

Preparing Tulsa's Children and Youth to **thrive!**

**“I barely got any sleep
last night so I almost
didn't come to school,
but then I remembered
we have club today.”**

School Year 2025/2026 Youth Afterschool Participant

A Letter to Tulsa

Dear Tulsa,

We are parents who have scrambled to find affordable childcare. We are educators who have watched students light up in afterschool programs only to lose those programs when the funding ran out. We are business owners who know that a strong workforce starts with strong kids. We are Tulsans who believe every child in this city deserves a real shot.

For the past three years, our coalition has been doing the work—studying what other cities have accomplished, documenting what Tulsa’s own children have gained from expanded learning and early childhood investment, and listening to families across our community. This report is what we found and shares our vision on where we need to go as a city.

The picture is clear. When Tulsa had the resources to invest in its children, the results were real: kids showed up to school more, learned more over the summer, and found pathways to adulthood they didn’t have before. But that funding has expired, and without a new commitment, those gains are slipping away. At the same time, the cost of childcare is squeezing working families, and state-level cuts are about to make things harder.

This isn’t a problem any one organization can solve alone. It’s a community challenge that calls for a community answer. That’s why we came together—and that’s why we’re bringing this to you.

Tulsa has always been a city that bets on itself. We’ve done it before—with Vision Tulsa, with a sales tax increase championed by then Mayor Jim Inhofe in the 80s, and with every generation that chose to build something better for the next one. We believe it’s time to do it again, this time for our children.

We hope you’ll read what follows, and we hope you’ll join us.

With hope for Tulsa’s kids,

*- YES
for Tulsa Kids Coalition*

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Executive Summary

WHEN CHILDREN ARE PREPARED FOR SCHOOL AND YOUTH ARE PREPARED FOR ADULTHOOD, TULSA IS SET ON A PATH TO THRIVE.

Tulsa faces urgent challenges across the full arc of childhood—from early readiness gaps to chronic absenteeism and youth disengagement—made more acute by the expiration of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund and impending cuts to statewide support for 21st Century Community Learning Centers. While Tulsa has strong individual programs, the absence of sustained, citywide investment limits scale, consistency, and long-term return.

Data from Tulsa and across Oklahoma show that expanded learning, quality childcare, and early childhood supports improved attendance, academic outcomes, workforce readiness, and family stability.

By aligning early childhood readiness with youth development, and backing that alignment with public investment and accountability, Tulsa can move from fragmented solutions to a future where every child is prepared for school, every young person is prepared for adulthood, and the city as a whole is positioned to thrive.



HAPPENING NOW: 5,800 FAMILIES AFFECTED BY STATE CHILDCARE SUBSIDY REDUCTIONS ¹

In November 2025, Oklahoma Human Services announced significant cuts to the childcare subsidy program. In April 2026, the pandemic-era \$5 per day add-on to providers' subsidy rates ended. In July 2026, income eligibility will return to 55% of State Median Income, impacting around 5,800 families statewide. More than 400 childcare centers across the state have shut their doors for good.

¹ Oklahoma Human Services. (2026). OKDHS Advances Child Care Subsidy Access While Strengthening Program Stability. Retrieved from <https://oklahoma.gov/okdhs/newsroom/2026/january/comm01072026.html>.

Why This Coalition Exists

A COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO A COMMUNITY NEED.

2023

In 2023, City Year Tulsa and the Opportunity Project convened stakeholders to address the impending ESSER funding cliff and the need for a citywide approach to expanded learning. The coalition quickly expanded to include philanthropic and nonprofit partners committed to equitable, sustainable preparation for children and youth.

2024

In 2024, CAP Tulsa joined to address the high cost and lack of access to childcare for families in Tulsa with children ages 0-4, reinforcing alignment across early childhood and youth development. Following the election of Mayor Monroe Nichols and understanding the importance of values aligned policy-makers, coalition members met with the Mayor in December 2024 to discuss our vision for long-term funding strategies for Tulsa's children and youth and the return on investment it could bring to Tulsa.

2025

In 2025, Yes for Tulsa Children applied and was accepted into the Children's Funding Project learning cohort and attended their summer Institute to strengthen our approach through national best practices in data-driven policy design that includes public accountability. Lessons from successful campaigns emphasized positive framing, data-informed decision-making, disciplined messaging, and early planning to ensure exceptional execution and a strong foundation of public trust—principles that continue to guide this work.

TODAY

The coalition met with city council members to share the history of our work and our vision for a long-term investment in Tulsa's children related to childcare and out-of-school time. The coalition continues to grow every day as families, childcare providers, youth-serving program providers, community leaders, and funders recognize the need to dedicate more resources to this pressing issue to build a better city for families across Tulsa.

Preparing Children for School

THRIVING STARTS EARLY.

Early childhood readiness is the strongest predictor of long-term success, yet families across Tulsa face gaps in care and enrichment, particularly during summers and transitions into kindergarten.



Why this matters

- Childcare gaps reduce family earnings and local economic activity
- Early learning loss increases remediation costs later
- The costs of insufficient childcare for children under 3 encompass three components:
 - **lost earnings for families**
 - **reduced revenue for businesses due to lost productivity and extra hiring costs**
 - **lower income tax and sales tax revenue for cities**

From the Data

- Tulsa County has constrained supply of childcare, with 1 licensed childcare seat for every 1.5 children under age 5
- Childcare costs range from \$10,800 – \$12,500 annually for young children in Tulsa County
- Tulsa families spend up to 13.3% of median family income on full-day childcare for one child, nearly twice the affordability benchmark of 7%
- For every additional child under age 3 enrolled in full-time care, the annual economic gain is \$8,630, a 2.8x return on investment

Early investment delivers the highest ROI and prevents costly interventions later.



THE CHILDCARE CLIFF IS ALREADY HERE ²

Recent reductions to Oklahoma's childcare subsidy program have already closed 400 childcare centers statewide and is expected to push thousands of families out of eligibility while eliminating key supports for providers. As these changes take effect, the gap between what families need and what the current system can provide continues to widen.

In July 2026, Oklahoma will reduce income eligibility for childcare subsidies:

Current: 85% of State Median Income → ~\$79,846 for a family of four

New: 55% of State Median Income → ~\$51,665 for a family of four

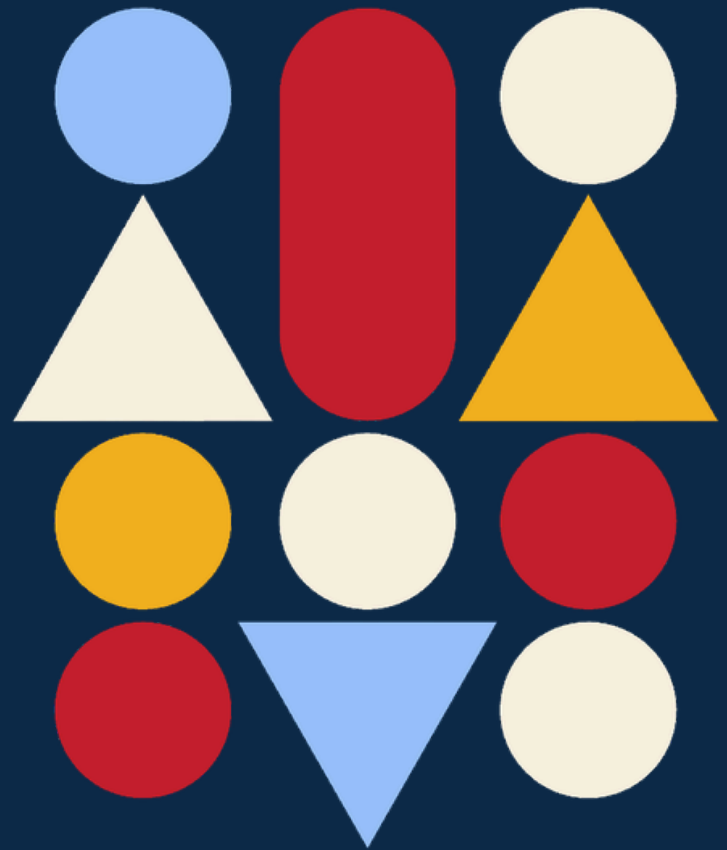
² KGOU. (2026). Oklahoma Human Services asks state legislature for nearly \$70 million to fund child care. Retrieved from https://www.kgou.org/health/2026-01-29/oklahoma-human-services-asks-state-legislature-for-nearly-70-million-to-fund-child-care?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Rising Costs and Limited Access

Childcare is increasingly out of reach for many Tulsa families. In 2024, the median annual cost of full-day childcare for one child was \$12,473, requiring families to spend **13.3% of median household income**—nearly double the 7% affordability benchmark established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

At the same time, access to childcare remains limited. In Tulsa County, there is **only one licensed childcare seat for every 1.5 children** under the age of five, leaving many families without viable options.³ Altogether, existing providers have the capacity to serve just 19,948 children—only 44% of the county's youngest residents.

Less than half of Tulsa's young children have access to a licensed childcare seat.



³ Sanogo, A., Davis, E., Murray, D., & Valiente, C. (2024). Understanding access and barriers to childcare in Oklahoma: Investigating the challenges and barriers impacting access to childcare services in Oklahoma (Research brief). United WE & Oklahoma State University.

Preparing Youth for Adulthood

THRIVING REQUIRES PATHWAYS, NOT JUST CLASSROOMS.

High-quality before-school, afterschool, and summer learning programs keep youth engaged, supported, and connected to opportunity during the highest-risk hours.

Across Tulsa^{4, 5}

- Youth in expanded learning **attended 2–5 more school days** per year than peers
- Schools with multiple afterschool programs and a dedicated coordinator saw students attend up to 5 more days per year
- 95% of participating Tulsa youth believe they will graduate high school
- 88% of Tulsa youth report programs help them identify their strengths

Across Oklahoma^{6, 7}

- Only 9% of Oklahoma students participate in afterschool programs
- More than 276,000 Oklahoma children want access but do not have it
- **88% of Oklahoma parents** support public funding for afterschool programs
- 7 in 10 students in afterschool programs demonstrated an improvement in their engagement in learning
- Nearly half of students who were chronically absent the previous year improved their school day attendance
- For every child in afterschool, four are waiting for an available program

Unmet demands represent both a risk and an opportunity for Tulsa.



4 TIDEL (Tulsa Integrated Data-system for Expanded Learning), administered by the Opp Project; Attendance Analysis, 2023–2024.

5 Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes, administered by the Opp Project; SAYO Analysis Fall 2025.

6 Afterschool Alliance. (2024). *This is Afterschool in Oklahoma*. Retrieved from <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/OK-Afterschool-Fact-Sheet-2024.pdf>.

7 Afterschool Alliance. (2025). *Afterschool in Oklahoma*. Retrieved from <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2025/OK-AA3PM-2025-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

Keeping Youth in Tulsa Safe

EXPANDED LEARNING IS A SMART INVESTMENT IN SAFER COMMUNITIES

Investing in expanded learning is a proven public safety strategy that keeps youth safe, strengthens families, and saves taxpayer dollars.

The Opportunity

- Afterschool and summer learning programs reduce violence and decrease youth engagement in risky or criminal behavior.
 - **2–6 p.m.** is the peak time for juvenile crime on school days in Oklahoma, accounting for **24% of juvenile offenses**.⁸
 - Comprehensive programs with mentoring and group counseling have been shown **to reduce:**⁹
 - **Violent crime arrests by 44%**
 - **Vandalism and weapons crime by 36%**
- **69% of police chiefs** identify afterschool programs as one of the most effective strategies for reducing juvenile crime.¹⁰
- **65% of 148 youth** respondents in Tulsa identified access to sports and music programming as a deterrent from criminal activity.¹¹

Inaction vs. Investment

- \$3–\$13 return for every \$1 invested in afterschool
- \$112,555 to incarcerate one youth for one year
- \$7,000 for a year of high-quality afterschool programs

⁸ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. (2019). From Risk to Opportunity: Afterschool Programs Keep Kids Safe When Juvenile Crime Peaks. Retrieved from www.strongnation.org/articles/930-fromrisk-to-opportunity-afterschool-programs-keep-kids-safe

⁹ University of Chicago. (2018). Study: Chicago counseling program reduces youth violence, improves school engagement. Retrieved from <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/study-chicago-counseling-program-reduces-youth-violence-improves-school-engagement>.

¹⁰ "Afterschool and Summer Learning: A City Strategy for Public Safety". National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.nlc.org/resource/afterschool-and-summer-learning-a-city-strategy-for-public-safety/>.

¹¹ Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. (2022). Racial Disparities in Tulsa's Youth Legal System: Findings and recommendations for advancing equity. Retrieved from <https://www.yst.org>.

Why the Status Quo Is Not Enough

FRAGMENTATION IS LIMITING LONG-TERM IMPACT.

Tulsa has strong programs, but inconsistent funding and fragmented systems prevent them from reaching scale. A coordinated public investment is needed to move from pilot success to lasting impact.

Stopgap Funding

Tulsa's expanded learning system has relied heavily on short-term funding:

- ESSER dollars supported expanded learning from 2021–2024, **but those funds have now expired.**
- In 2024, the final year of funding, over 6,000 youth participated in Tulsa Public Schools summer learning. In 2025, that number reduced to ~1,700.

Tulsa's youth and families need stability afterschool and during the summer.

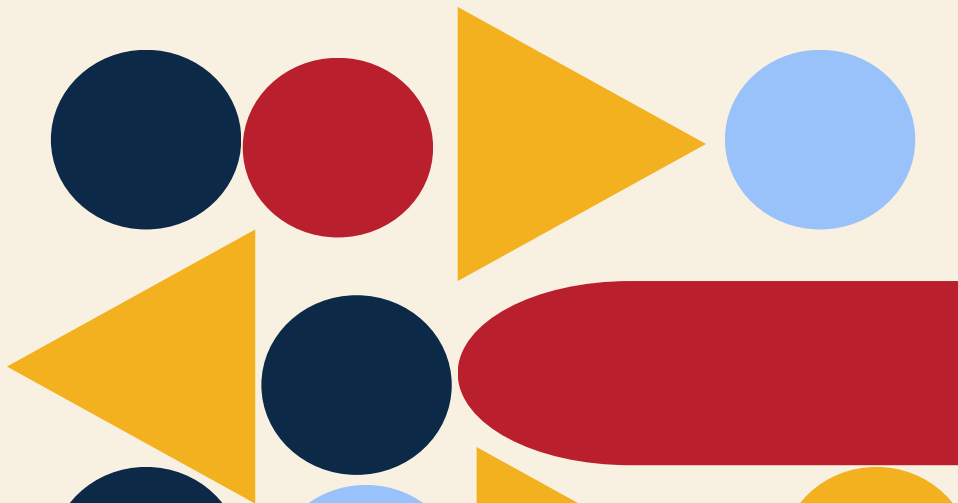


Need Sustainability

Without sustained investment:

- Proven programs cannot scale
- Access remains uneven by zip code
- Gains in attendance and engagement are at risk

Between 2021–2024, Tulsa served 6,000–9,000 youth annually through a district wide expanded learning initiative. Temporary funding produced real results, but we cannot sustain those results without continued investment.



Proposed Public Investment

A COORDINATED APPROACH TO PREPARATION.

To ensure every child in Tulsa has the opportunity to succeed, from early childhood through adolescence, we propose a revenue strategy that supports a \$30 million annual investment in Tulsa's children and youth.

This investment would strengthen the systems families rely on today while expanding access to childcare and the afterschool and out-of-school time programs proven to prepare children for school and youth for adulthood.

Funding would support four core priorities:



Support childcare access and affordability

Expand access to high-quality childcare and early learning opportunities so families can work and young children enter school ready to succeed.



Expand access to before-school, afterschool, and summer learning

Increase access to safe, enriching programs that keep youth engaged beyond the school day while strengthening attendance, academic success, and workforce readiness.



Stabilize funding for programs families rely on

Provide consistent, sustainable funding for proven programs that currently depend on short-term grants and expiring or expired federal relief dollars.



Strengthen data and accountability

Support systems that track participation and outcomes across programs, ensuring public investments are transparent, coordinated, and focused on measurable results.

A Strong ROI for Tulsa

- **\$1 INVESTED. \$3 RETURNED.**¹²
 - Improved academics, workforce readiness, and reduced crime drive long-term community benefit.
- **\$1.60 SAVED FOR TULSA FAMILIES FOR EVERY PUBLIC DOLLAR INVESTED.**
 - A \$7.5 million investment in expanded learning offsets nearly \$12 million in childcare costs that working families would otherwise shoulder.
- **GAINS FOR TULSA'S ECONOMY**¹³
 - Businesses lose \$1,640 a year for each working parent due to lost revenue and hiring costs because of insufficient childcare, totaling \$23 billion annually.
 - Investing in high-quality childcare and early learning generates a return of up to \$7.30 for every dollar spent.
 - Childcare programs attract homebuyers and increase property values by \$13 for every dollar invested.

¹² Afterschool Alliance. (2024). State Investments in Afterschool and Summer. Retrieved from <https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/State%20Investments%20in%20Afterschool.pdf>.

¹³ First Five Years Fund. (2024). Fact Sheet: Child Care and the Economy. Retrieved from [https://www.ffyf.org/2024/03/06/fact-sheet-child-care-and-the-economy/#:~:text=\(For%20comparison%2C%20in%20the%20K,every%20dollar%20invested%20in%20programs.](https://www.ffyf.org/2024/03/06/fact-sheet-child-care-and-the-economy/#:~:text=(For%20comparison%2C%20in%20the%20K,every%20dollar%20invested%20in%20programs.)

Case Studies

WHAT HAS WORKED IN CITIES SIMILAR TO TULSA

YES FOR NOLA KIDS¹⁴

Yes for NOLA Kids is a 2022 voter-approved initiative in New Orleans that dedicates ~\$21 million in annual property tax revenue to expand high-quality early childhood education and care for over 1,000 infants, toddlers, and three-year-olds. It supports working families, boosts the local economy, and provides wraparound services like health screenings and teacher development.

- Year Established: 2022
- Outcome: Passed with 61% of the vote
- Annual Revenue: \$21,274,959
- Type of Revenue: Property tax, \$5 per \$1000
- What it Funds: Early childhood

CHILDREN'S SERVICES FUND OF LEON COUNTY¹⁵

The Children's Services Council of Leon County (CSC Leon) is a 2021 voter-approved, taxpayer-funded entity dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth, and families. It provides funding to expand local programs, ensuring children are socially, emotionally, and physically equipped to reach their full potential.

- Year Established: 2020
- Outcome: Passed with nearly 66% of the vote
- Annual Revenue: \$7,500,000
- Type of Revenue: Property tax, \$.05 per \$1,000
- What it Funds: Cradle-to-Career

TRAVIS COUNTY AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE NOW¹⁶

Travis County Affordable Childcare Now is a voter-approved, county-funded initiative (formerly Prop A) in Travis County, TX, designed to make childcare affordable and accessible for low-to-moderate-income families by investing over \$75 million annually into scholarships, provider wages, and increased slots. It serves children 0-3, targeting families at or below 85% of the state median income.

- Year Established: 2024
- Outcome: Passed with nearly 60% of the vote
- Annual Revenue: \$75,000,000
- Type of Revenue: Property tax, \$.025 per \$100
- What it Funds: Early childhood and afterschool

¹⁴ Agenda for Children. (n.d.). *The Future Starts Here*. Retrieved from <https://agendaforchildren.org/>.

¹⁵ Children's Services Council of Leon County. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <https://cscleon.org/>.

¹⁶ Children's Funding Project. (n.d.). *Travis County Votes "Yes" for Affordable Child Care*. Retrieved from <https://childrensfundingproject.org/resource/travis-county-votes-yes-for-affordable-child-care/>.

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