State of Denver’s Youth Summer Programs (Summer 2020)
May 6, 2020

Dear Champion of Youth,

In this COVID-19 era, there are a great many unknowns presenting unprecedented challenges in providing much-needed, highly-coveted social, emotional and academic learning opportunities for Denver’s youth. To better understand the scope of these challenges, the Denver Afterschool Alliance (DAA) has collected a snapshot of data from a subset of out-of-school time (OST) organizations to highlight in-person programming gaps for summer 2020 as compared to summer 2019. It is important to note that many of these programs focus on elementary-aged youth, who are not able to stay home alone as their parents and caregivers prepare to return to work. Based on feedback from eleven comprehensive afterschool providers*, the gap in summer programming for Denver’s youth as a result of COVID-19 is becoming clear.

● Six organizations have their own facilities, allowing them to operate summer programming at 14 locations. In Summer 2019, these programs served 1,655 youth however due to heightened safety protocols, public health guidelines and other considerations due to COVID-19, they are preparing for at least a 30% reduction in capacity for Summer 2020. Because of these social distancing and safety guidelines, organizations also anticipate a reduction in overall dosage for students.

● Seven additional organizations (two are also listed above) are eager to provide summer programming, however they do not have access to a physical location. In summer 2019, they utilized facilities such as school buildings and community centers at 46 sites across Denver. In 2019, 5,190 youth were served at these sites; however, due to the lack of facility space for Summer 2020, none of these youth will be served through in-person programming.

● This means that of just these eleven providers, at least 5,615 fewer youth and families will have access to high-quality afterschool in-person programs this summer. This is a very conservative estimate as it does not include data from numerous other organizations which would include thousands more youth who, under current circumstances, are not likely to be served via in-person programs.

● The Denver Afterschool Alliance is working to create a toolkit of curated information from both local and national providers who have been providing in-person programming for youth throughout this crisis. DAA hopes that this collection of resources will provide much needed frameworks and information that organizations can use, in conjunction with their own governance, legal and health experts, to design safe and impactful in-person programming.

● Owing to in-person safety concerns and lack of access to physical locations, many providers are transitioning to online service models to reach youth and families. The Denver Afterschool Alliance is working to provide technical assistance and guidelines to them, as well as coordinating the promotion of these opportunities to families.

While space is the biggest and most immediate factor to permitting in-person programming, there are a number of other key considerations which range from staffing capabilities (e.g., meeting the 1:10 ratio guidelines and having the time to hire, background check and train staff, et cetera), to the ability to meet increased safety precautions and protocol (e.g., access to PPE where necessary, extensive sanitation practices, etc.), and of course, financial implications of all of these new factors in this COVID-19 era.

* The organizations represented in this data are: Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver, Colorado I Have A Dream Foundation, Denver Public Schools, DU Bridge Project, El Sistema of Colorado, Girls, Inc. of Metro Denver, Heart & Hand Center, MSU Denver Center for Urban Education, Scholars Unlimited, Sun Valley Youth Center, YMCA of Metro Denver.
Decades of local and national research has consistently proven that summer programming is essential to providing youth with a safe, structured place to engage in social, emotional and academic learning. This is especially important in the COVID-19 era, as early data suggest that the summer learning loss will be exacerbated for many youth who will miss out on critical instructional time. (Source) Finally, afterschool programs support Denver’s economy by providing critical services to families who rely on summer programs in order to work. As the map below shows, many high-needs communities will be left without this vital service.

At this time, the DAA is working to collect valuable, real-time data from partner organizations in order to share the current state of the field with key leaders, policymakers and funders. We believe it is important for these entities to understand the evolving landscape, challenges and opportunities facing not only the field of youth serving organizations, but also Denver’s children and families. We will continue to work with our partners to collect meaningful data and inform our network as we devise strategies to raise support for the
field. In these trying times, perhaps more than ever before, we all need to band together and overcome obstacles, conquer challenges and develop the best strategies that can be implemented in real-time.

This information is being shared with key stakeholders throughout the City. If you are able to contribute in any way—whether it be space, financial support, goods and materials, or as a thought partner about how to address these issues—please know that your efforts will help us ensure that all of Denver’s youth have access to safe and effective in-person programming. To do that, please reach out to the DAA at Denverafterschoolalliance@denvergov.org. Visit our website at www.denvergov.org/afterschoolalliance to learn more. As we brace for these enormous shortfalls in services, the DAA and our many partner organizations, are also planning for impactful virtual learning opportunities as our contingency plan for reaching youth who are not afforded the access or opportunity to attend Denver’s top-notch in-person programs this summer.

Thank you for your support and we hope to work with you as we design the best possible summer learning experience for children across Denver.