Middle School Afterschool Program: FAQ

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The Middle School Afterschool Program is a free, professionally staffed afterschool program for Traverse City middle schoolers. It opens at East Middle School in the 2026–27 school year and expands to West Middle School by 2027–28. It is a collaboration among: Safer Kids, Safer Schools (SKSS), Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS), and SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers.

These questions and answers are meant to complement the program's Case for Support. They cover why the program is needed, how it works, who does what, how it is funded, and how its impact will be measured.

Community need

Why do our middle schools need an afterschool program?

The school day at East and West Middle Schools ends at 2:35 p.m. Many 6th, 7th and 8th graders have nowhere structured to go after that. There is no regular program, no dedicated space, and no adult whose job is to be there for them. For many working families, the hours between the last bell and the end of the workday are a daily worry.

Isn't there already something available after school?

Right now our middle schools have no consistent, professionally staffed afterschool program. What exists are occasional clubs that depend on the goodwill of dedicated volunteers, and, for students who are interested and do not experience barriers to participating, there are sports. Those clubs and sports matter, but they can't offer the reliability or the daily adult relationships that some students and families need.

Why focus on middle school students?

Middle school is when peer relationships, mental health and a sense of belonging take shape. Students this age are often too old for traditional childcare but still benefit greatly from structure and caring adults. Research shows that feeling connected to school protects students against violence, emotional distress and high-risk behavior.

What do local young people and families say they need?

A 2024 Youth Needs Assessment by the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation found that afterschool hours are when young people most want structured activities, more than weekends or summer. The Foundation's Youth Wellness Initiative also heard from students that transportation is a major barrier. Students said they strongly prefer programs held right at their own school.

Why can't the school district or federal funding cover this?

TCAPS has said clearly that it has no discretionary funds to run an afterschool program on its own. The federal funding many afterschool programs have relied on was abruptly frozen in mid-2025. It was later restored for some programs, but its future is uncertain. Relatedly, not all schools are eligible for federal program funding. Local community investment lets this program launch now, without depending on unpredictable federal dollars.

Vision

What is the vision behind this program?

Safer Kids, Safer Schools envisions a community that shows through its actions and investments that it values all kids. It listens to their voices and champions, responds to and supports their needs. The goal is a lasting afterschool program that becomes part of how Traverse City's education system works.

What will be different once the program is running?

- **Students** will have a safe, structured place to go after school four days a week, plus summer programming, with trained adults whose job is to know and care about them.
- **Working families** will have reliable afterschool care at no cost, removing one of the biggest daily stressors parents describe.
- **Schools** will see stronger connectedness and safety, supporting TCAPS's own strategic goals for belonging, safety and positive behavior.
- **Our community** will see its investment pay forward. Multi-state research shows every $1 invested in afterschool programs returns at least $3 through higher lifetime earnings, better school performance and less juvenile justice involvement.

What is the long-term goal beyond the first three years?

The three-year program is a practical first step toward solving a clearly defined problem. It also builds momentum on bigger questions, including a stable source of public funding for afterschool programs across northern Michigan and beyond. Partners plan to begin those conversations in spring 2027.

Motivation and beliefs

What is Safer Kids, Safer Schools, and how did this effort start?

Safer Kids, Safer Schools (SKSS) is a community-led task force formed in Traverse City in 2022 in response to the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Over more than two years of learning and listening, the task force reached an unexpected conclusion. We cannot fortify our way to school safety.

Why would a school safety group focus on afterschool programs?

The task force's research pointed "upstream" to what actually keeps kids safe and well: mental health, family and community connection, and a sense of belonging. When students feel supported, their health, safety and academic outcomes all improve. A quality afterschool program builds exactly those things, every day, for the students who need them most.

What core beliefs guide the program?

- **Every student deserves a caring adult.** Relationships come first. Staff are there to know students and be a steady presence for them.
- **Belonging is protective.** Feeling connected to school and community helps keep young people safe and healthy.
- **Students should have a voice.** Young people help shape activities and lead projects based on their own interests.
- **Access should be equal.** The program is free, held at school, and designed to reach students who would benefit most.
- **Prevention is a community responsibility.** Investing in kids early is better for them and for all of us.

How was this approach chosen?

SKSS commissioned a year-long feasibility study by Parallel Solutions, funded by Rotary Charities of Traverse City. The study drew on interviews, conversations with service providers and other stakeholders, and a review of best practices across Michigan. It identified a ready-to-launch path: a partnership between TCAPS and SEEDS, a respected local nonprofit already running hands-on afterschool programs for more than a thousand students in the region.

This chosen afterschool approach complements the mentor-based programs led locally by Big Brothers, Big Sisters. Big Brothers, Big Sisters is not a daily program, but offers a parallel pathway for students to engage in a one-on-one relationship with a caring high school student or adult volunteer. Students participating in the afterschool program may also choose to participate in the once-a-week Big Brothers, Big Sisters mentoring program.

Program structure and model

Where and when will the program operate?

This is a three-year, two-site program. It launches at East Middle School in the 2026–27 school year, with programming beginning in October 2026. West Middle School is planned to open by the 2027–28 school year.

Program time	Schedule
After school	4 days a week, 2:35–5:30 p.m.
Lunch Lounge (optional)	During lunch periods, 10:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
Drop-in support (optional)	Mon, Wed, Fri, 1:50–2:35 p.m.
Summer	About 6 weeks, either 4 days a week for 6 hours or 3 days a week for 8 hours

Who can participate?

The program serves 6th–8th graders, with a focus on students who would benefit from extra connection and support. Staff are aiming for a balanced mix of grade levels. The first group will be about 20 students, growing to about 30 within the first three months.

How are students selected and enrolled?

SEEDS leads recruitment in close partnership with East Middle School. The school's Student Support Office, principals and teachers help identify and refer students and communicate with families. Enrollment follows a simple path:

1. A student is referred or expresses interest.
2. The family completes an application.
3. Staff meet one-on-one with the student to get to know them.
4. The student joins the group.

Does it cost anything for families?

No. The program is free for all participating students and families.

What will students do?

A typical afternoon starts with a snack and about 30 minutes of homework help or quiet reading to ease the transition from the school day. Then students choose activities based on their own interests, such as:

- Cooking and baking, carpentry, knitting, music, writing and painting
- Biking, hiking, boxing and active outdoor games
- Gardening, tree planting and hands-on ecology projects
- Mentoring, leadership roles and social-emotional skill building

SEEDS uses ecology and outdoor learning as a natural way to build relationships. Students also help design the program, so activities reflect what they want to learn together. Summer programming adds field trips and experiential learning.

Who are the staff?

SEEDS hires and supervises all program staff, who are trained and background-checked. A dedicated Site Coordinator is on site all day Monday through Thursday and builds relationships with students, teachers and school support staff. A teaching assistant supports afternoon programming.

How many adults are there per student?

The target is one adult for every 10 students. That is much lower than the state licensing limit of 1 to 18, so every student gets real attention.

Is the program licensed and quality-assured?

Yes. SEEDS is pursuing state childcare licensing for the site through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and maintains all required insurance. The program follows the Michigan Out-of-School Time Standards of Quality and aligns with TCAPS student support systems, including Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

How will students get home?

TCAPS does not provide routine bus service for the program. Partners are exploring options for families, including nearby BATA public transit routes and stops. Transportation is a known barrier, so finding solutions is a priority.

Will students get food?

Yes. TCAPS food services will provide daily snacks and meals.

How does the program handle challenging behavior?

Staff respond with patience and care, and they work closely with families. The aim is to keep students connected while keeping the program safe and positive for everyone.

Partner roles

Who is involved, and what does each partner do?

Three partners have signed a Letter of Intent setting out shared goals and each partner's responsibilities.

Partner	Main role	Key responsibilities
SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers	Program operator and fiscal sponsor	Designs and runs the program day to day; hires, trains and supervises staff; maintains licensing and insurance; leads evaluation and an annual report; receives, holds and

Partner	Main role	Key responsibilities
		tracks all donations and issues gift acknowledgments
Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS)	Host school district	Provides classroom space at East Middle School, building access and cleaning; provides daily snacks and meals; helps identify and refer students; aligns the program with school support systems; contributes $50,000 per year
Safer Kids, Safer Schools (SKSS)	Fundraising and community partner	Leads the fundraising campaign, donor relationships, private foundation grant writing and campaign volunteers; builds community awareness; reports fundraising progress to partners each quarter; works toward building a sustainable long-term funding model

Who is SEEDS?

SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers is a Traverse City-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit. It already delivers hands-on afterschool programs for more than a thousand students across the region. SEEDS is the programmatic operating partner for this program. www.ecoseeds.org

What is a fiscal sponsor, and why does SEEDS serve as one?

SKSS is a community task force, not a nonprofit. SEEDS is a nonprofit and acts as the program's fiscal sponsor so donors can make tax-deductible gifts. SEEDS receives and deposits gifts, tracks them in a restricted account, honors donor intentions, and provides regular financial reports to SKSS. Gifts are used only for this program.

Who leads the effort?

- **Kathleen Guy**, Initiative and Fundraising Leader, Safer Kids, Safer Schools
- **Jay Berger**, Campaign Leader, Safer Kids, Safer Schools
- **Sarna Salzman**, Executive Director, SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers
- **Dan Tiesworth**, Chief Academic Officer, TCAPS

Megan Motil of Parallel Solutions is a strategy , partnership, and campaign management advisor. A volunteer committee of dedicated community members serves as campaign ambassadors, educates and connects with other community members, hosts gatherings, and invites others to give.

How do the partners work together and make decisions?

The SEEDS Site Coordinator and the East Middle School principal meet monthly to review progress and address any issues. A Program Planning and Leadership Team with leaders from all three partners meets each spring. It reviews outcomes, operations, fundraising and finances, and each partner's commitments.

Funding needs and sources

How much does the program cost?

Running the program at East Middle School in its first year (2026–27) costs $201,180. Running it for three years costs $991,577: East Middle School in Year 1, then both East and West Middle Schools in Years 2 and 3.

Funding picture	Amount
Year 1 total cost (East Middle School, 2026–27)	$201,180
Already committed for Year 1, including $50,000 from TCAPS	$90,000
Still needed for Year 1, by December 31, 2026	**$111,180**
Three-year total cost (2026–27 through 2028–29)	$991,577

What does the money pay for?

Most costs pay for trained, qualified staff, including competitive wages to attract and keep good people. Funds also cover program supplies and activities, summer programming and field trips, licensing, evaluation, and program start-up. A small fiscal sponsorship fee covers SEEDS's work managing and reporting on donated funds.

Where does the funding come from?

The program relies on a mix of sources:

- **TCAPS** contributes $50,000 per year and provides space, food service and operational support.
- **Individual donors** give through the community campaign led by SKSS volunteers.
- **Foundations and grants** are being pursued from regional, state and private funders, including state out-of-school-time grant programs.
- **Businesses and sponsors** may support the program through sponsorships.

Why is private giving needed if the school district is a partner?

TCAPS is contributing funds, space and services, but it has no discretionary budget to cover the full cost. Federal afterschool funding is uncertain. Community gifts close the gap and let the program launch now.

Are gifts tax-deductible?

Yes. SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (EIN 38-3482266) and serves as fiscal sponsor for the program. Gifts are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law, and SEEDS sends every donor an acknowledgment.

How do I make a gift?

- **By check:** Make checks payable to "SKSS Middle School Afterschool Program" and mail to SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers, P.O. Box 2454, Traverse City, MI 49685.
- **Stock or donor-advised fund:** Contact Kathleen Guy at kathleeneguy@gmail.com or (231) 883-2379.

How do I know my gift will be used for this program?

All gifts are held in a restricted account and tracked separately by SEEDS. They are used only for the Middle School Afterschool Program. SEEDS provides regular financial reports to the partners, and SKSS shares fundraising progress with partners every quarter.

Are there recognition or naming opportunities?

Donor recognition follows the policies of the partner organizations. Any naming opportunity must be approved in writing by all three partners. Please contact Kathleen Guy to discuss.

What happens after the first three years?

Part of this campaign is building toward a long-term, stable source of funding from Year 4 on. Partners plan to begin conversations in spring 2027 about sustainable funding for afterschool programs, including public funding beyond philanthropy.

Evaluation and impact

How will we know the program is working?

The program will track results in five areas:

Area	What is measured	How it is measured
Engagement	Enrollment and attendance	Program attendance records

Area	What is measured	How it is measured
Equity	Participation by students who need extra support	Enrollment data and school referrals
Impact	Academic progress, behavior incidents, time out of class	School records and teacher and administrator observations
Youth empowerment	Student leadership and input into program design	Program records and student feedback
Wellness and belonging	Sense of belonging, connection to school, access to mentors and community supports	Student surveys

Partners will also gather feedback from families, school staff and community partners about how well the partnership is working.

What results can we expect?

Research on quality afterschool programs shows strong results:

- More than half of participating students improve their GPA.
- Seven in ten improve their engagement in learning.
- In Michigan, 58% of participants improved homework completion and 66% improved classroom behavior.
- Two in five participating students see fewer school suspensions.
- 90% of students in Michigan afterschool programs say the program helped them take more responsibility for their actions.

Who conducts the evaluation, and how are results shared?

SEEDS coordinates evaluation, following State of Michigan procedures for state-funded out-of-school-time programs. It prepares an annual report with a financial overview for the East Middle School principal and TCAPS leadership. All three partners review results together each spring and adjust the program as needed.

How is student privacy protected?

Student information is shared only between program staff and the school, as needed to support students. Results shared publicly are reported in summary form, never about individual students.

Getting involved

How can I help besides giving?

- **Spread the word.** Share the program with friends, neighbors, colleagues and community groups.
- **Host a gathering.** Invite people to a house party or coffee chat to learn about the program. Campaign volunteers will help you plan it.
- **Join the volunteer committee.** Committee members serve as community ambassadors and invite others to give.
- **Introduce a funder.** Connect us with a foundation, business or community group that might support the program.

My child attends East Middle School. How can they join?

Contact the East Middle School Student Support Office at (231) 933-7300 to learn about enrollment.

Who can I contact with questions?

Kathleen Guy, Initiative and Fundraising Leader, Safer Kids, Safer Schools: kathleeneguy@gmail.com or (231) 883-2379.

References and resources

These resources informed the *2025 Afterschool Program Feasibility Study* prepared by Parallel Solutions that shaped this program.

Research and data

- Michigan State University Extension. Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Center Research Briefs.
- Michigan Afterschool Partnership. Data and research.
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- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Statistical Briefing Book: Offending by Juveniles.
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- Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators. "Protecting Schools from Violence: What Matters Most?" June 3, 2024.

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Program examples

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