

AYPF Compendium on Out-of-School Time Programs

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American Youth Policy Forum

Bridging Youth Policy, Practice, and Research

Mission: To improve opportunities, services, and life prospect for youth, we provide learning experiences for national, state, and local policymakers and practitioners.

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), a nonprofit, nonpartisan professional development organization based in Washington, DC, provides learning opportunities for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on youth and education issues at the national, state, and local levels. AYPF's goal is to enable participants to become more effective in the development, enactment, and implementation of sound policies affecting the nation's young people by providing information, insights, and networks to better understand the development of healthy and successful young people, productive workers, and participating citizens in a democratic society. AYPF does not lobby or advocate for positions on pending legislation. Rather, we believe that greater intellectual and experiential knowledge of youth issues will lead to sounder, more informed policymaking. We strive to generate a climate of constructive action by enhancing communication, understanding, and trust among youth policy professionals.

Founded in 1993, AYPF has interacted with thousands of policymakers by conducting an average of 40 annual events such as lunchtime forums, out-of-town field trips, and foreign study missions. Participants include Congressional staff; federal, state, and local government officials; national nonprofit and advocacy association professionals; and the press corps. At forums, these professionals interact with renowned thinkers, researchers, and practitioners to learn about national and local strategies for formal and informal education, career preparation, and the development of youth as resources through service and skill development activities. Study tour participants visit schools undergoing comprehensive reforms, after-school and community learning sites, and youth employment and training centers, where they learn experientially from the young people and adults in the field.

AYPF focuses on three overlapping themes: Education, Youth Development and Community Involvement, and Preparation for Careers and Workforce Development. AYPF publishes a variety of nationally disseminated youth policy reports and materials, many of which may be viewed on our website (www.aypf.org).

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Part I

Setting the Stage

Out-of-school Time (OST) programs have become quite common, yet the field is still relatively young and continues to change and adapt to community and youth needs. In this setting the stage section, we address a number of key issues affecting out-of-school time programs, including the importance of OST, the purpose and goals of OST programs, the role of time in learning, high quality OST programs, OST programs for older youth, and systems and infrastructure to support OST programs.

Out-of-school Time Matters

How young people today spend their time in and out-of-school matters a lot. The myriad of experiences young people have with their families, friends, schools, and communities profoundly impacts their development and life trajectory. All young people should have access to a continuum of quality services and opportunities that keep them safe, help them develop positive social behaviors, prepare them for college, careers, and civic engagement, and facilitate their transition to productive adult roles.

Adolescents today face a challenging and demanding society and economy. Students not only need to develop strong academic skills to be successful, it is imperative that students develop what is commonly referred to as 21st Century skills, that include analytical thinking, innovation, problem-solving, and effective communication, to prepare them for postsecondary education and careers. Youth also need to develop positive social behaviors and have opportunities for experiential, engaging, and applied learning. Too many older youth are not getting the skills they need, partly because school is not structured to help them develop such skills, and also because about 30 percent of teens drop out of high school and are not engaged in any learning or work.

Today, more than 14 million K-12 students (25 percent) are responsible for taking care of themselves after school. Children who are left alone spend more time watching TV, risk obesity and health problems, are more likely to be victims of or commit crimes and are more susceptible to the temptations of smoking, drug use, and sexual activity (Time Learning and Afterschool (TLA) Taskforce). Only 6.5 million K-12 students (11 percent) participate in afterschool programs, and only 8 percent of those participants are from grades 9-12, but 2.3 million teens would participate if more programs were available. (Afterschool Alliance, 2004). Three-quarters of the voting public strongly supports the provision and expansion of afterschool programs and believes that afterschool programs can play an important role in keeping youth in school, helping them graduate, and preparing them for the workforce. (Afterschool Alliance Poll, Lake Research Partners, November 2008).

Out-of-school-time programs are already supporting youth in a variety of ways and are a key provider of youth services in many community-wide strategies to improve youth outcomes. The current body of research proves that participation in OST programs makes a positive difference in the lives of youth, especially for young people who continue to be underserved or lack other supports. Participation in OST programs not only provides access to a safe environment for youth, but also prevents negative behaviors and consequences, adds productive time to the day and year to help young people develop a myriad of important skills, supplements academic learning, creates connections with caring adults, provides engaging learning, and supports healthy personal and social development (AYPF).

OST programs and the best practices they exemplify should be included as a vital component of any reform effort to prepare our students for their future endeavors in college, career, and civic engagement.

Purpose and Goals of Out-of-school Time Programs

As noted above, OST programs have many goals and purposes as they assist youth in developing a range of skills and knowledge and provide opportunities for positive youth development, but there are a number of common goals that many OST programs share. Common goals include supporting academic performance, developing positive social and civic skills, preventing risky behaviors and improving positive health and wellness outcomes for youth, helping students with college and career planning and access, strengthening families and communities, and using OST programs as part of a comprehensive approach to youth development and preparation for life. Most of the programs that we reviewed for this publication have some of the multiple goals just listed, with a few focusing on one goal or purpose. Importantly, regardless of the program's goal, all OST programs maintain the resounding belief in the need to focus on positive youth development, using that as their fundamental basis, which is what sets these programs apart from education and other types of youth services.

Whatever the goal of an OST program is, it is important to keep in mind a key point. OST programs are only a small part of the entirety of community resources and programs that youth can access to develop skills and for support. No OST program can provide every type of program, service, or support needed. Even when OST programs are developed in response to a lack of high quality and effective programs and services in other sectors, OST programs should not be expected to meet the entire spectrum of needs and should not be viewed as a panacea to other failing systems. OST programs have a role to play in community-wide systems to support youth, and their flexibility and lack of bureaucracy often allow them to respond quickly to the needs of youth. Although the OST system is still small in comparison to other publicly-funded systems (e.g. schools), high quality OST programs carve out a niche that meets specific youth and community needs.

In considering the contributions of OST programs to the overall development of young people, it is helpful to consider some of the types of services OST programs have provided in the past. While many OST programs have had a focus on improving academic performance, some are now considering that OST programs are an avenue to help prepare youth more intentionally for college and career readiness, a growing topic of interest with policymakers and the public.

OST's Role in College and Career Readiness

Increasingly, policymakers are focused on how to improve the preparation of all students for college and career success. In the last five years, policymakers have dedicated much needed attention to closing the achievement gap between rich and poor and white and black and Hispanic students in our country, but many youth still experience large gaps despite these school-based efforts. Today, the reading and mathematics skills of black and Hispanic high school seniors are roughly the same as those of white students in 8th grade, and only one in 50 Hispanic and black 17-year-olds can read and glean information from specialized texts, such as the science section of a newspaper, compared to about one in 12 white students (National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Summary Data Tables, 2001). While standards-based reform efforts are beginning to demonstrate results, particularly with younger students, we need to work harder to ensure that our youth are prepared to face the challenges of the future. Many OST programs are seen as an important community resource to help youth gain access to

additional learning and skill development that will set them on a path to postsecondary education and good careers.

Participation in high-quality OST programs is associated with an increase in academic achievement, school attendance, time spent on homework and extracurricular activities, enjoyment and effort in school, and better student behavior (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003), all fundamental needs for college readiness. A 2007 study of *Promising After-School Programs* found that middle school students who regularly attended the high-quality afterschool programs across two years demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during afterschool hours (Vandell, D.L., Reisner, E.R., & Pierce, K.M., 2007). The programs selected for inclusion in the *Study of Promising After-School Programs* offered age-appropriate learning activities as well as recreational activities, community-based experiences and arts-related opportunities (Vandell, D.L., Reisner, E.R., & Pierce, K.M., 2007). The programs did not duplicate the work already being done inside the classroom in order to increase academic achievement, and instead offered rich and varied academic support accompanied by recreation, arts opportunities, and other enrichment activities (Vandell, D.L., Reisner, E.R., & Pierce, K.M., 2007). The activities were engaging and offered substantive learning with positive adult and peer relationships, thereby increasing student attendance and duration in the program (Vandell, D.L., Reisner, E.R., & Pierce, K.M., 2007). While these studies did not track students into postsecondary education, it is clear that the extra focus on academics can assist students on their pathway to further learning.

Various OST programs also expose youth to the idea of college, take them on visits to college campuses, work with the student and family to identify prospective colleges, provide assistance in the college application process, help navigate the student financial assistance jungle, and provide encouragement and support to students who do not see themselves as college material. These types of activities, which rarely occur during the school day, due to the dearth of counselors at most secondary schools, are a key to being college-ready and making the transition into college. Other OST programs provide youth an opportunity to learn about careers, participate in internships or work experiences, or to earn stipends for work. These types of activities are also important for youth that have little exposure to the workplace and are unfamiliar with navigating employment.

A key part of college and career readiness is the development of 21st Century skills. “Advanced economies, innovative industries and firms, and high-growth jobs require more educated workers with the ability to respond flexibly to complex problems, communicate effectively, manage information, work in teams and produce new knowledge (Partnership for 21st Century Skills). In 2007, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce explained that the best employers will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people for positions throughout the workforce (*Tough Choices or Tough Times*, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007).

While the *No Child Left Behind Act* brought much needed attention to the academic disparity between our lowest and highest performing students, increased accountability pressures that emphasize basic skills in reading, mathematics and science, have resulted in a narrowing of academic electives and decreased student exposure to arts, sports, experiential learning, service-learning, and other enrichment activities that can increase student engagement and develop creativity and problem solving skills. In addition, most teachers do not help students learn how to apply their knowledge, or they provide the academic content from a theoretical standpoint, divorced from the real world and almost always not in context of how the information or knowledge would be used to solve real problems. As noted by the

OECD, “curriculum, instruction and assessments traditionally used in American schools fail to support the development of critical thinking and creativity. The top-performing countries on international tests do well partially because they integrate higher-order skills with basic skills in their instruction (TLA Taskforce, 2007; PISA. Problem-Solving for Tomorrow’s World. Paris, France: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004). To be prepared for college and career in the changing economy, all students must be equipped with a diverse-array of skills in addition to basic math and literacy skills, and research has shown that out-of-school time programs can provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills to help them succeed in the 21st century (Halpern, 2007). OST programs excel in providing opportunities for youth to develop these types of skills and abilities by allowing them opportunities to work in teams, design and implement projects, undertake community service, and learn how to apply their knowledge.

Lastly, some are viewing the engaging learning activities of OST programs as a strategy to keep students involved in high school and to prevent them from dropping out. Studies have indicated that students will attend school more regularly on the days they are involved in relevant and engaging OST activities. Additionally, the pedagogies that OST programs use, that tend to be more experiential, active, applied, and contextual, also speak to youth, who frequently find school boring. OST programs have the potential to influence how schools provide material in interesting and engaging ways, and secondary schools can learn much by partnering with OST programs.

The Role of Time in Learning

AYPF acknowledges the evolving debate of how to most efficiently and effectively structure learning time to allow youth to develop the skills and knowledge they need to face the future. In addition to the question about when to provide learning time is the question of who should provide certain learning opportunities and where. This debate comes at a time when many policymakers and professionals in the education field are grappling with how to help our lowest performing and most underserved youth get the support they need to succeed, realizing that the school hours are not long enough and schools are not necessary equipped to provide the kinds of teaching and learning experiences needed by a vast number of young people. Various initiatives to expand the learning environment are being discussed, but no consensus has yet developed.

At the federal level, the “Afterschool Partnerships Improve Results in Education (ASPIRE) Act” was introduced to establish and expand afterschool programs for middle and high school students in order to increase student engagement, improve school success and graduation rates, and provide opportunities to increase interest in high-demand career opportunities (Afterschool Alliance; retrieved November 2008); the “Time for Innovation Matters in Education (TIME) Act” was introduced which calls for a federal expanded learning time pilot project to lengthen the school day, week and/or year. The legislation specifies that time should be increased for academic and enrichment opportunities, such as music, arts, physical education, service-learning and work-based learning opportunities that contribute to a well-rounded education. The legislation calls for collaboration between out-of-school time providers and schools and other educational and youth agencies and organizations to increase learning and development opportunities for students. The “Investment in After-School Programs Act of 2008” calls for the creation of a pilot program to establish or improve rural afterschool programs (Afterschool Alliance; retrieved November 2008). The proposed “Full Service Community Schools Act” would encourage schools, OST providers, and other community-based organizations and public and private partners to coordinate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services (Weiss, Little, et. al., 2008).

“Expanded learning time” is another relatively new concept to help support learning and development for youth. Beginning in 2004, Massachusetts 2020, an organization whose mission is to expand educational and economic opportunities for children and families across Massachusetts, began to promote the idea that expanding the school day could be the most effective lever to reach education goals, while simultaneously providing all children with the kinds of rich developmental experiences that after-school and out-of-school time programs offer (Bernier, 2008). As a result, the state created a pilot program to fund various ELT pilot programs. The key features of the Massachusetts ELT initiative include: a significant increase in the length of the school day or year (30% or more) to help students meet higher performance standards; mandatory participation by all students in the expanded schedule at the selected ELT schools; comprehensive restructuring of the entire school schedule; the approval of key constituents, such as teachers and parents, with evidence of support from collective bargaining units, community-based organizations, or higher education institutions involved in implementation; and public financing rather than funding through private foundations. To pay for the predicted costs associated with the added time and programming, each ELT pilot school in Massachusetts would receive an additional \$1,300 for every child enrolled (Bernier, 2008).

Another conception of using time differently was put forth in *A New Day For Learning*, a report from the Time, Learning and Afterschool Task Force, funded by the C.S. Mott Foundation. The report states that we persist in placing all the responsibility for teaching on the schools and on a short school day and therefore the aspirations of communities, whether they be affluent or low income, homogenous or widely diverse, are limited by these habits. In *A New Day For Learning*, the task force contends that in order to change the outcomes for all students, the whole day must be redesigned to provide a seamless learning experience with multiple ways of learning, anchored to high standards and aligned to educational resources throughout the community. In addition, the task force argues for a new approach that defines student success as more than the acquisition of basic skills, supports the time it takes to experience success, and develops sophisticated ways to measure it. To do so, the task force suggests integrating various approaches to acquiring and reinforcing knowledge into an expanded learning day, building new collaborative structures across sectors that focus all resources on supporting academic and developmental goals for children, and creating new leadership possibilities and professional development opportunities for teaching in and managing a different learning system (TLA Taskforce, 2007). The report also spells out a key role for afterschool programs in this New Day for Learning.

As more attention is focused on the academic needs of our most underserved students and the role time and place can play in meeting our students’ needs, policymakers and practitioners need to consider OST programs a means of offering students a continuum of supports. A key policy issue in any discussion of adding more learning time, however, is whether the additional time is structured like the current school day and existing class activities or if it is structured to be engaging, applied, experiential, linked to real world experiences and community resources, and relevant. If OST or ELT becomes a simple extension of the 8am-3pm school day, we will not likely see improved youth outcomes. It is therefore critical that policymakers are aware of the programmatic and structural components of OST programs that have a proven track record of positive youth development outcomes.

In our discussion of this issue, AYPF uses the term out-of-school time to describe both traditional programs operating during afternoon hours and more comprehensive efforts that respond to the needs of children, youth, and parents during evenings, weekends, summers, and holidays by offering activities that help youth grow, learn, and develop (AYPF). We believe that OST is a more inclusive term that includes efforts to comprehensively and holistically serve young people while contributing to positive youth outcomes. We are also concerned that the term extended learning time is too closely identified

with the extension of academic learning and does not take into account the various youth development activities that need to be made available to young people in the hours beyond the school day and in various learning environments.

High-Quality Out-of-School Time Programs

Recent research in the OST field points to specific programmatic and structural characteristics of effective programs that enhance learning and growth for students; there is now a heightened level of understanding of the key factors associated with high-quality OST programming for youth. Programs that provide a positive and safe environment for students to develop supportive adult relationships produce positive outcomes for youth. Findings from a 2007 report indicate that “the two most important things staff can do to increase engagement and learning are to effectively manage groups in ways that ensure youth feel respected by both the adults and other youth, and to positively support the young people and their learning process. The better these tasks were done, the more deeply youth were engaged and the more they felt they got out of activities (Grossman, Campbell & Raley, 2007).” A 2007 review of successful afterschool programs identified four skill-building approaches that the successful programs had in common. Using an acronym of S.A.F.E. to identify the four approaches, the review determined effective programs emphasized “Sequential” activities linked over several days, rather than offering unstructured drop-in opportunities; relied on “Active” involvement of youth, rather than passive reception of messages from adults; set aside time to “Focus” on personal or social skills, and were “Explicit” in identifying which skills they expected to develop (Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). A 2005 study of afterschool programs funded by The After-School Corporation (TASC) determined that programs that successfully increased students’ academic achievement shared characteristics around programming, staffing, and support systems that included (Jennifer Birmingham, Ellen Pechman, et al., 2005):

- A broad array of enrichment opportunities
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery
- Intentional relationship-building
- A strong, experienced leader/manager supported by a trained and supervised staff
- The administrative, fiscal, and professional-development support of the sponsoring organization.

In addition to this solid research base on quality OST programming, OST practitioners and researchers have been developing quality indicators that programs can use for a self-assessment, followed by a program improvement plan. According to the Forum for Youth Investment, some key characteristics of program quality assessments include direct program observation as a means for gathering specific data about program quality and in particular, staff practice; addressing social processes or the interactions between and among people in the program; applicable to a range of school and community-based program settings; and “research-based” in the sense that their development was informed by relevant child/youth development literature (Yohalem, 2007).

Leaders in the OST field have taken steady and serious efforts to ensure that programs are high quality and that students are experiencing positive outcomes. The lessons we can draw from the leading OST programs (some of which are described in this publication) can provide important lessons to policymakers and practitioners, both in the OST field and beyond.

Out-of-School Time Programs and Older Youth

Special attention should be paid to the positive role OST programs can play in the healthy development of older youth. Despite the fact that many youth participated in OST programs in elementary years, studies have shown that as students enter their teen years, their participation in OST programs drops off, both due to a shortage of programs and a lack of high-quality programs that attract and sustain teen participation (Arbreton, Bradshaw, 2008). Programs geared to older youth need to provide activities and services targeted for adolescents. Researchers have identified common characteristics of effective programs for teens (Hall, Israel, & Shortt, 2004; AYPF 2006).

- Youth feel a sense of independence as part of participation in the program, particularly financial independence through earning wages or a stipend.
- Youth voices are listened to and incorporated into decision-making.
- Programs offer employable skills, such as office skills, and include preparation for or direct connection to job training and employment.
- Youth have opportunities to interact with community and business leaders.
- Schools and principals are active partners.
- Participation includes receiving assistance in navigating and post-high school experience.
- Youth are introduced to the world outside their local neighborhood.

Early results from an evaluation examining the role Boys & Girls Clubs play in the lives of teens reveal lessons about attracting and sustaining teen participation in OST programs (Arbreton, Bradshaw et. al., 2008):

- Building strong ties when youth are young is likely a key strategy for keeping them connected to the program as they become teenagers.
- Flexible attendance policies and special programming for teens may be crucial to keeping a wide range of teens involved.
- A special teen space that offers the opportunity for an “unprogrammed” social dynamic is a main attraction for teens.
- For teens, many of whom are making their own choices about how they spend their time after school, having interesting activities available when they arrive is particularly important.
- Outreach and programming for teens must take into account the importance they place on friendships.

Because OST programs cannot be viewed as a monolithic structure, it is important for policymakers to allow flexibility to programs so that they can be designed and implemented to hold maximum attraction for older youth.

Systems and Infrastructure to Support Out-of-school Time Programs

How OST programs are structured and supported makes a difference in their quality. In an attempt to infuse effective programmatic components into more programs and provide coherence and stability (TASC), there is increased attention being paid to OST systems and infrastructure by various stakeholders. In addition, because of growing pressure from policymakers and practitioners to maximize return on investments and articulate how and how much OST programs contribute to young people’s learning and development, there is increased attention being paid to quality indicators of OST programs, leadership and the role of intermediaries in creating and sustaining an OST infrastructure, professional development supports and human capital needs, data, accountability and evaluation (Wilson-Ahlistom, Yohalem, with Donner, 2008).

The role of municipal and community leadership and support has emerged as an important element in successful OST programs. In 2008, AYPF conducted a forum series on building capacity in OST programming for underserved youth. One emerging theme from the forum presentations and discussions was that effective OST initiatives are the product of strong municipal leadership and collaborative partnerships, often led by intermediary organizations. AYPF found that municipal leadership is often the key to legitimizing and funding OST programs and that intermediaries engage in convening and supporting critical constituencies, promote quality standards and accountability, broker and leverage resources and promote effective policies. In sum, intermediaries are key players in providing the support to enhance the availability and quality of OST opportunities (Blank, n.d.; AYPF 2006). A recent evaluation from the Harvard Family Research Project supports the claim that programs that develop strong partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, especially families, schools, and communities are more likely to exhibit high quality (HFRP, 2008).

OST programs are also moving to improve and increase the collection and use of data. With support from the Atlantic Philanthropies, The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS), a partnership of 7 OST intermediaries, was created to shape and inform the work of OST systems-building by identifying and tracking common measures and investing in the infrastructure and professional development necessary to help programs use data to inform their work (Wilson-Ahlstom, Yohalem, with Donner, 2008). To date, CBASS has identified the importance of collecting data against a common set of measures in order to bring high-quality afterschool systems to scale and the positive role intermediaries play in using data to drive continuous improvement and contribute to the growth of citywide systems by implementing system-level measures. The work of CBASS signifies the growing emphasis on collaboration to increase the quality of OST programs through improved systems of accountability (Wilson-Ahlstom, Yohalem, with Donner, 2008).

There is growing momentum for schools, youth-serving providers, and communities to take on the shared accountability of ensuring all students are provided with the support they need to achieve academic success and develop into successful adults. While developing shared accountability systems across a range of programs supports the concept that all programs and systems are working toward the common goal of helping youth, it is challenging to create fair and realistic shared outcome measurements. The OST field has firsthand experience in being held accountable for certain outcomes that programs were never designed to impact; as such, there is still value in searching for ways to measure outcomes that take into account the contribution of various education and youth providers. Policymakers are still at the nascent stages of thinking about shared accountability, in terms of what are appropriate outcomes, what are realistic measures, how to assign credit for progress across programs, and what data collection mechanisms can be used with the least burden and cost. The K-12 education system is moving to develop longitudinal data systems to track how students do and what their outcomes are with regard to postsecondary education. Having OST programs involved in discussions about systemwide longitudinal data systems at the beginning stages would be helpful.

One of the most critical factors of high-quality programs is the quality of a program's staff (HFRP, 2008). Studies have shown that youth are more likely to benefit if they develop strong and supportive relationships with the program's staff, and staff can best cultivate these relationships through positive, quality interactions with youth. Strong and supportive relationships include being caring and responsive and providing guidance that gives young people the capacity to feel connected to others, make positive decisions, and participate in productive activities (Arbreton, Goldsmith & Metz, 2008). Positive adult relationships have been shown to correlate with better outcomes for youth as well as increased participant retention (Arbreton, Goldsmith & Metz, 2008). In a follow-up study of the TASC evaluation,

researchers found that strong and supportive staff to student relationships were found in sites where program staff (HFRP, 2008; Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005):

- Modeled positive behavior
- Actively promoted student mastery of the skills or concepts presented in activities
- Listened attentively to participants
- Frequently provided individualized feedback and guidance during activities
- Established clear expectations for mature, respectful peer interactions

To attract and retain high-quality staff, research indicates that the program must provide sufficient staff training in addition to recruiting staff skilled for specific programs, promoting personnel from within the agency and ensuring the buy-in of staff to any new program (Arbreton, Goldsmith & Metz, 2008).

Staff professional development has been found to contribute to strong program infrastructure and positive youth outcomes (Arbreton, Goldsmith & Metz, 2008). *In Putting It All Together, Guiding Principles for Quality After-School Programs Serving Preteens*, the authors assert that programs that continually seek to strengthen quality provide continuous and targeted staff training, monitor and coach staff to support implementation on the ground, and incorporate data collection and analysis of program strengths and weaknesses. Doing so will keep staff and participants focused on program goals and engaged (Arbreton, Goldsmith & Metz, 2008).

Need closing paragraph.

Research Notes

Search for Evaluations

The goal of this search was to identify scientifically rigorous and third-party evaluations of out-of-school (OST) programs to be included in the compendium. AYPF began its search in September 2006 by conducting an extensive literature review to identify research, evaluations, and studies on OST programs. AYPF searched the Internet, contacted universities and research centers, and used its extensive network, including the Afterschool Alliance, Council of Chief State School Officers, National League of Cities, Harvard Family Research Project, National Center on Time and Learning, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, Policy Studies Associates, The Finance Project, and the Forum for Youth Investment. AYPF also convened an advisory group of experts in the field to help identify the program selection criteria, identify programs to be included, and provide a context for how to frame policy recommendations.

In looking for OST programs to include, AYPF considered all types of potential out-of-school programs (i.e. traditional school-based, charter school-based, programs operated by intermediary organizations, programs at community-based and cultural organizations, summer programs, and alternative education programs, etc.). Within the included OST programs is a range of different types of programs that involve a variety of education and community partners.

The data-gathering stage of this project was especially time-consuming, as it was difficult to identify programs with a strong evaluation component. Because there are so few programs with rigorous evaluations, we decided to also include a number of programs that have engaged in comprehensive data collection but that did not have an outside evaluation performed. OST programs typically conducted these data collection efforts for program evaluation purposes tied to requirements from specific funding sources.

Many of the included programs collect limited data beyond the basics required of any OST program, such as student attendance and grade level. Other OST programs recognize the importance of data and collect comprehensive information relevant to defining their success, such as behavior and social development outcomes, standardized test scores, course grades, GPAs, promotion rates, suspension rates, parental involvement, etc. This information is often more difficult to collect, as it requires collaboration between multiple institutions or the ability to obtain this information from the student through devices such as follow up surveys or interviews. While few programs collect data on longitudinal student outcomes, that data is most valuable in understanding the role of OST programs in promoting positive youth development outcomes.

After identifying 23 studies or evaluations, AYPF conducted a rigorous internal review of each evaluation, engaged in extended discussions with program directors and researchers, and collected additional data and information on the programs to supplement material in the evaluations. Every site was given the opportunity to review its profile to ensure it was accurately reflected during the time period described in the research. Sites reviewed their descriptions and added clarifications and corrections as needed. Following this, an outside researcher reviewed the evaluated programs in the compendium as a screen to ensure legitimacy and validity.

Issues with data collection

Data operate as a universal language, providing information to all constituencies for decisions around program operations, improvement, and growth. Policymakers use data to aid in their difficult decisions regarding funding and program creation and improvement. Data also provide accountability and act as a yardstick by which programs can be compared. Programs, themselves, should constantly be collecting and analyzing data to make improvements to their practice. For OST programs, frequent data analysis provides a litmus test for program quality and effectiveness.

As evidenced by our search, even the “good” research in this field is inadequate. Poor data are an issue not just for OST programs, but this remains an issue for education and youth programming in general. Typically, OST programs collect and maintain qualitative data that provide information on students’ attitudes and feelings toward programs, not quantitative data demonstrating their success in academic and youth development outcomes, such as graduation and college going rates. Because the data, especially quantitative data, are so sparse, it is difficult to provide definitive answers on the longitudinal benefits of most OST programs. We do note, however, that more and more OST programs are seeking to develop internal evaluation systems to increase the quality and effectiveness of their own staffing and programming and thus there is a greater focus on collecting data on longitudinal student outcomes and on measuring certain quality indicators of programs. This coincides with the overall increased emphasis on accountability and data reporting in education and youth programs, which we applaud. At the same time, qualitative data can be very important in understanding why programs are effective and in measuring more effective measures of student outcomes, and we encourage programs to continue to collect qualitative data as well.

OST programs also have different reporting requirements for different sources of funding. While some funders may require projects to report data on student demographics, there generally are difficulties in getting accurate data on the demographics of participants. For example, students must self-identify to qualify for free and reduced-price lunch subsidies, and many students do not feel comfortable sharing information about their family income, which limits the reliability of the data.

Data collection on students who participate in OST programs is also hindered by the reality that students are participants in unique and separate systems, including the public education system, sometimes the private education system, child and family service agencies, and OST providers that operate in both the public and private sectors. Typically, students will have records in multiple systems, but they tend not to be linked, and most cities and states do not have the infrastructure in place to facilitate data sharing between the existing silos. In reality, this infrastructure will take several years to create and perfect, and therefore it may be several more years before we have the data to unequivocally answer questions about the value-added benefits of OST programs, particularly for various groups of students. As the field develops and more states and cities seek to intentionally link education and youth support systems, there is an opportunity to address these issues and to further design and build high quality data collection and evaluation systems.

Throughout the compendium, we note the limited availability of high quality research on OST programs. While this is an issue for the programs that we considered for this compendium, it is, indeed, an issue that faces all of education and youth services. This lack of data collection and systematic evaluation limits the knowledge base around effective practices and also constrains the policymaking process by not having sufficient data on which to base key decisions. Because we consider data and evaluation to be so critical to improving programs and implementing policies, AYPF suggests the following steps be taken to improve educational research:

- A comprehensive, national research agenda on education and youth issues should be developed so as to (a) determine which strategies and policies have resulted in the most benefit, for whom, and at what cost, (b) determine what types of research and evaluation are most useful to policymakers and practitioners, and (c) provide guidance to practitioners on how to initiate and use program evaluation for ongoing program improvement.
- Funders, both public and private, should require and set aside funding for high quality program evaluation as part of any grant and utilize and share findings to improve policy and practices. Funders should also help program providers learn more about why evaluations are important, how they can be used to continuously improve, and how to conduct quality evaluations.
- Disaggregation of data by race, ethnicity, English language proficiency, disability status, gender, and poverty level is critical for researchers, educators, policymakers, families, and the public at large to create programs that are effective in serving students with special needs.
- Longitudinal data collection that follows students through grades K-12, postsecondary education, and the workplace, across states and across all types of programs, is needed. We commend the states that are moving to create such longitudinal systems and encourage them to think about including service providers beyond just the education system.
- Support the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. While quantitative data is often the ultimate factor in making decisions, without qualitative data, it is often difficult to understand why a program is effective or successful in serving certain youth. Policymakers and funders should recognize that qualitative data serves a very valuable and useful purpose in understanding why programs are effective, and taken together with quantitative data, provide a much fuller and complete understanding of the policies and practices that result in positive outcomes for youth.

Program Evaluation Format

AYPF designed this compendium to serve dual purposes: to demonstrate to policymakers the value of OST programs and the need for policies that help in their creation and sustainability and to provide information to practitioners on best practices in the field.

Each profile of an evaluated program contains:

- An overview of the program
- Description of the program population and eligibility
- Unique program components
- An overview of the evaluation
- Description of the evaluation population and eligibility
- Information on how the evaluation was conducted and data was collected
- Findings
- AYPF's analysis of the factors that contributed to the program's success
- Funding for both the evaluation and the program
- Contact information for both the researcher and program

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Each profile is designed to give the reader an understanding of the program, to highlight its results, and to pinpoint the elements that appear to have led to its success.

Contributing Factors

In this section we will briefly define the programmatic and structural components that we believe led to positive outcomes for youth.

Although the goals and programming of the included OST programs varied considerably, AYPF identified a number of commonalities in the programmatic components of OST programs that are producing positive outcomes for youth. The programmatic factors briefly described below exemplify the intentional focus high-quality OST programs put on the needs and interests of students. High-quality programs shared many of the following programmatic components: adult mentors; apprenticeships/stipends; community service; comprehensive/youth development services; experiential learning; high-quality staff/professional development; peer support networks; safe environment; student-centered activities. Findings from our analysis of the included evaluations also revealed commonalities in the structural factors of OST programs, specifically how the programs are “glued” together, funded, managed and implemented. High-quality programs shared many of the following structural components: city-wide leadership; collaboration with Post-Secondary Education Institutions; collaboration with Schools; fidelity to model; high-quality implementation; role of intermediaries.

Adult Mentors/Contact
Apprenticeships/stipends
Community Service
Comprehensive/YD services
Experiential learning
High quality staff/PD
Peer support networks
Safe Environment
Student Centered Activities

City-wide leadership
Collaboration with PSE
Collaboration with Schools
Fidelity to model
High Quality implementation
Role of Intermediaries

Part II – Program Summaries

Program Summaries are not included in this version due to their length.

Part III

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Overview of Outcomes

In conducting our review of evaluations of OST programs, AYPF found that OST programs were designed to affect youth across a broad spectrum of outcomes. This range of program outcomes is not surprising given the wide diversity of OST activities and programs. While many programs are designed to increase academic success or have a stated goal of improving academic performance, many other OST programs are designed to provide opportunities for youth to develop a range of skills and talents, expand their horizons, or prevent negative behaviors. Interestingly, even when OST programs are not intentionally designed to improve academic outcomes, they can have positive impacts on academic indicators, supporting the concept of positive youth development by creating supportive environments that enable youth to grow and flourish in a holistic manner.

Many OST programs have the goal of improving academic outcomes, and academic outcomes can be and are measured in a variety of ways, including school attendance, high school graduation and dropout rates, course grades, GPA, achievement test scores, school-related behaviors and attitudes, and college preparation. A two-year longitudinal *Study of Promising After-School Programs* indicated that students who participated in high-quality out-of-school time programs across two years demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores compared to nonparticipants who were routinely unsupervised after school hours (Vandell, Resiner & Pierce, 2007). Our research supports that finding that OST programs can positively impact academic outcomes especially when OST programs are aligned to students' needs and the school curriculum.

Out-of-school time programs can also impact career preparation, social and emotional development, and health and wellness outcomes of youth participants. As schools have increasingly focused on improving academic achievement and closing achievement gaps, OST programs that allow students to develop other skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are important for success have garnered much attention. Research indicates that investments in afterschool programs for youth are likely to have benefits that far outweigh the costs (Miller 2005), but the evaluations that we reviewed generally do not report on benefits to the community

Out-of-school time programs produce both short-term and long-term positive outcomes and do so not by chance, but rather by consciously working within a structure that supports high-quality student-centered programming. A positive correlation was also found between the frequency and duration of youth participation and successful outcomes, therefore raising the question of just how much is "enough" in order to impact positive outcomes. The review of the evaluations does not answer this question, but does shed light on the importance of frequent and ongoing youth participation.

We believe the outcomes described below provide further evidence for the need to include OST programming in any conversation on secondary school reform, college and career preparation and a comprehensive system of support for all students.

Academic Outcomes

Of the 23 evaluations included in the compendium, 15 included measurements of academic success. The indicators used to measure academic success varied throughout the evaluations. For example, 9 out of the 23 program evaluations specifically measured attendance rates, graduation rates, and/or dropout rates; 7 out of the 23 measured course grades, GPA and/or achievement test scores; 4 evaluations measured college preparation outcomes, including taking college preparation courses, persisting to a 3rd semester of college and other postsecondary enrollment rates. Additionally, 9 programs measured academic success related behaviors and attitudes, such as increased engagement in school, taking college preparation classes, and studying more. More often than not, programs that increased participants' school related behaviors and attitudes demonstrated an increase in other academic success outcomes, including increased attendance, GPA and achievement test scores.

School Attendance, Graduation, and Dropout Rates

Of the included program evaluations, 6 demonstrated positive outcomes in attendance, graduation, dropout rates, or a combination of the 3 outcomes. An increase in attendance, graduation and/or graduation rates was always accompanied by other positive academic outcomes. For example, participants who participated in the Woodcraft Rangers program improved or maintained their school attendance and also improved learning skills and attitudes, student engagement, academic performance, GPA and pro-social interests and behaviors. Similarly, participants in Chicago's After School Matters program missed fewer days of school and failed fewer courses than similar classmates. Of the 6 included studies that demonstrated positive outcomes in attendance dropout rates, or a combination of the 3 outcomes, 3 indicated that students who participated at the highest levels also had higher rates of graduation and lower dropout rates. In order to measure school attendance rates, an OST program must collaborate with a school and/or school system in order to receive access to attendance rates, graduation rates, and dropout rates. Strong collaboration between an OST provider and a school occurred in 5 out of the 6 programs that measured attendance, graduation and dropout rates.

Course Grades, GPA, Credit Accumulation, and Achievement Test Scores

A total of 11 program evaluations demonstrated positive effects on course grades, GPA, credit accumulation, and/or achievement test scores. Programs that provided a structured tutoring component as one of several program components in a program session oftentimes reported an increase in such academic indicators. Overall, the tutoring sessions were offered daily, did not last longer than one hour, and students were provided with literacy and math enrichment more often than homework help. For example, Citizen Schools provides a structured extended day program from 3:00-6:30pm Monday-Friday that incorporates 60-90 minutes of daily homework and studying time led by adult community volunteers. Participants in the Woodcraft Rangers program begin each afternoon with a homework clinic and then move into more active programming, such as sports, visual arts, and performing arts. Both Citizen Schools and Woodcraft Rangers deliberately build targeted reading, writing and math lessons and exercises into their programming. Beyond the program components of tutoring and academic enrichment, programs that indicated positive academic outcomes exhibited strong collaboration with the participants' schools and/or institutions for post-secondary education, and

programming was led by high quality staff who received on-going professional development and were able to monitor the progress of their student participants.

It is important to note that programs that did indicate positive academic outcomes, such as an increase in GPA scores or a decrease in courses failed, did not always explicitly provide programming with an academic component, such as tutoring or math enrichment. However, programs that collaborated with schools and/or post-secondary education institutions and provided active, student centered programming, such as apprenticeships or experiential internships oftentimes reported positive academic outcomes. For example, students who participated in After School Matters, a program that encourages high school students to explore their interests and provides hands-on internships in the arts, sports, technology, and communication, failed fewer courses than nonparticipants.

Academic Success Related Behaviors and Attitudes

A total of 9 program evaluations measured academic success related behaviors and attitudes. Of the 9 evaluations that measured academic success related behaviors and attitudes, 6 also showed an increase in other academic success outcomes, such as increased GPA or achievement test scores. Evaluated programs that measured levels of student engagement and other positive school related behaviors and attitudes did so in accordance to a logic model that students who exhibit positive school-related behaviors and attitudes, such as student engagement and interest in learning, studying and participation in school clubs, are better positioned for academic success. Many positive school-related behaviors are indicators of future academic success. Students who participated in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program missed fewer days of school, felt more competent about school work, and also showed modest gains in GPA scores. Similarly, participants in the Boys & Girls Clubs Gang Prevention and Intervention program demonstrated positive school behaviors, accompanied by increased academic achievement. Positive school-related behaviors can be measured successfully externally and internally through student surveys, teacher surveys, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Evaluators do not have to rely on secondary source data from school systems, which is one reason why many OST programs included outcomes of positive school-related behaviors and did not include academic outcomes measured through secondary data sources, such as attendance rates and standardized test scores.

College Preparation

A total of 3 evaluations measured college preparation outcomes, including taking college preparation courses, persisting to a 3rd semester of college and college and other postsecondary enrollment rates. Such programs demonstrated strong alignment with the participants' education system, collaboration with postsecondary institutions, and highly trained and qualified staff. Both the College Now and Upward Bound Math Science programs focused specifically on increasing minority academic achievement and college enrollment and to do so, both programs collaborated with local colleges and universities to offer college preparation courses.

Career Preparation

A total of 3 program evaluations specifically measured indicators of preparation for career success. A range of indicators were used by the programs for career success preparation outcomes. The Seeds to Success program findings, for example, indicate participant improvements in basic financial skills, workforce readiness skills, understanding of healthy lifestyle practices, utilizing resources, working with others, using information, understanding systems, and working with technology. Both the Summer Career Explorations Program and Urban Alliance provide students with internship opportunities and

mentoring. The Summer Career Explorations Program successfully achieved the short term outcomes of providing teenagers with jobs and the means to earn money and be productively engaged during their summertime school break, however the intermediate outcomes of exhibiting stronger orientation toward college, increase employment rates of participants after leaving the program and fostering a better attitude toward work or work readiness were not met. The Urban Alliance successfully increased basic, intermediate, and advanced “hard skills” (faxing, data entry, researching, taking notes) and generally increased “soft skills” (more fluid abilities that make a person successful in the work place including professionalism, communication, job competency and development of personal responsibility and goal setting), both of which are needed for career success. Such programs utilized experiential learning methods and capitalized on various resources, including supportive adult mentor teachers and internship providers in the surrounding community.

Social and Emotional Development

OST programs provide students with exposure to environments that encourage youth to develop social and emotional skills that will benefit them into adulthood, including the development of personal responsibility and goal setting, increased perceived life chances and hope for the future, and the development of quality relationships with family and friends. A total of 8 programs improved social and emotional development of program participants; 3 of the 8 programs improved the quality of their relationships with supportive adults, family and friends, to some degree. Programs that demonstrated positive outcomes in supportive adult relationships more often than not directly involved or partnered with adults and or parents in the programming. For example, the Middle School FAST program requires that participating families sign a consent form demonstrating willingness to participate, prior to youth participating. In addition, the core of the FAST program involves 10 weekly family meetings whose purpose is to strengthen bonds within the family and their community. Youth attend meetings for 14 weeks; they start meeting 4 weeks before parents join. Participants showed an increase in self-esteem, family-closeness, parental involvement in school and reduction in social isolation. In addition, youth showed improvements in classroom behavior.

With standards-based reform, traditional high schools are focusing more on academics and less on the development of other important skills, and some young people have few opportunities to develop and gain skills beyond what they learn in school. Fortunately, many young people are able to acquire new skills and knowledge and develop new interests and talents in the OST hours. Researchers have found that youth who participate in OST programs change positively with regard to behaviors, attitudes, and self-esteem. More specifically, OST programs are more likely to positively impact young people’s interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and reduce problem behaviors (AYPF, 2006). It has also been shown that “Some positive youth development outcomes, such as higher academic self-esteem, academic aspirations and improved classroom behavior, are preconditions that lead to academic achievement (AYPF, 2006; Russet et al., 2006).

Health and Wellness Outcomes

Participation in OST programs has been shown to increase the health and wellness of program participants. A total of 8 programs showed positive health and wellness outcomes. The included outcomes vary from knowledge and awareness, such as increased awareness of crime prevention and bullying prevention and increased knowledge about healthy lifestyle practices to preventative outcomes, such as teen pregnancy, drug and gang prevention. Some of the included programs produced preventative outcomes, such as the Children’s Aid Society Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Program. The

intent of the Carrera program is for teens to learn about sexual responsibility while developing goals and aspirations for life; teens participate in a range of activities from a Job Club, individual tutoring, self-expression, sexuality education, and mental health and medical services. Program participants demonstrated a decline in sexual activity and teenage pregnancy and had higher odds of condom and birth control use as well as increased odds of receiving good primary health care. Programs that demonstrated positive preventative and health and wellness outcomes maintained strong, supportive adult to student relationships. The nature of the supportive relationships varied throughout the programs, with some emphasizing one-on-one individualized attention between a mentor and a student or an internship leader and a student. Other programs emphasized strong supportive relationships between group leaders and students in similar age groups by ensuring staff were positive with the participants and highly qualified.

Lessons Learned

In reviewing the studies and evaluations, AYPF learned a number of important lessons that can benefit OST providers and policymakers interested in supporting OST programs and ensuring all students are prepared for college and career success in the 21st century. Some of these lessons are focused directly on programmatic factors; others are focused on how the structural factors that support OST programs can be improved. Programmatic lessons include the importance of intentional, student centered activities including apprenticeships; comprehensive, youth development services; experiential learning; a safe and structured environment; supportive adult and peer to peer relationships; and high quality staff with on-going professional development. For lessons concerning structural factors and systems of support, collaboration with post-secondary education institutions, schools, intermediary organizations and CBOs is discussed as well as high quality implementation.

Programmatic Lessons

AYPF's analysis of the evaluations highlights several strategies that have proven effective, particularly in ensuring middle- and low-achieving students succeed in OST programs. These strategies include: providing student-centered activities, comprehensive, youth development services, experiential learning, a safe and structured environment, supportive adult and peer-to-peer relationships, high quality staff and ongoing professional development.

Student-centered activities

Programs targeted towards middle and high school youth need to provide activities and services intentionally designed for adolescents. The purpose of the activities should always be grounded in the best interest of the students. Programming should incorporate knowledge about the students' academic and developmental levels and goals as well as their interests. Programs should assess the skill levels of participants when they enter a program, align programming to the students' skill level and needs and monitor student progress throughout their participation in the program. Additionally, the needs and interests of a 5th grader vary substantially from the needs and interests of a 9th grader, and programming should take this into account. Within a program, choices should be provided to meet the wide-array of needs and interests. To attract, retain, and support older youth, program leaders and staff must make a conscious effort to involve youth in the decision-making processes of the program and in the administration of programs as a way to help youth learn leadership skills and to increase the level of understanding of the talents the youth possess and areas for further development. Student-centered

activities that take into account the needs and interests of the students attract, retain, and support the academic and social development of students.

Comprehensive, youth development services

OST programs alone cannot meet all of the needs of every participant, however by targeting their programmatic goals and activities to meet a wider array of student needs, the provided comprehensive services, including nutritional services, health care, preventative services or college preparation, will further support the academic and social development of the student. Basic needs such as nutritious food and snacks should not be overlooked and extending program hours to later in the evening (11p.m. or midnight) can help keep young people engaged by offering a safe place for study or play. In developing comprehensive, youth development services, OST providers that serve older youth must be cognizant of their needs and help youth secure employment to earn money for personal or family needs or for college expenses.

Experiential learning

The learning that occurs outside of school should look different than the learning that occurs in a traditional classroom. Experiential learning offers youth employable skills and preparation for employment, it also offers youth an opportunity to discover new areas of interests, develop a wide-array of civic and social skills and even apply lessons learned during school hours to the “real world.” Experiential learning oftentimes encourages youth to collaborate with one another as well as learn from and alongside adults and experts in the field. Youth want to feel that their time is being used wisely, and experiential learning gives youth a tangible and practical way to develop academic and social developmental skills as well as opportunities to develop skills and attitudes that will contribute to career and college success. Success in the 21st century requires a portfolio of skills in various domains (e.g., civic, social, and employability skills), and many of these skills cannot be taught or are not being taught in school. OST must capitalize on the time they have with students and provide students opportunities to develop a portfolio of skills that are not being developed during school hours. OST programs and activities allow young people the chance to experience various learning environments by participating in community or volunteer service or paid work or serving as youth leaders for projects. Exposure to various learning environments can increase the engagement and interest levels of students in school and provide youth knowledge and access to career and college programs that would otherwise be unfamiliar with.

Safe and structured environment

It must not be forgotten that for any learning to occur within an OST program, youth must feel safe and supported. For many young people today, the world outside of the school walls can be a very dangerous place, and these same youth oftentimes have no other place to go than OST programs offered in their schools or communities. Most youth also thrive in a structured environment. Some successful OST programs provide highly-structured programming with clear expectations and follow a consistent schedule on the hour, other programs provide a structure that allows for more flexibility, yet program participants know what is expected of them and are held accountable to the expectations.

Supportive adult and peer-to-peer relationships

Within a safe and structured environment, the youth must be supported by caring adults who want the youth to succeed and will do everything within their power to ensure the success of the youth. Caring

and supportive adults also create an environment that facilitates cooperative and supportive peer-to-peer networks, which are especially important for older youth, who hold in high regard the advice and opinions of their peers.

High quality staff and ongoing professional development

In order to develop programming that meets student needs and interests, foster a safe and structured environment, and develop real connections with students, OST staff must be well trained and receive on-going professional development. Program leadership must intentionally acquire high-quality staff who are committed to and engaged with the program and provide an infrastructure that encourages staff development based on youth development principles and provides opportunities to acknowledge good work, support professional growth and address weaknesses. Successful programs ensure that the staff members have the skills to establish and maintain relationships with youth participants and the staff enjoy participating in activities and show care and concern for the students. Programs should also have appropriate evaluation procedures and train staff to reflect on program evaluations and implement changes and improvements based on the evaluation findings.

Structural and System-focused Lessons

OST programs need structural and systemic supports in order to be successful and sustained. Our analysis of the evaluations indicates that collaboration and having collaborative leadership, high quality implementation, and students who participated on a regular basis help lead to effective programs.

Collaboration

Collaboration across organizations and educational institutions increases communication between the various youth serving sectors and fosters an environment of shared accountability and cooperation. Successful collaborations promote the sharing of program facilities, curricula and professional development as well as crucial information about the student participants themselves, including their academic needs, personal interests, family history, and future aspirations. Oftentimes, CBOs and intermediary organizations have an expertise in one area, such as pregnancy prevention, that can compensate, supplement, or complement what is taught during the school day. CBOs and intermediary organizations also have knowledge of and access to funding streams which schools cannot tap and vice versa, therefore increasing the amount of funds available for youth development programming and the longevity of the program. Collaboration across organizations can also strengthen parental, family, and community involvement, allowing all entities serving our youth to learn from and support one another in the process, ultimately leading to more success for the student participants. Collaboration with schools can allow OST programs to better meet the academic needs of participants and prepare the students to behave better in school and have a more positive attitude towards school and learning. In addition, schools can share information about student reading levels, grades, and standardized test scores and OST programs can better target programming to support the in school learning of students.

Collaboration Facilitator

To ensure a successful collaboration between an OST provider and education and/or community partner, it is crucial that a highly skilled adult take on the role of facilitating communication between the entities. The collaboration facilitator should have the leadership and communication skills to establish a foundation of cooperation between the entities. The facilitator can help partners assess their needs and the needs of the students and develop strategies for sharing resources, including facilities and

professional development to better meet the needs of the students. The facilitator can help the entities share student data, student interests, and family history, which in turn can help programs better target their services to the needs and interests of the students. Of the program evaluations included in the compendium, 8 out of 23 specifically noted the role collaboration between youth serving agencies played in developing an infrastructure and programming that produces positive youth development outcomes.

High-Quality Implementation and Fidelity to Model

Implementers of OST programs need to pay attention to the quality of the program and the elements that lead to high quality programs. Enough research on high quality programs for older youth exists to point the way for program implementers. Program directors also need to take enough time to plan for the program and to hire the “right” staff. Programs should build formative evaluation into program design so that it becomes integrated with the regular work of staff and provides useful feedback that can lead to continuous improvements. When implementing a tested, existing model, it is equally important that program implementers follow the model as closely as possible and ensure that the program includes all key elements and is supported by well-trained staff.

Frequency and Duration of Participation

In reviewing the evaluation outcomes, program participants in the studied OST programs who regularly participated reported greater statistically significant positive outcomes than participants who participated sporadically or stayed for a short amount of time. (ASM and PSA evaluations are two very concrete examples of this – need to expand).

Need summary paragraph.

Policy Recommendations

As noted throughout this publication, young people need to develop a wide range of skills in the domains of college and career readiness,¹ social and emotional development, and healthy life styles for success. Developing these skills and behaviors results from a complex interplay of inputs and influences on young people in various settings and at various times. While students obviously learn many skills in school, the K-12 system is not the only or even preferred mechanism for teaching certain skills and knowledge. There are not enough hours in the school day to develop all the types of skills and behaviors needed for success in today's world, and most schools are not structured to provide opportunities for the development of such a wide range of skills and knowledge. With the advent of standards-based reform over the past two decades, more and more instruction has been focused on learning basic skills and improving academic performance for all students, which is necessary. But as a result, the time available for teaching and developing other types of knowledge and attributes has been reduced. Teachers and educators, because of their disciplinary focus, are generally not prepared to teach across wide domains of knowledge and skills, and such tasks have generally not been viewed as a critical part of their job. While the focus on improving school performance is needed, a great deal of school reform has neglected the youth who have already left school and who are on the verge of dropping out. Keeping youth engaged, in school, or involved in learning outside the traditional school system is a community responsibility, and draws upon many various youth providers.

Multiple resources exist in the community that supplement, support, enhance, and augment school-based learning and provide opportunities for skill development not envisioned by school and that also reach students who are at the margins of the K-12 system. Given that most middle and secondary schools were not designed with the end goal of helping youth gain the full range of skills, knowledge, and behaviors needed for success, rather their focus is primarily academic, it is only natural to consider how non school-based and community systems and programs can provide such skill development and engage youth in new learning approaches. As policymakers consider how to improve outcomes for youth, it is important that they look across the broad range of available resources and determine how all resources, and specifically OST programming, can contribute to a systemic and holistic approach to help young people succeed.

The following recommendations for policymakers cover the need to Create a Vision for a Comprehensive Learning System, Encourage Partnerships and Collaboration, Focus on Quality, Ensure Equity and Access, Improve Data Collection, Evaluation, and Research, and Sustainability.

Create a Vision for a Comprehensive Learning System

Since learning and development continue when students are out of the school building, policymakers and leaders need to fashion a vision for a comprehensive approach to how multiple systems, programs, resources, and providers prepare youth for college, careers, and civic engagement. This should include working with youth who are close to dropping out of school or who have already left high school as well.

¹ As noted earlier in this publication, being ready for college and careers means more than just developing academic skills, but also being exposed to quality guidance and counseling during middle and secondary schools so as to be in a position to set clear goals for postsecondary education and careers, having access to counseling on college financing, having the opportunity to develop 21st Century and employability skills, learning how to apply knowledge, and being exposed to real-world work through project-based learning, work-based learning, service learning, community services, internships, entrepreneurship, or apprenticeships. For some students, developing skills that result in an occupational certification are also a key part of their personal goals.

Out-of-school time learning opportunities are a critical component of this vision, but there are many other systems that can be integrated into a comprehensive vision, such as health and mental health systems. Policymakers need to spend some time thinking through what a comprehensive learning system looks like and provide clear descriptions to stakeholders and the public. One of the major challenges in education reform today is that parents and voters do not see the need to change the status quo to either reform high schools or provide vastly different and increased opportunities for skill development and ongoing learning for youth. Policymakers need to make the case that using all of resources of the community, including OST programs, is essential to prepare youth for postsecondary education, a family-wage career, and engaged and active citizens. Policymakers also need to acknowledge the importance of helping youth develop multiple skills, not just academic skills, by placing value on the attainment of career, 21st Century, and civic skills.

The overarching task of policymakers is to create a sustainable vision of a comprehensive learning system that draws on OST and other resources to build the public will for such a system, and to provide policy frameworks for supporting such work. As policymakers undertake this task of creating a vision of a comprehensive learning system, they need to:

- Consider how the goals of various programs can best be aligned and support them by providing a picture of how the system fits and works together;
- Determine where programs overlap in the provision of services and can potentially collaborate to share resources and expertise to reach more youth;
- Identify common outcomes and measures to which all programs and providers in the comprehensive learning system will be held accountable;
- Ensure that sufficient resources are available to develop capacity across and within systems to ensure high quality implementation of services;
- Ensure that all groups of youth have equal access to high quality services from various providers;
- Provide support for intermediary organizations to manage the work;
- Develop data systems to track youth as they move across programs/systems; and
- Prepare for sustainability of efforts.

Encourage Partnerships and Collaboration

One of the most important areas that policymakers can support is creating the conditions to allow programs to partner and collaborate. This means being proactive in encouraging collaboration, as well as removing existing barriers.

Collaboration - One of the key elements of a comprehensive learning system that uses OST programs is to encourage and support collaboration among various education and youth providers, including K-12, postsecondary education, publicly-funded programs supporting youth, community-based organizations, and employers. For example, as a condition of funding, policymakers could require that partnerships or collaboratives be created, or require the presence of a certain sector, such as employers, in a funded project. Policymakers could require that funding plans be approved in advance by other key partners or funding sources. Policymakers should review existing programs and determine where there are opportunities for programs to align, support, and complement each other, both in terms of how OST programs can be used to expand options for youth and how other programs can contribute to enhancing OST efforts. For example, policymakers could encourage programs like the federal TRIO or Gear up programs to partner more systematically with OST programs that have a strong focus on college access and success.

Provide Flexibility - Flexibility is key in creating and sustaining partnerships between schools and OST programs, as well as other providers of youth services. Policymakers can play a large role in ensuring that legislative and regulatory frameworks do not restrict collaboration and that active partnering and sharing is encouraged. Flexible policies can relate to funding, in terms of allowing a percentage of funding from one program to be allocated to another for a similar or supportive purpose; allowing programs to use common reporting forms or limit certain reports when partnering; allowing some flexibility across eligibility requirements to better serve youth in certain communities; permitting programs to use common performance targets or outcomes; and pooling funding to support innovative activities or structures, including intermediary organizations.

Use Intermediaries –Intermediary organizations that represent various interests, programs, and stakeholders are an excellent mechanism for pulling together various parties, providing leadership and vision, enabling collaborative work, building capacity across programs and systems, and often, raising funding. But intermediary organizations are rarely acknowledged in legislation or funding streams, and sometimes are not eligible for public monies, despite being mission-driven and collaborative, cross-system managers. As collaborating and partnering become more common, policies should recognize and support the role of intermediaries in facilitating and sustaining quality services, and when appropriate, intermediaries should be allowed to compete for funds or be eligible providers.

Focus on Quality

Repeatedly, research has demonstrated that the quality of program implementation and the quality of the individual OST program has an impact on positive youth outcomes. Because data is so consistent in this area, policymakers should take active steps to ensure that quality becomes a key driver of OST and youth policy.

Policymakers can ensure that OST programs are designed, implemented, and operated to high quality standards by providing sufficient resources for hiring strong, well-trained leaders and key staff, in supporting ongoing training and development for staff, building capacity of programs to meet the needs of youth, and collecting and using data and evaluation for ongoing program improvement. One key area that policymakers could support is to encourage and fund cross training of OST, education, and other youth-serving providers so that services can be collaborative and there is greater understanding across school based and non-school based staff.

Policymakers should also ensure that individual OST programs are based on research and build on the solid foundation that has been laid by many existing OST programs. For example, various assessments to measure program quality elements such as youth engagement, peer interaction, and supportive and safe environments have recently been developed to help OST programs improve their practice and increase youth outcomes. Policymakers can encourage the use of such quality assessments and share information on how these assessments lead to improved programming. Research is also quite clear on how OST programs need to differentiate their programming based on the age of participants. Funders should require OST programs to design programs to meet the specific needs and interests of various ages based on research. While policymakers can provide specific guidelines about effective program practices, they should not become so prescriptive as to limit programs from trying innovative and untested approaches.

The quality of programs can have an impact on the frequency and duration of youth participation in OST programs, but student motivation also plays a role. While well-designed, engaging, and safe OST

programs appear to draw students on a regular basis, students also have other family and personal challenges that may keep them from participating. Still, OST programs that ask for a commitment by the student and his/her family often have greater participation, resulting in greater outcomes. A question for policymakers is whether or not it is possible to hold programs accountable for student participation or motivation, and if so, how? Policies that encourage incentives for programs and/or students to increase participation could be explored, but it is equally important to consider at what level (federal, state, or local) it makes sense to implement such policies.

Ensure Equity and Access

All students should have access to high quality OST programs, but that is not always the case. Policymakers need to ensure that resources are distributed equitably throughout communities, based on need, and that youth in communities of need have access to high quality OST programs. In a period of declining resources, it will be important for policymakers to collect information on who is currently benefitting from OST programs and ensure that public dollars are directed to communities most in need or that lack adequate quality programs.

Policymakers need to constantly check to ensure that programs are serving the population for whom they are intended, and that over time the target population does not change. Policymakers should make special efforts to also ensure that certain groups of youth that get scant attention, such as youth with disabilities, Native American youth, or foster youth, have access to quality programs and are actively encouraged to take advantage of OST resources. Additionally, because these groups of students may have special needs, policymakers should ensure that there are not only OST programs available, but that they take into account strategies to best serve such youth. While OST programs may not be available in every neighborhood due to limited resources, collaborating or partnering with other youth-serving providers to include at least some OST learning might be an option.

Improve Data Collection, Evaluation, and Research

Data should drive decision-making. If policymakers do not have adequate data, they may make poorly-informed decisions or policies. As noted throughout this publication, many OST, youth, and education programs do not collect adequate data to inform program and policy considerations. Often the data is out-of-date, or lacks specificity, such as information on student demographics. Much of the data collected on student outcomes looks only at short-term outcomes, and does not track students over a longer period of time to determine ultimate outcomes, or the data systems only track students in one system and not cross-systems. There is a strong need to improve data collection efforts and help practitioners learn how to design rich data collection systems that will provide feedback to help continuously improve programs. This is true for the OST field, but for many education and youth-serving fields as well.

Policymakers should also support the development of data systems that measure more than just academic skills. If we believe that youth need to develop more than just academic skills, policymakers should indicate what other kinds of skills are important to measure, such as 21st Century skills, for example. The requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have structured the existing assessment and measurement systems on academic outcomes, with little attention paid to other types of skills and knowledge. While the information collected under NCLB has been key in improving academic performance, it has had little impact on improving the development of other types of skills, as they have not been measured or valued. Policymakers need to affirm the value of measuring more than

just academic skills and help think about how a comprehensive assessment system could be developed. Another aspect of data collection that needs policy guidance is a clarification of what data should be collected at what level and to what end, how various quantitative and qualitative skills can be measured, assist in the development of such assessments, and clarify who or what system (OST programs, schools, communities, or states, K-12, postsecondary) should provide the assessments. This is an issue that broadly impacts youth-serving programs, but clearly affects OST programs, as they are a key part of the comprehensive learning system.

Data systems should be longitudinal and follow students for a number of years, so that longer-term impacts can be measured. Creating data systems that span from K-12 to postsecondary education is challenging and can be expensive and time consuming, but is being tackled by a number of states. These states should actively engage other systems, such as OST, as they begin the development of these longitudinal data systems from the start, rather than adding them at a later point in time. Policymakers can help provide funding for the design of longitudinal data systems or help design prototypes that can be widely shared.

Policymakers should provide support to states and communities interested in exploring new ways of determining the overall effectiveness of the community interventions and how each system or program contributed to the outcome. As more and more collaboration and cross-system partnerships occur, using a common or shared accountability measurement makes sense. Policymakers can support these efforts by providing seed funding to convene the appropriate researchers and data collection experts across systems and to allow some innovative approaches to be tested. One example of setting common accountability measurements could be increasing student attendance and graduation rates. Cross-system data sharing would need to be developed to demonstrate how each program, such as an OST program, contributed to that outcome. Policymakers should intervene if barriers prevent data exchanges such as this.

This publication has also noted the need for more and improved evaluations of not only OST programs, but education and youth service programs. The lack of high quality and scientific evaluations should not be surprising, however, as most federal and state programs do not allow funds to be used for program evaluation, and most program staff are not trained in conducting evaluations or scientific research, or there is limited staff to carry out such activities. Policymakers can easily encourage program providers to conduct evaluations by allowing them to use a small percentage of funds to do so, and this should be permitted across all programs. Staff need training in how to design, administer, and analyze program evaluations and use the data as a tool for improvement, and this should be encouraged with the use of professional development dollars.

Research on effective OST programs has been quite consistent about the importance of quality programs and quality implementation. Policymakers should disseminate the findings from this research broadly through clearinghouses and other mechanisms, and ensure that any program guidance they distribute is based on research findings. Additional research?

Sustainability

Policymakers have a duty to consider how to sustain effective OST programs and to require grantees to plan for sustainability early in their grant funding cycle. While this is often stated, there are many programs that fall by the wayside as soon as public funding streams end. While public funding should never be the only funding source used for OST programs, policymakers can provide assistance to

programs to help prepare them for the end of a grant cycle. Policy can also break down barriers to coordination and collaboration of various funding streams, so that various providers can take advantage of facilities, equipment, or personnel from other systems, and they should encourage program evaluation as a means of ongoing improvement and effectiveness.

Closing.

Appendices