

# Detroit Out-of-School Time Leadership Forum

Detroit, Michigan  
March 9, 2018

## EVENT SUMMARY

The Detroit Out-of-School Time Leadership Forum provided a platform for citywide conversation on out-of-school time system building, the opportunity to engage with national experts, and generate ideas among local leaders to inform Detroit's strategic priorities for expanding afterschool and summer learning in the future.

### Welcome and Opening Remarks

*Tonya Allen, President and CEO, The Skillman Foundation*

*Sara Plachta Elliott, Executive Director, Youth Development Resource Center*

*Terry Whitfield, Program Officer, The Skillman Foundation*

Sara Plachta Elliot and Terry Whitfield began the day by sharing their excitement about having so many local leaders in the room committed to working better serving children in Detroit with an out-of-school time (OST) system. The organizers acknowledged the immense amount of collective knowledge and experience of those in attendance and challenged participants to follow three key values for the day: 1) to leave their "baggage" at the door; 2) to dwell in the space of possibilities; and 3) to not try, but rather do.

Tonya Allen shared her deep gratitude for everyone's uncompromising commitment to children. She expressed that if people do not think of the children being served in OST as "our kids" and make them a collective priority, then the city will not do well by them. Allen said that there may be doubts about the ability of the city to create a dedicated funding source for OST programming, or there might be concerns about the time it might take for that dedicated funding to become a reality, but she believes that given the commitment of the city's youth development workers, it will happen. Allen exhorted the audience by saying, "We must work urgently, yet be patient. We must get smarter, wiser, and more strategic, until we win!"

### Presentation: Growing Together, Learning Together

*Priscilla Little, Consultant, Forum for Youth Investment*

Priscilla Little framed her presentation around the research provided in The Wallace Foundation publication [Growing Together, Learning Together: What Cities Have Discovered About Building Afterschool Systems](#), and explored four key questions 1) Why afterschool matters?; 2) Why take a systems approach?; 3) What is an afterschool system?; and 4) What are some key elements that support afterschool systems?

#### **Why Afterschool Matters?**

Little shared that research confirms what many practitioners already know from experience, that quality afterschool programs provide students safe places to grow, learn, and develop key skills. In Detroit,

through the Youth Development Resource Center (YDRC), some providers have come together to track and measure outcomes, using the Achieve, Connect, Thrive (ACT) framework developed by Boston Afterschool & Beyond.

**Why Take a Systems Approach?**

Two persistent problems exist that demand a systems approach: lack of access and quality. Nationally, low-income children are much less likely to participate in afterschool experiences like clubs, sports, and activities than their wealthier peers, and between 1997-2012 the “extracurricular gap” between poor and non-poor kids has widened. Additionally, not all afterschool programs are of quality. A 2007 meta-analysis of 73 evaluations of afterschool programs found that afterschool programs on average had positive effects on attitudes towards school, social behavior, school grades, achievement tests, and reduced problem behaviors from aggression. That being said, programs without specific quality features had no effect.

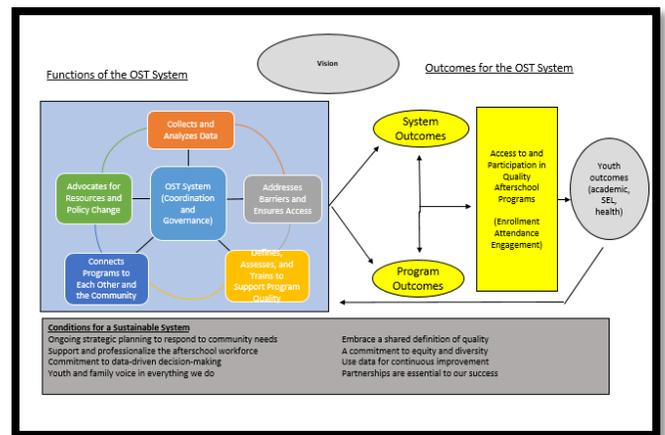
Little stated that there is a history of fragmentation among OST providers as afterschool programming has always been voluntary. In 2003, five pioneering cities, with support from funders, set out to create more coordinated afterschool systems. In 2010, the RAND Corporation found that coordination in those cities did work at increasing access, quality, data-based decision making, and sustainability. In 2013, researchers at FHI 360 found that 77 cities were engaged in coordinated afterschool system building, which was more than half of the cities surveyed. In those cities with coordinated systems, the median number of agencies and organizations participating was twenty.

**What is an Afterschool System?**

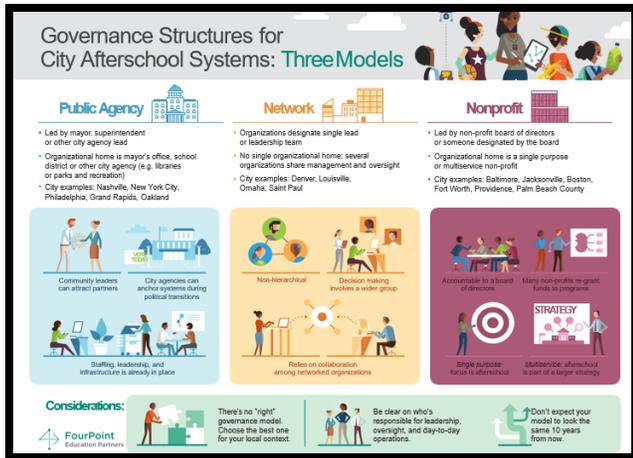
Little showed a diagram that demonstrates the functions of an afterschool system. She highlighted that an OST system can help with the coordination of responsibilities such as advocating for resources and policy change and collecting and analyzing data. This coordination results in both system and program outcomes, which eventually leads to youth outcomes.

**What are Some Key Elements that Support Afterschool Systems?**

Little stated that there are four elements necessary for system success: leadership, coordination, effective use of data, and quality. This finding is based on a scan of forty reports published since 2008 on OST system building and perspectives from practitioners, synthesized in the *Growing Together, Learning Together* report.



To see the full presentation, please visit: <http://www.aypf.org/resources/detroit-ost-leadership-forum/>



Little explained that strong systems require leaders across sectors, because collaboration, shared responsibility, and relationship building at multiple levels allows OST systems to remain sustainable even when city leadership changes. Little also emphasized that while coordination is necessary, there is “no one size fits all.” Cities have taken a variety of approaches, and three common governance structures include leadership offered by a public agency, a network, or by a non-profit organization.

To see the full presentation, please visit: <http://www.avpf.org/resources/detroit-ost-leadership-forum/>

To effectively use data, Little explained it is a matter of not only considering what technology and vendor to use for collection, analysis, and management of the data, but also which stakeholders need to be involved and which processes need to be developed and normalized. Cities must decide what data they want to collect and why they need a data system, before they begin collection. Little emphasized, “You need a data strategy before a data solution.” Little believes that data use is an area for growth in Detroit. YDRC and the United Way have partnered to work with an information management system to establish a summer learning program locator. Establishment of a program locator is often the first step as cities begin collecting data. They can then expand to collection of information on participation, quality, and youth outcomes.

Quality was the last key element discussed, and Little stated that she believes this is an area of strength in Detroit. She explained that often times the goal of strengthening the quality of programming is what attracts providers to engage in systems work in cities. Cities can approach quality through a cycle of assessing standards and performance measures, planning for improvement based on performance feedback, and improving through technical assistance, coaching, and training. Little highlighted the [Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality](#), located in Ypsilanti, Michigan as a resource available to assist with improving program quality.

To close, Little encouraged the attendees to reach out to the many city-wide afterschool systems, intermediaries, research entities, and other organizations that have worked on these issues for decades for resources, advice, and guidance as they continue to expand their OST system.

## Key Takeaways

- OST programs provide students safe places to grow, learn, and develop key skills.
- Lack of access and low quality programs demand a coordinated systems approach to OST programming.
- Coordinated OST systems result in systemic, programmatic, and youth outcomes.
- Four elements are necessary for OST system success: leadership, coordination, effective use of data, and quality.

## Panel: National Voices

*Mary Ellen Caron, CEO, Afterschool Matters, Chicago, Illinois*

*Karen Pittman, President and CEO, Forum for Youth Investment*

*Chris Smith, President and Executive Director, Boston After School and Beyond*

*Jessica Donner, Executive Director, Every Hour Counts (Moderator)*

Donner served as moderator for the session, briefly introducing each panelist, posing questions for discussion, and facilitating audience question and answer. Donner is Executive Director of [Every Hour Counts](#), a coalition of more than twenty city-wide organizations that increase access to quality learning opportunities through coordinating the work of providers, public agencies, funders, and schools. Of note, the Skillman Foundation, YDRC, After School Matters, and Boston After School & Beyond are members of Every Hour Counts.

As a national leader in the field of youth development, Karen Pittman offered framing remarks about improving youth outcomes. Pittman began by challenging attendees to think critically about what language is used and goals are set. While commitments to equality, access, and completion are important, systemic change requires a more specific focus on equity, quality, and readiness. Rather than supporting kids to “beat the odds,” youth development workers must commit to “changing the odds” for kids, which requires systems change. Pittman highlighted four key elements to building an OST system: effectiveness, scale, sustainability, and equity.

Pittman delved deeper into sustainability and equity. She emphasized that because students enter into systems with different circumstances and experiencing different barriers due to structural inequality, providing all students with the same or equal support or resources does not necessarily provide the same opportunities. A focus on equity aims to distribute resources to “level the playing field” among all youth. Pittman highlighted that equity must not only focus on reducing barriers, but also be coupled with opportunity and access. Youth must have the opportunity to engage in their education, work and civic life, but also feel they have the agency and readiness to take advantage of those opportunities.

Pittman described that while you can have a robust coordinated system with an established structure and plan, often reaching your goals can take longer than planned, and an essential part of a conversation about sustainability is funding. She highlighted the importance of finding various sources of funding, because funding for OST systems can come through many channels such as education, workforce development, and early childhood, at the federal, state, and local levels. Funding can be very fragmented, and so once it is found, the various sources must be aligned to meet the system needs. If gaps remain, it may mean the system needs to generate funding itself, such as a dedicated funding stream. Pittman also said that you must also evaluate how funds are used, and she closed by reminding everyone that OST programs are a critical part of a much larger complex education pipeline from cradle to career and thus must be connected to the K-12 system.

Next, Chris Smith provided insight into OST systems work in Boston. [Boston After School & Beyond](#) is an intermediary that facilitates partnerships across various sectors to support out-of-school time learning for students in the city. Boston After School & Beyond works with 225 programs serving 18,000 children. Smith described a system as when you have more than two entities that are working towards a common goal. When starting to think about OST system building, he highlighted you must start with the “why,” before delving into the details of what, how, who, where, and when. He encouraged considering what

multiple entities can accomplish together, because providers ultimately reach a limit on their individual capacity, and a more coordinated system will be needed.

Smith shared that approximately ten years ago, Boston found itself with a lot of funding for programming but there was a lack of trust and relationships across stakeholders and sectors. To address these issues, Boston Afterschool & Beyond harnessed collective power and provided common language but made it clear it values decentralization and individual program expertise. Boston After School & Beyond created the Achieve, Connect, Thrive (ACT) framework that created a structure for what skills matter and how those skills can be measured. The intermediary was also able to help coordinate a data strategy, to learn what was currently working in programs, and help bring those best practices to scale in the city. Smith closed with a sports analogy, explaining that their success as an intermediary was “not in how many points they scored, but rather in how many assists they made” to help programs reach their full potential.

Next, Mary Ellen Caron shared her expertise working with [Afterschool Matters](#) and OST in Chicago. She stated that while Chicago and Boston have approached their OST systems differently, she has learned so much from other cities, and encourages those in Detroit to continue to converse with cities trying different models. Caron explained that Afterschool Matters would be characterized within the non-profit governance structure provided by Priscilla Little in the earlier presentation, coordinating organizations and individual instructors to provide school year and summer OST programming for high school students in Chicago. Afterschool Matters provides apprenticeships and sometimes stipends to students who engage in their programming.

Caron also described the key elements that were necessary in the development of Afterschool Matters. First, Caron explained the importance of having a “champion.” Afterschool Matters began due to the commitment of the then mayor’s wife to providing OST opportunities for youth around the city. Second, early funders were essential to their growth. Though sustaining those initial funders and understanding their needs and priorities was important, it was equally important to garner the financial support and expertise of local universities that have experience fundraising. Additionally, Chicago had a large number of community-based organizations that provided support services to youth in and outside of school, and

## Key Takeaways

### **Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment**

- Rather than supporting kids to “beat the odds,” youth development workers must commit to “changing the odds” for kids through systems change.
- Four key elements in building a successful OST system are effectiveness, scale, sustainability, and equity.
- Given that students enter OST systems with varied experiences and barriers, there must be a focus on equity to not only reduce barriers, but also ensure opportunity, access, and readiness for all students.
- Funding is an essential part of sustainability. Sustainable funding requires multiple funding sources, alignment of those varied sources, evaluation of how those funds are used, and often generation of dedicated funding.

### **Chris Smith, Boston After School & Beyond**

- When engaging in the early stages of OST system building, stakeholders must consider why they are developing a system, before delving in to the details of what, how, who, where and when. Stakeholders should consider what they could accomplish together that they do not have the capacity to do alone.
- As an intermediary, Boston After School & Beyond aided in systems coordination through development of common language and a data strategy.

### **Mary Ellen Caron, Afterschool Matters, Chicago**

- Several key elements were necessary in the development and growth of Afterschool Matters in Chicago. These elements included having a “champion” to advocate for the importance of OST, sustaining initial funding sources while also developing new funding relationships with the local universities, leveraging the capacity of community-based organizations, and prioritizing data collection.

leveraging that capacity was important to the growth of Afterschool Matters. In building capacity, Chicago also prioritized data collection, from participation, to surveys, to quality assessments, and trends over time. Through collaboration with many partners from museums, to parks, to libraries, Afterschool Matters and their students became essential partners and sources of workforce capacity for various sectors in the city.

### ***Moderated Discussion and Audience Q&A***

*What are strategies for creating partnerships between the school district and OST system?*

Pittman responded that while partnerships with the district might start as transactional, they can evolve into more strategic partnerships. Smith shared that Boston After School & Beyond leveraged their capacity for providing summer learning opportunities, something the district could not do alone. Similarly, Caron shared that while Chicago Public Schools was cutting sports, arts, and summer learning programs, Afterschool Matters was able to partner with the schools and support those opportunities for children.

*How do you build public and political will? What are strategies for bringing more people to the “leadership table?”*

Smith shared the importance of thinking what sector, population, or structure each stakeholder represents, and ensuring diversity among those stakeholders. He also said that when Boston After School & Beyond went before the state legislature, they benefitted by representing all the OST providers as a unified sector. Caron mentioned that building their advocacy and sharing their success was important to building political will. Afterschool Matters tracked student stories through programs, compiled “report cards” of quality, and made sure to share with city elected officials what the programs were providing in their given ward.

*Any advice on how to address Detroit’s lack of transportation, which serves as a barrier to access of OST programs?*

Pittman shared that cities have identified short and long-term solutions to this problem. One potential short-term solution is bringing programming to the school, and long-term solutions involve partnering with the Department of Transportation to improve routes and access to passes.

*What are strategies for ensuring program resources are distributed throughout the city and understanding where students do or do not have access to OST services?*

Smith explained that Boston has developed an opportunity index, in which contracts are distributed to programs based on the need of the schools and communities they serve. Caron shared that in collaboration with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, they were able to create a map of where programs were located in the city. Pittman highlighted that in creating data systems to track where programs are available, OST systems should be aware of the other extracurricular opportunities that students are involved in and how participation in those activities can be included as well.

## Keynote Presentation

*Dr. Nikolai Vitti, General Superintendent, Detroit Public Schools Community District*

Dr. Nikolai Vitti began by thanking those in attendance for their hard work and dedication to the children of Detroit. While the Detroit Public Schools Community District has been under emergency management for over a decade, Vitti shared that the district is now restoring itself and set on building a more aligned and coherent way to consistently support each child. Vitti emphasized the need to end the fragmentation among OST programming, which might require reevaluating what responsibilities certain providers have. He explained that while the district does not necessarily need to drive the OST system building given the access to research, resources, and expertise that other entities have, it does need to be involved. To better support students, OST providers and the district must work together to ensure programming is connected and aligned with what students are learning the classroom. Vitti also emphasized that OST programs are great supplements to school systems, as they can fill gaps and provide the support and experiences that the school system cannot.

## Breakout Sessions: Leadership and Coordination, Funding, Quality, and Data

Following the keynote presentation, attendees split into four groups to dig deeper into specific issues related to system building and then reported their discussion to the larger group. Each group was provided framing questions and led by a facilitator.

### ***Leadership and Coordination***

The group began their discussion reflecting upon the question that Chris Smith had posed earlier in the day, “What can you do together, that you can’t accomplish alone?” The group discussed how great partnerships include an alignment of goals, clear expectations, and shared accountability. Attendees shared that the environment of survival in the city has limited growth in the OST sector, and some shared they thought a central governing body that could manage resources and communication across providers would be beneficial. The group also discussed that sustainable funding and an established governance infrastructure were important to system growth, yet recognized that the infrastructure could change and evolve over time. Additionally, attendees reinforced the importance of partnerships between public and private entities.

The group also brainstormed the role of city leadership. There was consensus that the mayor and superintendent need to be a part of the decision-making process and use their power to eliminate barriers for students and programs. The group reflected that providers, given their experience in the field, could provide necessary information to city leadership so they can make informed decisions. The group also discussed how leadership could be transactional or transformational, and that given turnover among city leadership, training is important to ensure leadership has the knowledge and skills they need to support an OST system.

To close, the group brainstormed what improved leadership and coordination could do for children in Detroit. Some shared that it would allow education providers to assess every child’s needs, what their interests are, and how resources can be maximized to support them. Others shared it meant increased exposure to various opportunities for youth, a comprehensive transportation system, shared goals, increased capacity and professional development, and youth involvement in decision-making in OST system development.

## ***Funding***

The group began by discussing the policy challenges to securing a dedicated funding stream. Given that there are state-level barriers to this approach, the group agreed that multiple layers of support and outreach were necessary to create collective action around this funding source. This included discussing the importance of dedicated funding with parents and youth and creating a unified front among intermediary organizations, the city, and schools to create more momentum at the state level.

The group also brainstormed how to get people to care about OST funding, and attendees suggested creating opportunities for stakeholders and policymakers to understand the experiences a child had in OST programming and sharing data in a way that demonstrates the return on investment of these programs. The group agreed that for student impact, sustained long-term funding was necessary. To close, the group discussed what an OST system would look like if fully funded, and attendees shared the importance of youth and family voice in decision-making processes, a clear focus on the continuum of services and development from cradle to career, a focus on equity, and partnership with the school district.

## ***Quality***

Two key issues emerged while discussing quality: defining quality and allocating resources to ensure access to quality programming. Attendees listed various ways in which they define quality in their programs:

- Authentic instruction from adults who are experts in their fields and care about youth
- Intentional, youth-focused programming
- Understanding student need and helping students meet those needs through connections with other services (i.e. housing, mental health, etc.)
- Programming that helps student thrive, not just survive

While there were different interpretations of quality based on design and goals of the program, the group discussed how YDRC has developed quality standards and training. The group reflected that setting common quality outcomes across the OST system requires leadership to set the agenda and maintain a clear focus. The group also discussed possible metrics for measuring quality and the consequences that come with those metrics.

The group also reflected that programs are engaged in duplicative work. While attendees discussed that programs can provide similar services, those services must be distributed across schools and neighborhoods to ensure all children have access. Often times the city will focus on specific neighborhoods and while many programs and services will gravitate to that neighborhood, they will not be coordinated. The group questioned the ability for long-term student and community outcomes if services are not coordinated and if resources should be targeted to the neediest students or more broadly to students needing only some services to achieve positive outcomes.

To close, the group reflected that providers must be involved in the decision-making process and clearly communicate to funders what they can do with the money they are given and how the funders can support them in doing their work more effectively.

## **Data**

The group began their discussion with how data is currently collected. A few providers shared that they collected student information and data in various ways, including online, in paper, registration forms, and surveys. Given that data collection in these programs is often not centralized in one system, reporting outcomes can be difficult. The group discussed different technology and data systems that programs and cities use to collect and analyze data, including City Span and Salesforce. Various members of the group emphasized the importance of working with a consultant to ensure the system is created to best serve the provider needs. Others shared their experiences working in other cities working to create a unified OST data system. One person shared that once a unified system is created, it takes time to train providers and other staff how to input data correctly and efficiently. A conversation about why data collection is important is needed at all levels of the OST system. Additionally, the group discussed how assessing current strategies is important, to ensure the OST system is maximizing its collective knowledge and not “recreating the wheel.”

The group also contemplated what data should be collected. The group agreed data systems must consider not only what information the provider needs, but also what is required by their funder. Attendees questioned how to create a unified system that allows for customization by different providers, while not being overly complicated or tedious. While data collection for funders is important, providers must be transparent with funders about their data collection capacity and also view data collection as a means to continuous improvement rather than just a requirement.

## Closing Reflections

*David McGhee, Program Director, The Skillman Foundation*

To conclude the day, David McGhee offered his thanks to attendees for their time and commitment to the children of Detroit. On behalf of The Skillman Foundation he shared, “We thank you, we appreciate you, we support you.” He reminded the audience that out-of-school time environments truly allow youth to engage and learn from one another and become the best people they can be. The Foundation’s goal is to enable providers to make those environments available for children. McGhee shared that the Foundation is not merely driven by their written strategy, but also by the fact that Detroit has the highest poverty rate in the country along with high rates of chronic absenteeism and parental unemployment. He believes that if other cities can generate millions of dollars for OST services, Detroit can too. Once the city can generate public dedicated funding, private philanthropy will follow.