

Out-of-School Time Stories

BOOST Grantee Spotlight: YMCA of Metro Atlanta

The YMCA of Metro Atlanta is an essential support system for children and families throughout the region. Serving youth from kindergarten through 12th grade across 18 branches, 55 afterschool sites, 21-day camps, and two outdoor residential facilities at Lake Burton and Lake Allatoona, the organization is embedded in local communities, offering safe, enriching environments for youth and ensuring year-round accessibility for working families.

The YMCA of Metro Atlanta's out-of-school time (OST) programs are designed to **help young people close learning gaps, build confidence, explore future careers, and develop the skills they need to thrive.**

Collaborative Partnerships

The YMCA of Metro Atlanta's impact is amplified through strong, constructive partnerships. With most afterschool programs located within school facilities, **close collaboration with principals, social workers, and district leaders enables responsive programming that meets the evolving academic and behavioral needs of students.** This partnership also facilitates information sharing that allows the program to adapt offerings and work to reduce barriers – such as **referrals for students at risk of chronic absenteeism and simplifying financial assistance processes for families qualifying for free and reduced lunch.**



2025-2026 Youth Served:

***8,455 Afterschool & Summer**

Ages Served:

K-12th Grade

Counties Served:

Cherokee, Cobb, Coweta,
DeKalb, Fayette, Forsyth,
Fulton, Gwinnett, Newton,
Rockdale

Programming Offered:

Afterschool, Summer

BOOST Grant Purpose:

-  Expand access
-  Reduce barriers
-  Increase quality

OST Government Funding Sources:

BOOST Grant, 21st CCLC

Website:

<https://ymcaatlanta.org/>



*Service numbers reported may include duplicate youth

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Civic, business, and nonprofit partnerships further enrich programming: Bank of America provides financial literacy classes while STE(A)M Truck and Zoo Atlanta bring educational experiences directly to youth. Perhaps most impactful is the partnership with **Kiwanis Club and the Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, which has screened 813 campers for vision needs over two summers, resulting in 204 children receiving glasses** who otherwise would not have had access to vision care. In the second year, the partnership evolved responsively to data showing transportation was a barrier. Doctors came on-site to YMCA locations, performed exams, and had glasses mailed directly to families, dramatically increasing the percentage of children who received needed vision correction. These relationships foster a culture of resource sharing, data-driven improvement, and holistic support for the children and families they serve.

Pathways from Curiosity to Career

The YMCA of Metro Atlanta has built its out-of-school time curriculum with the goal of **creating a seamless pipeline of learning, exploration, and leadership from early elementary through high school**. This pipeline begins with Y Explore, the YMCA's K-5 afterschool program that blends homework support, healthy living, and hands-on enrichment to focus on career exposure. The program incorporates clubs, imagination stations, and monthly themes that allow children to explore a wide range of careers through partnerships with community organizations and local businesses. Fox Theater, for example, brings Fox in a Box programming to help youth understand the jobs of professionals that make productions possible including lighting technicians, sound engineers, costume designers, and makeup artists.



It's not just about learning gaps. It's about career readiness and giving kids options, helping them imagine what their future could look like.



— Kim Nelson, Chief Program Officer, YMCA of Metro Atlanta

This is followed by clubs that meet weekly for middle school youth, helping them stay engaged during a critical developmental transition. Clubs offer entrepreneurship, arts, e-Sports, and community leadership tracks that maintain connection. A partnership with Trilith Studios offered a select group of teens a full week of screen-to-film instruction, providing career exposure that many families could not otherwise access. Teen programming extends this pipeline further with **SAT prep classes, college tours to institutions including Georgia State, Kennesaw State, and Morehouse, and explorations of technical colleges** to ensure students see all pathways available to them. These initiatives, made possible through targeted funding and community partnerships, offer practical career readiness, leadership training, and exposure to diverse possibilities that prepare youth to thrive in the workforce and beyond.





The Power of Public Funding: BOOST and 21st CCLC

Public funding through the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grant and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program has been transformative for the YMCA of Metro Atlanta's ability to deliver quality programming at scale and create career pathways for youth development professionals while improving outcomes for children.



BOOST funding has enabled the YMCA of Metro Atlanta to invest directly in staff through competitive pay enhancements and comprehensive professional development. It has also allowed them to reinstate iStation, an educational assessment tool that evaluates students monthly, identifies skill gaps, and generates personalized learning activities and progress reports. This data-driven approach is a critical element of the programs efforts to close existing learning gaps.

21st CCLC funding provides additional resources focused on academics and family engagement, supporting programs designed for parents and caregivers that equip families with resources to support learning both during the school year and summer. Funding also enables programs to operate during school breaks and for a full month during summer, providing continuous support when learning loss is most likely to occur.



Fostering Well-Being and a Sense of Belonging

Beyond academics and career readiness, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta recognizes children's mental health and their ability to build resilience and healthy relationships as a critical need. The organization partnered with Wings for Kids to develop a comprehensive initiative focused on emotional awareness, relationship-building, and life skills, integrated across all programs from kindergarten through 12th grade beginning with staff training. Staff members now carry discussion and conversation cards designed specifically for different age groups, creating meaningful moments for youth to practice interpersonal skills. **A partnership with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta resulted in training for all staff in mental health first aid, ensuring that every team member has the tools to recognize when a child needs support and the ability create safe spaces for difficult conversations.** This holistic approach to youth development is rooted in recognition of the fact that academic success cannot be separated from emotional well-being and social competence.



Building Stronger Futures

Through comprehensive programs, strategic partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to accessibility, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta empowers youth, supports families, and strengthens communities every day. Helping children discover new interests, ensuring families have reliable care year-round, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta continues to serve as a catalyst for opportunity by empowering young people to imagine, explore, and build what comes next.