

Our Keynote Speaker



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What St. Louis Families Are Telling Us and What It Means for Out-of-School Time Programs



BLUEPRINT4 • MINI LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

What St. Louis Families Are Telling Us

And What It Means for Out-of-School-Time Programs

Camp Summit • September 18, 2026

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for Blueprint4 (The Clark-Fox Family Foundation)

N = 467 • June 4 - August 31, 2026

The National Backdrop for This Work

82

OST Keeps Families Working

In a national survey, 82% of parents say out-of-school-time programs help them keep their jobs, work more hours, or reduce their stress.

3/4

Millions of Kids Still Miss Out

An estimated 22.6 million children would enroll if a program were available, 3 in 4 who want a spot don't have one. The gap is sharpest in communities of concentrated poverty (67% call finding an enriching environment a significant challenge, vs. 46% elsewhere).

This Mini Landscape Analysis

Commissioned by Blueprint4 (The Clark-Fox Family Foundation) to understand **what is helping, and what is getting in the way,** for St. Louis families trying to access quality OST programming.



Two Ways We're Gathering Family Voice

01

Family & Caregiver Survey

Anonymous Qualtrics survey open to St. Louis families, live since June 4, 2026. Covers barriers, discovery, decision factors, and belonging.

467

responses: 246 June, 127 July, 94 August

02

Focus Groups

Four discussion guides built for distinct family audiences: parents/caregivers, early elementary (K-2), upper elementary/middle (3-7), and middle/high school (7-12).

4

guides, by audience

What National Research Tells Us- How Families View OST

Systematic review of 42 qualitative and mixed-methods studies on parent and caregiver perspectives of OST programs (Shim, The Clark-Fox Family Foundation, 2026)



St. Louis Families Are Telling the Same Story

National literature theme	What St. Louis families told us
Financial barriers	Cost is a barrier for 86% of St. Louis families, at least sometimes, and the #1 theme in their own words
Safety & environment	Safety, quality, and feeling welcome is the #1 enrollment decision factor (4.39 / 5)
Family engagement	Feeling informed and respected as a parent is the strongest driver of a positive experience
Cultural identity (SEL)	The one area families rate lowest: whether a program feels culturally familiar to their child

FINDING 1

Cost Is the Universal Barrier

86%

of families report cost as at least
sometimes a barrier to participation

National literature: financial burden is the single most
cited barrier to OST access, especially in under-
resourced communities.

Cost is the single most stable finding across every survey wave since June, and by far the most common theme in families' own written comments, raised in roughly 6 in 10 open-text responses.

"We loved local programs that offered scholarships and sliding-scale fees, but access varies by neighborhood. More programs in south and north county and inner-ring suburbs would help."

Closing comments, Blueprint4 survey



Gateway Region YMCA

FINDING 2

Safety and Welcome Drive Enrollment

4.39

out of 5, the top-rated of five enrollment decision factors (cost, location, hours, interests, safety)

National literature: parents define a safe environment as inclusive and family-oriented, not just physically protective.

When St. Louis families choose a program, safety, quality, and feeling welcome outweighs cost, location, hours, and even their child's specific interests.



FINDING 3

Communication and Staff Capability Drive Satisfaction

88%

of families report a positive or mixed overall experience with the programs they use

Comparing families with a positive experience to those with a mixed or negative one, the gaps are largest on feeling informed and respected as a parent (0.77 pts), the child's excitement (0.69) and belonging (0.69), and whether staff understood the child (0.59). Cultural reflection shows the smallest gap of all, it matters, but it is not what moves satisfaction.

"[The] staff were incredible. They contacted me ahead of time to learn about my son's needs and accommodated them so he could actually attend camp."

On what made the experience positive

FINDING 4

We Need Intentional Outreach To Connect With Families

33%

of families for whom cost is often a barrier
find their program through a school

The Blueprint4 site works well for families with more flexibility to search online. For families facing more barriers, a warm handoff from a school or community partner works best.

33%

Schools

20%

Flyers & community posters

17%

Direct outreach from organizations

How families for whom cost is often a barrier find their program

FINDING 5

Families Want to See Cultural Representation in Programs

3.54

the area families consistently rate lowest, out of everything we asked about belonging

National literature: caregivers value programs that help children develop cultural identity and connect with similar peers.

Families feel good about safety and staff. They feel less sure a program was built with their child's specific background and culture in mind, and that shows up in every wave of the survey.



What Families Bring Up, Ranked

Across 171 caregivers who left written comments, eleven themes recur. Top six:

59%	Cost	The single most common written theme, and consistent with the 86% barrier rate.
48%	Staff quality	The second most common theme. Ties directly to the satisfaction drivers.
19%	Disability & special-needs inclusion	Unprompted. Families want confidence that staff are trained and prepared.
19%	Camp Communication with parents	Regular updates, progress notes, and clear expectations.
14%	Registration timing & process	January-February planning stress, lotteries, late-enrollment gaps.
10%	Older kids/ teens gap	Fewer percieved options for middle-schoolers and teens, including jobs and apprenticeships.

What This Means for Providers

1

Make affordability visible

Sliding-scale and scholarship options matter as much as their existence. Say so, up front, everywhere.

2

Lead with communication

Proactive, personal outreach before day one builds the trust families rate above everything else.

3

Treat inclusion as core, not niche

Disability and special-needs readiness is the top unprompted theme families raise. It's a differentiator.

4

Look at your teen offerings

Older kids are an underserved and vocal gap. Even small, teen-specific tracks stand out.

5

Partner with schools and community orgs

High-need families are reached through schools and direct outreach, not digital communications. Build those relationships.

6

Reflect the cultures you serve

Cultural reflection is the lowest-rated belonging item locally. Small, specific changes can move it.

LET'S DISCUSS

Which of these findings resonates with you the most? Which ones are surprising to you?

What's one thing your program could try this fall, based on what you just heard?

Finances, Logistics, and Parent Impact

Four parent/caregiver focus groups were coded into three themes. This is the largest by volume, 146 code references across all groups, more than either other theme.

Cost, transportation, and scheduling compound the existing labor of planning a child's summer, especially with more than one kid to place.

“

And I just feel like a lot of summer camps are not designed for working parents.

Parent focus group, on scheduling

“

Yeah, so definitely barriers for me is transportation. It is a big one, a really big one. That determines everything for programs in the past.

Parent focus group, on transportation

“

The finances just do not be adding up. Especially for like one kid it's cool, but when you've got multiple children it's expensive.

Parent focus group, on cost with multiple kids

Program Quality

Safety and communication are effectively tied as the most-coded items in this theme (32 and 31 mentions). Staff training and trust follow the same thread: parents want to know their child is looked after, and to hear about it.

“

I want something that is versatile. They're not just doing one thing. We tried the pure soccer camps, or just the [ones] where they were outside playing all day. I want something they're getting value out of.

Parent focus group, on program variety

“

I want to have a couple adults that are there that you feel reassured.

Parent focus group, on staffing and trust

“

I do tell the staff, if anything is going on, call me. I don't care if I'm at work. Call me immediately.

Parent focus group, on communication

Opportunity & Access

Smallest of the three themes by volume (114 references) but distinct from cost: parents describe not knowing what exists, when to register, or where to find a program built for their child's age.

“

I've never seen a resource fair for summer stuff, unless [my child] is just ignoring it and not telling me.

Parent focus group, on the awareness gap

“

I do find there's a lack of that middle age group. It's too young for them, or they're not old enough to volunteer or be a camp counselor.

Parent focus group, on the age gap

“

Kids that come from wealthy families, they have different opportunities than kids that are mid-class, or in poverty.

Parent focus group, on opportunity by income

Enough to Do Isn't the Same as Enough to Do Well

Three focus groups with kids ages 5–13 (Early Elementary 6/27 & 6/30, Elementary 7/23, Middle School 7/30) add a youth-voice layer. All participants were already enrolled, so these themes speak most directly to engagement and retention.

Kids describe boredom as a specific, nameable failure mode, distinct from safety, when a program lacks variety.

“

Stuck in a gym with basketballs... there wasn't really anything to do.

Middle school youth, on a program that fell flat

“

I like having lots of different stuff to do. The more you do, the less you worry.

Middle school youth, on staying busy

“

It wasn't just one topic all day long.

Middle school youth, on why a program worked



Cost Awareness Starts Young

88%

of families report cost as a barrier, and youth raised it unprompted too

Corroborates the survey's cost-barrier finding, this time from a kid's own mouth, not a parent's.

Middle schoolers volunteered cost as a barrier without being asked, echoing the survey finding and confirming the burden is felt across the whole family, not only by parents.

"There have been things I wanted to do, but they were like thousands of dollars. I don't think it should be that much money."

Middle School youth

Camp Hours Don't Match Work Hours

Youth independently described the same 9-to-3 scheduling and drive-time burden that parents raised in focus groups, adding the child's-eye detail of extra wait time before and after camp.

*"The hours of camps are like 9 to 3
and I don't know of many jobs that
have those hours."*

Middle school youth



Metro Theater Company

A Missing Casual Tier for Tweens and Teens

Youth describe organized sports as either hyper-competitive or ending around age 13, with no casual middle option, a concrete mechanism behind the survey's underserved-teens finding.



"It gets super competitive or ends at 13 years old."

Middle school youth, on organized sports options

Being Outside Is the Closest Thing to a Universal Favorite

5 of 5

kids gave a thumbs-up to being outside in the elementary thumbs-up exercise

Also true across sessions: a majority of “best day” drawings from both elementary groups featured water or pool imagery.



Across both elementary focus groups, outdoor and physical play dominated “best day” content more than any other single activity, reinforcing why safety, quality, and feeling welcome top the list for parents too.

Where This Goes From Here

1

All four family guides are in

Youth and parent/caregiver focus groups are both complete and folded into this deck. Analysis now shifts to synthesis and the final report.

2

Synthesize across all three sources

Weave survey, parent, and youth findings into one coherent narrative for the final report.

3

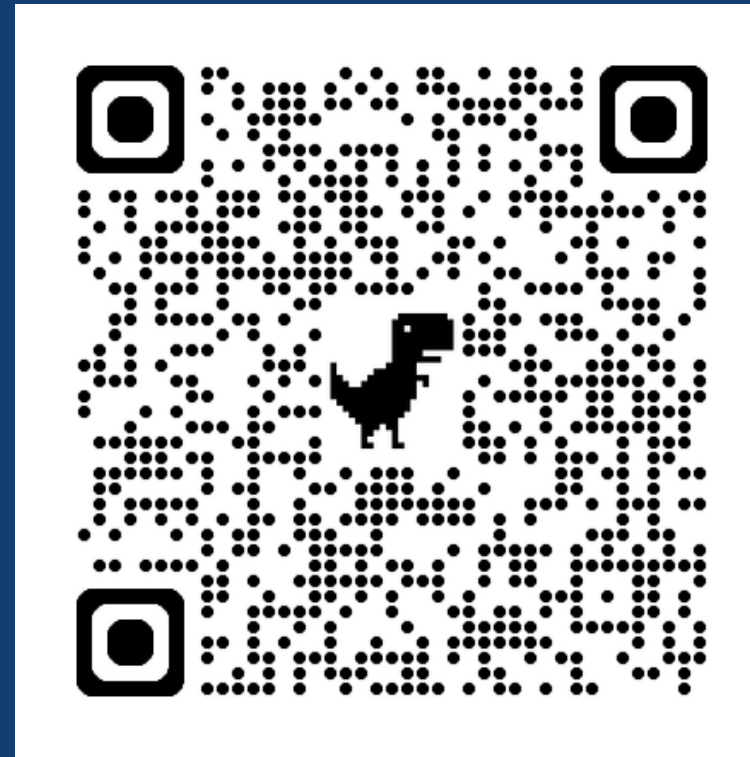
Final landscape analysis

Stay tuned for full findings and recommendations for Blueprint4 and its provider network.

The Roundtable discussions that happen today and your feedback during this event will also provide context and provider voice to our report!

Thank You

Questions and conversation welcome.



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and FREE RESOURCES*



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