awareness of careers (particularly in STEM fields) and their educational requirements.
- **Growth in social skills**, including improvements in social skills, leadership skills, self-expression, and sense of belonging.

*“The class of 2023 was a small cohort but had outstanding results. 100% graduated high school. They earned over \$5 million in college scholarships which included national scholarships such as Posse, QuestBridge and 5 Strong. 24 out of the 30 are attending traditional college, including Yale, UGA, Georgia Tech, George Washington, Notre Dame and Northwestern. Several are attending technical schools and joining the military.”*

– C5 Georgia Youth Foundation

Data were available for nearly all the proposed enrichment outcomes during the academic year (N=28, 93%) and summer (N=35, 90%). Tools used to measure these outcomes included program participation data, youth surveys, informal conversations with youth, staff, and/or family members, and staff observations. As shown in Figure 10, most grantees met or exceeded their enrichment outcomes during the academic year (75%) and/or the summer (71%). **Overall, enrichment outcomes were achieved for 8,534 youth during the academic year and 13,264 youth during the summer.**

**FIGURE 10.** Status of Enrichment Outcomes



## Well-Being and Connectedness

A total of 119 connectedness and well-being outcomes were proposed in Year 2 by 45 academic year grantees and 61 summer grantees. Specific outcomes included:

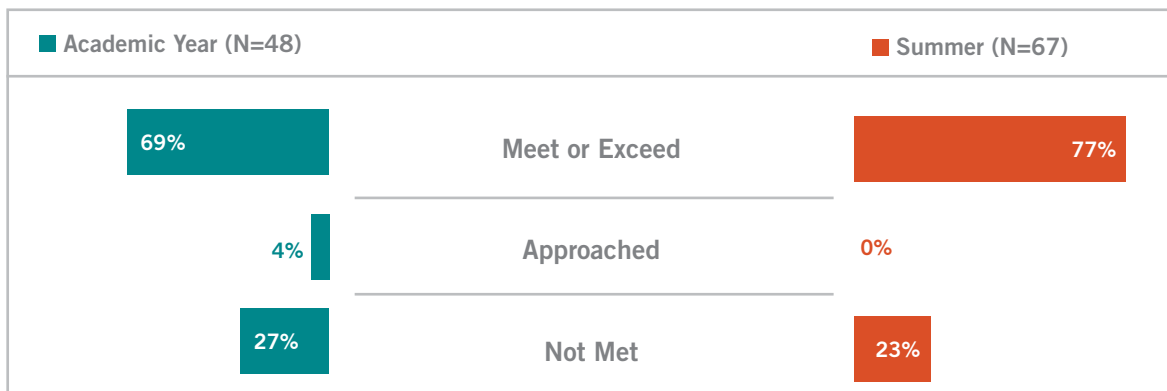
- **Growth in personal well-being**, including self-confidence, self-esteem, social skills, leadership skills, and sense of belonging.
- **Increased access to activities** to promote student well-being and connectedness, including team building, mentoring, community service, and family engagement activities.
- **Increased access to mental health supports** and information on mental health concepts, such as the importance of self-care.
- **Improved social and academic behaviors.**
- **Positive perceptions of program quality**, including the extent to which the program environment was safe and supportive and provided opportunities for youth to establish positive relationships with adults and/or peers.

*“Over 80% of our students report forming meaningful connections with at least three or more friends within our program. Every student in our program feels welcomed and comfortable being authentic. Every one of our students feels genuinely heard and recognized by our dedicated program staff.”*

– The Drake House

Data were available for 115 (97%) of the 119 well-being and connectedness outcomes. Tools used to measure these outcomes included program participation data, youth surveys, informal conversations with youth, staff, and/or family members, and staff observations. Overall, most connectedness and well-being outcomes were met or exceeded during the academic year (69%) and the summer (77%) (Figure 11). **Well-being and connectedness outcomes were achieved for 11,692 youth during the academic year and 31,088 during the summer.**

**FIGURE 11.** Status of the Well-Being and Connectedness Outcomes



## Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

A total of 52 healthy eating/physical activity outcomes were proposed by 17 academic year grantees and 27 summer grantees. Specific outcomes achieved included:

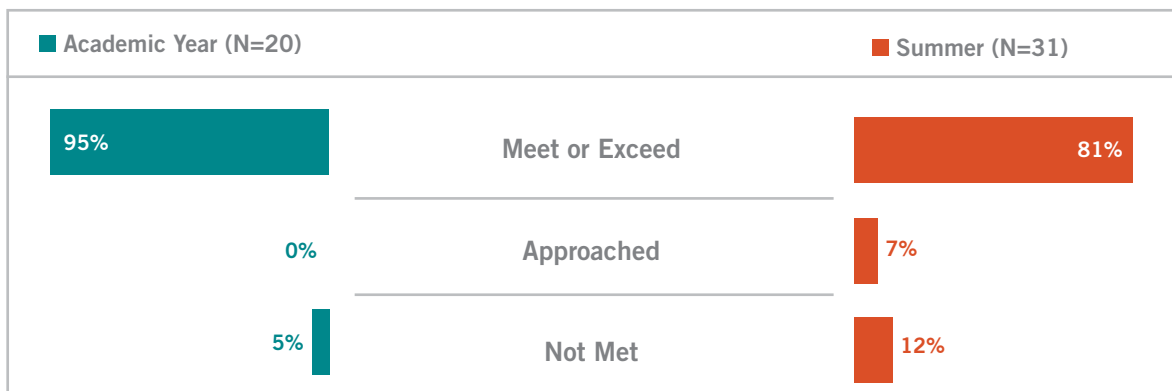
- **Increased knowledge of healthy living and nutrition**, leading to healthier choices and improved self-confidence and well-being.
- **Increased time spent engaging in physical activity**, including daily exercise and structured activities such as sports and related activities.
- **Increased access and exposure to healthy foods**, including nutritious snacks and meals provided by grantees during programming.

*“The students learned to read and track water intake and completed the daily tracking. We used the age-appropriate Skillastics Curriculum to teach students healthy meals and physical activity, which was fun and engaging for the students.”*

– Thomasville Community Resource Center

All but one of the 52 healthy eating and physical activity outcomes were measured. Tools used to measure these outcomes included program participation data, youth surveys, informal conversations with youth, staff, and/or family members, and staff observations. Figure 12 shows that most healthy eating/physical activity outcomes were met or exceeded during the academic year (95%) and the summer (81%). **Healthy eating/physical activity outcomes were achieved for 27,052 youth during the academic year and 34,811 youth during the summer.**

**FIGURE 12.** Status of the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Outcomes

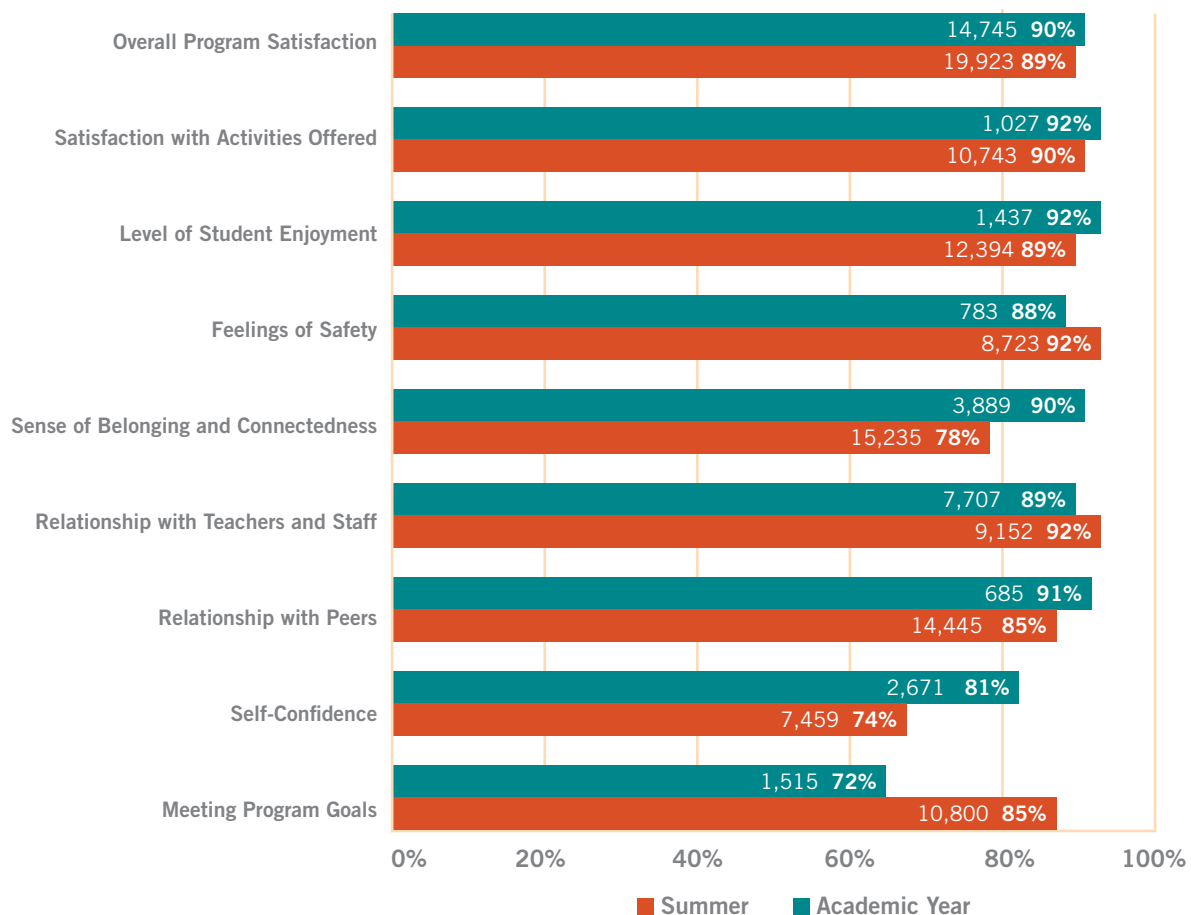


## Youth Satisfaction

All academic year and summer grantees measured youth satisfaction with BOOST-funded programs in Year 2, primarily through student surveys. Data on youth satisfaction were available for 34% of the 79,911 academic year youth participants and 43% of the 86,924 summer youth participants. In addition to measuring youth satisfaction with the overall program experience, many grantees also assessed additional constructs, such as satisfaction with activities offered, sense of belonging and connectedness, relationships with teachers/staff or peers, youth enjoyment, and feelings of safety.

Overall, youth satisfaction with BOOST programming appears high – **90% for the academic year youth and 89% for the summer participants**. The majority of youth reported satisfaction with program activities offered, relationships with teachers and staff, and level of student enjoyment.

**FIGURE 13. Youth Satisfaction Results, Year 2**



# Systems Study

In the spring of 2023, Metis researchers conducted 14 interviews with BOOST stakeholders with varied experiences with and knowledge of the BOOST grants program's development, planning, submission, review, implementation, and evaluation. These stakeholders included statewide and local providers and national and statewide OST experts.

## BOOST Grants Program Design

Several stakeholders served as advisors or information providers in the collaborative process that led GaDOE and GSAN to create two RFPs—one for statewide and one for local agencies—that would reach underserved youth throughout the state. They described the mission of the BOOST grants program most commonly in the following order:

- Diminishing learning loss and meeting the educational needs of all students;
- Expand access to out-of-school time (OST) learning to promote student success; and
- Strengthening OST quality, building the capacity of OST providers, and meeting the mental health or well-being needs of students whom COVID has impacted.

According to nine stakeholders, the decision to disperse ESSER III funding in Georgia through a competitive grants program was primarily a means of ensuring the fair distribution of funds. Several stakeholders mentioned that GSAN was uniquely positioned in the state to help reach a broad range of organizations, given its longstanding and productive relationships with the OST community. In describing the RFP development process, several stakeholders described reaching new organizations as a key motivator. Being flexible with funding was also an important consideration while developing the RFP. It allowed organizations to focus on their specific needs and request support for transportation and capital costs not typically covered by other grants. **While the ability to manage a BOOST grant was part of the funding criteria, GSAN and partners also sought to build local capacity so that smaller organizations would be encouraged to apply.**

*"A huge part of [BOOST] was to be able to help support nonprofits in school districts who were providing essential academic support services across the state. And the idea was to get those public dollars into their hands so that they could continue to provide academic support and address the learning loss that we all experienced post-COVID."*

**– Key Stakeholder Informant**

A competitive grant process also ensured that only high-quality programs would receive funding—guaranteeing that “taxpayer dollars are being used wisely for the kids.” Still, two stakeholders expressed their interest in bringing greater attention to racial disparities in the fund distribution process. Another interviewee recognized that ensuring a good mix of urban and rural applicants was challenging, though they did not find the RFP process at fault as there are fewer youth-serving organizations in remote areas, resulting in fewer rural applicants.

When asked about GSAN's greatest successes overseeing BOOST, all who responded were positive overall and about various aspects of their work. This includes highlighted strengths including:

- Communicating with grantees and answering their questions,
- Helping grantees navigate legal and budget questions,
- Offering training and certificate programs from the Georgia Center for Nonprofits, and
- Getting the “money out the door and getting access for kids.”

*“There are not enough slots for kids to have programming. Why is that? In some cases, it's because there aren't enough organizations, but for the most part, it's because those organizations don't have enough money.”*

– Key Stakeholder Informant

## BOOST Public-Private Structure

All stakeholders lauded GaDOE's decision to partner with GSAN to manage, administer, and provide support for BOOST, with some calling it a model that should be replicated. Stakeholders described many benefits to using a public-private structure, with half referencing how a private organization like GSAN's distinct qualities enhanced

the BOOST process. Almost all (12) stakeholders described GSAN as an obvious choice of partner because of its knowledge of OST best practices. Four interviewees also described that CBOs already know and trust GSAN, so they are more comfortable working with them than with a less familiar government entity. Combined with their expertise in grant administration, these interviewees felt that GSAN brought unique knowledge, skills, relationships, and experience to the table.

*“I think the value added of [having GSAN involved] is it shows that—through a combination of a partnership with the state education agency and a statewide intermediary, or an entity like GSAN—you can use [public] funds... to run a competition and have a positive impact. I think that helps make the case not just in Georgia but in other states that this is something worth having. It is more than a nicety, but essential to be able to provide supports for families and kids that need it.”*

– Key Stakeholder Informant

As a content expert in the OST field, GSAN provided grantees with professional learning opportunities that supported their work while further building strong relationships. Further, two stakeholders explained that having GSAN as a partner allowed for greater speed and support than would have been possible if GaDOE had been running the BOOST competition alone. The collaboration created a “fantastic opportunity.”



## Successes and Challenges

Interviewees defined success for BOOST in many ways, though there was the greatest agreement (six people) that the initiative should build local capacity for program staffing, operations, and fundraising. Relatedly, the ability to sustain programming post-BOOST will be an important measure of success. One stakeholder explained, “I think [capacity building] is a measure of success. What happens to those programs in 2025 and 2026? How many of those can get additional funds and keep their programs going?... And for the network itself, what do they look like post this huge endeavor that shifted the organization itself?”

Others described success as:

- Expanding access,
- Strengthening program quality,
- Providing students with academics, enrichment, and well-being, and
- Creating sustainable public-private partnerships and cross-sector collaboration.

*“Some of the biggest impact [of BOOST] has been providing funding to providers that have never had federal funds before and giving them the capacity so that now they’re in a place where they can go after 21st Century [Community Learning Centers] grants, or some of the other funding streams.”*

– Key Stakeholder Informant

More broadly, some spoke about BOOST’s potential to support the OST field: “[BOOST] has raised the caliber of what people think about OST,” contributing to stronger support from state actors and funders, thus advancing program longevity.

Stakeholders were largely satisfied with BOOST’s ability to meet these metrics for success, with six describing how organizations have grown capacity due to BOOST. This growth includes adopting best practices, building internal teams and partnerships, enhancing the capacity to apply for new funding, and investing in new curricula and enrichment.

Five interviewees also referenced successes on the ground when describing program impact. Specifically, three stakeholders explained how BOOST has expanded the reach of funding geographically to rural areas and to smaller “mom and pop” organizations, which “expanded availability of services for kids.” Two also spoke about BOOST’s impact on children and families as a key success, giving kids a safe place to go and building their confidence.

While generally positive about BOOST, stakeholders also discussed challenges to grant implementation. **Half of the respondents mentioned issues related to grantee funding and financials, including determination of final award amounts, the need for state vendor approval, having to split afterschool and summer funding evenly, delays in securing first-year grantee funding, and the lag in second-year budget approvals.**

Other notable challenges included:

- Understanding and interpreting state and ESSER relief fund regulations and allowable costs,
- Tight grant schedules left grantees with limited time to hire and orient staff, purchase equipment and supplies, and implement planned services, and
- Finding program staff to meet demand.

To address these challenges, some stakeholders suggested improved communications between grantees and partners. Interviewees also encouraged further examination into the best cadence of communications with grantees—balancing their need for information and support with the desire not to overwhelm them. Some stakeholders also wanted to see more discussions about how to best facilitate processes for vendor approval, eligible expenses and budgets.

## Sustainability

**Stakeholders who discussed sustainability were all adamant that BOOST (or a comparable form of support) should continue to support OST programs for Georgia youth.** Though it was conceived as a response to the impact of COVID, the need for interventions that continue to address learning loss and mental health challenges is as strong as ever. One interviewee described how researchers have found “that the pandemic may be over and the funding may be over soon, but the impacts on young people and the need for additional supports isn’t going to be over anytime soon...Even before the pandemic, we had 25 million students who wanted to be in an afterschool program nationally and who didn’t have access to a program or couldn’t afford available ones. And so, I think sustaining the programs that started and the programs that expanded is critical.” Those interviewed also noted that programs simply cannot continue with the same scope and reach if staffing funds disappear.

While agreeing that such offerings are worthwhile, there needed to be more consensus on where future funding should come from. Five stakeholders argued that the federal government has a role in sustaining OST funding—though they should not be the sole source of dollars. Others saw the state as the starting point for future support before going to the federal government, with one noting, “We’ve had the opportunity through these federal dollars to test this out. We’ve learned some things. Maybe we do a few things differently. But here’s the evaluation, the success, the stories...We need to continue this, and the state needs to invest in this to do so.” Another similarly stressed the state’s role in advancing OST efforts: **“I hope to see more state investment in out-of-school time and not just as a stop-gap to bridge learning loss, but looking at the wide array of what kind of services these programs offer and think of it being a whole child, whole community approach to how we are supporting young people.”**

*“You’ve seen in states and in local jurisdictions, universal pre-K or early care programs or state versions of Head Start rolled out on a pilot basis ... And if they were not intended to be forever, they’re now forever because parents spoke up and said, ‘Absolutely, you cannot take this away.’ I feel that must happen here, particularly in the communities that never had access to these [OST] programs before. Voices at the local, state, and federal levels need to be raised. I would argue the funds are there, the support is there, but it’s a prioritization issue at different value levels, and does it make sense to spend money on it.”*

– Key Stakeholder Informant

Five stakeholders argued that braided funding that combines a mix of federal, state, local, foundation, corporate, and private philanthropic funds would be necessary to sustain the accessibility and levels of service made possible by BOOST. One stakeholder noted that GSN and GaDOE could guide how to blend and braid funding to support CBOs, as Alabama’s Department of Education has done in partnership with their afterschool network.

Six stakeholders explained that advocacy efforts are important in sustaining BOOST-like support. Some noted that mobilizing youth and especially getting the “taxpayers calling”—is a particularly effective way to create change.

Six stakeholders articulated the need to keep “storytelling...ongoing and often” about the impact BOOST has had on families, communities, and state-level partnerships to ensure that policymakers understand the benefits—with some arguing that this kind of widespread sharing has not been done enough. This includes not just promoting the impact of OST programming on youth but also the well-being of their families; as one explained, “It would be nice to be able to speak to how important afterschool is in terms of families recovering [from COVID] and people going back to work.”

Stakeholders agreed that a combination of qualitative stories and quantitative data is essential to making the case for future funding support; as one noted, “I think the data side is key. And then, the story side is just as key.”



*Deep Center*



# Next Steps

## The Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network recommends the following:

1. Create and fund grant program, an out-of-school time (OST) grants program modeled after the grants program, at \$20 million housed at the Georgia Department of Education and building off the existing infrastructure and partnerships of BOOST. This will facilitate:
  - a. Creation of a statewide framework that expands access to and assures quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities.
  - b. Prioritization of funding support to OST programs that serve vulnerable youth, such as those who are economically disadvantaged, have a disability, and English language learners.
  - c. Utilization of existing state infrastructure to provide training and technical assistance to OST providers in four targeted areas: fiscal administration, quality measurement, program effectiveness, and provider leadership.
  - d. Leveraging the program evaluation and evidence collection strategies embedded within the BOOST grant to determine how to best serve current and prospective afterschool and summer learning providers in the future.
2. Create and fund an interagency liaison to coordinate afterschool and summer programming between the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and Georgia Department of Education to ensure alignment and coordination of OST services provided to youth and families.
3. Lower barriers of access to government funding for smaller organizations, especially in rural communities, by providing flexible funding to allow programs to meet evolving needs, allowing funds to be used for hard to cover expenses, such as capital expenses, partial upfront funding rather than reimbursement-based funding, and investments in organizational capacity building.
4. Develop partnerships between school districts and youth development organizations that lead to data sharing agreements to optimize resources, align services, and provide targeted academic and non-academic supports to youth.
5. Develop transportation grants to increase access to high quality youth development programs.



**BOOST Reports Page**



**BOOST Year 2  
Evaluation Report**



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