Utah Statewide Needs Assessment of Out-of-School Time Programs for Elementary-Aged Children

November 2024

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Message from the Utah Department of Workforce Services, Office of Child Care

Utah's youth landscape is remarkably different from that of other states in the country. The state features diverse family structures, from traditional family units to single-parent or guardian families, and also encompasses both urban areas and small rural communities. Based upon these unique characteristics and others, the Department of Workforce Services, Office of Child Care (DWS-OCC) has determined that typical national data and demographic assumptions would not be enough to provide an accurate picture of the scope of out-of-school time (OST) programs throughout the state.

DWS-OCC is highly grateful to the Utah Education Policy Center, Utah Afterschool Network, Utah State Board of Education, and the OST Needs Assessment Advisory Committee for working together to create such a comprehensive, data-driven report that can be used in the years to come to guide the support needed throughout the state.

The Office of Child Care's mission is to ensure that Utah families have access to affordable, high-quality care for their children. Quality childcare is a key contributor to Utah's economy, supporting employment and economic stability for communities and promoting the safety and health of developing children. OCC addresses all stakeholder needs through a comprehensive system, including childcare assistance for families, grants, quality initiatives and supports, child development resources and afterschool program support. DWS-OCC hopes that this information will help inform and guide programs through their own creation and implementation of a plan to address the unique needs of the communities they serve and help DWS-OCC with furthering the mission to support all working families across the state.

Megan Vlaming
Former Grants Program Manager
Utah Office of Child Care, Department of Workforce Services

Message from the Utah Afterschool Network

The Utah Afterschool Network envisions a future where every child in the state has access to a high-quality afterschool program. As an organization dedicated to supporting out-of-school time programs and providers across Utah, we recognize the importance of having a comprehensive, data-driven understanding of the youth we serve, the staff who support them, and the circumstances in which these programs operate.

Utah boasts a uniquely collaborative culture among educators and childcare providers, all committed to ensuring that every child has the opportunities and support needed to succeed. The longstanding partnership between state agencies, organizations, and researchers, focused on a unified approach to delivering comprehensive and beneficial services for youth, has culminated in this statewide assessment. This assessment reflects what Utah, and its youth-oriented partners are doing to promote positive outcomes for young people and where we can do more to create circumstances for them to succeed and better serve youth.

We are excited to share this research at both state and national levels and hope to draw attention not only to the incredible work being done and the dedicated individuals creating safe and engaging environments for at-risk youth but also to highlight the systematic changes that can enhance the impact of this work for youth, families, and communities.

This research could not have been possible without the thoughtful engagement of youth-serving professionals around the state who took the time to reflect on the field and share their experiences. We are thankful for their dedication to Utah's future.

Ben Trentelman
Executive Director
Utah Afterschool Network

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Leslie Lonsbury	Boys and Girls Club of Northern Utah	Bear River
Michael Torrey	Cache School District	Bear River
Tara Alder	Logan Parks and Recreation	Bear River
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Afterschool Allstars Cedar City

Alpine School District

American Preparatory Academy

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Salt Lake

Boys and Girls Club of Northern Utah

Boys and Girls Club of Utah County

Boys and Girls Club of Weber-Davis

Canyons School District

Carbon County CARE Coalition

Carbon School District

PROMISE South Salt Lake

CEP of West Valley City, Inc

Dual Immersion

Entheos Academy

Grand School District BEACON

Guadalupe School

Murray School District

Neighborhood House

Ogden School District

Park City School District

Park City School District Foundation

Provo School District

Salt Lake City School District

Salt Lake County Youth Services

San Juan CARE Coalition

San Juan Counseling

San Juan Foundation

San Juan School District

Utah State University Carbon County 4H

Utah State University Salt Lake County 4H

Utah State University San Juan County 4H

YMCA of Northern Utah

Executive Summary

In May 2023, the Department of Workforce Services-Office of Child Care (DWS-OCC) contracted with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) to conduct a statewide Needs Assessment of Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs for Utah children in kindergarten through sixth grade during the 2023-24 school year. The purpose of this statewide needs assessment was to study the following questions:

- ◆ *What are the strengths and critical gaps in OST program services across the state?*
- ◆ *What do children and families want and need from OST programs?*
- ◆ *What assets and resources are used to support OST programs currently?*
- ◆ *What are the challenges OST programs encounter, and what barriers stand in the way of children and family participation in OST programs within their communities?*

The data sources for the needs assessment included a variety of qualitative and quantitative data from both existing OST programs and areas of the state lacking OST program services due to a variety of reasons.

These data sources included OST staff surveys, family surveys, OST funding surveys, OST coordinator focus groups and interviews, and partner organization focus groups (USBE, DWS-OCC, and UAN). Other sources of data included UAN OST Program Information Forms, Utah Census data, National Center for Education and Statistics data, and DWS and USBE funding data.

The data collection process, instruments, and timelines were developed by the UEPC in partnership with DWS-OCC and the Needs Assessment Advisory Committee, which included approximately 30 OST professionals representing programs and organizations from across the state. The data collection and analysis were geographically organized by the nine DWS Service Areas and according to six key topic areas with guiding questions that informed the data collection and analysis. These topic areas listed below were determined through multiple conversations with OST leaders from DWS-OCC, USBE, and the UEPC, as well as data collected from OST program staff and leaders over the past few years. A summary of the findings is outlined below the topic areas.

Program Access and Availablity	Programming Capacity	Program Quality and Continuous Improvement
Partnerships	**Alignment with the School Day**	**Availability of Resources and Funding**
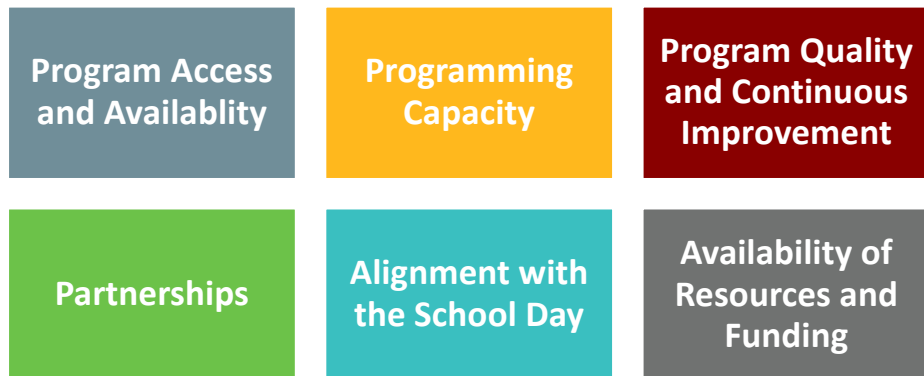
Program Access and Availability

Under program access and availability, we examined the current gaps in available OST services, particularly for children and families from low-income backgrounds. We also examined the current needs of OST program staff and specific program needs that still exist for children and families. Below are key findings about OST program access and availability.

Demographic data about children and families highlighted the important role that OST programs can play in providing critical services. Given the number of children in each service area eligible for participation in OST programs, including the number of children eligible for free or reduced lunch programs, the number of children considered multilingual learners, the number of students with disabilities, and the number of children in single-parent households, OST programs have the potential to provide pivotal services and resources for these children throughout the state that many schools and families can't do alone.

Current Utah OST programs are heavily concentrated along the Wasatch Front, where the child population density is the highest, with other OST programs operating throughout most of the state. This project explored the locations of approximately 100 OST programs across the nine service areas, along with the child population density of each service area. The areas with the largest numbers of OST programs included Bear River, Wasatch Front North, Wasatch Front South, and Mountainland. Areas with fewer OST programs were also areas with lower child population density.

Many OST program administrators and staff reported operating at full or nearly full capacity, while some reported participant waitlists during the 2023-24 school year. While many of the smaller OST programs (e.g., serving between 1-30 students) have average daily attendance near or at full capacity, the larger programs (e.g., serving more than 30 students) might be able to serve additional children if the programs had the means to increase their capacities, such as fiscal resources, community partner supports, and additional quality program staff. In addition, reports of participant waitlists varied by service area in terms of the lengths and anticipated timelines and were influenced by a number of factors. OST programs with participant waitlists are generally located in urban areas such as Wasatch Front North, Wasatch Front South, and Southwestern.

Some OST teams identified specific challenges in providing needed program services, including transportation for participants, staffing, and rising program expenses, particularly in rural areas of the state. OST staff and leaders specifically discussed these three challenges in relation to their ongoing impact on providing needed program services for children and families. Despite OST leaders' creative efforts to work through these barriers, these remain some of the most pressing issues faced by program teams.

Programming Capacity

For programming capacity, we examined the total number of children OST programs can accept based on program size, available resources, and OST grant requirements for staff-to-child ratios. We also studied the ability of OST teams to provide services to meet the specific needs of children and families across the state.

OST programs across the state offered a wide variety of critical academic, social, and physical activities for children to ensure their well-being. These included services such as **academic enrichment and tutoring**, **homework help**, **outdoor recreation**, and **social skills activities**. Family members reported appreciation for the academic and homework assistance provided in many programs.

OST program activities and services offered at least weekly were reported to be generally aligned with those identified by OST staff as most valuable for children and families, with a few exceptions. In general, program activities that OST staff identified as "very important" or "extremely important" for children and families were the same activities that they reported as being offered at least weekly during the programs. Opportunities for additional alignment of needs and services included home visits/calls to families, take-home activities, and social-emotional resources.

OST program staff and families identified the need for mental health resources for staff and children as a high priority. Statewide, staff and families reported that mental health resources and supports are a vital service within OST programs. However, many program teams reported being unable to keep up with this increasing need as they lack adequate resources and training for their staff.

Challenges with staff recruitment and retention were reported to complicate program teams' capacity to provide needed services for children and families. Some OST staff and administrators reported feeling overwhelmed at times with the demands of their programs as well as the needs of the children, particularly regarding mental health needs and behaviors. This can often lead to staff burnout and frequent turnover. OST teams are working diligently to hire and retain quality staff to meet the changing needs of the children and families within their programs.

Program Quality and Continuous Improvement

To study programming quality and continuous improvement, we explored how OST programs access and implement various state and national OST tools and resources. We also explored the benefits and barriers that OST programs face as they work to ensure quality program services and a commitment to continuous improvement.

OST program administrators and staff reported using a variety of improvement resources/tools and attending professional learning opportunities around relevant topics, albeit at varying degrees based on their roles, as they work to strengthen program quality. Almost 80% of OST administrators and coordinators reported using statewide tools and resources, such as the *OST Quality Tool Self-Assessment, Professional Learning Events,* and the *Program Quality Assessment Observation Data*. Those same three resources were also the most frequently used by OST program staff, yet only approximately 50% of staff respondents reported using these tools.

OST program staff and administrators identified additional topic areas and suggestions for professional learning opportunities/resources that would be valuable to their teams as they worked to strengthen program quality. These additional topics included Cultural Competence for Inclusive Programming, Supporting Students with Post-Secondary Opportunities, Prevention Education/Strategies, and Family Engagement. In addition, OST staff and leaders suggested offering expanded leadership tracks during state and regional professional learning

sessions and continuing to offer a variety of in-person and virtual opportunities for differentiated professional learning.

Several OST administrators reported frequent data use or evaluation activities to monitor progress toward program goals, revealing opportunities for these OST leaders to build their staff's capacity in these areas. The OST staff survey revealed that the largest gaps in data collection practices between the OST administrators and those in other program roles were in reviewing and interpreting data and using evaluation data for program planning and improvement. These gaps suggest opportunities for OST administrators to work alongside their program staff in these specific areas as part of their ongoing commitment to enhance program quality.

Partnerships

For partnerships, we studied how OST programs engage with other community organizations to leverage resources and provide intentional, quality services, such as nutritious meals for program participants and mental health supports. In addition, we explored examples of community partnerships focused on this work and the benefits and barriers that OST teams encounter as they cultivate and sustain these partnerships to achieve program outcomes.

In some Utah communities, strategic, intentional partnerships with local organizations supplement critical services that many OST program teams cannot provide on their own due to limited resources. These partnerships offer additional services and resources for families and children, such as hot meals, mental health supports, and clothing throughout the year. OST leaders emphasized the important distinction between community organizations

and OST programs working together to meet families' needs instead of competing for similar resources.

Some rural OST program teams have successfully partnered with existing local coalitions to access needed services for children and families. These intentional, sustained partnerships rely on consistent representation from all organizations and frequent, transparent communication to be most successful. Partnerships coalitions mobilize all available resources to meet the needs of local families and children, particularly within rural areas of the state.

Alignment with the School Day

To understand how OST programs align with the school day, we gathered information from staff and OST administrators about specific alignment practices, including how program teams purposefully align with the context and goals of the school day and which alignment strategies OST staff feel are most important.

Several OST program teams described success in their ongoing efforts to align with the school day, particularly in working with school-day teachers to intentionally support children with their specific needs. Alignment strategies mentioned most by OST staff included talking one-on-one with classroom teachers, attending faculty meetings, and engaging in informal discussions with school administrators. Other alignment strategies identified by OST staff included emailing teachers, working alongside teachers in the OST program, and attending regular meetings with school administration.

Many OST staff and families reported how much they valued the academic support and enrichment activities the OST programs provided, further highlighting the

significance of the statewide alignment work. Specific academic and enrichment activities valued by both OST staff and families included individual tutoring, homework help, dedicated reading/writing time, and STEM learning opportunities. These four activities were also reported by 84-98% of OST staff as occurring at least weekly during their programs.

Many OST program teams reported using the statewide supports and resources shared with programs, such as professional learning opportunities and the UAN alignment rubric, to facilitate intentional OST alignment with the school day. Professional learning topic areas in which OST staff reported both attending and perceiving these topics to be "valuable" or "extremely valuable" included school day/afterschool alignment and helping students with academic skills. In addition, 67% of OST coordinators and administrators reported using the state alignment rubric as a resource to help their teams set small, focused goals.

Opportunities exist within the OST/school day alignment work to focus on developing and maintaining reciprocal relationships with the OST program and school teams. While many OST staff and administrators mentioned opportunities to develop and strengthen reciprocal relationships with school day teachers and administrators, to build on the current momentum of OST/school day alignment efforts, these reciprocal relationships could be prioritized, highlighting the responsibility of both teams to ensure a successful partnership.

Availability of Resources and Funding

To understand the availability of resources and funding for OST programs, we gathered information about funding sources and

identified areas of the state where resources are abundant and those areas in which they appear sparse. We gathered information about the processes by which OST programs are funded, how programs use these funds to meet the needs of children and families, and how they leverage and sustain these funds over time. We also identified trends and gaps in OST funding and resources that can be used by funding organizations and policymakers to allocate resources to the areas in Utah with the greatest need.

Federal and state funding sources are available for Utah OST programs to consider, with most involving a highly competitive review process. State and federal OST grant funds are available through both USBE and DWS-OCC. However, the total request for needed funds far surpasses the amount available. Some OST administrators reported that, due to decreases in both state and federal funding allocations, they are scaling back their operations by reducing program hours, cutting part-time staff positions, and limiting enrollment.

OST administrators recognize the impending need to be more creative with local, state, and federal funds to sustain their program services. Many OST programs are trying to determine how to maintain existing program services using other resources. Potential supports for OST programs and schools might include the use of Title I funds, as well as other federal funds (when appropriate and allowed under federal guidance), such as Migrant Education, McKinney Vento, and Child Nutrition Program resources. Another promising funding source for OST programs is the Childcare Assistance Program through DWS-OCC.

Considerations

The following considerations are offered for state leaders, OST funders, and OST program leaders **to encourage engagement in initial discussions at the state and regional levels about the findings presented in this report and how they may be leveraged for ongoing improvement and capacity building to ensure the needs of children and families are met.** Each one also offers timely opportunities for those discussions to deepen as leaders explore the unique contexts within various communities and regions.

◆ **Data-Driven Allocation of State and Federal Funds**
State funders who oversee OST funding competitions are encouraged to use multiple sources of timely 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, and grant funding history.

◆ **Opportunities to Leverage Multiple Sources of Funding for OST Programs**
State and LEA leaders who manage federal and state funds are encouraged to talk with local school, community and OST leaders about opportunities to explore additional state and federal funds that could supplement OST budgets. Leaders who have already engaged in these conversations are encouraged to build an awareness of any new opportunities that will help OST programs and partners provide needed services to families and children.

◆ **Mental Health Supports and Resources**
State OST funders, program administrators and community partners are encouraged to think differently about mental health resources for children in OST programs. Exploring opportunities to expand regional, state, and national resources to more broadly reach OST programs is key. Possible partnerships between Utah colleges and universities and OST programs could significantly enhance community networks with the latest research and resources to support children and families.

◆ **Alignment with the School Day**
State and community leaders should continue to support the OST/school day alignment work. As a national leader in this area, Utah OST leaders could maintain momentum by expanding opportunities for OST program teams to go deeper with their alignment work (i.e. professional learning cohort tracks and virtual Communities of Practice meetings with OST and school day team members). LEA personnel, school administrators and teachers should consider facilitating frequent collaborative discussions on the successes of the alignment work from the school day perspective, as well as exploring opportunities for reciprocal relationships between school day and OST teams.

◆ **State and National Professional Learning Opportunities**
State OST leaders who organize, facilitate, and promote professional learning opportunities should continue to prioritize access and differentiation of content through multiple pathways and customized professional learning.

OST staff throughout the state value the annual state conferences and regional convenings and appreciate opportunities to connect regularly with colleagues in other regions. Some experienced OST staff also suggested additional opportunities for virtual leadership cohorts throughout the year. OST leaders are encouraged to maintain an intentional awareness among their staff about these ongoing professional learning opportunities. State OST leaders are encouraged to collect and analyze additional data to study how the professional learning content/discussions are implemented within programs and communities, and how this intentional implementation impacts progress towards participant and program goals.

◆ **Intentional Partnership Networks**
Community and school leaders should consider intentional partnership networks within their regions as pathways to sustainable OST services for children and families. Starting small, these networks might first include key organizations that provide services to meet the most critical needs within the area and slowly grow over time to provide more comprehensive community support. In regions with very few or no OST programs, community and school leaders might regularly collect and study data to accurately identify

current needs of families and then allocate community resources to meet those specific needs. Finally, existing OST regional networks consisting of program administrators, staff, and community partners offer another partnership model through which OST program teams located within the same region can share available resources, engage in professional learning sessions, and address ongoing challenges within their communities.

◆ **State OST Partnership Support for Local Needs Assessments**
This comprehensive report offers a process framework for a statewide OST needs assessment, which can be adapted and used by other states or organizations to assess their specific OST needs. The process outlined in this report would also benefit a smaller-scale needs assessment, particularly for communities looking to assess the current needs of families, school day teachers, children, and community members when school is not in session. Given the differences in community needs, available resources, and experiences with OST programs across the nine regions explored during this needs assessment process, the State OST Partnership Group should take this opportunity to collaboratively develop a local-level needs assessment template and accompanying guidebook for community and school leaders.

Introduction

Out-of-School Time (OST) programs have played important roles in many Utah communities for over three decades, offering Utah's children and adolescents safe, engaging environments, academic enrichment activities to supplement the content of the school day, and opportunities for relationship and social skill development outside of the regular school hours. These OST programs are often built and sustained using a strategic combination of federal, state, local, and/or private funding sources, including program participation fees and competitive grants specifically designed to enhance OST program opportunities.

During the past four years, the COVID-19 pandemic and changing economic conditions have greatly impacted the landscape of available OST programs. Across the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the daily lives of both children and adults, with closures to schools and childcare programs, including OST programs, as well as the rise of remote learning for children, and remote work for parents not deemed essential workers (Crouse et al., 2023; Ettekal & Agans, 2020). Many OST programs adjusted to these disruptions and found ways to continue serving children through modified in-person program options with health and safety rules, virtual programming, Wi-Fi access to support remote learning, and food delivery and pick-ups (Afterschool Alliance, 2021).

Given the critical role of OST programs and their potential benefits for families across Utah, it is important to understand the current state of programs regarding the availability, access, and sustainability of quality programs to leverage limited resources and explore innovative partnerships in areas of the state where OST programs are needed the most. This is especially important as many programs face significant funding deficits with the end of COVID-19 relief funds.

In May 2023, the Department of Workforce Services-Office of Child Care (DWS-OCC) contracted with the Utah Education Policy Center (UEPC) to conduct a statewide OST Needs Assessment for Utah children in kindergarten through sixth grade during the 2023-24 academic year. The purpose of the needs assessment was to find answers to critical questions about OST program opportunities in Utah:

- What are the strengths and critical gaps in OST program services across the state?
- What do children and families want and need from OST programs?
- What assets and resources are used to support OST programs currently?
- What are the challenges OST programs encounter, and what barriers stand in the way of children and family participation in OST programs within their communities?

This report presents the combined findings from an iterative and collaborative data collection effort carried out this past year to answer these questions.

Report Organization

This report begins with a review of the relevant research and literature about OST programs in both national and state contexts. This includes a discussion of the OST landscape in Utah. In the next section, we describe the methods used to conduct the needs assessment, including the research questions, data sources, data collection, and analysis. We then discuss the needs assessment findings,

which are organized according to six topic areas: (1) Program Access and Availability, (2) Programming Capacity, (3) Program Quality and Continuous Improvement, (4) Partnerships, (5) Alignment with the School Day, and (6) Availability of Resources and Funding. Based on the findings in these areas, we conclude with considerations for state leaders, OST funders, and OST program administrators as a foundation for intentional OST discussions at the state and regional levels.

Intended Audience

The intended audience for this OST Needs Assessment report includes state and local policymakers, state and regional funders of OST programs, OST program administrators, and organizational leaders who partner with OST program teams to provide essential services and support. The data, findings, and considerations discussed here will offer both state and regional perspectives on the existing needs of children and families, as well as where opportunities exist to develop, strengthen, and sustain high-quality OST programs. Additionally, this report is intended for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout Utah that currently provide OST programs or are considering providing OST program services to meet the needs of children and families.

Definitions and Terms

OST programs refer to services provided at any time that school is not in session, including before school, after school, summer, and school breaks and holidays. This term is often used synonymously with "afterschool" programs. Across OST programs, administrative and staff roles and titles vary. For the purposes of the needs assessment, we refer to those who lead individual OST programs as "Program Coordinators" and those who lead multiple OST programs within an organization as "Program Administrators". We refer to children in grades Kindergarten through sixth grade who attend these OST programs as "children" and their adult caregivers as their "families," which may include parents, stepparents, grandparents, and other family members or guardians.

Advancing Out-of-School Time in Utah

For close to 15 years, key state OST partners, including the DWS-OCC, the Utah Afterschool Network (UAN), the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), and the UEPC, have collaborated to support the field of OST in Utah by developing quality program standards, aligning OST grant requirements, assessing professional learning needs, and collaborating on evaluation efforts for Utah OST programs.

In 2017, the OST quality standards were codified in the state code, with key OST partners involved. Additionally, state funding was allocated to conduct a one-time study regarding quality improvement efforts and OST programs. The UEPC engaged DWS-OCC, UAN, and USBE, to study OST program quality. The UEPC team worked closely with coordinators of selected OST programs to gather information about quality improvement strategies and their understanding of the program's goals and outcomes. This study culminated in a list of important recommendations and opportunities for future technical assistance for OST programs, as well as a Utah Quality Logic Model (included in the Appendix) which has been used as the framework to guide ongoing Utah OST grant requirements and professional learning events and trainings (Shooter et al., 2017).

In addition to the Utah Quality Study, the Utah OST partnership group has spoken at national conferences and symposiums on their collaborative work and how they intentionally engage with each other to align funding applications, data collection and reporting, and quality improvement

efforts for all OST programs. They have received feedback from OST leaders in other states and leaders with the National Afterschool Association, the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation, and the Afterschool Alliance on how unique this Utah group is within the OST field. This state partnership group has also served as an essential collaborative group to inform this needs assessment project, including the ongoing planning, data collection, and reporting processes.

Review of OST Research Literature

Below we provide a review of the research literature on OST programs to better situate the needs assessment findings and considerations for ongoing planning and continuous improvement at the state, regional, and local levels.

Benefits of OST Programs

Over the past few decades, out-of-school time (OST) programs have been the subject of much interest and study, recognizing the vital support OST programs can provide for children, families, and communities. These programs can offer a safe and engaging environment for children during the times when school is not in session, and family members may still be working. Participating in quality OST programs has numerous benefits for children, including improved school attendance, academic achievement, and positive social behaviors (Mahoney et al., 2005; Vandell et al., 2007; Vandell 2013). Regular attendance in these programs has been associated with higher engagement in learning and reduced risky behaviors due to unsupervised time (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Chang & Jordan, 2013).

Academic and Social Benefits
As the needs of children, families, and communities have shifted over the past few decades in the United States, there has been an increased emphasis on creating safe and productive spaces for children to spend their time outside of the school day. The need for these types of organized OST programs has also been driven by the increased number of family members working outside the home (Vandell & Su, 1999).

Considering past and current times, there has been consistent public and family support for OST programs. In the 1990s, there were promising relationships between participation in an organized activity and positive youth outcomes, including better grades, connections with peers, and fewer behavioral issues (Posner & Vandell, 1994; Pettit et al., 1997). The 1990s also saw federal funding initiatives to support OST programs, including the 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) Grant through the United States Department of Education, still the only OST-specific federal funding source (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.).

Building off the initial research of children participating in organized activities outside of the school day, a robust research base was developed in the early 2000s to document the relationship between OST programs and positive youth outcomes, focusing on academic and SEL areas. OST programs contribute to better academic performance, with studies showing improvements in standardized test scores in English language arts, math, and science (Mahoney et al., 2005; Vandell et al., 2007; Durlak et al., 2010). Studies also demonstrated the influence of OST programs on social and emotional learning (SEL) by teaching skills such as communication, teamwork, self-confidence, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Durlak et al., 2007; Vandell et al., 2007).

In 2005, Mahoney and others reported on the benefits of children participating in structured and organized youth development programs, such as OST programs, and described how previous quasi-experimental studies had found promising results from children participating consistently in OST programs, but also emphasized the importance of certain program features more likely to promote positive development for youth. To understand the role OST programs for children from low-income background in 2007, Vandell et al. studied the linkages between OST program participants and increases in outcomes such as social skills, grades, and test scores, as well as a reduction in risky behaviors. The study examined the youth outcomes from an 'assets orientation' model.

Durlak et al. (2010) released a pivotal meta-analysis of the impact of OST programs on participant outcomes involving academics and social benefits. The meta-analysis, which examined 68 outcomes reports from various programs across the United States, found participants in OST programs had increases in academics and less risky behaviors. In addition, the meta-analysis also described recommended practices for OST programs to implement to support quality programming, including (1) sequenced activities, (2) active learning activities to encourage participants to learn, (3) focused program components, and (3) explicit focus on implementing specific personal and social skills (SAFE).

More recently, Lester and others (2020) conducted a systemic review and meta-analysis of OST impacts, focusing on expanding the sample of evaluation studies reviewed to create a more representative sample of the literature, to support better funding and policy decisions. The analysis reviewed OST program studies from 1997 through 2018. This recent review emphasized the need to use more rigorous methods to better establish the positive impact of OST programs on children, youth, and families.

Typically, as reported by national surveys, middle to high-income families have more access to various organized activities, with families paying for the costs associated with participation, outside of the school day, including summer months. Families from low-income backgrounds with fewer resources at their disposal have less access to these types of organized activities, such as the OST program, but are interested in having their children participate if such programs were more readily available (Duncan and Murane, 2011; Howie et al., 2010; Vandell, 2020). High-quality OST program participation can support academic enrichment for participants from low-income backgrounds (Vandell, 2007). Pierce and colleagues (2013) found consistent participation in an elementary OST program was related to reducing the achievement gap in math for children from low-income backgrounds, as compared to their peers from middle and high-income backgrounds.

Vandell and colleagues (2020) examined how OST programs and other extracurricular activities may work together to support better outcomes for children and youth, utilizing a diverse sample of children from low-income backgrounds. This study marks a change in the direction of the study of OST programs. All types of activities outside of the school day were studied together, rather than in isolation. According to teacher reports, for both groups that including children who participated in only an OST program and children who participated in an OST program and other extracurricular activities, showed better academic achievement compared to the groups of children who were unsupervised afterschool and participated in some extracurricular activities. This recent study also

highlights the need for increased partnerships between OST programs and other organizations offering typical child and youth extracurricular activities.

Utah's Success with OST Programs

In Utah, OST programs have demonstrated significant positive outcomes. For example, a longitudinal analysis of the Intergenerational (IGP) Afterschool Grant Program conducted by the UEPC found that participating children had improved state assessment scores in multiple subjects (Ni et al., 2018). Moreover, the academic gains increased with longer participation. On average, students' academic gains for attending three years at least tripled the gains in state test scores seen for one year of attendance.

According to a 2023 US Department of Education report, 70% of children in Utah's 21st CCLC program showed improved learning engagement, and 50% of previously chronically absent participants improved their school attendance (Afterschool Alliance, 2024). As noted in the introduction, through the collaboration of state OST funding agencies (e.g., DWS-OCC and the USBE) further attention to the use of research and best practices to ensure positive outcomes are reinforced through their grant requirements.

Remaining Questions about the Potential Impact of OST Programs

While the benefits of quality OST programs have been well-documented, research on OST programs has faced significant challenges and limitations that hinder the ability to draw definitive conclusions about all the benefits and outcomes of OST participation. As Durlak et al (2010) highlighted, many of these challenges and limitations are related to methodological challenges, such as the reliance on correlational studies (compared to experimental or quasi-experimental designs). Additional limitations include challenges with identifying appropriate comparison groups for assessing the impact of programs in experimental/quasi-experimental designs, high attrition rates among program participants, insufficient attendance in programs, poor attendance data quality, the lack of representativeness among the programs studied. Similarly, as described by Lester et al. (2020), evaluation of OST programs and participants' outcomes has heavily relied on selecting only 'quality' OST program evaluations. Finally, research on OST programs has been challenging due to the wide variations in program practices and implementation levels and the lack of a uniform approach for assessing program quality (e.g., the need to tailor evaluations to each program's unique goals and contexts). These variations in both assessing implementation and documenting program outcomes makes it difficult to draw conclusions about program effects (e.g., see Lauer et al, 2006).

Importance of Program Quality

Key Components of Quality OST Programs

The quality of OST programs is critical for achieving positive outcomes. Quality programs intentionally implement engaging activities and services to meet the needs of children in the community served to provide them with a variety of opportunities to build important skills for success in life, with an emphasis on the supportive relationships between participants and staff (Durlak and Weissberg, 2007; Gootman & Eccles, 2002; Mahoney et al., 2009; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Currently, there is no universally agreed-upon set of program quality features in the OST field. Yet, in the OST program quality literature, common quality program features have emerged. Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2010) described six features of OST program quality, including relationships, environment, engagement, social/behavioral norms, skill building, and routine or structure. The process for

assessing program quality has also expanded to include program observations, such as the Weikart Center Program Quality Assessment (PQA) Tool, as well as program team self-assessments, staff surveys, and youth reports (Cross et al., 2010; Kuperminc et al., 2019; Ramney, 2018).

Well-trained professionals who are supported with appropriate and ongoing professional learning opportunities are essential to program quality (Grossman, 2007; Foundations Inc., 2010). OST staff also need the backing of their organization to plan and implement OST program offerings to meet the needs of the children and families participating in the programs. Even if OST staff consistently implement best practices, including relationship building with participants, appropriate behavior management techniques, cultural responsiveness, clear and communicated expectations for participants, and youth voice and input, they need organizational support to consistently implement quality OST programming (Kuperminc et al., 2019).

In 2017, the Utah legislature allocated funds to study OST quality improvement efforts in Utah. The USBE partnered with the UEPC, UAN, and DWS-OCC, as well as five OST organizations operating school-year programs. The UEPC Quality Study examined current quality improvement efforts and recommendations for state OST partners and local OST programs (Shooter et al, 2017). A Utah Afterschool Quality Improvement (QIM) logic model for quality improvement was also created and has been used to guide quality improvement efforts for the past several years (See Appendices). The QIM is rooted in evidence-based practices to support OST staff in implementing quality programming to meet the needs of the participants in the OST offerings.

Challenges in Staffing and Funding

Even as many OST programs are working to intentionally design needs-based, quality OST experiences and programs are recognized as a strong protective factor for children, as well as a support for working families, programs still struggle to recruit and retain quality professionals (Foundations Inc., 2010; Afterschool Alliance, 2022). Like other industries with frontline workers, OST programs nationwide experienced major staffing issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the height of the pandemic, over 50% of OST programs across the US were concerned about both hiring and retaining staff (*Afterschool in the Time of COVID-19 Survey*, 2021). In 2019, through multiple federal funding streams, $3 billion in funds were allocated for OST programs, including school year and summer programming (Afterschool Alliance, 2024). The various COVID-19 relief funds for combatting learning loss and supporting working families helped to provide temporary support for OST programs, but funding will end September 2024, leaving many OST programs with limited funding options (Afterschool Alliance, 2022; Afterschool Alliance; 2024).

Access to OST Programs

Disparities in Access

Access to OST programs is crucial for realizing their benefits. However, a significant number of children lack access to these programs. Nationally, close to 25 million children do not have access to an OST program (American After 3 PM, 2020). In Utah, for every child in an OST program, eight children are waiting to join (Afterschool Alliance, 2019).
Families still cite cost as a barrier to having their child participate in an OST program, with over 50% of parents indicating OST program cost as a barrier, according to a 2022 Afterschool Alliance survey. Additionally, other barriers parents experience includes transportation of their child to and from the OST program and the program schedule not aligning with their needs (Afterschool Alliance, 2022).

Community Support and Family Satisfaction

In Utah, based on data from the Afterschool Alliance, for every child participating in an OST program, there are 8 children waiting to participate in a program (Afterschool Alliance, 2019). Families of children who do participate in an OST program are highly satisfied with the program, with 97% of Utah families reporting being satisfied with their local program. Programs also support working families, with 76% of Utah families agreeing their local afterschool program helps working families keep their jobs and provides a safe space for their children (Afterschool Alliance, 2024).

Needs Assessment Design and Data Collection

The following section describes the development and roles of the Needs Assessment Advisory Committee. The advisory committee supported the data collection process and promoted statewide representation in surveys and focus groups. This section also includes descriptions of the qualitative and quantitative data sources used for the needs assessment, as well as the data collection process and timeline for each data source.

Needs Assessment Advisory Committee

During the initial planning for the statewide OST Needs assessment, the DWS-OCC and UEPC teams established an advisory committee that included state OST leaders, OST Program Directors, community organization leaders, school district grant administrators, and OST program leaders. These committee members represented regions of the state that are described below in the Needs Assessment Design section. The committee members' roles included participating in virtual or in-person meetings every six weeks from November 2023 to May 2024. The members were asked to provide specific feedback on the needs assessment data collection activities, timeline, strategies to increase participation rates, and the data collection instruments themselves. In addition, each committee member was asked to be the liaison for their region by distributing the OST staff and family survey links and reminders, and by encouraging participation from OST teams in the requested interviews and focus groups. The advisory committee members were instrumental in the data collection throughout the state. A list of the Needs Assessment Advisory Committee members can be found in the initial pages of this report.

Needs Assessment Design

The needs assessment was designed according to six topic areas with guiding questions for data collection and analysis, presented in Figure 1. The topics were determined through multiple conversations with leaders from the UAN, the USBE, the DWS-OCC, and the UEPC. The topic areas were identified from data collected during the past three years from OST program leaders, program staff, professional learning conference participants, OST community partners, and OST grant funders. In addition, the State OST Partnership Group discussed these topic areas in detail using various questions about current OST programs, needs of children and families, and gaps in services and funding to guide the planning of the needs assessment. These six topics and the corresponding guiding questions below then informed the development of each of the data collection instruments and analysis used throughout the needs assessment.

Figure 1. Needs Assessment Topics and Guiding Questions

Program Access and Availablity

1. What are the demographics of youth in Utah (grades K-12; ages 5-18)?
2. What are the characteristics of families in Utah by region?
3. How many programs are operating throughout the state and where are they located?
4. What are the benefits and barriers to participation, and how do these differ by region and/or youth/family characteristics?
5. What are the gaps in services currently offered by OST programs?

Programming Capacity

1. What are the most common services and activities offered by OST programs across the state?
2. What are families seeking from OST programs?

Program Quality and Continuous Improvement

1. What resources are available to ensure program quality?
2. In what ways are programs using or accessing the program quality resources?
3. What are the benefits and barriers to ensuring program quality and continuous improvement?

Partnerships

1. With what types of organizations do OST programs partner?
2. What services, activities, or resources are provided through partnerships?
3. What strategies are used to develop and sustain partnerships?
4. What are the benefits and barriers to developing and sustaining partnerships?

Alignment with the School Day

1. In what ways are OST programs taking steps to align with the regular school day and what strategies are used?
2. What are the benefits and barriers to aligning with the school day?

Availability of Resources and Funding

1. What funding sources are available for OST programs?
2. In what ways do OST programs combine funding sources?
3. What supports and resources are available for organizations to secure funding?
4. In what ways do OST programs plan for sustaining programs when grant funding ends?
5. What gaps remain in comparing available funding and program needs?

During the early stages of planning for the needs assessment, the UEPC and DWS-OCC teams determined that the data collection and analysis would be geographically organized by the nine DWS Service Areas. These regions have their own local DWS facilities that provide local residents with workforce and economic resources. This breakdown of information by service area is intended to support the targeted use of findings. Figure 2 provides a map illustrating these nine DWS service areas.

Figure 2. DWS Service Areas
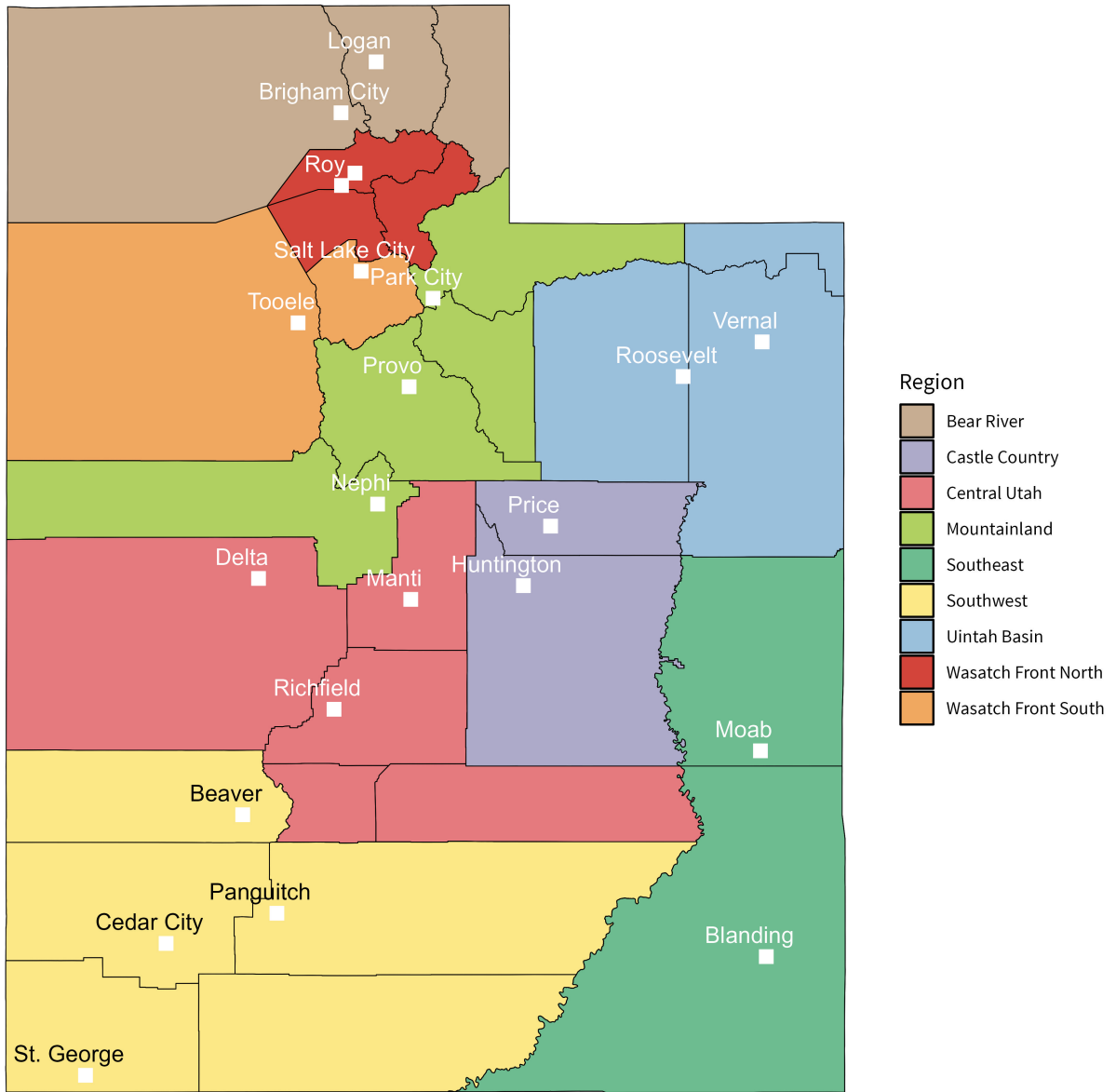
Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services website

Since some families and OST staff may not be familiar with the nine DWS service areas, the data collection instruments for the needs assessment asked respondents to identify their counties of residence (families) or program locations (OST staff/administrators). During the analysis of the data, UEPC evaluators translated the county data into service area data. A list of counties located within each DWS service area is included below.

Table 1. Counties within Each DWS Service Area

DWS Service Area	Counties
Bear River	Box Elder, Cache, Rich
Castle Country	Carbon, Emery
Central Utah	Millard, Piute, Sanpete, Sevier, Wayne
Mountainland	Juab, Summit, Utah, Wasatch
Southeast	Grand, San Juan
Southwest	Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, Washington
Uintah Basin	Daggett, Duchesne, Uintah
Wasatch Front North	Davis, Morgan, Weber
Wasatch Front South	Salt Lake, Tooele

Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services website

Data Sources

The following data sources were identified early in the needs assessment planning process by the DWS and the UEPC teams based on the research questions guiding the project. These data sources included a variety of qualitative and quantitative data from both existing OST programs and areas of the state that are lacking OST program services due to a variety of reasons. These data sources are listed in

Table 2 and are described in further detail below.

Table 2. OST Needs Assessment Data Sources

Data Sources	Number of Respondents
OST Staff Survey Respondents	356
Family Survey Respondents	331
OST Funding Survey Respondents	13
OST Coordinator Focus Groups/Interview Participants	95

Partner Organization Focus Groups:
    USBE State and Federal Funding Focus Group
    DWS-OCC Focus Group
    UAN OST Specialist Focus Group
	1
	2
	10

Document Review and Secondary Data	Source Name
OST Program Information	Spring 2023 UAN Program Information Form
Utah Census Data	2020 Utah Census Data on Population & Workforce Information
National Center for Education Statistics	NCES 2021-2022 Student Demographics
USBE Data	USBE 2021-2022 Student Demographics
USBE Funding Data	USBE self-reported OST competition data
DWS Funding Data	DWS self-reported OST competition data

OST Staff Survey

The UEPC developed an online survey for OST program staff for statewide administration. The survey was translated in a Spanish language version as well. The survey asked questions categorized by the six needs assessment topic areas, as well as demographic questions consistent with DWS's data collection procedures. A pilot survey was tested with members of the UEPC team and the Needs Assessment Advisory Committee members, who provided feedback about the survey design, length, and content. The UEPC launched the OST Staff Survey at the annual UAN Southern Recharge OST Conference in Cedar City on February 10, 2024, and the UAN Northern Utah Recharge OST Conference in Salt Lake City on February 24, 2024. At both conferences, the UEPC team introduced the needs assessment project and the purpose of the OST staff survey during the opening plenaries. OST staff from around the state were provided time during the conferences to take the survey. This dedicated time for survey completion was an important factor in collecting the staff survey data, as one of the limitations of the OST staff survey was its length. With survey questions addressing all six topic areas, the UEPC team worked closely with the Needs Assessment Advisory Committee to keep the survey as concise as possible. The median completion time of staff survey respondents was approximately 26 minutes.

After the two Recharge Conferences, the UEPC worked closely with the Advisory Committee members and other partner organizations to distribute the survey to their staff who may not have attended these two conferences. In addition, the UEPC sent survey reminder emails to contact lists from around the state, including contacts with UAN, USBE, and DWS-OCC. The survey closed on May 31, 2024, with 507 respondents opening the link and consenting to take the online survey. Out of those initial 507, some were encouraged to stop the survey if they identified that they were not currently working as an OST program staff. When the survey closed, 356 respondents had identified their residential county in the demographics section, which enabled the evaluation team to use those respondents' data in both the aggregate and disaggregate levels.

Table 3 below shows the number of staff survey responses by role and Table 4 shows the distribution of the staff survey responses across the nine service areas.

Table 3. OST Staff Survey Responses by Role

	Count	Percent
School Day Teacher working in OST Program	31	9%
Program Staff	191	54%
Site Director/Coordinator/Manager	120	34%
Other	14	4%
Total	**356**	**100%**

Source: Staff Survey

Table 4. OST Staff Survey Responses by Service Area

Service Area	Count	Percent
Bear River	27	8%
Castle Country	12	3%
Central Utah	3	1%
Mountainland	88	25%
Southeast	6	2%
Southwest	52	15%
Uintah Basin	1	0%
Wasatch Front North	37	10%
Wasatch Front South	130	37%
Total	**356**	**100%**

Source: Staff Survey

The service areas most represented within the OST staff survey include Wasatch Front South, Mountainland, and Southwest. This is expected, given the large number of OST programs currently operating in these regions. Many of these programs are at least partly funded through DWS-OCC or USBE grants, and almost all of them work with the UAN Specialists for ongoing technical assistance. Due to those connections to DWS-OCC, UAN, and USBE, program administrators received several survey requests and reminders, which could also explain the higher response rates.

Service regions that had relatively lower OST staff survey response rates include Uintah Basin, Central Utah, Southeast, and Castle Country. These service areas also have fewer existing OST programs, as shown by the OST program map in Figure 5 of the findings section. In addition to fewer OST programs, the child population density map (Figure 6 in the Findings) also highlights the relatively lower numbers of children living in those service areas, which would help explain the lower staff survey responses in these regions. Additional details regarding the OST staff survey data are included throughout the findings section of this report.

Family Survey

The UEPC also administered an online survey for families around the state. The purpose of this survey was to collect data from three groups as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Family Survey Responses by Child's Participation in OST Program

	Count	Percent
Family members of K-6 children **currently participating** in OST programs	269	81%
Family members of K-6 children currently **on the waitlist** for OST programs	53	16%
Family members with **no children in grades K-6 participating** in OST programs and **no K-6 children currently on the waitlist** for OST programs	9	3%
Total	331	100%

Source: Family Survey

Each of these three groups of respondents were routed to specific questions within the survey about topics such as program services and benefits, program waitlist timelines, and reasons for lack of OST program participation. The UEPC relied heavily on the Needs Assessment Advisory Committee members to distribute the survey within their regions, as well as various partner organizations with access to family contact lists. The UEPC worked with OST grant administrators and local community partners to distribute the family survey.

The family survey opened in mid-May and closed in mid-June, with 380 family members consenting to take the survey. After some family members were routed to the end of the survey because they said they didn't currently have a child in grades K-6, 331 family members continued with the survey questions and identified their residential counties. The median completion time for family survey respondents was just under six minutes. Table 6 below shows the distribution of the family survey responses across the nine service areas.

Table 6. OST Family Survey Responses by Service Area

Service Area	Count	Percent
Bear River	4	1%
Castle Country	7	2%
Central Utah	0	0%
Mountainland	80	24%
Southeast	22	7%
Southwest	144	44%
Uintah Basin	0	0%
Wasatch Front North	34	10%
Wasatch Front South	40	12%
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Family Survey

The service areas most represented by the OST family survey responses were the Southwest and Mountainland areas. Like the staff survey, the larger numbers of OST programs in these two regions may have contributed to the larger response rates, as OST program administrators most likely used their program family contact lists to distribute the survey link. In addition, OST program administrators in those two service areas shared with the UEPC team that they intentionally used a variety of communication strategies to share the survey link with families. One strategy that they found particularly useful was connecting with their community partners to distribute the survey link to their own family contacts, expanding the survey "reach" to families (with and without children currently attending OST programs) throughout those regions.

Also like the staff survey, service regions that had much lower family survey response rates included Uintah Basin, Central Utah, and Castle Country, which again could be explained by the lower child population density (Figure 7). Additional details regarding the OST family survey data are included throughout the findings section of this report.

OST Funding Survey
In addition to the OST staff and family surveys, the UEPC developed and administered an OST funding survey specifically for OST administrators. The purpose of this survey was to collect data on how OST administrators were planning for the upcoming expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funds that had been explicitly allocated for OST programs during the past three years, as well as the recent reduction in state grant funds during the 2024 Utah Legislative Session. The survey asked the OST administrators about any possible new financial resources for the upcoming school year as well as which of their current program services could be in jeopardy with the reduction in available OST funds.

The funding survey was open throughout June 2024 and distributed to OST program administrators through a series of reminder emails to UAN contact lists and advisory committee members, as well as through individual phone calls and emails to grant administrators. A total of 16 OST grant administrators participated in the survey. One additional respondent consented to participate but did

not provide their county. The specific numbers of OST funding survey responses representing each service area are listed in Table 7.

Table 7. OST Funding Survey Responses by Service Area

Service Area	Count	Percent
Bear River	3	19%
Castle Country	1	6%
Central Utah	0	0%
Mountainland	1	6%
Southeast	2	13%
Southwest	1	6%
Uintah Basin	0	0%
Wasatch Front North	4	25%
Wasatch Front South	4	25%
Total	**16**	**100%**

Source: Funding Survey

The service areas most represented by the funding survey responses included Wasatch Front North, Wasatch Front South, and Bear River. The lower response numbers in Castle Country, Central Utah, and Uintah Basin were not surprising for the same reasons as the OST staff surveys and family surveys.

Out of the 17 OST administrators that started the funding survey, 8 of them represented non-profit organizations (i.e., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, local non-profit groups), 2 identified as a municipality (i.e., cities, towns) and 7 represented schools or school districts. In general, these survey numbers appear to represent the larger proportion of OST program fiscal agents, with non-profit organizations and school districts serving as the largest groups of OST grant applicants and fiscal organizations supporting Utah OST programs. Additional data from the funding survey are included throughout the findings sections of this report.

OST Coordinator Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to the quantitative data collected through the staff, family, and funding surveys, the UEPC conducted regional focus groups for OST coordinators and program administrators. These focus groups were designed to ask participants about specific program services and needs in each region, which included opportunities to follow up on specific regional needs that were reported on the OST staff survey. For example, if the Southeast region staff survey data indicated a large need for professional learning on mental health supports for children in OST programs, the UEPC team would ask the Southeast program coordinators and administrators participating in the focus group about specific plans for professional learning on that topic in the coming year. As many OST program leaders who were invited to participate in regional focus groups had scheduling conflicts, many found alternative times for individual interviews with the UEPC team.

To ensure that the focus group protocol yielded quality data, the UEPC piloted the focus group with OST staff and collected feedback about the clarity of questions, pacing of the conversation, and time allocated for the focus groups. The UEPC teams also collected feedback on the focus group protocol

through the advisory committee. The UEPC conducted a total of 37 focus groups and interviews from February through June 2024. Table 8 below is organized by service area and includes the number of focus groups/interviews conducted, the number of organizations represented within each focus group/interview, and the total number of participants for each one. The focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis, which is described in further detail below.

Table 8. Number of OST Focus Groups and Interviews, Organizations, and Participants by Service Area

Service Area	Number of Focus Group or Interview sessions	Number of Organizations Represented	Number of Participants
Bear River	3	3	6
Castle Country	5	4	21
Central Utah	0	0	0
Mountainland	6	2	7
Southeast	8	4	21
Southwest	5	2	7
Uintah Basin	1	1	1
Wasatch Front North	2	4	7
Wasatch Front South	7	13	25
Total	**37**	**33**	**95**

Source: Focus Group/Interview Data

To have representation from all service areas, including those with very few or no existing OST programs, the UEPC contacted LEA directors of several rural school districts in Central Utah to request brief, individual virtual interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to discuss the needs of families and children within those communities and inquire about any past or current OST program conversations. However, due to the busy time of the school year and the multiple responsibilities of LEA directors within small, rural school districts, none of the directors contacted were available for interviews.

The UEPC team used the following structures and processes for collecting and analyzing the focus group and interview data. Each one is briefly described below.

Memoing. Immediately following each focus group session, UEPC team members engaged in memoing in which they documented their observations, insights, initial interpretations of the data, and any follow-up questions to pursue (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). These memos served as preliminary analytical notes that were used in subsequent stages of data analysis.

Data Matrix. Key themes that emerged during the memoing process were systematically recorded in a combined data matrix that was organized according to the six topic areas and guiding questions and broken down by the service area regions. This matrix functioned as an organizational tool, allowing the UEPC team to consolidate and compare themes across different focus group sessions

(Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). The matrix facilitated the identification of patterns and the emergence of overarching themes.

Coding with Atlas.ti. The transcripts were analyzed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. A codebook was imported into Atlas and used by five members of the UEPC for descriptive coding (Saldana, 2021) of the coordinator focus group transcripts. After coding was completed, each team member's Atlas files were merged into one Atlas.ti file for further analysis.

Reviewing Coded Data and Memos and Identification of Key Themes. After coding the transcripts, the UEPC team reviewed the coded data alongside the memos and documentation of initial themes in the data matrix. Team members identified common patterns of responses and looked for any conflicting information. This iterative process of revisiting the data together and cross-referencing the multiple data sources allowed the team to synthesize the coded data and memos to identify the key themes across all collected data and to integrate it with the other survey and secondary data. The identified themes were then used to inform the overall findings and discussions of the report.

Partner Organization Focus Groups

During the design of the data collection plan, it was determined that key state OST partner organizations could provide helpful insight into the needs and gaps of elementary-age OST programs. These included the UAN, which provides targeted technical assistance to OST program teams around the state, and DWS-OCC and USBE, two major funders of OST programs. Both DWS-OCC and USBE act as pass-through agencies for federal funds, which is a large source of funding for many of Utah's OST programs. The UEPC scheduled and facilitated focus groups with team members from these three organizations to collect data for this project.

The UAN focus group included the eight OST Specialists assigned to programs around the state with support for improving and maintaining program quality, staffing, resources, and other technical assistance needs. The OST Specialists have a unique perspective that includes developing relationships with the OST administrators and staff, and understanding each of the program's strengths, as well as opportunities for additional growth. Focus group questions for this team addressed topics such as the OST Specialists' understanding of the current professional learning needs within the OST field, successes and challenges with recruitment, hiring and retaining quality OST staff, and any current children and/or family needs that remain unmet across the state.

The USBE focus group included staff who manage statewide competitions for federal and state OST funds and regularly monitor the grant recipients for acceptable use of funds and progress toward planned program goals. Topic areas for this focus group included federal and state funding trends over the last ten years, current and future possibilities for additional state and federal funding to support OST programs, and the importance of messaging the value and return on investment of OST programs with district teams, school personnel, families, and community members.

The DWS-OCC focus group also included staff who manage and monitor OST funds. Similar to the USBE focus group, topic areas for this focus group included a review of perceived trends in the use of federal and state funds for OST programs, as well as possible opportunities to access and leverage additional resources. The DWS-OCC team also discussed their OST grant competitions during the past two years in which applicants self-identified their OST programs' stages of development (e.g., as

initial, emerging, etc.) based on years of operation and momentum towards achieving program goals. Grant applicants were also asked to identify specialized needs and areas of focus for their programs (i.e., family engagement, alignment with the school day), which then led to technical assistance opportunities for those teams who were awarded grants. During the focus group, the DWS-OCC team discussed this new system of differentiating grant applicant teams as an important step in recognizing the continuum of OST programs' experiences and needs across the state and providing timely support and resources for teams based on these needs.

Review of Program Documents and State Data

The UEPC team also analyzed OST program documents, and state funding and census data. These documents included the Spring 2023 UAN Program Information Form, which was completed by OST programs last spring. Due to the submission timeline of the Spring 2024 UAN Program Information Form, the prior year's form was utilized. This annual document is required by both USBE and DWS for OST grant funding, yet many other programs complete the form annually even if they do not receive state or federal OST funds. The 2023 Program Information Form provided data such as numbers of children and grade levels served, program services offered, professional learning opportunities offered for staff, and staff sizes and levels of experience. It also provided valuable data on opportunities for program development, such as the remaining unmet needs of children and families, existing barriers that impeded program quality, and additional resources and training needed for staff to feel competent and confident in their roles. The UEPC team analyzed a total of 124 UAN Program Information Forms that were submitted to UAN in May 2023. We limited our analysis to programs serving K-6 students. These data helped to inform our data collection activities, including specific topics to focus on in surveys and focus groups/interviews.

The UEPC team also utilized several secondary data sources to better understand the broader state context. Utah Census Data was used to capture community characteristics such as the population density of children in the state and the proportion of children residing in single-parent households. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and USBE were used to provide additional demographic information about students in the state, including race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English learner status, and disability status.

In addition to the Program Information Forms and the Utah Census data, the UEPC utilized historical data provided by the DWS-OCC and USBE teams regarding recent federal and state OST funding competitions. These data illustrate the number of applicants for OST grants over the past four years, along with the numbers of approved grant recipients. They also provided information on the total amount of OST grant funds that applicants applied for each year, versus how much funding was available in each competition. More details on the OST funding information are included in the *Availability of Resources and Funding* section.

Needs Assessment Findings

The needs assessment findings presented below represent the analysis of all the data collected across the state from multiple data sources. The findings are organized into six sections according to the primary topic areas, including (1) Program Access and Availability, (2) Programming Capacity, (3) Program Quality and Continuous Improvement, (4) Partnerships, (5) Alignment with the School Day, and (6) Availability of Resources and Funding.

For each of the six findings sections, we first provide an overview of the topic area and the questions that guided our data collection and analysis. The key themes in each section reflect multiple data sources and geographic regions. Findings are supported by both qualitative and quantitative data.

Note: *Several findings are interrelated and will be discussed in multiple topic areas.*

Program Access and Availability

To identify gaps in available OST services, particularly for children and families from low-income backgrounds, we studied the current need for OST programs statewide and by DWS service area. We also collected data on children currently served by OST programs, and what specific program needs still exist for children and families. In addition, we studied the reported benefits and barriers of existing OST programs. The questions below guided our data collection and analysis regarding access and availability.

1. What are the demographics of children in grades K-6 in Utah?
2. What are the characteristics of families in Utah by region?
3. How many programs are operating throughout the state and where are they located?
4. What are the benefits and barriers to participation in OST programs, and how do these differ by region and child or family characteristics?
5. What are the gaps in services currently offered by OST programs?

Demographic data about children and families pointed out the important role that OST programs can play in providing critical services.

Utah is home to nearly 900,000 children ages 0-17 (Utah Census Data, 2020). Approximately 690,000 of these children are K-12 students (NCES, 2021-2022) and, therefore, potentially eligible for OST programming opportunities. Table 9 below shows the state's K-12 student population divided by service area with both numbers of K-12 students, as well as the population proportions in each area sorted from largest to smallest. This range in the proportion of students by service area points to the need for concentrated support along the Wasatch Front. This range also highlights the critical need for OST programs, especially in the rural areas where resources may be more limited.

Table 9. Utah K-12 Student Population by Service Area

Service Area	#	%
Wasatch Front South	27,3141	40%
Mountainland	154,914	23%
Wasatch Front North	119,667	17%
Southwest	58,671	9%
Bear River	41,836	6%
Central Utah	14,892	2%
Uintah Basin	13,217	2%
Castle County	6,175	1%
Southeast	4,594	1%
	687,107	**100%**

Source: Authors' calculations using NCES 2021-22

We also examined NCES 2021-22 data to identify student demographic patterns across the service areas. Figure 3 below shows the proportion of USBE students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in each service area. Next to each percentage, we also included the number of students to provide context about the variation in child population across the service regions. (Population density will be discussed in more detail within the next finding.) The data show a wide range in the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch services across the state, with the highest proportion in the Southeast (78%) and the lowest in the Mountainland region (19%). The other seven service areas fall within the range of 44% (Castle Country), to 23% (Wasatch Front North) with the state average at 27%. In terms of the total number of children in each service area, regions with the highest numbers of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch include Wasatch Front South (81,689), Mountainland (29,579) and Wasatch Front North (27,623). These data begin to offer insights about the various needs of families and children and suggest the importance of OST programs in providing services such as nutritious snacks and hot meals to meet those needs. Examples of these services are discussed throughout the additional findings of this report.

Figure 3. Proportion of K-12 Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch in each Service Area

Service Area	Percentage	Students
Southeast	78%	(3,560 students)
Castle Country	44%	(2,716 students)
Central Utah	43%	(6,371 students)
Uintah Basin	36%	(4,805 students)
Bear River	31%	(13,082 students)
Wasatch Front South	30%	(81,689 students)
Southwest	29%	(16,727 students)
Overall	27%	(186,152 students)
Wasatch Front North	23%	(27,623 students)
Mountainland	19%	(29, 579 students)
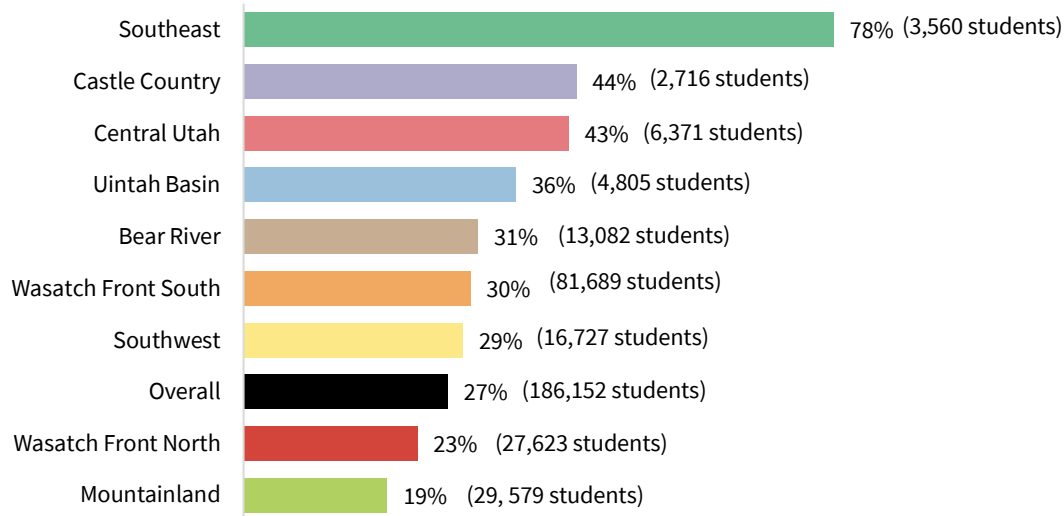
Source: Authors' calculations using NCES 2021-22

Table 10 below highlights additional support needs for multilingual learners and students with disabilities across service areas. Similar to Figure 3, both the percentages and numbers of children are included for each region, offering perspective on the specific needs for specialized OST supports and services for students across the state. OST programs can provide valuable support for multilingual learners and students with disabilities. For example, OST programs that focus on literacy enrichment activities can support the needs of multilingual learners (Afterschool Alliance, 2017). Similarly, OST programs that can provide individualized, differentiated support during academic enrichment and homework time can support the needs of students with disabilities. As further context, based on an *America After 3 PM* study (2020), over 90% of parents of children with disabilities were satisfied with the OST program their child attends and 78% of parents surveyed were also satisfied with the academic support their child receives in their OST program (Afterschool Alliance, 2021)

Table 10. Proportions and Numbers of K-12 Students who are Multilingual Learners and Students with Disabilities in each Service Area

Service Area	% (N) Multilingual Learners	% (N) Students with Disabilities
Bear River	6% (2,381)	15% (6,352)
Castle County	2% (123)	21% (1,299)
Central Utah	5% (737)	16% (2,338)
Mountainland	6% (9,590)	13% (20,533)
Southeast	22% (1,004)	17% (779)
Southwest	5% (2,825)	14% (7,971)
Uintah Basin	2% (321)	18% (2,370)
Wasatch Front North	5% (6,122)	16% (19,013)
Wasatch Front South	13% (35,897)	14% (37,500)

Source: Authors' calculations using NCES 2021-22 and USBE data available to the UEPC via Data Sharing Agreement

In addition to the free or reduced-price lunch data, we reviewed the Utah Census data regarding single-parent households across the state to better understand the potential need for OST programs to support families. Figure 4 below shows the proportions and numbers of Utah children ages 0-17 in single-parent households by service area. Again, the data show a wide range across the service areas, with the highest proportion in the Southeast (35%) and the lowest in Mountainland (13%). The other service areas fall within the range of 23% (Castle Country and Wasatch Front South) to 16% (Bear River), with the state average at 19%. In terms of the total number of children in each service area, regions with the highest numbers of children in single-parent households include Wasatch Front South (73,080), Wasatch Front North (38,786), and Mountainland (28,531). These data provide important context about Utah families and their need for OST programs, as many families rely on these programs to provide safe, enriching environments for their children while they are at work. Further discussion on the impact of OST programs on Utah families is discussed throughout the findings in this report. Additional information about households and socioeconomic backgrounds of Utah children and their families are located in the appendix.

Figure 4. Proportions and Numbers of Children Ages 0-17 in Single-Parent Households by Service Area

Service Area	Percentage	Number of Children
Southeast	35%	(2,162 children)
Castle Country	23%	(1,839 children)
Wasatch Front South	23%	(73,080 children)
Wasatch Front North	21%	(38,786 children)
Southwest	20%	(12,405 children)
Uintah Basin	19%	(3,321 children)
Overall	19%	(171,794 children)
Central Utah	17%	(2,996 children)
Bear River	16%	(8,674 children)
Mountainland	13%	(28,531 children)
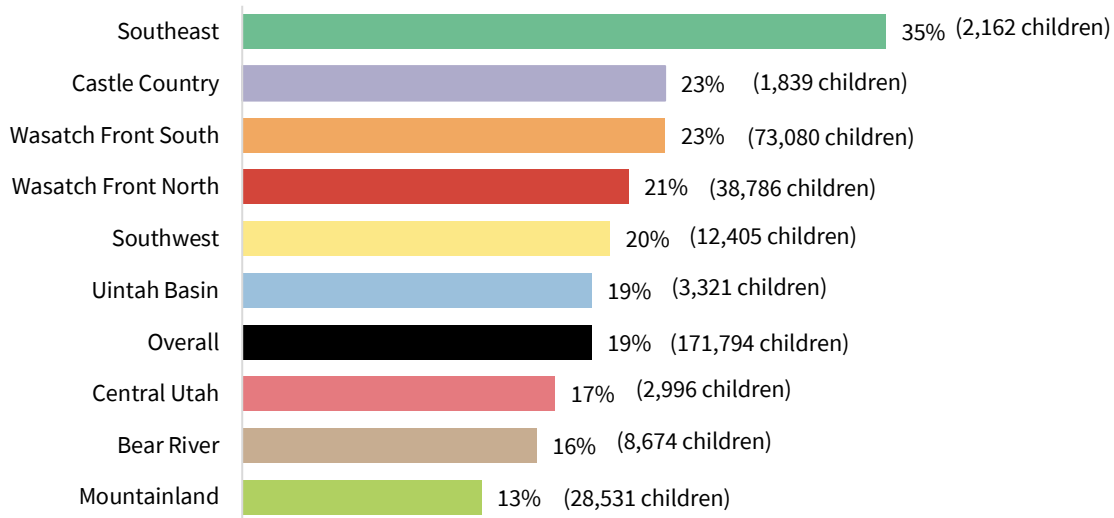
Source: Authors' calculations using Utah 2020 census data

Current Utah OST programs are heavily concentrated along the Wasatch Front, where the child population density is the highest, with other OST programs operating throughout most of the state.

Currently, the OST State Partnership Group collectively tracks approximately 170 elementary OST in Utah. This "tracking" includes activities such as data collection for grant funding requirements, program observations by UAN Specialists, technical assistance offered by OST partner organizations, documentation of funding proposals, and attendance at statewide OST professional learning events. Of those 170 programs, approximately 100 completed the Spring 2023 Program Information Form for the Utah Afterschool Network. These "registered" programs are eligible to receive ongoing technical assistance from the UAN team, participate in annual state and regional professional learning opportunities, and are on the contact lists for upcoming state and federal OST grant competitions.

Despite the ongoing efforts of the UAN team and the State OST Partnership Group, not all Utah OST programs make this deliberate connection with the UAN and are, therefore, somewhat isolated from statewide announcements and information about these opportunities. Despite our team's intentional outreach for statewide needs assessment data, our data collection was limited to existing OST programs that are connected with UAN and the other partner organizations through the OST State Partnership Group, DWS-OCC and USBE. In addition, even with our team's intentional outreach for statewide needs assessment data, our data collection was limited to existing OST programs that are connected with UAN and the other partner organizations through the OST State Partnership Group, DWS-OCC and USBE.

Figure 5 illustrates where the existing OST programs are located within each of the DWS Service Areas. Bear River, Wasatch Front North, Wasatch Front South, and Mountainland currently have more OST programs than other service regions. The Southwest region also has several OST programs, while OST program availability in the remaining service regions appears sparse or nonexistent.

Figure 5. Current OST Program Locations
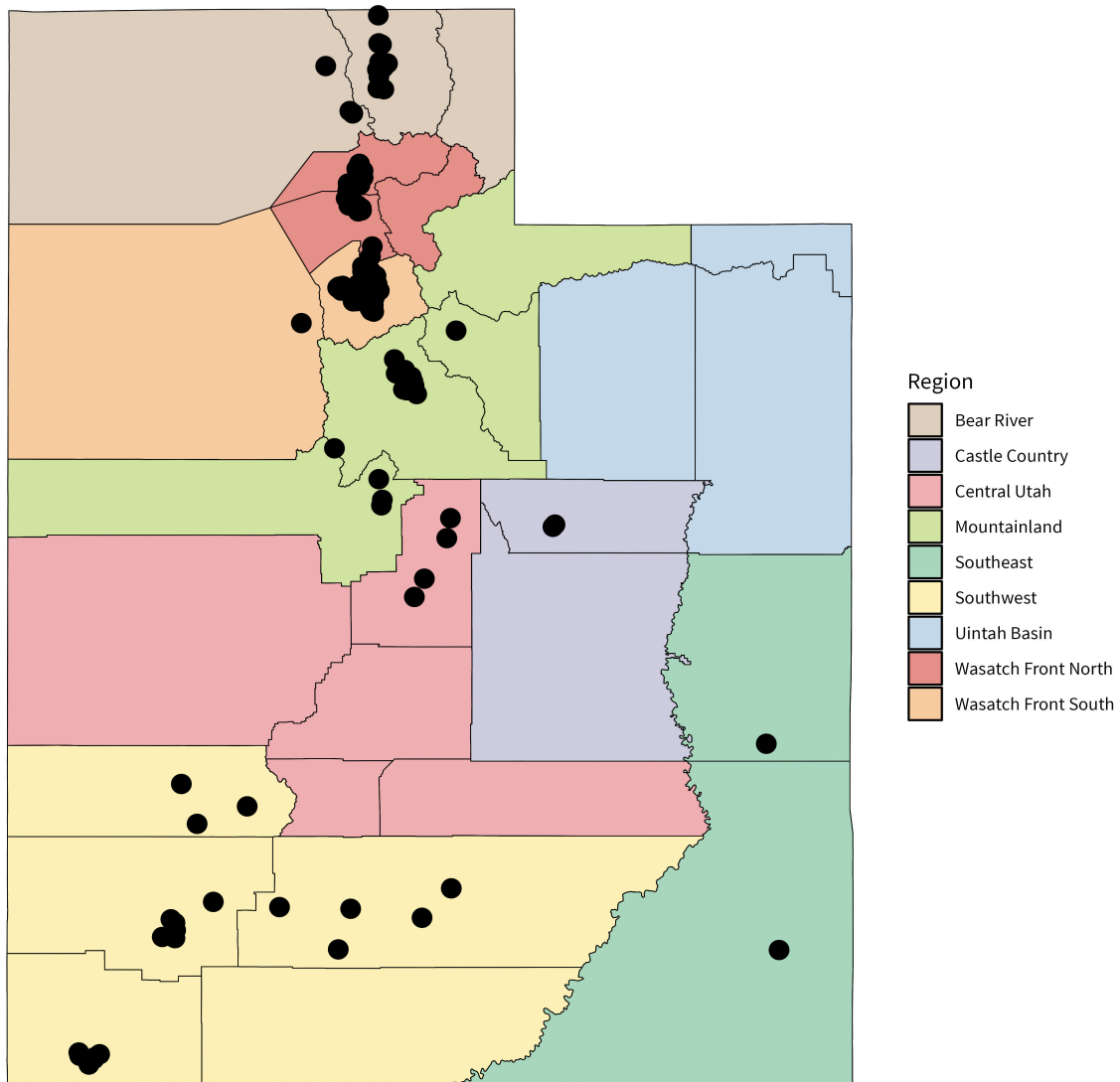
Source: UAN, USBE and DWS data on OST program locations

As mentioned in earlier findings, while examining locations of existing OST programs across the state, it is also important to consider the child population density of each service area, as show in Figure 6 below. Service areas with more OST programs tend to also be regions with considerably higher numbers of children per square mile. Areas with very few or no existing OST programs (i.e., Central Utah, Castle Country, Uintah Basin, Southeast) are also areas with relatively fewer numbers of children per square mile. This comparison of program locations and population density will be important to consider as we discuss both quantitative and qualitative data collected across the state, as well as explore differences across specific service areas. Further discussions within these needs

assessment findings across the six topic areas will offer perspective on the need for OST programs, even in regions with fewer children.

Figure 6. Child Population Density by Service Region
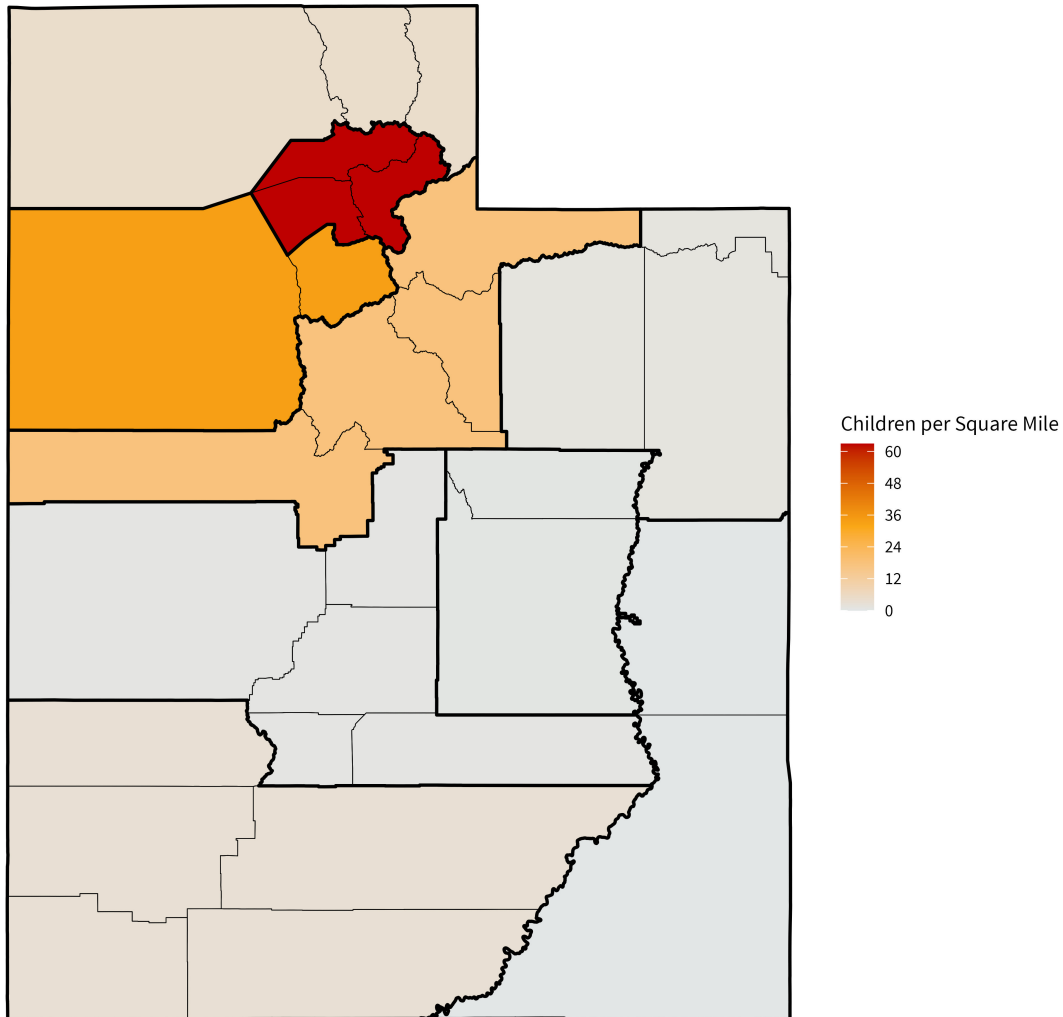
Source: Utah 2020 Census Data

Many OST program administrators and staff reported operating at full or nearly full capacity, while some reported participant waitlists during the 2023-24 school year.

To better understand how OST programs are made available to children and families, we collected information about the number of children served in programs, including program capacity, average daily attendance, and whether programs have waiting lists. **As indicated in Figure 7, most OST programs in Utah (76%) reported having the capacity to serve between 16 and 75 students.** Only 4% of programs reported a small program capacity of 1-15, and 19% reported a large program

capacity of greater than 75. Figure 8 shows the reported average daily attendance, which follows a similar pattern as overall program capacity.

Figure 7. Total Number of Children that can be Served in OST Programs (Program Capacity)
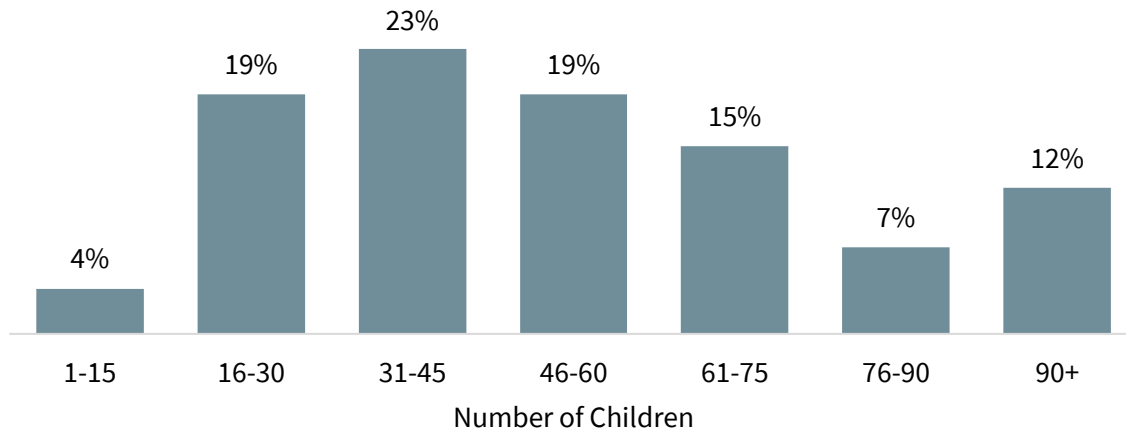
Source: Staff Survey

Figure 8. Average Daily Attendance in OST Programs
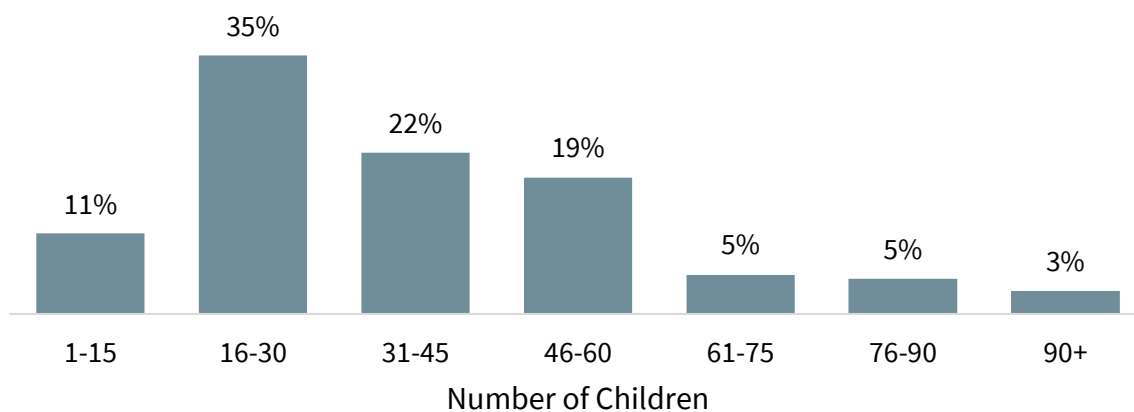
Source: Staff Survey

Figure 9 illustrates the average daily attendance of OST programs in relation to their program capacities, according to OST staff survey respondents. In most cases, the smaller programs serving fewer children reported average daily attendance similar to their full capacities, and, as the programs' overall sizes increased, the percentage of programs operating at full capacities decreased. The exception is the programs with capacities of 90 or more children. **These data suggest that while many of the smaller OST programs (e.g., serving between 1-30 students) have average daily attendance near or at full capacity, the larger programs (e.g., serving more than 30) might be**

able to serve additional children if the programs had the means to increase their capacities, such as fiscal resources, community partner supports, and additional quality program staff.

Figure 9. OST Program Average Daily Attendance in Relation to Program Capacity
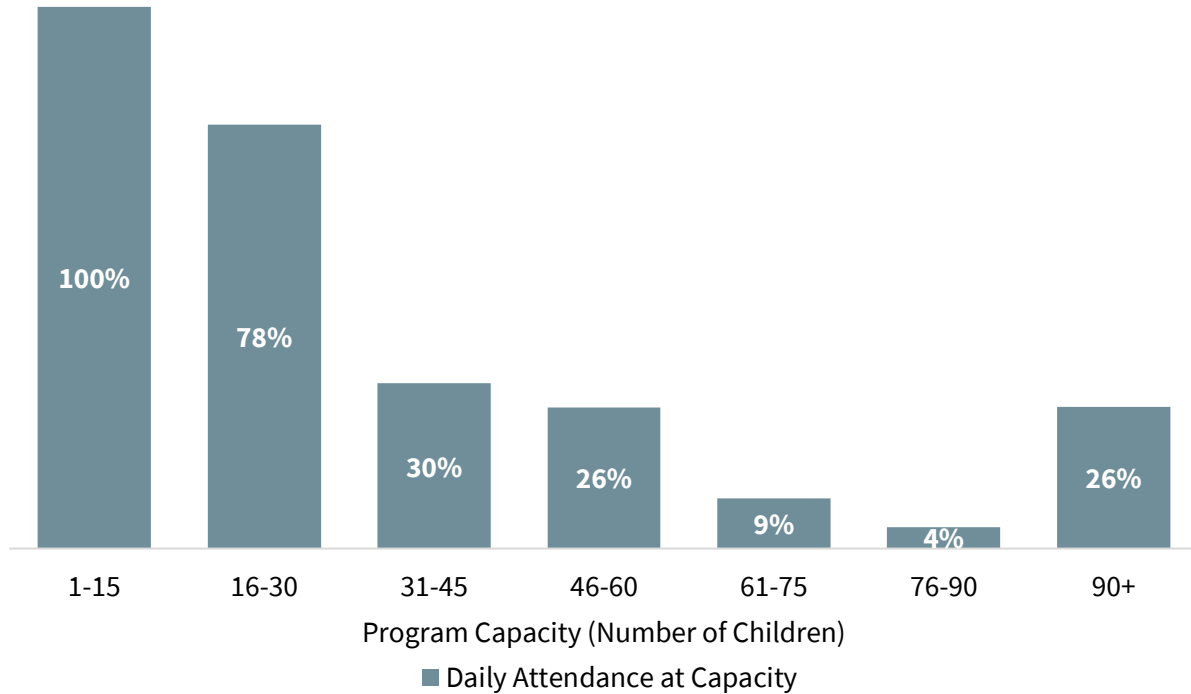
Source: Staff Survey

Data collected through the staff and family surveys and program administrator focus groups and interviews indicated that some OST program teams reported participant waitlists due to the growing need for services after school. The lengths and anticipated timelines of these program waitlists varied by service area and were influenced by several other factors, including the overall sizes/capacities of the programs and the number of staff available to work in the programs.

Figure 10 below shows the percentage of OST staff survey respondents reporting a participant waitlist within individual service areas for the 2023-24 school year, with the data disaggregated by all survey respondents and by OST coordinators only. **These data suggest that certain service areas have more OST programs with participant waitlists, particularly in urban areas such as Wasatch Front North, Wasatch Front South, and Southwestern.**

Figure 10. OST Programs Reporting a Participant Waitlist for the 2023-24 School Year

Region	All Respondents	Coordinators Only
Bear River	0%	0%
Castle Country	100%	100%
Central Utah	0%	0%
Mountainland	41%	31%
Southeast	17%	0%
Southwestern	63%	88%
Wasatch Front North	73%	69%
Wasatch Front South	56%	51%

■ All Respondents   ■ Coordinators Only
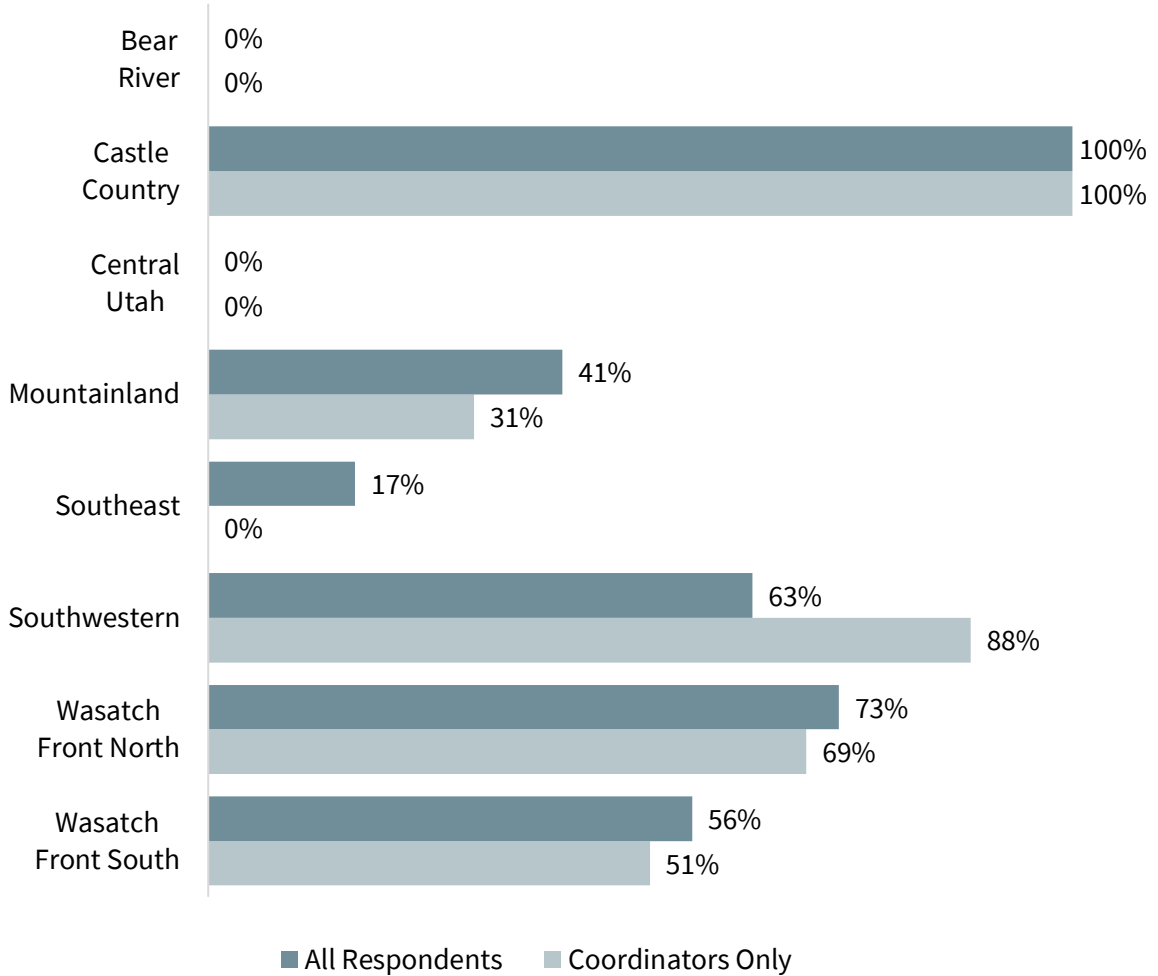
Source: Staff Survey

The following focus group and interview comments illustrate common experiences reported throughout the state about programs' participant waitlists and provide additional context about the complexities these waitlists add to other program elements, such as offering services to children while family members are at work, and ongoing staff recruitment and retention.

> "*I had over 30 kids on my waitlist and parents who were calling every day that they really needed the afterschool program... hearing parents coming in and me having to turn them away because there was no more staffing to accept them. I just feel like that defeats the purpose of having an afterschool program because we just didn't have space to take them in.*"
>
> *- OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South*
>
> "*For two of the programs, we have a waitlist. We've been bringing kids off. The biggest barrier with the wait list is, if we're fully staffed, we have six staff. We have very rarely been fully staffed this year at any of those sites. So, we haven't been able to take on additional kids as much as we should be able to. If we were fully staffed consistently, with six staff, we could have probably at least 10 more kids enrolled at each site. So, the staff retention thing has really affected us this year.*"
>
> *-OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front South*

Some OST teams identified specific challenges in providing needed program services, including transportation for participants, staffing, and rising program expenses, particularly in rural areas of the state.

Transportation

During the surveys and focus groups, OST program staff and administrators were asked about current challenges that impeded their ability to provide needed services for children and families. One challenge discussed across programs was providing transportation home for children at the end of the programs. OST staff survey respondents were asked to identify specific challenges that they heard discussed by families of participating children. Transportation was the biggest challenge identified by 31% of the staff survey respondents. While transportation was identified as a challenge for some programs, it was also recognized as a necessary service provided by other programs and valued by many families. When asked about the importance of various aspects of the OST programs their children were enrolled in, 90% of family survey respondents with children currently participating in OST programs identified transportation (*How easy this program is for my child to get to/from each day*) as "Somewhat important or very important". Family survey respondents with no K-6 children currently participating in OST programs were asked for specific reasons that their children do not participate, and 8% of these family members identified "*Transportation to and from the afterschool program is not available.*"

31% of the staff survey respondents identified **transportation** as the biggest challenge.

90% of family survey respondents with children currently participating in OST programs identified transportation as either **"somewhat" or "very" important**.

In focus group and interview discussions, OST staff and administrators explained why transportation is so challenging. One common barrier is the rising costs

for fuel and vehicle maintenance. Others mentioned the ongoing bus driver shortage in many school districts across the state. Some teams with programs located in urban areas explained that having children walk to and from programs is a safety issue and a major concern for families. OST staff further explained that, when their program budgets become tighter, transportation is one of the services that is often cut, restricting access for many families looking for OST programs for their children after school when they are still at work. The focus group and interview comments below are examples of how the transportation barrier is affecting programs, children and families.

> "
> *The kids that we used to serve way over here can't come to club {OST program} anymore because there is no way to get them all here, which is really frustrating."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front South**
>
> *"One of the ways we've tried to deal with it {transportation challenge} is we don't really even use district buses anymore for any field trips because they just can't staff enough bus drivers to even give us buses. So, we've gone around them and just used private rental services. And last year they were only able to give us one bus a week, which spreads pretty thin among 30 programs. And this year we were able to have two buses a week, which has helped us out a lot."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Mountainland**
>
> *"Transportation from the district, for example, they've had to increase to cover additional fuel, increase pay for drivers, all of these things. And so it's frankly become untenable because the grants aren't keeping up with the rising costs of all of these things, and we've had to reduce significantly the amount of transportation we're able to provide."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front North**
>
> *"…There's no transportation… for the kids to get to these (OST) sites that are not at a school…It's pretty inconvenient for most parents, and they have a lot of worries about their kids walking in the neighborhood."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South**
>
> *"That was the major barrier of getting people to (the) program because parents didn't drive, or they were working at their jobs."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South**
>
> *".... We have really large, really busy streets that families have difficulties just in general. Families have difficulties crossing… They're just really large barriers."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South**

Program Staffing

Another challenge highlighted through the needs assessment data was the recruitment and retention of high-quality program staff. **Over half (56%) of OST staff survey respondents statewide said that hiring and/or retaining staff during the 2023-24 school year had been "*Very or Somewhat Difficult"*.** These responses about staffing varied across service areas, with some reporting no difficulties and some reporting significant struggles in this area, indicating that this challenge is not specific to any region; rather it is complicated by a variety of other factors, such as salaries and benefits work schedule, and better opportunities within other fields, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 11. Reasons for OST Staff Turnover
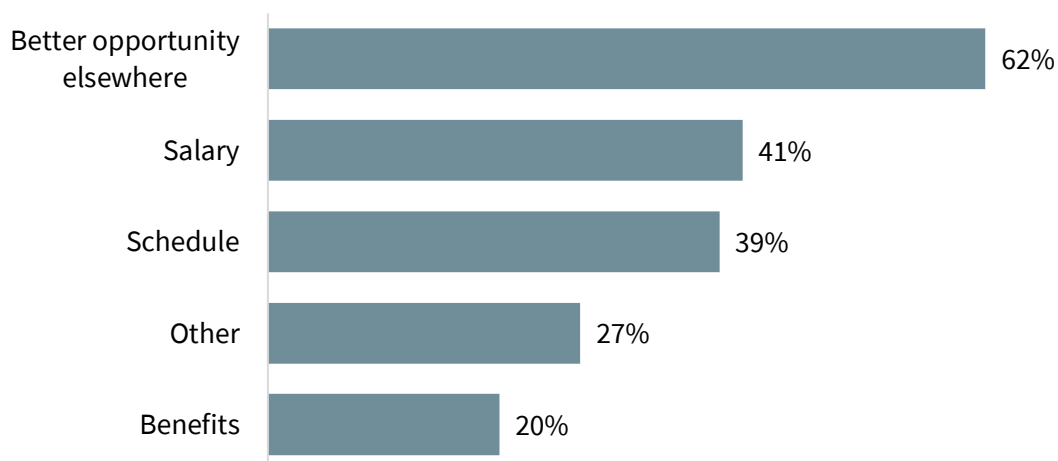
Source: Staff Survey

The OST field has tended to have more turnover and lower retention due to its traditionally younger staff and fluctuating OST resources, which create a lack of job security. Often referred to as a "steppingstone" for students currently enrolled in or just graduating from college, the challenge of retaining staff is not new to Utah or to the nation. OST staff overwhelmingly feel passionate about their line of work but are concerned about wages and benefits (Hall et al., 2020). Over the past several years, program teams have had to get creative in how they recruit and retain their program staff, implementing innovative approaches, such as increasing wages, offering flexible hours, developing personalized professional learning opportunities, and providing on-site childcare for staff.

During the focus group discussions, **some program administrators explained they struggle to hire and retain staff simply because the staff can't afford the cost of living in those towns. For these staff, it's not feasible to travel much back and forth to work, so they end up taking other jobs closer to home.** Below are illustrative quotes from the focus group and interview discussions that highlight these staffing challenges and the ways in which programs are attempting to address them.

> **"**
> *We have to make it so that they (OST Staff) can live. We can't make it so that they can't survive and do after school, because these people are dedicated. They don't get paid enough anyways. So that's probably one thing that I know that is a huge impasse in K through six (OST) programming right now."*
> *-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Bear River*

> *"The amount of staff that we have throughout our programs, not just at one site, but organizationally, most aren't going to be in the afterschool field forever. We have student teachers working with us. We have staff that already work in the school, so they have their jobs and careers. And then we have staff, a lot of young staff. We have a very young staff team who are still in college and figuring out what they want to do."*
> *-OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front South*

> *"We've had multiple staff members who have been like, 'I would love to stay with you in the program, but I have nowhere to live.' We had some thoughts for {hiring} other staff members, and unfortunately, they got priced out of town."*
> *-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Southeast*

> *"Coming out of the pandemic, we really struggled for staff…We just were in this cycle of just trying to get people in to meet the ratio requirements, and the quality of the program really suffered. It was so hard to find good staff and those staff willing to stay. Anyway, it was this vicious cycle. We have been coming out of it, but it's come at a financial cost. We have definitely increased our rates where, I would say, in the past three years, our hourly rate for afterschool program staff have probably increased $3 to $5 an hour…. So, it is a big cost."*
> *- OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front North*

> *"Something we've been talking a lot about over the last year or so, is just finding those ways to foster staff growth, that we aren't trying to promote them out of the parts of the job that they really enjoy. And sort of trying to pivot our approach a little bit on that. I mean, for one, because we only have so many full-time positions, but also just in that sort of a switching mentality of it is a career, to be in after school. And there are ways to continue to grow and have opportunities to explore new things, while doing the position that you're feeling solid in."*
> *- OST Program Administrator Interview, Bear River*

Program Expenses

Another significant challenge OST staff and administrators discussed was being able to consistently afford ongoing program expenses to provide quality services. These ongoing expenses include things such as hourly wages for homework tutors, nutritious snacks, school supplies, project materials, and gas for field trips.

On the OST Funding survey, program administrators were asked about any foreseeable impacts to program services with the recent decrease in state funding and the end of COVID-19 relief funds. Several survey respondents offered specific examples of planned reductions in services, such as program hours, number of school-based programs within a school district, and variety and number of activities offered to program participants. The following comments from focus groups and interviews illustrate the types of challenges programs are facing with respect to program expenses.

> "
> *Everything is doubled. And it's not just for programming, it's for everyone. And some of it tripled in food. And house resources, things like that, so. Right. I mean, yeah, we are constantly in need of supplies, it feels like. I mean, and they've gotten crazy expensive to actually run the clubs. It's gotten kind of expensive. I mean, usually, we do okay, we plan for it and stuff like that. We're the kind of club who everything that we bring in, we turn back to the programs. So, everything that we bring in goes back to mostly salaries, that's mostly, and benefits, things like that. And then, supplies are probably next. And then, overhead's always hard to cover."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Bear River**
>
> *"[Program Name] will be scaling back the amount of program hours, reducing part time staff positions, and limiting enrollment."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Interview, Southeast**

Additional details about the OST funding challenges and their impacts on program services for children and families are discussed further in the *Availability of Resources and Funding* section.

In many Utah communities, OST programs are considered a necessity among families looking for a safe, engaging environment for their children when school is not in session.

OST data from program staff and families throughout the state indicated in many communities, OST programs are considered a necessity among families looking for safe and enriching environments for their children when school is not in session. When asked what they valued about their children's current OST programs, family members described program features such as opportunities for their children to socialize with peers, participate in enjoyable activities, and complete homework. Some family members also mentioned the convenience of the program location (right at their child's school), ease of registering their child, and, in some cases, program affordability.

As we noted previously, according to the Utah Census data, the percentage of children living in one-parent/guardian households ranges across the service regions from 13% (Mountainland) to 35% (Southeast). In addition, the percentage of children with at least one non-working parent in the household ranges from 18% (Southeast) to 38% (Uintah Basin). Another way to consider this is that

the percentage of children in households in which all parents are working ranges from 82% (Southeast) to 62% (Uintah Basin). Additional Utah Census data is included in the Appendix.

Many family members of children in grades K-6 rely on these OST programs to be safe environments, as one family survey respondent shared **"We have someone looking after him and I know that he is getting the care that he needs while I am at work." (Family Survey).**

When family survey respondents with children not currently participating in OST programs were asked what their child typically does after school, **26% responded that their child stays at home alone or with an older sibling.**

26% of the family survey respondents with children who are not in an OST program **reported their child stays home alone** or with an older sibling after school.

The following comments from the family survey and administrator interviews further illustrate the benefits of having a safe and engaging environment for children, as well as the commitment and persistence that OST providers demonstrate to ensure they can keep their programs operating.

> "
> *...A program that can help my children with their educational needs and give them a safe place to be after school when I can't be available."*
> *-Family Survey Respondent*
>
> *"I really had to fight to get the program there. The principal was just like, 'We really like having our doors shut at 4:00, and the lights turned off.' So, our program ended and there was a lot of parents who were upset. They (children) didn't have any place to go. Some of the kids, they found ways to transport them over to (a different school), which is nearby, but it would be great to have a (closer) location."*
> *-OST Program Administrator Interview, Southwest*

Programming Capacity

Programming capacity refers to two separate concepts within the OST field. First, it refers to the total number of children an OST program can accept based on program size, available resources, and OST grant requirements for staff-to-child ratios. Programming capacity also refers to the ability of OST teams to provide services to meet the specific needs of children and families. For this needs assessment, we collected data on both meanings of program capacity. The data we collected about the number of available spaces within OST programs is described in the previous *Program Access and Availability* findings.

In this section, we explored the various focus areas and activities offered by existing OST programs (e.g., academic support, family engagement, STEM) and what OST program services families are looking for from programs in their communities. These data can be used to inform community leaders on how best to support families and children in identifying available OST programs within their communities. In addition, these data could also be used to identify opportunities for OST program teams located within the same service areas to collaborate in addressing common gaps and responding to unmet needs in critical program services.

The questions below guided our data collection and analysis regarding programming capacity:
1. What are the most common services and activities offered by OST programs across the state?
2. What are families seeking from OST programs?

OST programs across the state offered a wide variety of critical academic, social, and physical activities for children to ensure their well-being.

Data collected through staff surveys and OST administrator interviews and focus groups indicated that OST programs offered a variety of activities for children based on their interests and needs. Figure 12 below shows the percentage of OST staff that reported offering each of the activities and services listed at least weekly. **Academic enrichment/subject-focused tutoring was the highest with ninety-eight percent (98%)**, as many OST funding grants are awarded to applicants trying to supplement the content of the school day with hands-on enrichment activities that help children make sense of the new academic concepts. **Homework/other academic help was also high on the list of activities provided at least weekly with eighty-eight percent (88%)**, as program teams often used dedicated time each afternoon to support children in getting assignments completed. This service was also a big focus for many families who appreciated their children's homework being done when they picked them up from the OST programs after a long day at work. When asked to identify how important various OST services/activities were to them, **79% of family survey respondents stated that their child completing homework during the OST program was "somewhat" or "very important" to them.**

Figure 12. OST Program Services and Activities Offered at Least Weekly

Service/Activity	Offered weekly or more
Academic enrichment, including subject-focused tutoring	98%
Time to interact with peers and build social skills	95%
Physical well-being opportunities	94%
Outdoor activities	90%
Homework or academic help	88%
Opportunities to develop life skills	88%
Independent or group reading or writing time	85%
STEM learning opportunities	84%
Opportunities to discuss feelings and emotions of with peers and staff	84%
Utilizing technology to support program activities	78%
Family or parent engagement activities	71%
Youth leadership opportunities	63%
Prevention activities (e.g. healthy lifestyles)	56%
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum/Tools	44%
Other social and emotional supports	22%
Take home activities and other virtual activities	12%
Home visits and/or check-in calls with students and families	8%

■ Offered weekly or more

Source: Staff Survey

In addition to the academic services provided by OST programs, another area in which program teams offered activities at least weekly was social skills and peer relationships. **Ninety-five percent (95%) of OST staff reported that their teams offered children time to interact with peers and build social skills (95%)**, as well as offered them **opportunities to talk with peers and staff about their feelings and emotions (84%) at least weekly**. Such opportunities to learn and practice social skills in OST programs are further explained through comments like the ones below.

> **"**
>
> *It has taught my child a lot of independence. She walks to the program herself; she is there with kids 1-5th grade and has friends all over the school because of that."*
> *-Family Survey Respondent*
>
> *"Also, just the skills of like cooking and just interacting with other people in a positive way and being able to redirect behaviors and let them know that they're not in trouble. That you can make mistakes, but you just got to learn from them."*
> *-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Castle Country*

A third area in which many OST program staff reported providing activities at least weekly is with physical and outdoor activities. These program components are often considered valuable for children, particularly after a long school day in the classroom. **Program staff reported leading physical well-being opportunities (94%), and outdoor activities (90%) as an essential part of helping children understand personal well-being and healthy lifestyles.** These activities are also supported by research indicating that OST programs can be a positive place to support healthy habits for youth, including eating practices and physical activity (Huberty et al., 2013; Weaver et al., 2015).

OST program activities and services offered at least weekly generally aligned with those identified by OST staff as most valuable for children and families, with a few exceptions.

In addition to reporting the frequency of activities and services, OST staff were asked how important each activity was for children and families. Figure 13 below shows the percentage of OST staff that identified each activity as "very important" or "extremely important" for children and families. The first eight activities with the highest perceived importance are the activities that OST staff reported occurring at least weekly in Figure 12. **These data suggest that many OST program teams were providing services that aligned with the needs of children and families within their communities.**

In contrast, there were a few activities and services that the OST staff rated as higher in importance relative to frequency. For example, 12% of staff respondents indicated that take-home and virtual activities were offered at least weekly, while 48% of staff considered these same activities to be "very important" or "extremely important" to children and families. Another service, home visits/check-in calls with students and/or families, was reported to occur at least weekly by 8% of staff survey respondents but was reported as "very important" or "extremely important" to children and families by 58% of respondents. A third category, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum/tools, was identified by 44% of OST staff as offered at least weekly, while 75% of staff identified this area as "very important" or "extremely important". Additional data regarding the need for social/emotional and mental health supports is provided and discussed in more detail within the next finding.

Figure 13. OST Program Activities and Services Reported by OST Staff as "Very Important" or "Extremely Important" to Children and Families

Activity	Percent
Academic enrichment, including…	91%
Time to interact with peers…	87%
Physical well-being…	84%
Outdoor activities	84%
Homework or academic help	82%
Opportunities to develop…	76%
Independent or group reading…	72%
STEM learning opportunities	69%
Opportunities to discuss feelings…	81%
Utilizing technology to support…	75%
Family or parent engagement…	51%
Youth leadership opportunities	73%
Prevention activities…	70%
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)…	75%
Other social and emotional…	31%
Take home activities and…	48%
Home visits and/or check-in…	52%

■ Very or extremely important to students and families

Source: Staff Survey

OST program staff and families identified the need for mental health resources for staff and children as a high priority.

Some program staff and families across the state identified mental health resources and supports for children as a current unmet need. This area has gained national attention during the past four years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a national online survey of OST program providers, over 60% of OST staff are extremely or very concerned about the mental and emotional needs of the children and youth they serve (Afterschool Alliance Provider Survey April Brief, 2024).

Program staff and administrators from several different regions described varying degrees of mental health resources that they were able to provide for children enrolled in their OST programs. Some program teams described referral partnerships with local mental health professionals to support the needs within their programs, while other OST teams hired specialized staff to oversee the mental health needs and resources. Other OST teams expressed less confidence in their abilities to support the mental health needs of program participants, explaining that they didn't have the training or experience in this area. The data from staff and family surveys and program coordinator focus groups indicated that mental health supports were widely recognized statewide as a critical need, but very few OST program teams reported having adequate training, resources, and experience to confidently meet the needs of children within their communities. Using the data from Figures 12 and 13 above, OST staff responses regarding specific mental health supports and resources are highlighted in Figure 14. **For both Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum/tools, and other specialized mental health or counseling supports, the percentage of staff identifying those services as "very important" or "extremely important" to children and families was larger than the percentage of staff that reported these services being offered at least weekly**. This indicates a perceived need for additional program services and resources in these two areas.

Figure 14. Frequency and Perceived Importance of SEL Services According to OST Staff

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum/Tools
- 44%
- 75%

Other social and emotional supports (e.g., specialized mental health or counseling support)
- 22%
- 31%

■ Offered weekly or more ■ Very or extremely important to students and families
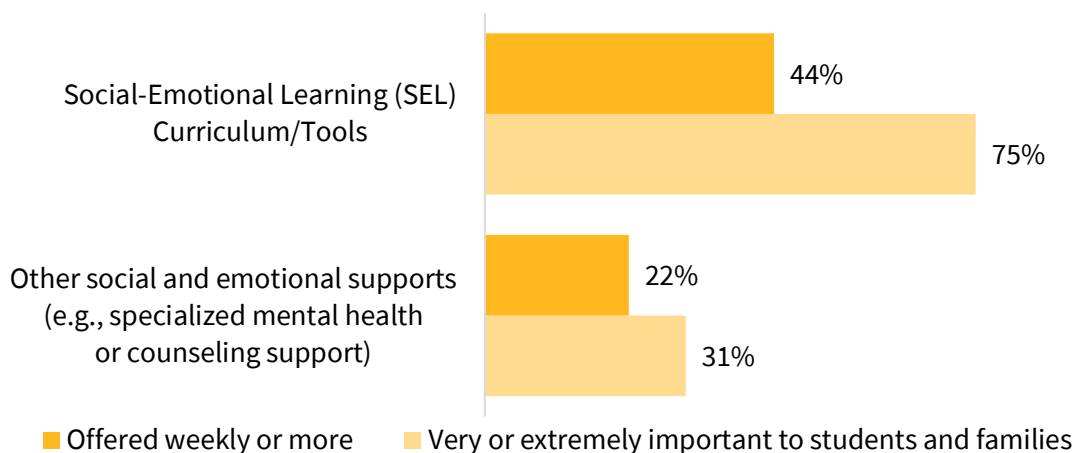
Source: Staff Survey

Discussions during the OST program coordinator focus groups and interviews further supported this finding, as many OST administrators described their ongoing efforts to meet the growing mental health needs within their communities.[1] Some of these administrators described an increase in the acuity of mental health needs that are often observed in the behaviors of children during OST program activities, as expressed in the comment below.

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[1] In a small study of children in elementary-age OST program, de Oliveira Major and colleagues (2023) used teacher assessments to understand the relationship between participation in an OST program and social skills during the height of the pandemic. The study found that children participating in OST programs during the pandemic had higher levels of self-control. While this is a small study with its own limitations, it highlights the important support role OST programs can offer children, families, schools, and communities in supporting pandemic recovery efforts.

> **"** *Since Covid especially, we're seeing huge increases in the SEL needs of youth. And I think a lot of systems, schools, out of school families, so many different systems are really struggling to figure out how to meet those needs. And so, it's manifesting in increased behavior concerns, longer-term behavior concerns… And so, I think the whole field is trying to figure out how to meet the needs of kids who've experienced this historical thing.*
> **–OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South**

In some cases, these mental health needs and behaviors created staff frustration and burnout, leading to staffing shortages in OST programs. Despite the ongoing efforts to partner with community professionals and school counselors specifically trained for these needs, this remained one of the biggest challenges that OST program teams faced, as expressed through the following comments from program administrators during focus groups and interviews.

> **"** *It's come not only to the hiring part but retaining the staff just because we're seeing difference in kids' behaviors, how they are in programs. There's a lot more issues that are being faced right now that I think affect the staff a lot. And then sometimes the leadership over them don't always know how to best support them through it all."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Mountainland**
>
> *"We've got to make up what these kids are missing, which is a lot. Yes, absolutely we see an uptick. In our small little district, we have 11 counselors and 10 social workers, so that's for 7,000 students and it's still not enough. So, we see lots and lots of needs for a multitude of reasons, and I don't anticipate that going away anytime soon."*
> **-OST Administrator Interview, Uintah Basin**

As OST program teams continue to recognize these ongoing challenges and find ways to support children and families with their mental health needs, state OST partners are also collaborating to explore opportunities for additional support in this area. These include conversations with teams from the Utah Department of Health and the University of Utah Educational Psychology Department to explore possible partnerships for OST mental health resources. Further discussion of these partnership opportunities is included in the considerations section of this report.

Challenges with staff recruitment and retention often complicated program teams' capacity to provide needed services for children and families.

When asked about staffing patterns of their program teams, most OST administrators reported employing 3-8 staff members for their programs, with a minimum of 1 employee and a maximum of 25 employees. Figure 15 below shows the reported time that staff have been working within their current OST programs, according to administrator survey responses. While program administrators reported that just over half of employees (57%) have worked for their current programs between 6 months and 3 years, only 18% of employees have been with their current OST program for four or more years.

OST program administrators reported that **59%** of their current program employees have worked within that program for **one year or less**.

Figure 15. OST Staff Experience in Current Program as Reported by Administrators

Staff Experience in Current OST Program
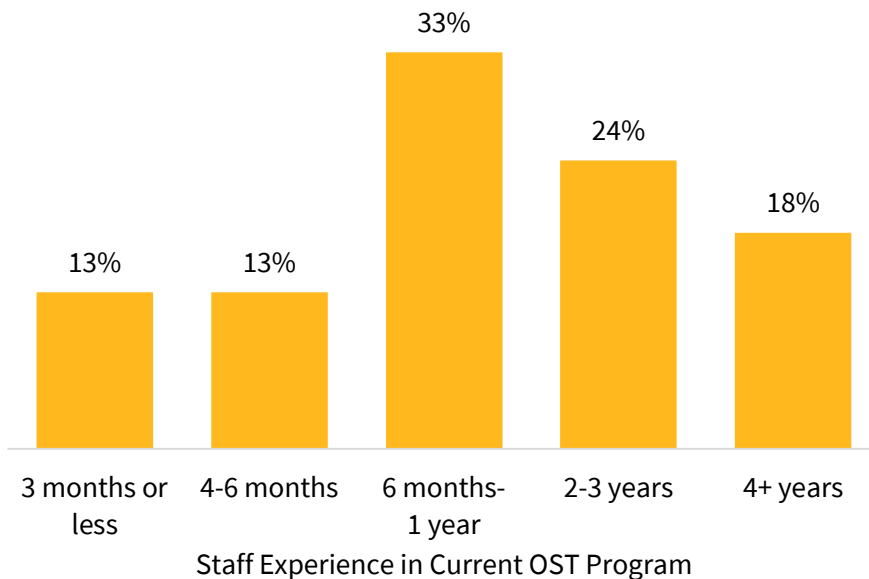
Source: Staff Survey

In considering the perceived importance of OST services and activities discussed in the previous findings, these staff retention data can greatly impact a program team's ability to provide needed services for children and families. During focus groups and interviews, some program administrators explained that their staff often become overwhelmed or frustrated with the demands of the job. In an effort to retain quality staff, administrators described looking for ways to increase staff salaries, despite the ongoing fiscal challenges the programs face.

> **❝**
> *That's going to be the biggest gap is just, yeah, salaries for staff and just, it's going to make it harder to increase that hourly pay."*
> -**OST Coordinator Focus Group, Southwest**
>
> *"I think the biggest thing I'm concerned about that's going to be a greater need is the pay structure. I felt like when this grant started, what, a year and a half, almost two years ago, this starting, our organization starts staff out at $15 an hour, and that was a good part-time job."*
> -**OST Coordinator Focus Group, Southwest**

Despite these efforts to increase the salaries and benefits for OST staff, many program administrators explained that, as their staff often experience burnout and leave their OST programs for other job opportunities, administrators then face a staffing shortage which can compromise their team's ability to provide children with the program services they and their families desperately need. This cycle is described through some of the OST administrators' comments below.

> **❝**
> *Well, the stress of meeting the current needs of the kids, because the needs of the kids have obviously increased dramatically, too. So, we've got increased needs with staff and youth, emotional needs, just big things going on in their lives, just crazy. I'm seeing a lot of staff just getting discouraged."*
> -**OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Mountainland**
>
> *"And sometimes they (staff) come, and they stay a couple of days and they're like, 'This isn't really for me.'"*
> -**OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Castle Country**

Program Quality and Continuous Improvement

To understand how current OST funders and programs are addressing programming quality and continuous improvement, we explored how OST programs access and implement various tools and resources. These resources include the UAN's *Afterschool Quality Self-Assessment and Improvement Tool* and *Out of School Time Partnership Rubric*, Weikart Center's *Program Quality Assessment Observation Tool*, state and regional professional learning conferences, UAN's online resource library, and individualized program technical assistance opportunities. We also explored the benefits and barriers that OST programs face as they work to ensure quality program services and a commitment to continuous improvement (e.g., staffing, resources, knowledge, experience, partnerships)

The questions below guided our data collection and analysis regarding program quality and continuous improvement:

1. What resources are available to ensure program quality?
2. In what ways are programs using or accessing the program quality resources?
3. What are the benefits and barriers to ensuring program quality and continuous improvement?

OST program administrators and staff reported using a variety of improvement resources/tools and attending professional learning opportunities around relevant topics, albeit at varying degrees based on their roles, as they worked to strengthen program quality.

In their ongoing efforts to provide quality program services for children and families through a model of continuous improvement, OST program administrators and staff reported accessing various statewide tools and resources developed and offered through UAN. Figure 16 below lists the various resources available to program teams throughout the state, as well as the percentage of staff who reported use of each resource, broken down by staff role. **Respondents who identified themselves as OST Site Coordinators/Managers/Directors all reported the highest use of each of the resources listed above all other staff roles, as almost 80% reported using the Quality Tool Self-Assessment Data, Professional Learning Events, and the Program Quality Assessment Observation Data.** Those same three resources were also the ones most frequently used by program staff, yet only approximately 50% of staff respondents reported using these tools.

These gaps in program administrators' and staffs' reported use of statewide resources are also illustrated by the reported use of the *UAN Out of School Time Partnership Rubric* (approximately 70% administrators, 30% staff), the UAN newsletter (approximately 60% administrators, 25% staff), and the UAN Well-Being Institute (approximately 45% administrators, 20% staff). Staff survey respondents who identified themselves as classroom teachers or having "other" roles in OST programs reported similar use to that of the program staff for each of the resources listed. In addition to the consistent use of statewide tools and resources by OST program administrators, these data also suggest that opportunities exist for program administrators to build the capacities of their program staff to regularly access and use these resources in their program improvement efforts.

Figure 16. OST Program Staff Reported Use (by Role) of Statewide Resources and Tools for Quality Improvement
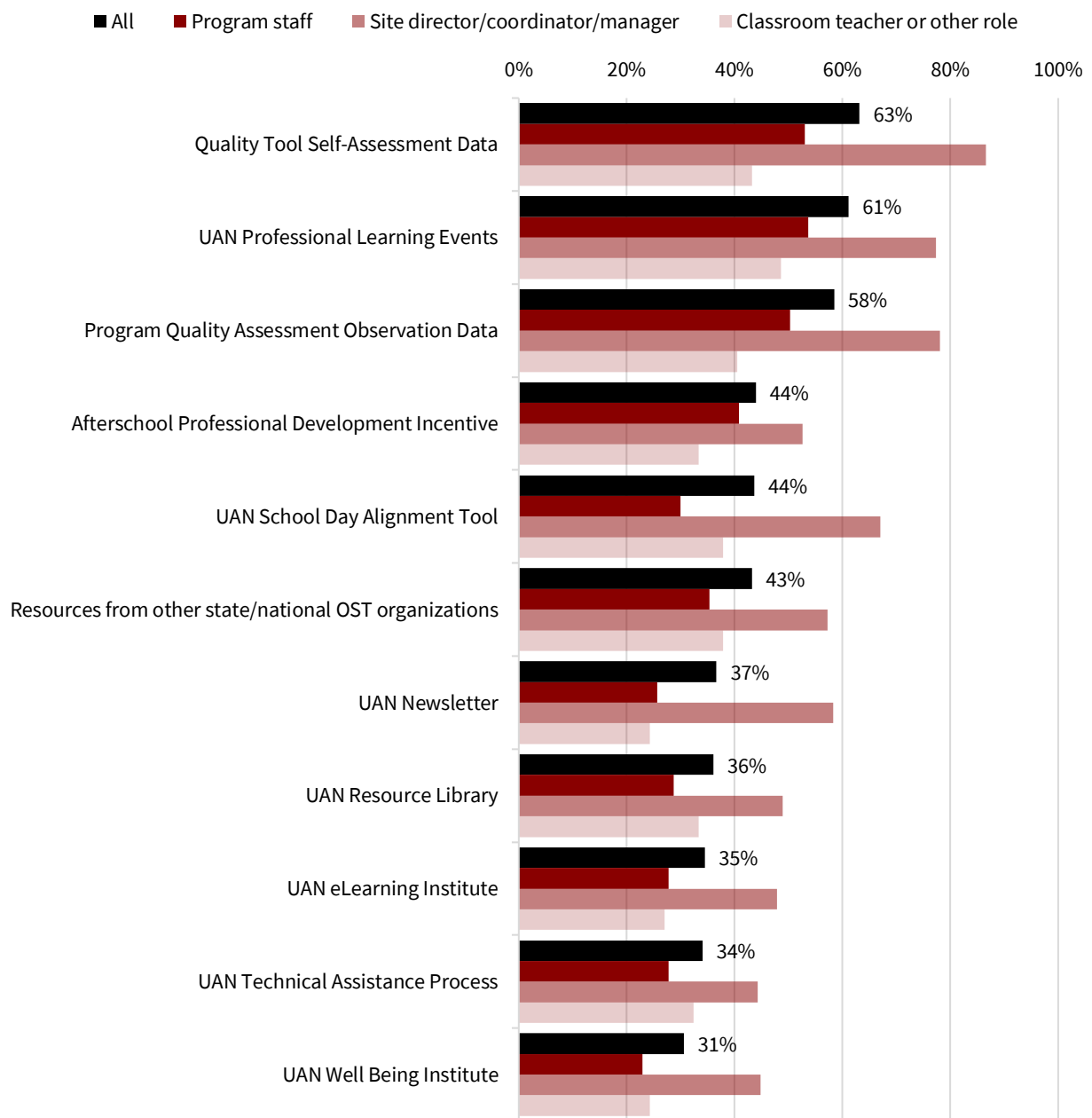
Legend: ■ All ■ Program staff ■ Site director/coordinator/manager ■ Classroom teacher or other role

Resource/Tool	All
Quality Tool Self-Assessment Data	63%
UAN Professional Learning Events	61%
Program Quality Assessment Observation Data	58%
Afterschool Professional Development Incentive	44%
UAN School Day Alignment Tool	44%
Resources from other state/national OST organizations	43%
UAN Newsletter	37%
UAN Resource Library	36%
UAN eLearning Institute	35%
UAN Technical Assistance Process	34%
UAN Well Being Institute	31%

Source: Staff Survey

OST program staff and administrators identified additional topic areas and suggestions for professional learning opportunities/resources that would be valuable to their teams as they worked to strengthen program quality.

Statewide resources mentioned in the previous finding and found to be valuable by program administrators and staff are the UAN professional learning events, which include the annual

Jumpstart Conference, Recharge Regional Convenings, and quarterly topic-specific institutes. To dive deeper into program staff reflections on specific topic areas for these professional learning events, the OST staff were asked to report on which topic sessions they have attended, and which ones they considered to be most valuable to attend in the future. Figure 17 lists four OST topics for which the percentage of staff considering each topic to be "valuable" or "extremely valuable" is greater than the percentage of staff reporting having attended a session about this topic. **The largest gap in this data is found within *Cultural Competence for Inclusive Programming*, with 28% of staff respondents reporting having attended a session about this topic, while 50% of staff reported this topic to be "valuable" or "extremely valuable". *Supporting Students with Post-Secondary Opportunities* is the second largest gap, in which 55% of staff report having attended a session, and 72% find it to be "valuable" or "extremely valuable"**. The remaining two topics listed, *Prevention Education/Strategies*, and *Family Engagement,* were also identified as "valuable" or "extremely valuable" by program staff (both 67%).

Figure 17: Session Topics Attended and Valued by OST Staff at Professional Learning Events

- **Reported attending** ■ **Perceives as extremely or valuable to attend in the future**
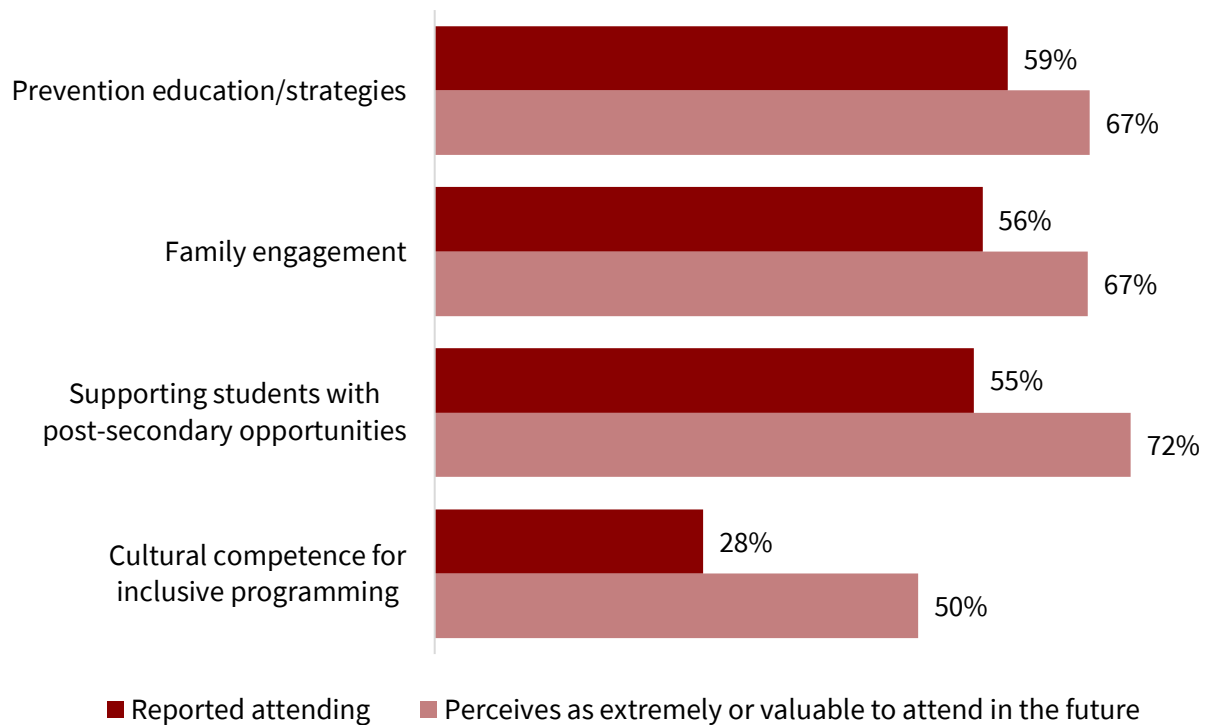
Source: Staff Survey

As part of their reflections on state and regional professional learning topics during the focus groups and interviews, OST staff offered additional feedback for teams organizing and facilitating OST professional learning opportunities. These ideas include expanding session "tracks" offered at conferences to allow current and emerging OST leaders to have a suggested list of sessions to attend, thereby providing additional opportunities for OST

leaders to collaborate across regions. The comments below from OST administrators during interviews and focus groups further highlight these suggestions.

> " *One thing I would say that as an administrator I'd like to see is more administrative tracks at some of those statewide conferences. I think it's so important for direct service work, but a lot of times I don't do direct service work as often. And so, I'd love to see more administrative tracks or administrative opportunities at some of those statewide conferences."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Mountainland**
>
> *"Like a coordinator from (region) realized there's a coordinator in (region) and they know each other now. And so, they communicate with each other, and they share ideas. And that has been one of our biggest strengths, I think, is that collaboration."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Southeast**

Other program administrators discussed how important it was to have a balance of in-person conferences and networking sessions along with frequent opportunities for OST staff to participate in brief, virtual learning sessions focused on topics relevant to their program's needs. These ideas are explained through comments such as the one below.

> " *...We have different conferences that I have funding that I can send these (staff) to. But then a lot of times it doesn't work with their schedule because they're moms at home...That's why they don't have a daytime job but working in the afternoons (in OST Programs) is beneficial because either older siblings are home or their husband's home. So, they don't have the ability to go to a conference, let alone a Jump Start, which is two days long from 9:00 in the morning until 5:00 at night. I'd like to see... and I know this is really reaching. But like very specific, here's an hour, maybe an online, where we can do something like that. Where I can say, 'Hey, you can do this while the baby's napping.'"*
> **-OST Coordinator Focus Group, Southwest**

Several OST administrators reported frequent data/evaluation activities to monitor progress toward program goals, revealing opportunities for these OST leaders to build their staff's capacity in these areas.

For the past several years, the State OST Partnership Group has developed, promoted, and facilitated several virtual and in-person trainings and cohort discussions for OST administrators and staff focused on collecting and using data to show the impact of program services and document progress towards short- and long-term program goals. The primary goal of these data sessions is to build the capacity of OST administrators and program staff to utilize the Continuous Improvement Cycle as a guide in using data to develop program goals, collecting formative data to monitor progress on goals,

and making timely program adjustments as necessary based on the data. (Please refer to the Continuous Improvement Cycle framework in the Appendix)

When asked about their engagement in specific data activities, such as discussing progress on goals, reviewing and interpreting data, and developing or revisiting program logic models, OST administrators reported participating in each of the data activities at higher rates than OST staff in other roles, including program staff and classroom teachers working within the programs. Figure 18 below lists the specific data activities and shows the percentage of survey respondents (by role) who reported engaging in each one. **The largest gaps in participation between the OST administrators and those in other program roles were in *reviewing and interpreting data* and *using evaluation data for program planning and improvement*.** These gaps suggest opportunities for OST administrators to build capacity of their program staff in these specific areas as part of their ongoing commitment to enhance program quality.

Figure 18. Percentage of OST Staff (by Role) Reporting Participation in Data Activities
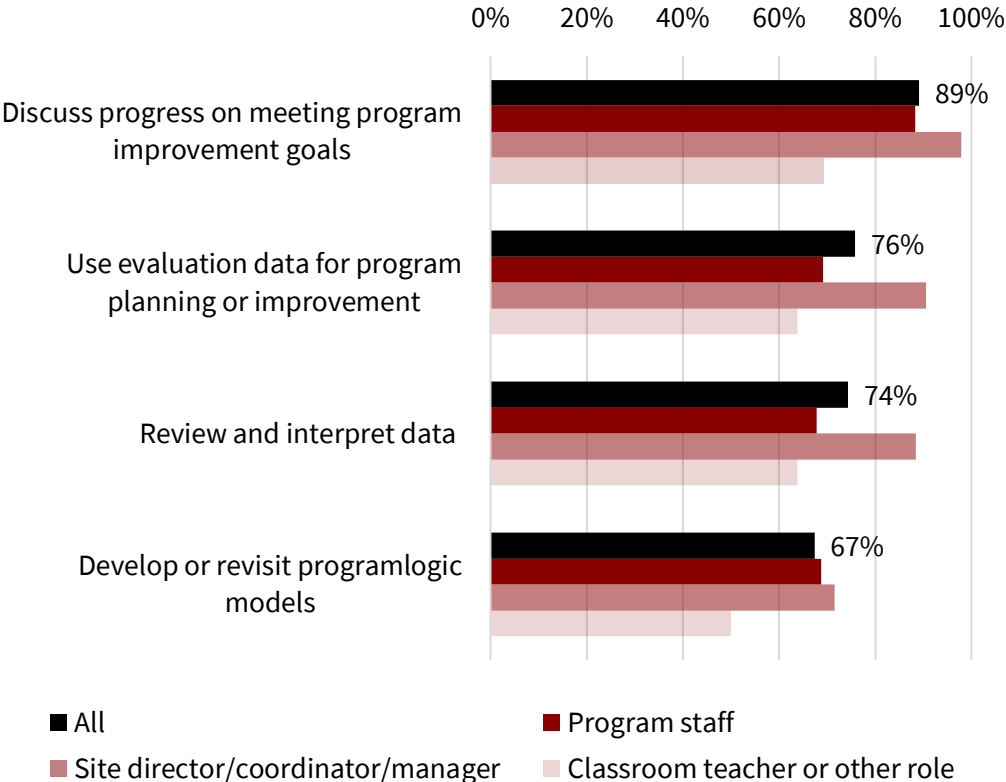
Source: Staff Survey

Focus group and interview data suggest that, as OST administrators consider strategies to build the capacity of their program staff in these data and evaluation activities, many program teams currently struggle to collect and use data to show the impact of their program services. These struggles often create a sense of urgency for program administrators to help their staff engage in frequent cycles of data collection and analysis, as federal and state funding for OST programs become increasingly

competitive and is often reserved for programs that demonstrate clear and consistent outcomes. These concerns of OST administrators around their team's current data collection practices as a means to show program impact are explained through comments like the one below.

> "
> *What keeps me up at night… that we're not demonstrating what we're doing well. We've had a hard time showing what we do works, proving what we do matters. We always get the numbers…but I think we don't prove what we do well. I think we don't talk about it."*
> **- OST Program Administrator Interview, Bear River**

Partnerships

Community partnerships can be a powerful and successful resource to provide needed program services for children and families. We studied how OST programs engage with their community partners to leverage resources and provide intentional, quality services, such as nutritious meals for program participants and mental health supports. In addition, we explored examples of community partners engaged in this work and the benefits and barriers that OST teams encounter as they cultivate and sustain partnerships to achieve program outcomes.

The questions below guided our data collection and analysis regarding partnerships:
1. With what types of organizations do OST programs partner?
2. What services, activities, or resources are provided through partnerships?
3. What strategies are used to develop and sustain partnerships?
4. What are the benefits and barriers to developing and sustaining partnerships?

In some Utah communities, strategic, intentional partnerships with local organizations supplemented critical services that many OST program teams couldn't provide on their own due to limited resources.

Many OST program coordinators described their community partners as providing additional critical services for children and families that their own budgets couldn't provide**. Examples of these services included nutritious snacks and hot meals for children during OST programs, weekend to-go meals for families, mental health resources, and clothing, shoes, and coats for children and families who needed these essentials throughout the year.**

During focus groups and interviews, some OST Program Administrators offered insight into how these intentional partnerships supported their OST teams in providing needed services for children and families, **instead of competing with local organizations for available resources**. This concept is described through the following comments.

> " Even if we had the (OST grant) funding now, we wouldn't be able to have the types of snacks that the Boys & Girls Club currently is providing. We could have fruit, maybe a granola bar, cheese stick, or something like that. What they provide are ham and cheese sandwiches with a pear, with a drink, with chocolate milk..."
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Southwest**
>
> "The biggest thing is resource sharing. I'm really good at recognizing resources that three or four places have and how we can share those together. I also try really hard to be respectful of other non-profits and what the schools are doing, and I don't look at myself as competing with them... We have this idea that we're competing. We're competing with childcare, we're competing with schools, we're competing... I am not competing with any of that. We are all part of the whole... I'm advocating for everybody."
> *- OST Program Administrator Interview, Bear River*

Other OST program administrators explained that their partnerships with local organizations allowed families to access needed supplies and clothing essentials beyond what the OST programs provided. The following comment by an OST administrator describes the impact of these partnerships on their community.

> " I would say as a whole, families do okay, but there's no extra, so we're lucky that we're in a position we can help out with shoes or Thanksgiving meals, and of course, we did a bunch of kids for Christmas and parents as well, a couple of grandmas too. We're in a position that we have some pretty good community partners, but we could open our doors all day long for free stuff, and our kids would always need to take it."
> *- OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front South*

In addition to the focus group and interview data, OST staff survey data also revealed opportunities for community partnerships to support OST programs in addressing specific family and child needs that the OST teams may not be able to address on their own, as shown in Figure 19 below. **When asked about their levels of concern for the needs of children and families in the programs, half of all staff survey respondents stated they were "very concerned" or "extremely concerned" with the need for academic support of program participants, while almost half expressed the same levels of concern for the mental health and emotional needs of the children (49%) and the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of the children currently attending their programs (48%).** As discussed within other needs assessment findings, some of these concerns identified by OST staff may warrant additional resources and supports of community partners instead of relying solely on OST teams to provide the needed services.

The mental and emotional health of youth in your program	49%
The need for academic support of youth in your program	50%
Having adverse childhood experiences (i.e. abuse, neglect, and other household dysfunctions)	48%
Youth in your community who need OST programming and are not able to access it	31%
Youth experiencing food insecurity	40%

Source: Staff Survey

Some rural OST program teams successfully partnered with existing local coalitions to access needed services for children and families.

In addition to partnering with local organizations to supplement OST program services and resources, some rural communities in Utah have developed intentional, long-term relationships with coalitions of community partners that share resources to meet the needs of local families. These coalitions are built and sustained through ongoing collaboration and shared visions within the communities. OST program administrators who participate in these coalitions reported ongoing success through transparent, frequent communication. This communication includes monthly meetings of representatives from each organization to assess the current needs within the community and strategize the most effective ways to collectively meet those needs. In the following focus group and interview comments, OST administrators described their local partnership coalitions and provided examples of the ways in which they mobilize support for families.

> " We (community partners) meet once a month… It's school district, police department, Boys and Girls Club, 4-H, all of us come together, let's say the library is saying they're doing these activities, but they need this help for whatever, then maybe we can reach out for that help. Where I might be saying, 'We're good on this, but my kids are looking really for shoes,' so then somebody else, like Walmart Distribution Center is part of it, so it's really great…We average about 25 to 30 members a month that show up from all different prevention sites…"
> *-OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front South*
>
> "They're (community partners) the ones that come to us throughout the year and say, 'Hey, we have this new family. They really need childcare.' It could be anything where they might be experiencing homelessness, or we just had a few kids sign up who are Spanish speaking only. And so, we're able to provide support in those areas as well. …. making sure that kids had some place to go after school, as opposed to sometimes living in a car."
> *-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Mountainland*

Many OST administrators described the success of these coalitions through the intentional alignment of their OST program services with partners' existing community events. Examples of these shared events could include Back-to-School Night, Community Health Fairs, Safety Fairs, and in-person school registration days. The OST staff explained the success of these shared events due to the large numbers of families that typically attend, as well as the long-standing relationships among the local organizations that sponsor these gatherings. These events often provide natural opportunities for OST program teams to connect within the communities and share information about their program services, positive program outcomes, and even any challenges they currently face. A few OST Program administrators provided some examples of this particular partnership strategy in their comments below.

> " We do a really good job, I think, of connecting them (families) with other organizations like DWS and WIC and the local health department because we have events that we try to make really fun, but we also invite those organizations too. So, it's like they come maybe for the fun, but while they're there they get connected. And so, I feel like we're able to do a really good job, especially along the Wasatch Front, of meeting those needs."
> *-OST Program Administrator Interview, Wasatch Front South*
>
> "We have quite a bit of students who one or both parents are currently incarcerated. So, a lot of the kids at my school, they don't trust police. …every year when we do the Safety Fair, we have the police officers come out… For literacy night…they come out and read with the kids. And just to have them come out and interact with the kids in a non-threatening setting has been life-changing for some of our kids. This year we're going to have the fire department come out and do crosswalk safety, how important wearing bike helmets are. And again, it's just having that reinforcement of the police officers and the fire department out there, but as a friend instead of maybe how they've seen them in the past."
> *-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South*

As many OST program administrators described their success with these partnership coalitions, some discussed a few remaining challenges that are more difficult to address. These challenges include addressing ongoing food insecurity, supporting the mental health needs of families and children, and securing program buildings in which to provide needed OST services. The following comments by OST administrators illustrate the different types of challenges OST programs face.

> "
> *Food is a problem out here…. Everyone seems hungry all the time. I do have a connection with (non-profit organization), which I just picked up 40 food bags today…but it's not nearly enough. But we are fortunate because we now have the funding to hire a CNP, so we are going to have a nutritionist on site, so we will eventually start opening for dinner, which is really going to help all families."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Southeast**
>
> *"But the gaps I hear over and over have to do with parenting and mental health, parenting and mental health. I also think connecting with community resources is more difficult in the rural areas."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Southwest**
>
> *"What are our needs? How can we maybe work together to fill those gaps and to fill those needs? …If we had a facility, if we could use a school, or a building, that would reduce our costs for our summer program and possibly open it up so that we could have more youth attending because we have this building, as opposed to what we're doing right now, which is just out in a park, and a few rooms from the library…I've gone to four of the schools and they've told me no, because they're prepping to get the schools prepared for the upcoming school year."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Southwest**

Alignment with the School Day

Aligning OST programs with the school day (e.g., academic content, behavior policies, communication with school administrators and teachers) is an essential area of focus for this needs assessment, as the implementation of alignment strategies can lead to more intentional programming, efficiency of resources, and improved outcomes for children. For this topic, we studied the various ways OST program teams purposefully align with the context and goals of the school day, and which alignment strategies OST staff feel are most important. By identifying the benefits and barriers to this intentional alignment, OST program funders and supporting organizations can better assist programs with their ongoing alignment efforts by providing additional resources, professional learning opportunities, and technical assistance.

The questions below guided our data collection and analysis regarding alignment with the school day:

1. In what ways are OST programs taking steps to align with the regular school day, and what strategies are used?
2. What are the benefits and barriers to aligning with the school day?

Several OST program teams described success with their ongoing efforts to align with the school day, particularly in working with school-day teachers to intentionally support children with their specific needs.

To better understand the specific alignment practices OST program teams are using to develop these collaborative relationships within the schools, OST staff were asked to report on the frequency of various alignment activities within their programs. In Figure 20 below, several alignment strategies are listed along with the percentage of OST staff survey respondents that reported engaging in these practices at least monthly. The highest percentages of OST staff reported talking one-on-one with classroom teachers (66%), attending faculty meetings (63%) and engaging in informal discussions with school administrators (63%). **These high-leverage alignment strategies enable the OST staff to have intentional discussions with school-day teachers and administrators so that they can best support the children's unique needs during the OST programs**. Other alignment strategies identified by fewer OST staff, but still over half of staff survey respondents, include emailing teachers (55%), working alongside teachers in the OST program (54%), and attending regular meetings with school administration (53%).

Figure 20. Alignment Practices Performed by OST Staff at Least Monthly
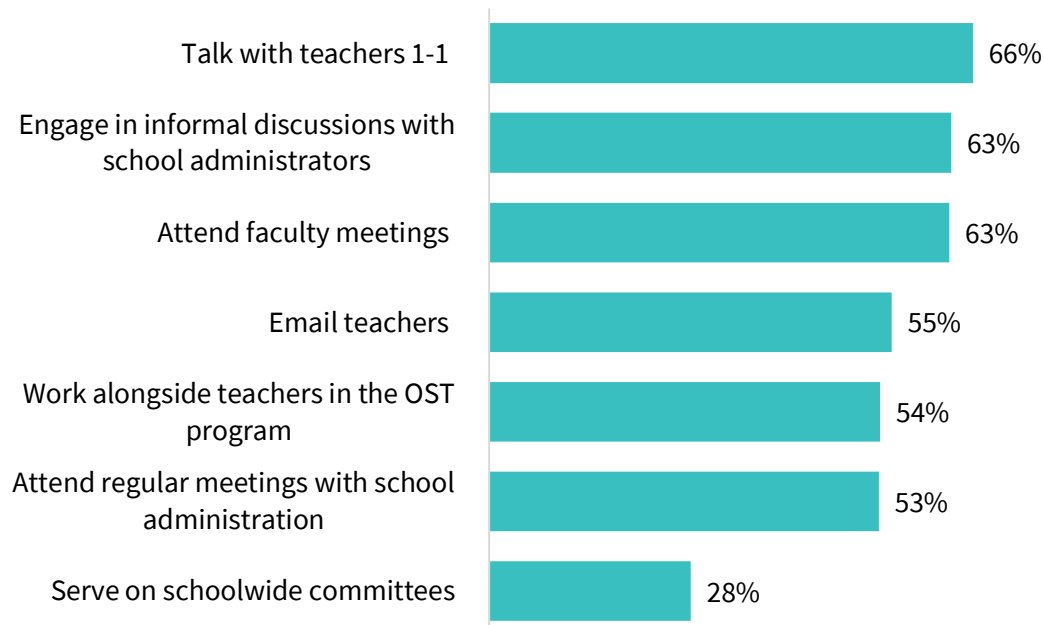
Source: Staff Survey

In addition to the staff survey data, focus group and interview discussions also emphasized these high-leverage alignment strategies between the program staff and the school day teachers. The following comment by an OST program administrator illustrates the importance of these relationships in maximizing the supports and resources for children.

> **"**
> *Overlapping with the day school… I think building those relationships and the rapport with the school day teachers and the administrators is huge because we can help those kids during our homework time, and we build the relationships. And that's what I stress with my staff is, 'Go talk to the teachers. See how you can help them. See how you can benefit them.'*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Mountainland**

During the focus groups and interviews, several OST administrators further expanded on these alignment strategies and offered specific ways in which they work with the school day teams to address children's specific needs, such as school day absenteeism and individual academic challenges. In the comments below, OST administrators described their relationships with the school administrators and teachers and expressed how critical these relationships are in helping them to meet these specific needs.

> **"**
> *And then working with the school as well to address any chronic absenteeism. There's a significant fraction of our school that's on that list. So those are conversations we've been having more so recently with school partners and school administration trying to figure that out."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front South**
>
> *"I talk with them (school day teachers), ask them what their students are struggling in, and I develop their homework time specifically targeted to what they need help with. We do it before school, so it helps start their day. They've (teachers) already been coming to me and telling me what a difference they've seen in some of the kids. They are ready to go, because they've already started their day of getting started."*
> **–OST Program Administrator Interview, Bear River**
>
> *"Having the ability to talk to administrators and work with them as closely as I am at my site and having access to things just makes it so that I can see things that I may not have been able to see…There are some kids that do wonderful in after school but then really struggled during the school day and I would've never known that they were having those troubles if I didn't have as close of a relationship with my school and having these resources."*
> **-OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Wasatch Front North**

In addition to explaining the importance of regular conversations with school day teachers and administrators in meeting the needs of the children, OST administrators also described their communication with teachers and school counselors to identify children that would benefit from participation in the OST programs, as discussed in the comment below.

> "They (school day teachers and administrators) are very active in finding youth that need to attend our program, specifically the teachers and school counselors."
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Mountainland**

Many OST staff and families reported how much they valued the academic support and enrichment activities the OST programs provided, further highlighting the significance of the statewide alignment work.

As OST staff were asked about the variety and frequency of activities provided within their programs (12 in *Programming Capacity* findings), we took a closer look at the specific academic activities to study both the reported frequency and perceived importance of each one, shown in Figure 21 below. The highest percentage of OST staff reported offering academic enrichment (including subject-focused tutoring) at least weekly (98%), while identifying this as "very important" or "extremely important to children and families" (91%). Another academic activity that staff reported consistently between frequency and importance included homework help (88% at least weekly, 82% very or extremely important). **All four academic activities listed were reported by 84-98% of staff survey respondents as occurring at least weekly within their OST programs.**

Figure 21. Frequency and Importance of Academic Activities as Reported by OST Staff

Academic enrichment to include subject-focused tutoring — 98% / 91%
Homework or academic help — 88% / 82%
Independent or group reading or writing time — 85% / 72%
STEM learning opportunities — 84% / 69%

■ Offered weekly or more　■ Very or extremely important to students and families

Source: Staff Survey

Family members expressed similar opinions about the importance of academic activities provided during their child's OST programs. On the family survey, respondents were asked to identify how important various program activities/services were to them. Eighty-four percent (84%) of families

identified "*The ways in which the program connects to the school day or my child's teacher(s)* as "somewhat important" or "very important", while 79% of families reported the same for *"My child completes their homework during the afterschool program."* These data from families emphasize the importance of ongoing efforts to intentionally align OST services and activities with those of the school day. For many families across the state, OST programs' academic activities and alignment efforts not only support their children's academic success, but they also provide opportunities for more quality family time at home instead of doing homework in the evenings.

> " *(I value) My children having a place to go until parents are off work as well as completing any homework. This helps give us more family time at home."*
>
> *– Family Survey Respondent*

Many OST program teams reported using the statewide supports and resources shared with programs, such as professional learning opportunities and the UAN alignment rubric, to facilitate intentional OST alignment with the school day.

During further discussions with OST administrators about their teams' attempts to align with the school day, several mentioned specific tools and resources their team uses regularly as part of these efforts. These resources include professional learning opportunities explicitly focused on OST program/school day alignment and *the UAN Success: Out of School Time Partnership Rubric.* On the OST staff survey, respondents were asked to review a list of common professional learning topics and identify which ones they have attended and how valuable they believed each topic was for them to attend in the future. The two topics with the highest percentage of OST staff that reported both attending professional learning sessions and perceiving these topics to be "valuable" or "extremely valuable" include **school day/afterschool alignment** and **helping students with academic skills**. These data are shown below in Figure 22.

Figure 22. Reported Attendance and Value of Professional Learning Topics by OST Staff

School day/OST alignment — Reported attending: 77%; Perceives as extremely or valuable to attend in the future: 87%

Helping students with academic skills — Reported attending: 75%; Perceives as extremely or valuable to attend in the future: 90%

Legend: ■ Reported attending   ■ Perceives as extremely or valuable to attend in the future

Source: Staff Survey

In addition to the professional learning opportunities involving the OST program/school day alignment, many program administrators also reported using the UAN Out-of-School Time Partnership Rubric. This tool was developed by the UAN OST Alignment Specialist in collaboration with the State OST Partnership Group in 2019, for the purpose of offering OST program teams a shared resource to self-assess progress in implementing various alignment strategies. According to the OST staff survey, **67% of OST Coordinators and Administrators reported using this alignment rubric.** Several OST administrators also mentioned this specific tool during focus groups and interviews, explaining that the opportunity to set small, focused alignment goals from the self-assessment rubric was very helpful for their teams, as explained in the comment below.

> **"**
>
> *I love the school alignment piece, there's huge value there…taking those and setting two goals in each area…So I'm really trying to look at that and thinking, 'Okay, let's have an overall goal and then let's set smaller goals to help reach the overall goal.'*
>
> **- OST Program Administrator Interview, Southwest**

Opportunities exist within the OST/school day alignment work to focus on developing and maintaining reciprocal relationships with the OST program and school teams.

As many OST staff and administrators described specific strategies and resources that support their ongoing efforts to align with the school day, several also mentioned opportunities to develop and strengthen reciprocal relationships with school day teachers and administrators. As the OST staff often reach out to teachers and school leaders to help them understand the purpose and goals of the OST programs, they often take on additional tasks and responsibilities to support the school staff. However, during focus groups and interviews, several OST administrators expressed that these relationships can sometimes feel one-sided, despite the responsibility of both teams to ensure a successful partnership. Below are a few comments from OST administrators to illustrate these sentiments.

> **"**
>
> *…They've (teachers) got a lot on their plate, and we're being asked to do all this stuff and then, 'Well, why isn't it getting done?' Well, it's because we're not getting it back the other direction. So, we can share, and we can teach…but there's no reciprocity."*
> **- OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Mountainland**
>
> *"At the end of the day, if the principal is not open to it (OST program) or they don't want it, they can shut it down…. They like what we do, but they want no part of it and they're not willing to let us do our thing. So yeah, I agree that school is the biggest supporter, but I also think on the flip side of the coin, especially at some of my (OST program) sites this year, it's been our biggest roadblock as well."*
> **- OST Program Coordinator Focus Group, Mountainland**

Availability of Resources and Funding

One of the topics at the forefront of Utah OST discussions is the availability of resources and funding for program services. To better understand the resources available for OST programs, we identified areas of the state where resources are abundant and those areas in which they appear sparse. Further, we identified the processes by which OST programs are funded while also exploring how programs use these funds to meet the specific needs of children and families, and how they leverage and sustain these funds over time. Finally, we identified trends and gaps in OST funding and resources that can be used by funding organizations and policymakers to allocate resources to the areas in Utah with the greatest need.

The questions below guided our data collection and analysis regarding the availability of resources and funding:
1. What funding resources are available for OST programs?
2. In what ways do OST programs combine funding sources?
3. What supports and resources are available for organizations to secure OST funding?
4. In what ways do OST programs plan for sustaining programs when grant funding ends?
5. What gaps remain to compare available funding and program needs?

Federal and state funding sources are available for Utah OST programs to consider, with most involving a competitive review process.

Many Utah OST programs receive state and/or federal grant funds through scheduled, competitive processes at DWS-OCC and USBE. Some OST programs also receive funding through local, state, and national partnerships.

Figure 23 shows staff survey responses about the primary sources of funding that support their elementary OST programs. The funding amount available and the length of the grant cycle vary by grant type, based on factors such as individual grant sources, approved OST program applications, and state and federal legislation and requirements.

Figure 23. Funding Sources for OST Elementary Programs, as Reported by OST Staff
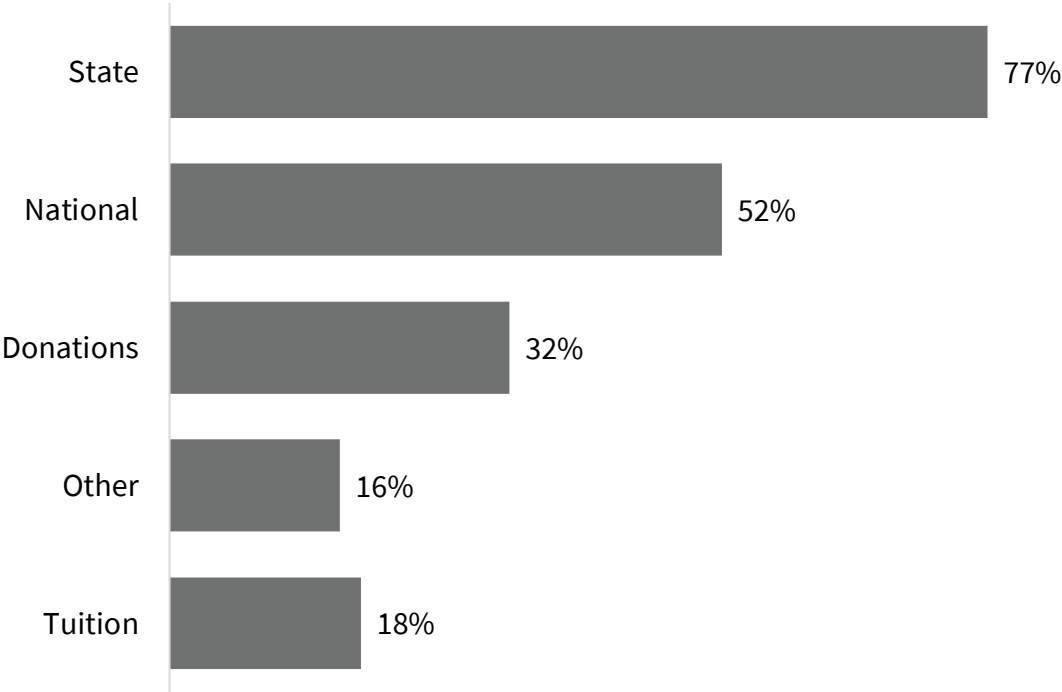
Source: Staff Survey

Utah has a long history of offering competitive grant funds for various OST programs, both school and community based. DWS-OCC and USBE both administer OST grants and award funding through statewide grant competitions. Utah OST programs also partner with schools and community organizations for additional funding sources, including fundraising efforts and partnership matches.

Table 11 provides an overview of elementary-age OST program grant competitions by DWS-OCC and USBE in 2022 and 2023. For each of the competitive grants listed, the total amount of funds requested by applicants, as well as the total amount awarded to grant recipients is provided.

Table 11. DWS-OCC and USBE Elementary OST Program Grant Competitions 2022, 2023

Utah OST Grant Type	Amount of Funding Awarded to OST Programs	Amount of Funding Requested by OST Programs
DWS-OCC Intergenerational Poverty Supplemental Grant 2023	$306,728	$1,047,941
DWS-OCC School Age Quality 2022-25 Grant	$9,103,157	$9,103,157
USBE 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) Grant 2023-24	2,046,683	$4,883,614
USBE Intergenerational Poverty Grant (IGP) 2023	$920,307	$2,215,570
USBE Program Quality Enhancement Grant (PQE) 2022	$103,125	$103,125.00
Total	**$12,480,000.00**	**$17,353,407.00**

Source: DWS-OCC and USBE OST Grant Award Information 2022, 2023

To combat the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and families, DWS-OCC and USBE received additional federal funding sources from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act to grant to eligible Utah OST programs, listed in Table 12. Based on data from the *Utah OST Funding Survey*, these relief grant funds filled a critical gap in OST services for programs across the state. **However, similar to the DWS-OCC and USBE OST grant funds listed in Table 11, the total CARES and ARP funding requested by Utah OST programs far exceeded the federal covid relief funds that were available.**

Table 12. DWS-OCC and USBE Elementary OST Program Grants Utilizing COVID-19 Funds 2020-22

Utah OST Grant Type	Amount of Funding Awarded to OST Programs	Amount of Funding Requested by OST Programs
DWS-OCC School Age Summer Quality Expansion 2022	$5,449,489	$5,449,489
DWS-OCC School Age Summer Expansion 2021	1,311,493	1,311,493
DWS-OCC School Age Program Grant 2020-2021	$8,741,600	$8,741,600
DWS-OCC Summer 2020 Supplemental Grant	$3,1320,00	$3,132,000
USBE School Year Program American Rescue Plan Act Grant 2021	$14,655,262	$17,685,974
USBE Summer Program American Rescue Plan Act Grant 2021	$6,159,290	$8,742,977
Total	**$36,348,454.00**	**$45,063,533.00**

Source: DWS-OCC and USBE OST Grant Award Information 2020-22

In addition to the lack of adequate state and federal OST grant funds available to meet the requests of grant applicants across the state, OST program funding was impacted again during Utah's 2024 legislative session as two USBE OST program grants, the IGP and PQE funding sources (both listed in Table 11), were permanently dissolved. These OST grants were the only state funding source for OST programs and supported 12 organizations and 28 program sites across the state. As the CARES and ARP covid relief grants expire on September 30, 2024, many OST program teams are faced with difficult decisions regarding budgets, staffing, and program services.

The survey completed by OST administrators highlighted several critical issues related to funding and sustainability of OST programs, including the loss of these key state and federal funding sources and the resulting need to reduce staff and scale back on program services. **OST administrators reported that, due to funding changes, they plan to serve fewer children, particularly in elementary age groups, and specialized training opportunities for staff will diminish. Some programs are scaling back their operations by reducing program hours, cutting part-time staff positions, and limiting enrollment.** This has already resulted in a notable reduction in the number of summer programs offered in 2024, with no funds allocated for future summer programming. The loss of these funds will significantly impact many Utah OST programs, as expressed in comments like those below.

> " *The program will lose ARP and Stabilization funding this year. ARP allowed the program to serve an additional 125 youth. There is not funding to replace those funds, therefore fewer youth will be served…the organization will see a decrease in the number of staff that will receive specialized training and greater opportunities. This does not include the school year, but funds have diminished in summer programming. The organization ran 14 summer programs in 2023, and 6 this summer in 2024. There are no funds allocated for 2025 summer programs at this time."*
>
> ***- OST Funding Survey, Mountainland***

In addition to the impact on summer programs, OST administrators discussed the anticipated impacts on the number of children they will be able to serve during the 2024-25 school year, as well as the reductions in program services, and ultimately decreases in program quality. These sentiments are expressed through the comments below.

> " *We will not be able to serve as many elementary age children as we would like, as well as have to let some staff go due to changes. Our staff are highly trained and qualified to work with at-risk youth. They deserve to have quality pay and be treated as professionals. By not having monies to give raises or to sustain them, we will also decrease in quality of care."*
> ***-OST Funding Survey, Wasatch Front North***
>
> *{Our program} will be scaling back the amount of program hours, reducing part time staff positions, and limiting enrollment."*
> ***-OST Program Administrator Interview, Southeast***
>
> *Due to the end of both the Federal ARP ESSER funds and IGP USBE funds, we will have a significant reduction in OST services offered in our district next school year."*
> ***- OST Funding Survey, Bear River***

OST administrators recognize the impending need to be more creative with local, state, and federal funds to sustain their program services.

As discussed in the previous finding, both DWS-OCC and USBE administered new OST grant programs utilizing CARES and ARP covid relief funds. However, with the pandemic funding streams ending in September 2024, many OST programs are working to determine how to maintain program services. Potential supports include expanding their partnerships with schools to explore using Title I funds, as well as other federal funding sources, such as Migrant Education, McKinney Vento, and Child Nutrition Program funds. However, during focus group and interview discussions, some OST program administrators expressed hesitation in contacting school partners to discuss these funding possibilities. Some program administrators described a lack of awareness and understanding (both at

the program and school/LEA levels) regarding allowable sources of federal and state funds to support OST programs.

Staff survey data also supported this perceived lack of clarity regarding possible additional OST funding sources. When asked to identify needed resources for their program teams, **fifty-one percent of OST staff survey respondents reported that** *advice on funding streams and securing funding would be helpful for them as OST professionals*. Combining multiple state and federal funding sources can be complicated, and more guidance is needed for OST administrators and school leaders to understand how these processes can be done correctly. State OST funding partners can also provide support in this area by implementing more peer-to-peer learning networks focused on leveraging various funding streams. These opportunities are discussed further in the considerations section.

 Another potential source of funding for elementary-age OST programs is the Childcare Assistance (subsidy) Program through the Department of Workforce Services. This program was designed to support Utah families by helping with the cost of childcare while parents are working (Utah DWS Child Care Assistance Fact Sheet, 2023). Through this process, families work with DWS to select OST programs that meet the subsidy requirements as their "childcare" provider. DWS then reimburses the selected OST programs for each family served through this program. Since so many of Utah's OST programs intentionally do not charge program fees or have minimal sliding scale fees for families, the Childcare Assistance Program enables OST programs to access state funds for providing needed services for Utah's families. Elementary OST program teams interested in learning more about this possible funding source should contact DWS for additional details along with state and federal requirements. They can also access additional information on the DWS website here.

A few OST administrators discussed the Childcare Assistance Program during interviews and focus groups as they explained the potential benefits of this program for OST program teams, families and children. These benefits include additional funding for OST programs providing quality services, affordable OST services for family members who work during afterschool hours, and high quality academic and enrichment activities for children to supplement their learning during the school day. One OST administrator explained how the Childcare Assistance Program has benefited the OST program and families in the comment below.

> " *They (DWS) send direct checks directly to our program. So, we just have to sit down with families and help them walk through the paperwork. Our outreach team helps us out there. And once they're in, they're in. And so, yeah, we just receive that every month, it's like full tuition."*
> **-OST Program Administrator Interview, Mountainland**

Conclusions & Considerations

Conclusions

The data collected as part of this needs assessment project represented the voices of OST staff, program administrators, and family members of elementary-aged children (both OST participants and non-OST participants) throughout Utah. Despite ongoing efforts made to reach and represent those groups in all nine service areas, there were limitations that impeded the response rates in some regions. These limitations included a partial information from existing OST programs in some regions and limited survey response rates from families and OST staff in several areas. In addition, the timeline for statewide data collection was somewhat limited due to the expiration of federal funds supporting the contract for this project.

While much of the data collected for this project came from regions with many OST programs, other data revealed there are some regions with very few or no existing programs. It is important to acknowledge that, while many OST staff, families, and community/school leaders throughout the state encourage the development and/or expansion of OST programs to meet the ongoing needs within their communities, some regions with few or no OST programs have chosen to allocate resources for other priorities. For leaders in some regions, resources are allocated for other services (i.e., youth school sports leagues) based on their assessment that the needs of the communities do not warrant OST programs at this time. Whether the community services provided are OST programs or other resources, community and school leaders are encouraged to regularly assess the changing needs of local families to ensure that the specific services provided are adequate to meet those needs.

Given the short timeline of this project and the amount of data available, we recommend further study of specific areas to better understand the current statewide context of OST programming. For example, additional exploration of regions with few or no OST programs is encouraged to ensure that decisions about community needs and resources are determined using the best available information, and adjustments to community services are made in a timely and efficient manner. Also, further study of private childcare opportunities and the needs of Utah families choosing to homeschool their children would provide additional context about the needs and gaps in OST services. Finally, studying the availability and allowable use of Tribal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) resources within some communities would clarify the full range of availability and access to OST resources.

In addition to future areas of study, the needs assessment data intentionally collected throughout the nine DWS Service Regions led us to consider potential opportunities that the DWS regional employment centers can offer in supporting the OST field in Utah. One area for future exploration includes how state, regional, and community leaders can best access and utilize these regional resources. For example, these regional centers could serve as a connector to share time-sensitive OST funding information, disseminate statewide OST resources, and other communication for existing or developing programs. Even in regions with few or no OST programs, these regional centers can offer resources such as neutral meeting spaces for community partner discussions, family focus groups, and other community-centered events. Leaders in each of these regions are encouraged to explore potential ways in which these nine service centers can be strategically used to share important community resources.

Finally, the findings shared within each of the six topic areas emerged as central themes supported by multiple data sources during the needs assessment analysis. Although we intentionally situated these findings within the six topic areas, there are many intersections across these findings. This overlap of themes across the findings offers state leaders, OST funders, and OST administrators multiple access points through which to initiate generative conversations about OST program access and availability, program capacity, program quality, partnerships, alignment with the school day, and availability of resources.

Considerations

Based on the needs assessment findings and overlapping themes across the six topic areas, we offer the following considerations for state leaders, OST funders, and OST program leaders. **These considerations are intentionally broad to encourage engagement in initial discussions at the state and regional levels.** However, each consideration also offers timely opportunities for those state and regional discussions to deepen as leaders explore specific community and school data, ongoing regional challenges, and the unique context within various communities and regions.

Data-Driven Allocation of State and Federal Funds

Given the recent reductions in state OST funding and the funding data that shows applicant requests exceeding the funds available for competitive OST grants, 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, 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. Based on focus group discussions with DWS-OCC, USBE, and several OST leaders, state OST funders are encouraged to review and, when possible, coordinate their grant competition timelines to limit overlap and duplication of applicant requirements and reduce the strain on applicant teams.

Opportunities to Leverage Multiple Sources of Funding for OST Programs

State and LEA leaders who manage federal and state funds are encouraged to talk with local school, community and OST leaders about opportunities to identify additional state and federal funds that could supplement OST budgets. Strategic, intentional allocations of funds such as Title I, McKinney-Vento, and Migrant Education (when appropriate and allowed by state code and federal regulatory guidance), could make a substantial difference for communities in need of OST services, as evidenced by needs assessment interview and focus group discussions with state funders and OST leaders. Some participants in these interviews and focus groups expressed uncertainty about the allowable use of

federal and state funds that could support OST program services and the process to initiate these exploratory conversations.

These opportunities to strategically combine funds for OST programs could be shared regularly at both the state and local levels to continue discussions with LEA, school, and community leaders. As turnover in education and OST fields remains high, frequent reminders during annual state conference sessions, back-to-school professional learning days, LEA budget meetings, and other regular leader convenings will help to keep these important discussions at the forefront.

Mental Health Supports and Resources

State OST funders, program administrators and community partners are encouraged to think differently about mental health resources for children in OST programs. As discussed in the findings, the evidence gathered from across the state indicated that the growing mental health needs of children in OST programs often exceed the available resources of program staff and, in some cases, the resources of local community partners. Therefore, exploring opportunities to expand existing resources to more broadly reach OST programs is key. For example, the possible partnership mentioned earlier between the UAN, Utah Department of Health, and the University of Minnesota for online mental health resources could be a promising opportunity to meet these critical needs in many regions. Collaboration between Utah Institutions of Higher Education (i.e., Departments of Social work; Departments of Educational Psychology) and OST programs could significantly enhance community networks with the latest research and resources to support struggling children and families.

Alignment with the School Day

Given the overwhelmingly positive responses from families and OST staff regarding the importance of academic activities (i.e. homework hour, academic enrichment activities, subject-specific tutoring) during OST programs, state and community leaders should continue to support the OST/school day alignment work. Utah is one of the national leaders in this work, and OST program teams are acknowledging the positive outcomes from these ongoing efforts. This could include expanding opportunities for OST program teams to go deeper with their alignment work (i.e. professional learning cohort tracks, virtual Communities of Practice meetings with OST and school day team members). LEA personnel, school administrators and teachers should consider facilitating frequent collaborative discussions on the successes of the alignment work from the school day perspective, as well as exploring opportunities for reciprocal relationships between school day and OST teams through which all team members invest to strengthen the alignment and share the outcomes.

LEA and school leaders could reassess alignment in terms of creating a welcoming space within the schools. Consider opportunities to include OST program administrators and staff in faculty meetings, offer time on meeting agendas to promote aligned services, and encourage an open mindset among faculty and staff for the OST programs. These specific strategies will benefit the children and families

who are counting on the intentional alignment between the school day and OST programs to provide enhanced academic support for student success.

State and National Professional Learning Opportunities

State OST leaders who organize, facilitate, and promote professional learning opportunities should continue to prioritize access and differentiation of content through multiple pathways and customized professional learning. As indicated by the survey responses and focus group discussions, OST staff throughout the state value the annual state conferences and regional convenings, while some said they find it difficult to travel from very remote areas and would value additional opportunities to connect regularly with colleagues in other regions. Some experienced OST staff also suggested additional opportunities for virtual leadership cohorts throughout the year. As some of these suggested enhancements to the statewide professional learning system are already available, OST leaders are encouraged to maintain an intentional awareness among staff about these ongoing opportunities, such as virtual, topic-focused online OST courses and monthly, virtual school day alignment cohort discussions. This intentional awareness could also include developing a professional learning timeline to be shared statewide among OST leaders and staff. This would encourage adequate planning and budgeting for these professional learning opportunities, while also considering any competing district/organization schedules.

Having planned and facilitated professional learning opportunities throughout Utah for the past 20 years, state OST leaders are now in a unique position to expand their study of these professional learning impacts on OST program teams. In addition to participant surveys at the conclusion of conferences and institutes, state OST leaders are encouraged to collect and analyze additional data to study how the professional learning content/discussions are implemented within programs and communities, and how this intentional implementation impacts progress towards participant and program goals. One model to consider for this process is Guskey and Kirkpatrick's model of professional learning evaluation (Guskey, 2016). OST program leaders can also build participation in professional learning activities and the subsequent implementation of new skills into their program logic models to ensure a clear alignment between program objectives and the investment in these professional learning opportunities.

In addition to state resources, several national organizations also offer professional learning opportunities for OST leaders and program teams. Organizations such as the National Afterschool Alliance, National Institute for Out-of-School Time, and the 21stCCLC Technical Assistance Center offer both in-person convenings as well as online, virtual webinars focusing on current topics. Additionally, some of these organizations also provide targeted technical assistance for OST leaders in developing internal professional learning structures and processes (i.e., onboarding for new OST staff, program staff development).

Intentional Partnership Networks

Given the impact that community partners have on available OST services, as described by the OST leaders during interviews and focus groups, community and school leaders should consider intentional partnership networks within their regions as a pathway to sustainable OST services for children and families. Starting small, these networks might first include key organizations that provide services to meet the most critical needs within the area and slowly grow over time to provide more comprehensive community support. These networks thrive on the consistency of representatives from each partner organization who come together regularly, study timely community and school data, and mobilize available resources based on those data to meet the needs of children and families within the region.

In regions with very few or no OST programs, interview and focus group data suggest opportunities for community and school leaders to regularly collect and study data to accurately identify current needs of families and then allocate community resources to meet those specific needs. This process of identifying specific assets and needs within a community can build the foundation for sustained collaboration among partners to ensure the needs of children and families are met.

In addition, existing OST regional networks consisting of program administrators, staff, and community partners offer another partnership model through which OST program teams located within the same region can share available resources, engage in professional learning sessions, and address ongoing challenges within their communities. For regions that do not already have these regional OST networks, the UAN team can support and guide OST leaders who would like to explore this model and initiate conversations with community partners about these possibilities.

State OST Partnership Support for Local Needs Assessments

This comprehensive report offers **a process framework for a statewide OST needs assessment**, which can be adapted and used by other states or organizations to assess their specific OST needs. The process outlined in this report would also benefit a smaller-scale assessment, particularly for communities looking to assess the current needs of families, school day teachers, children, and community members when school is not in session. Given the differences in community needs, available resources, and experiences with OST programs across the nine regions explored during this needs assessment process, the State OST Partnership Group should take this opportunity to **develop a local level needs assessment template and accompanying guidebook** for community and school leaders. These tools would serve as a step-by-step resource to guide leaders through the processes of developing needs assessment questions, identifying potential participants, designing data collection plans and analysis approaches, and outlining a thorough dissemination plan through which to share results with interested parties. The DWS regional offices in each of the nine areas of the state could serve as a resource for leaders conducting these local needs assessments. These needs assessment

data would also serve as critical background information for potential OST funding applications. A consistent needs assessment template for all Utah OST funding applications could provide more equitable opportunities for grant applicants, regardless of community size, previous experience with writing competitive grant applications, and access to "professional" or dedicated grant writer(s).

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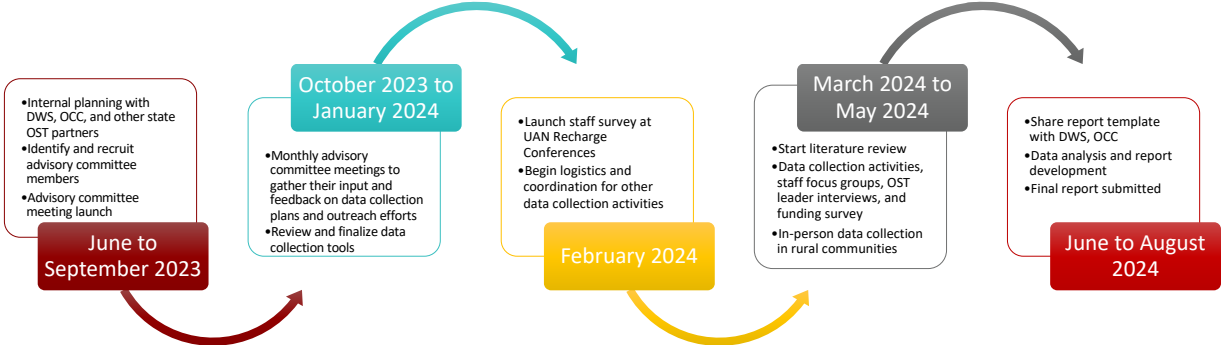
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Appendix A. Needs Assessment Timeline

Utah OST Elementary-Age Programs
Needs Assessment Data Collection Timeline

- Internal planning with DWS, OCC, and other state OST partners
- Identify and recruit advisory committee members
- Advisory committee meeting launch

June to September 2023

October 2023 to January 2024
- Monthly advisory committee meetings to gather their input and feedback on data collection plans and outreach efforts
- Review and finalize data collection tools

- Launch staff survey at UAN Recharge Conferences
- Begin logistics and coordination for other data collection activities

February 2024

March 2024 to May 2024
- Start literature review
- Data collection activities, staff focus groups, OST leader interviews, and funding survey
- In-person data collection in rural communities

- Share report template with DWS, OCC
- Data analysis and report development
- Final report submitted

June to August 2024

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Appendix B. Additional Student Demographics

Table 13. Race/Ethnicity of K-12 Students by Service Area

	Bear River	Castle County	Central Utah	Mount-ainland	South-east	South-west	Uintah Basin	Wasatch Front North	Wasatch Front South
% American Indian/ Alaska Native	1%	1%	2%	0%	38%	1%	7%	0%	1%
% Asian/Asian Pacific Islander	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	3%
% Hispanic	14%	13%	12%	15%	11%	14%	10%	16%	25%
% Black	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%
% White	81%	85%	84%	78%	48%	79%	79%	78%	63%
% Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	3%
% 2+ Races	2%	1%	1%	4%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%

Source: Authors' calculations using NCES 2021-22 and USBE data available to the UEPC via Data Sharing Agreement.

Table 14. Characteristics of Utah Children Ages 0-17 and Their Families

	Bear River	Castle County	Central Utah	Mount-ainland	South-east	South-west	Uintah Basin	Wasatch Front North	Wasatch Front South
Total Children	55140	7922	18050	225927	6259	63095	17866	183738	317468
Total Families with Children	22251	3413	8074	86326	2635	26214	6912	76922	135547
% Children with at least one non-working parent in household	33%	30%	28%	37%	18%	31%	38%	27%	26%
% Children in one-parent households	16%	23%	17%	13%	35%	20%	19%	21%	23%
Median Household Income	70500	66557	64014	86922	62426	70656	71494	90193	90384
% White	86%	88%	87%	82%	58%	85%	85%	82%	72%
% Black	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%
% American Indian/Native American	1%	1%	1%	1%	32%	1%	6%	1%	1%
% Asian	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	2%	4%
% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%
% Other Race	5%	3%	5%	5%	3%	5%	3%	6%	9%
% Two+ Races	6%	7%	5%	9%	6%	7%	6%	8%	10%
% Hispanic/Latino	11%	11%	9%	13%	8%	11%	7%	14%	19%
% Non-English Households	10%	7%	10%	15%	28%	9%	8%	11%	20%

*Source: Authors' calculations using 2020 Census Data*

Appendix C: Utah OST Quality Logic Model

Source: Utah Afterschool Quality Report, 2017

Appendix D: Continuous Improvement Cycle

Engage

Conduct needs assessment. Discuss needs and available resources with stakeholders. Conceptualize the vision for the program

Design

Design program services based on needs. Identify program and student outcomes, as well as data to collect for each outcome.

Implement

Implement program services and collect data for program and student outcomes.

Adjust

Analyze the data collected. Make timely adjustments to program services based on the data.
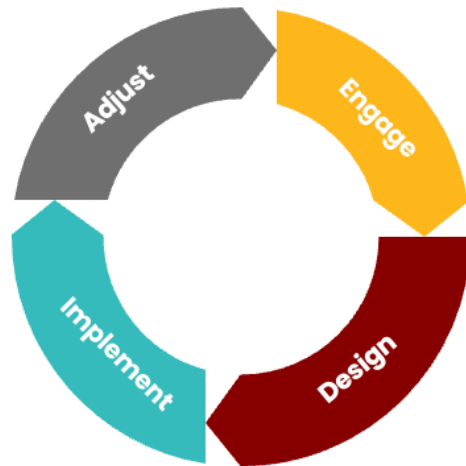
Source: Utah Education Policy Center, 2017

Appendix E: Federal and State OST Program Funding Sources

Federal Sources of OST Funding

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)

Some states, such as Utah, utilize the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) for elementary OST programs, focusing on quality improvement efforts and family choice in childcare options. Currently, the Utah OCC supports 17 organizations with elementary OST grant programs focused on quality improvement efforts.

Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) Grant Program

Across the country, over 1.5 million children are served in an OST program supported by the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant program. This important funding stream is one of the few federal funding sources specifically for OST programs (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.). The federal grant program has been around for over 25 years. This funding source is critical for communities across the country, but highly competitive, with 1 in 3 applications selected for funding (Afterschool Alliance, 2024). In Utah, the 21st CCLC program funds over 30 organizations.

State Sources of OST Funding

USBE Intergenerational Poverty (IGP) Afterschool Grant Program

Starting in 2014, the state legislature created an OST grant program to support children and families in communities experiencing high levels of intergenerational poverty. The afterschool grant program focused on academic enrichment opportunities aligned with the school day. The state grant program ended in June 2024.

USBE Program Quality Improvement Grant Program

During the 2018 Utah legislative session, a supplemental OST grant program with a matching funds requirement was developed with key state OST partners. The grant program supported OST programs with efforts to improve or enhance the quality of their OST programs with professional learning opportunities for staff, as well as expand the academic enrichment and prevention offerings. The state grant program ended in June 2024.

COVID-19 Relief Funds for OST Programs

Both the DWS-OCC and USBE OST teams managed COVID-19 funds for OST programs to support accelerated learning efforts across the state. The DWS-OCC distributed close to $10 million in COVID-19 relief funds for school year and summer grant programs. The USBE developed an OST grant program with the input of key state OST partners and organizations, utilizing $12 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The grant program ended in September 2024.