

## OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) EXPANSION

The Out of School Time (OST) field has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many programs were completely disrupted in March, 2020, and did not return to typical operations until the summer of 2021, with some programs still facing impacts. DHSP programs lost approximately 40% of its staff during the 15-month closure, which greatly impacted the ability to operate programs at the same capacity. Cambridge is not alone in this predicament; throughout the state and country, the childcare sector is still experiencing a hiring and retention crisis.

Prior to the pandemic, DHSP had begun to take a closer look at practices that may have led to inequitable enrollment patterns in many of its programs, particularly its largest out of school time provider, Community Schools. The pandemic accelerated this process, as it revealed the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on low-income families.

In the OST sector, there are systemic problems not unique to Cambridge, in particular: there are not an adequate number of seats to serve all children whose families want to send them to an out-of-school time program. In Massachusetts, data suggests that only 25% of families state-wide are able to access OST programs that meet their needs. In Cambridge, City-operated and community-operated OST programs have capacity for approximately 40% of the JK-5th grade Cambridge Public Schools population. There are roughly 3,600 elementary school children in the Cambridge Public Schools. Prior to the 2021-2022 academic year, there were about 1,100 seats in City programs and approximately 350 in community-based programs operating daily in the schools or in community non-profit programs. The pandemic seemed to increase the demand for afterschool programs and heightened the racial and economic disparities that have often left lower-income families with fewer options. The cost of programming and knowledge of programming options are often barriers to access for families. Additionally, staffing and space are major challenges that need to be solved.

Providing additional afterschool programming requires a collective effort to determine a path forward. The process will require system-level work between all of the OST stakeholders: OST providers, families/caregivers, Cambridge Public Schools, and DHSP. The Agenda for Children Out of School Time Initiative (AFCOST) is a citywide intermediary and is the organizing body for the Cambridge OST community. AFCOST will lead this effort over the next fiscal year and work closely stakeholders to map out a process to examine OST expansion opportunities for Cambridge.

The effort will require a capacity study to determine how many OST providers, programs, slots, and opportunities currently exist, and where there may be room for growth and expansion. It will also involve input and feedback from families and caregivers about their needs for afterschool, as well as input about access and equity - with a focus on centering voices of the most traditionally marginalized residents. The study will also require some examination of the workforce, including pay equity, education and support and career ladders. Lastly, examining tuition and subsidies across afterschool and summer programs will help to round out the work.