



**BIG THOUGHT**  
Institute

# IN FOCUS

## Elevating Afterschool Excellence: Design & Implementation Support



In 2021, with the release of Federal ARP ESSER (American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), local education agencies (LEAs) from across the state were able to pursue grants for developing high-quality afterschool programs. These programs, aligned with research-based best practices, emphasized factors like duration, staff-to-student ratios, full-time program management, high-quality instructional materials and a blend of academic support and enrichment. Grant funding also included an allocation for LEAs to engage a Technical Assistance Provider to aid their efforts.

**Big Thought Institute** (BTI) has supported eight LEAs in their journey, including Azle ISD, Baker Ripley Community Schools, Bridgeway Preparatory Academy, Copperas Cove ISD, Ferris ISD, IDEA Public Schools, Southwest Public Schools, and Transformation Waco, to bring these enriching programs to life.

### The Opportunity

LEAs have much to consider when launching a new afterschool program, often with limited time and capacity to do so. Among the many components to contemplate are mission and vision, along with the everyday logistics that make a program come to life, resulting in an engaging, enriching and just plain fun program for youth to attend.

- What are the goals and objectives of the afterschool program? These can be different for every LEA, and even vary from campus to campus.
- How can afterschool look and feel differently than the school day and how does this drive teacher, student and parent perceptions, participation and relationships?
- How will afterschool untap opportunities for academic support, from supplemental classroom instruction to small-group tutoring?
- Which enrichment activities will provide youth with the opportunity to apply classroom learning to real world challenges as well as introduce them to new fields, concepts and activities?
- How does afterschool imbue youth with a sense of belonging, help them build interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, as well as support the development of their social and emotional skill sets?
- How do you identify and equip a Program Manager to oversee planning and implementation, recruit and lead a local steering committee, hire and train staff, recruit students, and guide continuous improvement efforts based on student outcomes?
- And...how do you do all of this while ensuring youth remain at the center of your decision-making process?

Once launched, programs must also consider sustainability, which in the case of these LEAs is especially relevant as the end of the 2023-2024 school year also brings the “ESSER Cliff” when relief funds expire. Therefore, LEAs must identify other funding sources and resources to maintain programming.

### Connect with Us

If your organization is interested in tapping into the Big Thought Institute, we'd love to hear from you. Learn more at [bigthoughtinstitute.com](https://bigthoughtinstitute.com).

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## The Solution

BTI has walked along this process with each of our clients, bringing a wealth of experience and a toolkit of resources and ideas for LEAs to tap into. A dedicated two-person project team from BTI regularly met with each LEA, often weekly throughout the school year. Teams focused on building relationships, conducting site visits, learning about the distinctive elements of each community, facilitating meetings, tracking timelines, identifying resources, researching answers to questions, and providing additional support as needed. The key intent was ensuring the solution strategies met the unique context and needs of each client's community – whether suburban, rural, or urban, large or small, school district or charter – no two LEAs look, feel, or operate the same way. Specific resources provided by BTI included the following.

- BTI annually organized in-person professional learning community conversations where LEAs could gather to learn from and support each other.
- A shared challenge that was raised was a need for a system to not only track daily attendance but to also note which youth received access to state-mandated program components such as HIT (high-impact tutoring) or HQIM (high-quality instructional resources). In response, BTI developed an agile attendance spreadsheet to streamline site-based data collection and centrally equip the Program Manager with access to key reporting metrics.
- Understanding that locating training time and dollars can be difficult, BTI leveraged its learner management system, providing LEA Program Managers and front-line personnel access to a range of asynchronous virtual training.
- Because some programs found locating enrichment options to be a challenge, the BTI team compiled a contact list of providers for each client's geographic area.
- With sustainability on each Program Manager's mind, the BTI team doubled down on providing tips and techniques for accessing funding and resources, including using data to support storytelling, bundling district funding, exploring in-kind support and creating a pitch for prospective community funders.



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**Big Thought has provided unmatched assistance and an excellent experience. The services provided are more than I can ever ask for.**

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## The Results

Through BTI's collaboration, **8** LEAs successfully launched and managed afterschool programs at **25** campuses, serving over **1,200** youth yearly.



BTI's work has positively impacted over **4,800** youth and adults.



Between 2021-2024, BTI delivered over **700** team hours



with nearly **900** client interactions.