# ENGAGING OLDER YOUTH

*Program and City-Level Strategies to Support
Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time*

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APRIL 2010

Harvard Family
Research Project

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# Executive Summary

## Overview

Out-of-school time (OST) programs represent a vital opportunity and resource for learning and development for children and youth. There is growing recognition that OST is important not just for elementary school students, whose parents need supervision for their children when they are not in school, but also for middle and high school youth, whose participation in OST programs can help keep them connected to positive role models and engaged in their education at a time when many are beginning to disengage from schools.

Further, evidence suggests that once older youth have enrolled in a program, meaningful and sustained participation is a key factor in attaining positive outcomes. However, despite the well-documented benefits of OST participation for older youth, their participation wanes with age. OST programs struggle with how to recruit and retain older youth and continue to look for guidance on how to do so more effectively. There are also real discrepancies in access to and participation in OST programs by location and socioeconomic status. Predictably, youth from lower-income families and neighborhoods have fewer OST opportunities than their more privileged peers, and many low-income and minority families report unmet need for high-quality and accessible programming. The lack of opportunity for some youth is especially problematic given our nation's increasing dropout rates. If, as research suggests, OST programs have the potential to support graduation and postsecondary success, then better access to quality OST programs may have the potential to help address educational inequalities, particularly in urban areas.

In response to the evidence pointing to the benefits of out-of-school time, coupled with the lack of access in many urban neighborhoods, many cities are creating citywide infrastructures to support networks of OST programs, with one goal being to support participation. With support from The Wallace Foundation and other private and public dollars, these nascent OST city initia-

tives are attempting to build the capacity of programs to deliver better-quality programming by engaging in one or more of the following efforts: supporting professional development for providers, providing funding, implementing quality improvement efforts, establishing data tracking systems, and connecting OST programs to one another and to other community institutions. All of these efforts can directly or indirectly support improved access to and sustained participation in OST programs.

Given the potential of city-level OST initiatives to support participation, and against the national backdrop of inequitable access to quality OST programs for older youth from disadvantaged communities, The Wallace Foundation commissioned this research study. To understand how to promote sustained participation in OST programs, this study examined the program characteristics—both program practices and structural features—associated with high participation and retention that were employed by OST programs, primarily serving disadvantaged youth, in six cities that have worked toward building OST initiatives. In particular, this report addresses how OST programs keep middle and high school youth engaged over time (i.e., the duration of participation) and how the supports that city initiatives provide can help foster youth participation, with the assumption that programs can have a potentially greater impact if they are able to work with these youth over an extended period of time.

We examined three key questions:

1. What are the characteristics of high-participation OST programs that support sustained participation as measured by retention?
2. How do these characteristics differ for middle school and high school youth?
3. What strategies are city initiatives implementing to support access to programs and sustained participation, and how do OST programs perceive the usefulness of city-level strategies for achieving their participation goals?

## Research Strategy and Methods

Using mixed-methods research strategies, the study design brought together both survey data from a large sample of programs and in-depth interview data. This design allowed for both breadth and depth in our understanding of critical issues related to access to and sustained participation in OST programs for older youth. We collected and integrated these qualitative and quantitative data and used an iterative analytic process, weaving together findings from both sets of data to confirm, augment, and challenge our understanding of program characteristics—both program practices and structural features—and support from city initiatives.

The six cities in the study—Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, Providence, San Francisco, and Washington, DC—were chosen because they have an intermediary or government agency coordinating funding and providing services for OST programs, a management information system (MIS) or database to keep track of attendance and participation, extensive programming aimed at middle and high school youth, and a focus on low-income youth and distressed neighborhoods. The initiatives in these cities all provide a set of supports to OST programs in the community, and they are making efforts to raise the profile and increase understanding of out-of-school time in their cities; they are also all relatively new, having been founded between 2004 and 2007.

After we identified the six cities for inclusion in the study, we then identified a large number of programs in these cities with high participation rates among middle and high school youth, based primarily on MIS data gathered by the city-level OST initiatives, and administered a survey to program leaders, asking about program activities and features, staffing, youth participants, family involvement, use of data, recruitment and orientation practices, practices for fostering and supporting engagement, and involvement with the OST initiative in the city. Out of the sample of programs that returned a survey, we selected a smaller subset of programs to interview in depth. The survey sample had an average program-level participation rate of 70 percent, and the interview sample had an average program-level participation rate of 79 percent. We also selected a group of city-level respondents to be interviewed for the study.

Altogether, we analyzed data from 198 program surveys, 28 program interviews, and 47 city-level respondents. Our quantitative analysis focused on the program practices and structural features associated with retention (i.e., duration of participation) of youth in programs. To identify characteristics that were significantly associated with higher rates of retention among older youth participants, we first examined which of the numerous individual program practices and structural features from the survey data were significantly more common in high-retention programs than in lower-retention programs. For this study, we define high retention as retention of 50 percent or more of a program's youth participants for 12 months or more. We then conducted a regression analysis of retention to isolate which of the many competing practices and features were uniquely associated with the variation in retention rates, even when taking into account other practices and features.

Analysis of our interviews, in addition to document review, enabled us both to identify program practices that respondents cited as relating to greater retention and to create a picture of what it takes in programs and at the city level to keep youth engaged in programs over time, using a grounded theory approach. We focused on the major themes present across programs related to the successes and challenges of achieving high participation and retention rates and what program practices or features were linked to these efforts. We also analyzed program data to understand how programs participate in OST initiatives. Throughout the analysis, we cross-walked findings from the interviews and the survey against each other to refine our understanding of participation.

## Major Research Findings

**Five program characteristics (two program practices and three structural features) were identified that set apart the programs that were the most successful in supporting high retention:**

- Providing many leadership opportunities to youth in the programs
- Having staff keep informed in several ways about youth outside programs

- Being community-based
- Enrolling 100 or more youth
- Holding regular staff meetings

These practices and features explained 38 percent of the variance in retention. Our analyses indicate that among the group of programs serving older youth, the ones that achieve relatively high rates of retention emphasize youth leadership and outperform other OST programs in their efforts to stay connected with youth; they are also more likely to be larger community-based organizations that give staff members regular opportunities to meet about their programs.

**There is an additional set of retention and recruitment practices that, while not statistically related to retention when we account for other factors, were consistently reported as being important in engaging older youth. High-retention programs often employ these practices.**

**Retention practices:** fostering a sense of community through connections to program staff and peers, providing developmentally appropriate activities and incentives, and engaging families.

**Recruitment practices:** using peers and staff as recruiters, using organizational relationships, and matching program attributes to youth needs.

These additional strategies may be associated with engagement and/or participation frequency; more research is needed.

**The study found that the same five program features and strategies were significant in understanding how programs retained middle and high school youth, yet program leaders reported that there were also important differences geared toward meeting the needs of each age group.**

The factors that were quantitatively linked to retention were the same across the two age groups—keeping informed about youth participants' lives, providing many leadership opportunities, and the presence of certain structural features. However, our interviews with the 28 high-participation programs allowed us to better understand how these and other practices manifested themselves differently when working with middle or high school youth. Successful middle school programs give

youth opportunities to interact with peers, create structures and routines to make youth feel comfortable and safe, and take advantage of their participants' willingness to try new things, particularly through peer interaction. High school programs focus their programming more on providing formal and informal opportunities to explore and prepare for college and other postgraduation plans; giving youth more responsibility through job-like programming, apprenticeships, and mentoring; and offering the content and the particular skills older teens want to learn.

**City-level OST initiatives employ a set of common recruitment and retention supports, but it is less clear that these efforts have made a difference in programs' abilities to recruit or retain older youth.**

City initiatives provide a set of services aimed at increasing OST participation broadly rather than solely for older youth. These supports include:

- Engaging in citywide recruitment efforts
- Coordinating information about programs across the city and helping programs network
- Collecting and using data on OST programs
- Supporting quality improvement efforts
- Providing professional development and technical assistance to programs

They were also beginning to foster relationships with school districts and to work with families on a citywide basis. Based on city-level respondents' reports, these efforts may be increasing recruitment and participation at the city level.

The data collected for this study, however, provided little evidence that accessing these city-level supports (which were deemed useful by the programs surveyed) was directly related to the retention rates of individual programs. Helping programs to network, providing training in youth engagement, and helping with evaluation were three of the supports used by the greatest number of programs surveyed. Both high- and lower-retention programs, however, reported similar patterns of use of these and many other supports that they were asked about on the survey. In two cases where there were differences, it was the lower-retention programs that were more likely to use the supports.

In addition, programs reported that being part of a city-level initiative created new challenges having to do with data management, program competition, and tying participation numbers to quality within a high-stakes funding environment.

## Implications

Our findings can help programs move toward a more nuanced approach to recruiting and retaining older youth and help cities understand their role in supporting participation. In addition, these findings have implications for future investment and policy decisions about OST programming for older youth. Therefore, we offer a set of implications aimed at key decision makers—city leaders, funders, and others—whose goal is to continue to improve access to and participation in OST programs as part of their overall efforts to support learning and development and to create pathways of opportunity for older youth.

**The program practices distinguishing programs that achieve high rates of retention among older youth from those that do not can help guide the actions of program directors and city leaders as they try to improve participation within a context of limited resources.**

Our findings about the two practices that set high-retention programs apart—providing many leadership opportunities to youth in the programs and having staff members keep informed about youth outside programs in several ways—can give other programs an idea of where to direct scarce resources. Because we know these practices support retention, city initiatives can target professional development and technical assistance efforts to ensure that these practices are implemented effectively.

The other practices that high-retention programs use, even though they did not prove to be significant in the regression analysis, warrant further attention. Although we do not know conclusively whether these practices promote retention in other settings, we do know that they were reported by the programs in our study (both on the survey and in interviews) as being part of an overall "participation package."

**Cities should consider offering a variety of specialized activities for high school youth.**

Choice is an important program component and a key feature of youth development, but it seems to matter in different ways for middle school and high school programs. Our interviews with program staff suggested that youth become more focused in their interests as they move into high school, which often means that they are in more specialized or single-focus programs. As a result, while activity choice within programs is developmentally appropriate for middle and high school students, high school students may also benefit from choice across a variety of more specialized programs. Cities can work toward this objective either by providing programs with funding to add specialized activities or by creating a variety of specialized OST opportunities for high school youth.

**OST programs' attention to developmental changes can support continuing youth engagement in OST programs.**

Understanding developmental growth can help programs retain youth longer as well as support program participants' transition from middle school to high school. High-retention high school program providers reported that their participants want programming to help them meet concrete goals, such as taking the SAT. Middle school programs reported that, particularly around eighth grade, youth stop attending because they want a program that feels "older." OST programs can use this finding as an opportunity to create programming for eighth and possibly ninth graders that includes more responsibility and skills aimed at having a successful ninth-grade year. Cities can support these efforts by bringing OST providers and school staff together to create curricula for transition programs and establish a team approach to the transition. By supporting youth in transition from middle to high school, this collaborative effort could lower the dropout rates for particular schools.

**Family engagement matters for older youth participation.**

Program and city-level respondents alike clearly understand and value family engagement as a strategy to recruit and retain older youth, but are challenged as to how to implement effective family engagement strategies. Further, though family engagement practices were not

statistically related to retention, high-retention programs in this study reported using more strategies to engage families than did lower-retention programs. Our findings have implications for city-level professional development efforts, which could be designed to include training on working with families. They also have implications for recruitment strategies, which should include reaching out to families in a variety of ways to persuade them of the value of OST participation for older youth.

**Supporting school–program partnerships can help recruitment efforts.**

Initiatives are in a strong position to influence and advocate for partnerships between school and district leaders and OST program leaders. They can increase youth access to programs by actively supporting the establishment and development of these partnerships. The stronger the partnerships between programs and schools, the more energy they can invest in targeted recruitment fairs and strategic marketing efforts during and outside of the school day. City-level initiatives can support partnerships not only by linking and connecting schools with OST providers, but also by helping programs and schools develop mutually beneficial goals and expectations; streamlined tools for data sharing; and clear, two-way channels of communication regarding students.

**Resources for organizational capacity are important to support participation.**

Our findings suggest that high-retention programs have strong organizational capacity and sound program management. These programs' staff members have time to go the extra mile, attend meetings and plan programming, network with other providers and schools, and attend professional development opportunities. In fact, many of the programs selected for our in-depth study were supported by large OST intermediaries (like Beacon initiatives and Boys & Girls Clubs) that provide this kind of capacity building. These findings suggest that investments in direct service alone are necessary but not sufficient to improve retention and that resources should be allocated to sufficiently support organizational development, including resources to support the finding that regular staff meetings matter for retention.

**Improved data-based decisions can improve participation.**

Cities use data in multiple ways to support participation, including data about location of and access to programs, where underserved youth live, participation rates, and quality across the initiatives. Overall, programs reported that the city-level supports that enabled them to obtain and use information were helpful for improving recruitment and retention; they also reported challenges, however, related to data collection and use that cities need to address. Initiatives can work, for example, to ensure that data collection and databases are supporting programs' work and that programs are spending their time managing data in ways that are helpful for participation and are not sapping organizational resources. City initiatives can support programs' understanding and use of participation data in order to improve recruitment and retention. The next step in the coordination of data is to link OST data to other data systems, including those of schools, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of participation and outcomes across all the supports, including schools, available to youth in the city.

**City-level initiatives should work with programs for older youth to learn how to better support retention goals.**

All of the cities in our study employ city-level supports to improve access to and sustained participation in OST programs; few of these strategies, however, appeared targeted toward the participation of *older* youth in particular. Rather, the strategies were part of cities' overall initiative-building efforts to support the quality and sustainability of OST programs. Although cities reported using strategies that directly addressed recruitment, such as social marketing, most of the strategies they employed addressed retention only indirectly. Further, none of these strategies supported high-retention programs' participation goals in a statistically significant way. Therefore, applying what we have learned about the high-retention programs in our study—and with the understanding that recruitment and retention are two sides of the same coin—it is important for cities to strengthen their recruitment and retention efforts, finding out from programs what is needed to promote the sustained participation of older youth.

# Introduction

# Introduction

Out-of-school time (OST) programs represent a vital opportunity and resource for learning and development. There is growing recognition that OST is important not just for elementary school students, whose parents need supervision for their children when they are not in school, but also for middle and high school youth,[i] whose participation in OST programs can help keep them connected to positive role models and engaged in their education at a time when many are beginning to disengage from schools.[1]

The benefits of OST participation for older youth are well documented, with research indicating that participation in well-implemented OST programs and activities has the potential to support postsecondary success and a healthy adulthood. Participation is associated with a range of academic and learning-related outcomes, including improved academic achievement and graduation rates and higher rates of school attendance.[2] OST participation has also been correlated with positive feelings toward school and improvement in school belonging, particularly for the oldest youth.[3] Finally, OST participation bolsters social, career, and civic skills for older youth through team-building work, the development of strong relationships with adults and peers, and involvement in "prosocial" activities.[4]

But once older youth have enrolled in OST programs, *meaningful* and *sustained* participation is a key factor in attaining positive outcomes.[5] Research suggests that when youth are engaged in programs in meaningful ways, they are likely to learn more, experience better developmental outcomes, and stay in programs longer.[6] While few data are available on exactly how much participation is needed for youth to reap the benefits of OST programs, researchers and practitioners do have a sense that older youth need exposure to a range of healthy environments, including OST programs, to gain the skills necessary for a productive adulthood; duration of participation may be a critical factor in attaining positive outcomes.[7]

Despite the findings linking OST participation to positive outcomes, programs still struggle with how to attract and engage older youth.[8] Historically, adolescent participation in OST programs has been relatively low compared with that of elementary school-aged youth.[9] For example, of the youth who participate in afterschool programs, only 18 percent are in middle school and 12 percent in high school.[10]

Participation of older youth in OST programs plummets for a number of reasons. Adolescents have many options for how they spend their time outside of school and do not necessarily have to be involved in programs for afterschool care. Older youth have needs that are quite different from those of younger children, and many programs are ill equipped to handle developmental differences. Older youth might need to take on family responsibilities like child care, might have jobs to help family finances, or might prefer to hang out with friends.[11] Older youth, particularly those at risk of becoming disconnected from school, might not want to spend any more time in the school building than they have to.[12] All of these factors have implications for how to structure programs for older youth to best meet their developmental needs.

There are also real discrepancies in access to and participation in OST programs by location and socioeconomic status.[13] Predictably, youth from lower-income families and neighborhoods have fewer OST opportunities than their more privileged peers, and many low-income and minority families report unmet need for high-quality and accessible programming.[14] The lack of opportunity for some youth is especially problematic given our nation's rising dropout rates. If, as research suggests, OST programs have the potential to support graduation and postsecondary success, then better access to quality OST programs may have the potential

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i   Throughout the report, "youth," "older youth," and "adolescent" are used to refer to middle and high school-aged youth.

to help address educational inequalities, particularly in urban areas.

In response to the evidence pointing to the benefits of out-of-school time, coupled with the lack of access in many urban neighborhoods, many cities are creating citywide infrastructures to support networks of OST programs, with one goal being to support participation. The infrastructures across cities vary: Some take the form of OST partnerships or funding collaboratives, while others consist of departments and nonprofit intermediaries dedicated to supporting youth organizations, their staff, and the youth in the programs. In this report, we use the term "initiative" to refer to efforts to create these city-level infrastructures for OST. With support from The Wallace Foundation and other private and public dollars, these nascent OST city initiatives are attempting to build the capacity of programs to deliver better-quality programming by engaging in one or more of the following efforts: supporting professional development for providers, providing funding, implementing quality improvement efforts, establishing data-tracking systems, and connecting OST programs to one another and to other community institutions.

## Research Purpose and Questions

Given the potential of city-level OST initiatives to support participation, and against the national backdrop of concern about access to the benefits of quality OST programs for older youth from disadvantaged communities, The Wallace Foundation commissioned the research study reported here. To understand how to engage older youth in meaningful ways in OST programs, this study examined the program characteristics—both program practices and structural features—associated with high participation and retention in OST programs primarily serving disadvantaged youth in six cities that have worked toward building OST initiatives.[ii] In particular, this report addresses how OST programs keep middle and high school youth engaged over time (i.e., the duration of participation) and how the supports that city

initiatives provide can help foster youth participation, with the assumption that programs can have a potentially greater impact if they are able to work with these youth over an extended period of time.

We examined three key questions:

1. What are the characteristics of high-participation OST programs that support sustained participation as measured by retention?
2. How do these characteristics differ for middle school and high school youth?
3. What strategies are city initiatives implementing to support access to programs and sustained participation, and how do OST programs perceive the usefulness of city-level strategies for achieving their participation goals?

## Contributions of the Research Study

This study builds on and expands the knowledge base about older youth participation in several important ways. First, while many studies have been conducted on promising retention strategies (by this report's authors and others), most of these have been based on a small sample of handpicked programs. This study examines the program characteristics (both program practices and structural features) of almost 200 OST programs across six diverse cities, as well as a smaller subset of programs chosen for in-depth study, in the context of a mixed-methods research design (see Chapter 1 for a description of this design). Second, while many studies recently have examined participation of older youth as a whole—middle *and* high school—our study compares and contrasts the program practices that are effective for *each* of these age groups. Given the profound developmental differences between middle school- and high school-aged youth, it is not surprising that a "one-size-fits-all" strategy does not work well. Our study points to the need for programs to take a more nuanced developmental approach to working with older youth. Finally, there is emerging knowledge, supported by The Wallace Foundation and others, on developing citywide OST initiatives, but no studies have attempted to understand the role these initiatives play in improving access to

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ii   As described in Chapter 1, "high participation" was defined using each city's management information system (MIS).

and sustained participation in individual OST programs. This study begins to explore this important topic.

As this study demonstrates, there is a set of program practices and structural features that distinguish programs that attain high rates of retention among older youth from programs that do not: They are likely to be community-based programs that enroll a larger number of youth, offer a greater number of leadership opportunities, have more ways to keep staff informed about participants, and hold regular staff meetings to discuss program-related issues. Although we report on what city initiatives indicate they are doing to support access and sustained participation, we did not find any empirical association between city-level participation supports and higher rates of long-term retention. One reason may be that the six city initiatives examined in this report are relatively young (in existence 5 years or fewer). Another possibility is that the strategies of OST initiatives examined in this study affect other key areas of program success, such as enrollment rates, that were not the focus of this report.

## Structure of the Report

Chapter 1 describes our mixed-methods research strategy, including information on sample selection and data collection and analysis. The next three chapters integrate our qualitative and quantitative findings to address our three research questions. Chapter 2 presents findings on the program characteristics of high-retention programs, as well as other commonly used program practices for sustained participation, which together illustrate how to meaningfully engage older youth in OST programs. Chapter 3 examines the differences in OST programming for middle and high school youth that correspond to developmental changes. Chapter 4 draws on information collected from our city-level respondents to present data on city-level participation strategies; it then uses interview and survey data to report on how programs perceive the value of city initiatives in supporting program participation goals. Chapter 5 concludes the report with implications of our results for future OST programming and OST initiative-building efforts.

# Research Methods and Overview

# Research Methods and Overview

Using mixed-methods research strategies, the study design brought together both survey data from a large sample of programs and in-depth interview data. This design allowed for both breadth and depth in our understanding of critical issues related to access to and sustained participation in OST programs for older youth. We collected and integrated qualitative and quantitative data and used an iterative analytic process, weaving together findings from both sets of data to confirm, augment, and challenge our understanding of program characteristics—both program practices and structural features—and support from city initiatives. This chapter describes our mixed-methods approach, including city selection, data collection activities, program sample selection and characteristics, and analysis.

## City Selection

To understand how program participation may be affected by city initiatives' supports, we selected our six sites—Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, Providence, San Francisco, and Washington, DC—because they all have

- An intermediary or government agency coordinating funding and providing services for OST programs
- A management information system (MIS) or database to keep track of attendance and participation
- Extensive programming aimed at middle and high school youth
- A focus on low-income youth and distressed neighborhoods

All of the cities in this study are contending with issues affecting urban areas, including issues related to high poverty rates. Providence's child poverty rate (36.3 percent), for instance, is twice that of the United States as a whole, while Cincinnati is among the 10 U.S. cities with the lowest median household income.[15] The cities'

diversity provides interesting points of comparison and contrast (see Table 1.1). Their population sizes range from fewer than 1 million to more than 8 million, while high school graduation rates vary from 46 percent to 68 percent. San Francisco, interestingly, has the lowest percentage of youth in any large city in the United States, which presents its own set of challenges for participation.[16]

The six selected initiatives all provide a set of supports to OST providers in the community, and they are making efforts to raise the profile and increase understanding of out-of-school time in their cities; these efforts will be discussed in Chapter 4. (See Appendix A for descriptions of cities and their OST initiatives.) The OST initiatives in each city are profiled in Table 1.2. They are all relatively new, having been founded between 2004 and 2007, and they are coordinated by different types of organizations—both nonprofit intermediaries and government agencies.

## Data Collection

Five main sources of data were used to develop the findings in the report:

1. **MIS participation data.** Each city selected for inclusion in this study provided, at a minimum, individual-level attendance data from its respective MIS to document, program by program within its initiative, participation rates over the 2007–2008 school year. In addition, each city provided demographic information on participants (most commonly, ethnicity/race, gender, and age or grade level) so that we could calculate approximate participation rates for middle and high school youth separately. There was variability in how these data were recorded by each city and transmitted to us. The similarities and differences and how we worked with each data set to calculate participation rates are described more fully in Appendix D.

TABLE 1.1
## Overview of Cities

| CITY | Population* | School Enrollment** | Children in Poverty* | High School Graduation Rate*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chicago | 2,725,206 | 467,174 | 30.7% | 49.6% |
| Cincinnati | 299,577 | 46,674 | 40.3% | 45.6% |
| New York City | 8,308,163 | 1,392,232 | 27.4% | 49.9% |
| Providence | 169,635 | 28,614 | 36.3% | 60.3% |
| San Francisco | 798,176 | 76,281 | 11.6% | 67.8% |
| Washington, DC | 588,373 | 80,094 | 27.0% | 48.8% |

* U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 American Community Survey.
** Population enrolled in K–12th grades. Data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 American Community Survey.
*** EPE Research Center *Diplomas Count 2009* mapping tool.

TABLE 1.2
## City OST Initiatives

| CITY | Initiative | Coordinating Body | Year Started | Children and Youth Served* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chicago | Out-of-School Time (OST) Project | Chicago Department of Family & Support Services (FSS) with After School Matters, Chicago Public Schools, The Chicago Park District, and The Chicago Public Library | 2006 | Over 175,000 children and youth served in 2008–2009 |
| Cincinnati | CincyAfterSchool | YMCA of Greater Cincinnati | 2004 | 3,896 children and youth served in 2008–2009 |
| New York City | Out-of-School Time (OST) Initiative | NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) | 2005 | Over 78,000 children and youth served in 2006–2007 |
| Providence | AfterZones | Providence After School Alliance (PASA) | 2004 | Over 1,600 middle school students served annually |
| San Francisco | Afterschool for All (AFA) Initiative | SF Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF) and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) | 2005 | 27,608 children and youth served in 2008–2009 |
| Washington, DC | Project My Time** | Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (DC Trust)*** | 2007 | 1,600 middle school students served in 2009 |

*Approximate number of youth served; data furnished by initiatives. The Chicago number is the total served by all five partners. The San Francisco number is the total funded slots for youth aged 6–13.
**Since data collection, Project My Time has transitioned to the DC Public Schools.
***Founded in 1999.

2. **Online program survey.** Selected programs within each city (see "Sample Selection" for selection procedures) were asked to complete an online program survey. The survey was designed to generate information about program activities and features, staffing, youth participants, family involvement, use of data, recruitment and orientation practices, practices for fostering and supporting engagement, and involvement with the OST initiative in the city.

3. **Site visits to each city.** In-person interviews were conducted with OST program leaders at 28 selected programs and with 47 city-level respondents. The interviews with program leaders covered program activities and structure, the youth who participate, recruitment practices and challenges, attendance issues, retention practices and challenges, developmental issues for older youth, and experience in an OST initiative. The interviews with city-level respondents addressed their role in the city OST initiative, how the initiative supports recruitment and retention, partnerships to support OST programs, data and evaluation, and city contexts for OST.

4. **Document review.** Documents provided to us during our site visits and gathered via online searches were reviewed to supplement our understanding of the city initiatives and of how programs were working to recruit and retain older youth.

5. **Community of Practice.**[iii] The Community of Practice enabled us to vet and expand on the ideas coming from the survey and interviews. It comprised teams of three or four individuals from 12 cities—the 6 research sites and 6 other cities working on city-level support for OST—as well as consultants and representatives from national organizations. The group met six times over the course of the study to discuss themes related to participation and emerging findings (see

Appendix B for more information about the Community of Practice and a list of members).

Additionally, a thorough literature review of OST participation for older youth as well as a review of the emerging literature on OST systems deepened our understanding of the developmental needs of middle and high school youth and helped us develop a theoretical lens to guide our instrument development, analysis, and interpretation of findings.

## Sample Selection

We used a funnel approach to select our samples: After we identified the six cities for inclusion in the study, we then identified a large number of programs in these cities with high participation rates among middle and high school youth based on city-level MIS data, and administered a survey to program leaders. Out of the sample of programs that returned a survey, we selected a smaller subset of programs to interview in depth.[iv] Thus we have two program samples in this study: a survey sample and an interview sample. We also selected a group of city-level respondents to be interviewed for the study (see Appendix C). This section of the chapter describes our sampling strategies; Appendix D provides more detailed information on how we developed our survey samples and on the characteristics of programs that responded to our survey.

### Program survey sample

To generate the sample of programs to complete our online survey, we used data from each city's OST management information system to calculate average participation rates for each program in the initiative. In general, we calculated average program participation rates as the proportion of program sessions youth attended, averaged across all youth attending the program.[v] For example, a youth who comes to half the

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iii  A Community of Practice is an intentional, focused, and voluntary group whose members come together around a common interest or problem to share knowledge, find solutions, improve performance, and discuss and test the transferability and scaling of solutions and innovations. The Community of Practice convened regularly to discuss topics important to the study and contributed to the overall framing of the study and to our understanding of specific recruitment and retention strategies.

iv  A few interviewed programs were chosen based on recommendations and reputation.

v  Some cities track enrollment and exit dates for individuals, allowing for more precise participation rates to be calculated; others do not

sessions offered would have a participation rate of 50 percent; if a second youth has a 100 percent participation rate (attending all the sessions offered), the *program's* average participation rate across both youth participants would be 75 percent. (See Appendix E for more detailed information on calculations.)

After the MIS data were analyzed, programs with a participation rate of at least 44 percent were selected for inclusion in the survey. [vi] This cutoff allowed us to identify a large number of programs within each city that had a range of success at engaging older youth. In order to detect the differences between more successful programs and less successful programs, we wanted a sample with both strong and moderate older-youth participation. Because the literature already suggests a set of practices that seem associated with engaging older youth, we decided not to include programs with poor participation rates; we thought we would learn less from these programs.[vii] Our goal was to select approximately 50 programs per city that met the minimum participation criterion of at least 44 percent. In some cities, this meant choosing all the programs that met the criterion;

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track this information, and therefore we needed to make estimations differently. When a program served both middle and high school youth, we calculated the participation rates for the two groups separately. We then asked the program respondents to think about either the middle or the high school youth they serve when responding to the survey questions, depending on which group met the minimum participation level. When both age groups met the minimum level, we asked the respondent to focus on one or the other age group to get a similar representation of both middle and high school programs.

vi   Because Cincinnati's initiative has fewer programs for older youth than the other initiatives in this study, we used this participation rate cutoff where data were available and developed a reputational sample for the rest of the survey and interview sample.

vii   Our goal in selecting programs was to include a sample with a great enough range in participation rates to allow us to explore staff practices and program features that correlate with higher retention rates. Given that programs with low participation rates may have a host of organizational and infrastructure issues that may be relevant to low participation generally (rather than to participation of older youth specifically), we wanted to be careful that the lessons we generated from the data collection and analysis would be particular to understanding programs' effectiveness in attracting older youth and not limited by general program weaknesses such as poor quality or uneven programming. Thus the programs we selected did not include the very worst performers on participation rates, but rather the more average programs.

in cities in which there were more than 50 programs that met the criterion, we sampled from all the programs that met the criterion. This process identified 346 programs from the MIS data that were included in the online survey portion of the study. We received a total of **198 completed program surveys** (or 57 percent of those surveyed), which constituted our survey sample for quantitative analysis.

## Interviewed program sample

Results from the survey data guided in part the selection of **28 programs across the six cities** for more in-depth study (see Appendix F for descriptions of these programs). Criteria for the qualitative program sample included an MIS participation rate of 60 percent or higher, geographic distribution across the city, a mix of program activities and goals, and service to primarily low-income youth as defined by percentage of free or reduced-priced lunch participants. We also examined retention rates to ensure that we included some programs with high retention. Program lists for each city were vetted with leaders of the city OST initiatives, who suggested additional programs for the sample based on these programs' reputation for participation and engaging activities.[viii]

The interviewed program sample includes 18 school-based and 10 community-based programs, 14 of which focus on middle school, 8 on high school, and 6 on a combination of the two. Examples of program content areas include jewelry making, music, theater, college prep, law education, and a soccer and writing program.

## City-level respondent sample

To understand the role of city OST initiatives in middle and high school youth participation, we interviewed **47 city-level respondents** who represented a range of

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viii   When describing data from the interview sample, we refer in most cases to the programs' high participation rates because we do not have retention information from all of them. Some of the cases are not high-retention programs but were selected because they had high participation and were interesting along another dimension, such as the use of stipends or interactions with families.

TABLE 1.3

## MIS Participation Rates by Sample

| | Full-city Database Sample | | | Survey Sample* | | | Interview Sample** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Middle school* j=4 n=330 | *High school* j=3 n=649 | *Overall* j=4 n=979 | *Middle school* j=4 n=72 | *High school* j=3 n=52 | *Overall* j=4 n=124 | *Middle school* j=3 n=9 | *High school* j=3 n=8 | *Overall* j=4 n=17 |
| Program-level average participation rate across all programs | 54% | 70% | 65% | 70% | 71% | 70% | 79% | 79% | 79% |

Source: City MIS database daily attendance data provided by the four cities with relatively comparable and complete data. The numbers for the survey and interview samples reported on this table are smaller than for the full sample because they do not include the surveys and interviews from the cities that were excluded from this presentation of the combined participation rates. See footnote ix.

Notes: j=number of cities; n=number of programs across all cities. Descriptive data include MIS data provided by four cities. Program-level values reflect the average across all participants within each program. City-level values are presented in Appendix D and were calculated by taking the average across all programs within each city and then taking the mean of the city-level averages.

*Six programs that completed surveys did not provide MIS participation data.

**One interview site did not provide MIS participation data.

city-level stakeholders, including lead agency representatives; MIS developers; people responsible for quality improvement and professional development efforts at the city level; heads of large community-based organizations; representatives from parks, recreational facilities, and libraries; and mayoral staff. These respondents were selected in consultation with the lead agencies of each city's initiative.

## Program Sample Descriptions

Table 1.3 displays the participation rates based on the overall combined MIS data,[ix] the full program sample ("Survey Sample"), and the subset of 28 programs that took part in our in-depth qualitative study ("Interview Sample").

Table 1.3 indicates that the participation rates from the full MIS database are relatively high (65 percent).

Because programs were selected to receive a survey only if they met a minimum criterion of 44 percent participation, the average for the survey sample is higher (70 percent). The interview sample is representative of programs that have even higher rates of participation, so the average rate across that sample of programs is still higher (79 percent). The average participation rates for the high school youth within programs are similar to those for the middle school youth within programs in both the survey and interview samples; however, in the full database, high school youth have a higher participation rate. More descriptive information on the participation rates for each of the samples is presented in Appendix D.

Table 1.4 describes other program characteristics of the survey sample and the interview sample. As the table indicates, the two samples are similar along most of the dimensions, including age of participants, when they operate, whether or not they have been operating 5 or more years, and their service area. One difference stands out: A greater proportion of the interviewed programs are school-based.

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ix  The table does not include data from New York City or Cincinnati. The participation calculations in New York City were not comparable to those of the other cities; because the bulk of the programs surveyed from Cincinnati were selected based on nominations, participation data were often not available.

TABLE 1.4
## Program Characteristics

| CHARACTERISTICS | Survey Sample n=198 | Interview Sample n=28 |
|---|---|---|
| School-based | 34% | 46% |
| Serves 100 or More Youth | 47% | 52% |
| Age of Participants | | |
| Serves elementary school and older students | 39% | 42% |
| Serves only middle school students | 29% | 31% |
| Serves middle school and high school students | 13% | 12% |
| Serves only high school students | 12% | 12% |
| Serves high school and post-high school students | 6% | 4% |
| Number of Years Program in Operation | | |
| 1–2 | 18% | 32% |
| 3–4 | 22% | 12% |
| 5+ | 60% | 56% |
| Operates School-year Only | 40% | 42% |
| Open 5+ Days per Week | 61% | 69% |
| Only Program in Its Area with Its Particular Focus | 26% | 23% |

Source: Program surveys.

## Youth Served

Through our interviews we learned that the youth attending the programs we studied in depth are in schools and neighborhoods with high rates of violence, crime, and gang activity, and with few resources for youth services and programs. Many of these youth must constantly navigate these issues in their neighborhoods, making OST a low priority for some and a much-needed refuge for others.

Table 1.5 provides a summary of demographic information on the youth from both samples. One common feature across the programs in this study (in both the survey sample and the interview sample) is that participating youth are struggling with poverty. Across surveyed programs, an average of 79 percent of participants were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch;

the proportion for the interview sample was 87 percent.

On average, more than 90 percent of youth participants in the survey sample are non-White. Programs serve a mix of boys and girls; an average of 52 percent of total participants in the survey sample are female. Only 4 percent of programs serve girls exclusively; 2 percent serve only boys. The rates are similar for the interview sample.

In the survey sample, an average of 25 percent of youth participants were estimated to attend other OST programs, based on staff responses. On average, almost a quarter (24 percent) of youth have siblings attending the same program.

Programs serve as many as 6,400 youth annually, but only 10 programs serve 1,000 or more youth annually. The median number of youth served annually is 90.

**TABLE 1.5**
## Youth Served

|  | Survey Sample n=198 | Interview Sample n=28 |
|---|---|---|
| % Eligible for Free Lunch | 79% | 87% |
| Race or Ethnicity |  |  |
| African American | 49% | 57% |
| Latino/a or Hispanic | 27% | 21% |
| Asian | 10% | 10% |
| White | 9% | 6% |
| Mixed race | 4% | 4% |
| Native American | <1% | <1% |
| Other | 1% | 1% |
| % Girls Served | 52% | 51% |
| % Attending Other OST Activities | 25% | 24% |
| % with Siblings in Program | 24% | 32% |

Source: Program surveys.

## Analysis

### Calculating retention

Our quantitative analysis focused on the program practices and structural features associated with *retention* (duration of participation) of youth in programs. Retention was selected as the main outcome of interest, rather than intensity (number of hours per week) of participation, for both theoretical and pragmatic reasons. First, prior work on the effects of OST programs on older youth suggests that they reap benefits—particularly those associated with meaningful relationships with staff and peers—through participation over a longer period of time rather than through intense participation over a short period of time.[17] Second, the data on intensity gathered via the cities' MIS were not all comparable, whereas the survey questions were asked in the same way across all the programs (see Appendix D for more explanation).

Each program's retention rate was calculated based on respondents' answers to a series of questions on the survey. Respondents indicated the proportion of their participants who remained in the program for 3, 6, 12, 18, and 24 months or longer. Percentages for youth coming for 12, 18, or 24 or more months were summed to indicate the proportion of youth in the program who were retained for 12 months or longer.

Retention rates for both the survey and interview samples are presented in Table 1.6. As the table shows, in the survey sample, on average approximately a third of youth (34 percent) were retained for 12 months or more. By design, the average retention rate is higher for the interview sample (43 percent) because we wanted to ensure that we learned through our interviews with staff about practices used to increase retention; thus retention rate was one of the variables we considered when selecting programs to be included in the interview sample. The table also shows the proportion of programs within each sample that reported that 50 percent or more of the older youth served were retained for 12 months or longer. Although the results presented in Table 1.3 indicate that the average rate of intensity of participation for high school youth was found to be similar to that of middle school youth across the two samples, as Table 1.6 shows, the average rates of retention are significantly and substantially higher for high school youth in the programs in both samples compared with those of middle school youth.

The variation in retention rates reflects in part the nature of how city initiatives are set up. In at least two of the cities in the sample (Providence and Chicago), programming for older youth consists of sets of shorter, more intensive programs and activities that older youth would only be expected to attend over a short period of time (e.g., activities in the Providence AfterZones or a session of Afterschool Matters), but they might attend multiple sessions over the course of a year.

### Quantitative analysis

To identify characteristics that were significantly associated with higher rates of retention among older youth participants, we used a two-step process.

TABLE 1.6

## Program Retention Rates by Sample

| | Survey Sample | | | Interview Sample | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Middle school* *j=6* *n=103* | *High school* *j=5* *n=72* | *Overall\** *j=6* *n=176* | *Middle school* *j=5* *n=15* | *High school* *j=4* *n=8* | *Overall* *j=6* *n=23* |
| Program-level average rate of youth retained 12 or more months across all programs | 22% | 52% | 34% | 32% | 64% | 43% |
| % of programs that retain at least 50% of participants for 12 months or longer ("high retention") | 24% | 61% | 40% | 40% | 75% | 52% |

Source: Program surveys.

Note: j=number of cities; n=number of programs across all cities.

*Sample size of middle school and high school programs do not sum to overall sample size due to missing data on age-group focus.

First, we examined which of the numerous individual program practices and structural features from the survey data were significantly more common in high-retention programs than in lower-retention programs (see Appendix G for the usage rates).

Next, we conducted a regression analysis of retention including those practices and features identified in step one. Regression analysis allowed us to isolate which of the many competing practices and features are uniquely associated with the variation in retention rates, even when taking into account other practices and features. Results of regression analyses also provide information on the relative contribution of each factor, above and beyond the contribution of other factors, in explaining retention (see Appendix E for a fuller description of the regression analyses). Chapter 2 describes the findings of the regression analyses in detail.

### Qualitative analysis

Analysis of our interviews and document review enabled us both to identify program practices that respondents cited as relating to greater retention and to create a picture of what it takes in programs and at the city level to keep youth engaged in programs over time, using a grounded-theory approach.[18] We developed our codes

and coding structure based on what our review of the literature and early findings indicated were important elements to include in a study of participation and retention and then refined our codes over time.[x]

For our analysis of program interviews, we focused on the major themes present across programs related to the successes and challenges of achieving high participation and retention rates and what program practices or features were linked to these efforts. We also analyzed program data to understand how programs participate in OST initiatives. For our analysis of city-level interviews, we created detailed city-level descriptions of the initiatives and identified their major efforts related to participation as well as the challenges they face in improving access and participation.

Throughout the analysis, we cross-walked findings from the interviews and the survey against each other to refine our understanding. Sometimes both the regression analysis and the qualitative analysis agreed, as was the case with the importance of leadership opportunities for older youth. Some themes appeared in the qualitative data that would not be found in the quantitative data

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x  We used NVivo to organize the qualitative data.

because there was no corresponding survey question. In other cases, the findings disagreed. For example, the regression analysis did not identify developmentally appropriate incentives as being important to retention, whereas the bivariate analysis and interview data did. By digging deeper into the interview data, we discovered that incentives can be important and that different types of incentives matter in different ways to older youth in urban areas. Thus, the mixed-methods approach ultimately strengthened our understanding of participation among older youth and what it takes for programs to keep youth engaged over time and for cities to support programs' efforts.

## Limitations of the Study

This study has several strengths. First, it is based on a much larger survey sample than many prior OST studies. Second, cross-referencing our qualitative and quantitative findings has greatly strengthened what is known about how programs can retain older youth. However, there are limitations to what we can conclude based on our methodology.

Our sample selection for both cities and programs was guided in large part by our interest in the contributions of OST city-level initiatives; programs that were not included in these initiatives were also not included in the study (with a few exceptions). Our conclusions thus apply most directly to the population of programs nested within our sample of six city-level OST initiatives. Generalization to other OST programs outside of our study should be done with some caution.

In addition, our study was bounded by examining participation and retention from program- and city-level perspectives. Interviews with youth would have given us a richer and more personal understanding of sustained participation, but that was beyond the scope of the study.

Also noteworthy is the program lens through which the study examined factors related to youth participation and retention. We know that older youth likely participate in a range of different OST programs over the course of a year, a month, and even a week, and there may be a separate set of factors that predicts sustained

participation in OST experiences more generally. Nevertheless, the data presented here are informative about program practices and features related to sustained participation within a single program.

Finally, we do not have data on program-level participation before the launch of the city initiatives, so we cannot draw firm conclusions about how having the initiative has affected older youth participation in OST programs; rather, we rely on the interviews with program and city initiative-level staff to address questions about how the initiative supports participation.

**CHAPTER 2**

# Keeping Youth Engaged Over Time

*Program Characteristics That Matter for Sustained Participation*

# Keeping Youth Engaged Over Time

*Program Characteristics That Matter for Sustained Participation*

Given the important benefits that longer-term participation in OST programs can yield, this study sought to understand more fully the nature of program characteristics (both program practices and structural features) that support sustained participation, using both quantitative and qualitative data. Analysis of survey data enabled us to determine which types of program practices and features, among the many that programs employ, are uniquely and quantitatively associated with longer retention rates. (We use the proportion of youth retained in the program for 12 months or more as our measure of retention.) This analysis yielded a set of "distinguishing" characteristics of high-retention programs.

Survey analysis also identified other practices that were commonly used by programs with high retention. Although these were not significantly related to retention, analysis of the interview data illuminated how and why these practices might be linked to engaging older youth. The interviews also revealed additional program practices we had not asked about in the survey that staff members believed to be important to a young person's decision to stay involved in programs. Although these other program practices were not linked to retention, we present them here because they may be related to other aspects of participation such as engagement and frequency. Clearly, these potentially promising practices warrant further research to determine whether and how they are associated with participation. Similarly, survey and program data revealed a set of commonly reported recruitment practices. We do not have evidence that these practices are significantly related to retention; still, we suggest it is important to understand how programs with high rates of participation are able to get youth to enroll in them.

In this chapter, we first summarize the results of our empirical analysis and discuss the practices and features that were found to be quantitatively linked to retention rates. We then present the additional promising program and recruitment practices that emerged through interviews and survey analysis in order to provide an integrated picture of what it takes to promote sustained participation for older youth. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the recruitment practices commonly used by the programs in our interview sample.

## Empirical Evidence of Program Characteristics That Matter for Sustained Participation

To identify the characteristics that most distinguish high-retention programs from other programs, we conducted a regression analysis to determine which of the many practices and features we asked about were empirically related to the proportion of older youth participants retained for more than 12 months. In other words, we asked whether engaging in each practice or program feature changed the percentage of older youth whom the organization retains, holding all of the other practices and features of an OST program constant.[xi]

Results from these analyses suggest that there is a relatively small set of program characteristics that distinguish programs that achieve high rates of retention among older youth from programs that do not. We divide these into program practices—what are also referred to as process features in program quality

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xi  Specifically, we included any variables in which the bivariate correlations with 12-month retention rates differed significantly between lower- and high-retention programs. See Appendix E for a more in-depth discussion of the analysis.

literature[19]—and structural features. Specifically, two program practices and three structural features distinguish the high-retention programs in this study (see Table 2.1 for results of the regression analysis):

*Distinguishing program practices*
- Offering many leadership opportunities
- Staff members using multiple techniques to keep informed about youth's lives

*Distinguishing structural features*
- Being based in the community rather than a school
- Enrolling 100 or more youth per year
- Holding regular staff meetings to discuss program-related issues

The number of leadership opportunities, the number of ways in which staff members stay informed about youth, and the three structural features explain 38 percent of the variance in retention.

## Distinguishing Program Practices of High-retention Programs

The two program practices that set high-retention programs apart in our regression analysis were an emphasis on offering many leadership opportunities and efforts of staff members to keep informed about youth in many ways (e.g., collecting report cards and contacting parents regularly). These are the practices that were significantly

TABLE 2.1

## Key Program Practices and Features Corresponding to Higher Rates of Retention in Programs

| PRACTICES AND FEATURES | Betas |
|---|---|
| Greater number of leadership opportunities offered | .25*** |
| Programs are located in a community-based organization | .24*** |
| Staff members have discussions about programs at least twice a month | .20** |
| 100 or more youth enrolled per year | .20** |
| Greater number of ways staff members keep informed about youth | .16* |

Source: Program surveys.

Note: This table presents standardized regression coefficients, or "betas," from the final step of a backward stepwise regression analysis using the full survey sample to predict the proportion of youth retained 12 months or longer. The full set of variables that were included in the first step were: # parent engagement activities, # leadership opportunities, # ways staff members keep informed about youth, staff-to-youth ratio, # strategies to build youth–staff relationship, # opportunities for peer interaction, # rewards & incentives, staff discussions about the program, # recruitment strategies, data used for staff development & training, # activities, # services, serve 100+ youth, # months open, # days open, serve older youth only, and community-based location.

Betas allow comparison of the relative importance of each variable in explaining retention rates. Thus, for example, the number of leadership opportunities is associated with larger changes in retention than being a community-based program. The five variables that are listed in the table with corresponding betas were included in the model along with three other control variables that were not significantly associated with retention once all of the other variables were in the model (i.e., number of months open; number of days open; and serves older youth only). Apart from these three control variables, if the beta is not presented, then that factor did not explain a significant amount of variance in 12-month retention once the other variables were accounted for and was thus dropped from the regression model. Collectively, the five key factors in Table 2.1 accounted for 38 percent of the variance in 12-month retention. See Appendix E for more details on how the regression analysis was conducted.

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT OST ATTENDANCE FOR OLDER YOUTH:

### Commitment May Matter More Than Hours

Many providers reported that daily attendance at a youth program is often not realistic for teenagers—that high school students would never come to a program 4 days a week and that it is developmentally "off" to expect older youth to attend a program every day. A New York City respondent, for example, noted that "inundating them with required hours" does not work.

Most of the programs (92 percent) we interviewed have attendance requirements for youth, many of which are tied to a funding source, although only 22 percent indicated that they enforce these requirements. Because teens are often engaged in many activities and have choices about how they spend their time, OST programs (with some notable exceptions including After School Matters and a few other programs) have found that attendance requirements are difficult to apply to their work with older youth. Instead, they focus on encouraging youth to attend. According to a respondent in Providence,

> We're not requiring kids to come, to sign up for 4 days a week. . . . We say, "You can come as many or as few days as you want." How do we . . . get kids to want to come 4 days a week if we're not requiring it? We're trying to make it something that they feel like they have some choice over.

Additionally, many programs have set up systems to work with individual youth on attendance: A student's absences might trigger a conversation with the youth, then contact with the family; in some instances, youth are dropped from the enrollment list.

Less frequent attendance with a high level of commitment, however, is an attainable goal for older youth in OST programs. Providers suggested that what matters more is engagement—the level of involvement and feelings of connection to the program. The message of many providers in OST programs for older youth was that commitment cannot be measured by hours attended but by what happens when youth are there: Quality often matters more than quantity.

related to youth participation in a program for 12 months or more when all other variables were taken into account. Although other program practices may play a role in retention (and we discuss possible examples below), these two were the ones that distinguished the high-retention programs in this study's sample.[xii] We discuss each in this section.

### Opportunities for leadership development

The number of leadership opportunities offered by a program was the strongest single predictor of retention in our study, taking into account all the others examined. Overall, 88 percent of the high-retention programs (defined as those retaining 50 percent or more of their participants for 12 months or more) in our survey offer leadership activities. Table 2.2 shows the percentage of high-retention programs that provide various types of leadership opportunities. For example, 81 percent of high-retention programs offer community service activities, and 67 percent have youth councils or decision-making groups. These findings do not suggest that other leadership opportunities that we examined are not important; rather, these are the practices that are more often found in high-retention programs (see Table G.1 in Appendix G for more detail).

Interviews with providers confirm the importance of leadership opportunities for retention. In San Francisco, for example, one provider structures the program so that "if you are there for 2 years, there's an opportunity to provide more leadership to the group, have direct meetings with the staff on a weekly basis, and provide major input to the program"; staff members have found that this is a message that keeps youth coming back.

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xii  Characteristics that had the highest correlations in the bivariate analysis but that were not distinguishing features were the number of parent engagement activities, staff-to-youth ratio, the number of strategies to build youth–staff relationships, the number of opportunities for peer interaction, the number of rewards and incentives, the number of recruitment strategies, the greater the extent to which data are used for staff development and training, the number of activities provided, and the number of services offered.

TABLE 2.2

## Leadership Opportunities in High-retention Programs

| LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES | High-retention Program Usage Rates |
| --- | --- |
| Average number of leadership opportunities (out of 9) | 5.6 |
| Volunteer opportunities | 82% |
| Community service activities | 81% |
| Opportunities to design/lead activities for peers or younger youth | 76% |
| Youth council/Decision-making groups | 67% |
| Peer interaction through leadership bodies (e.g., youth councils) | 64% |
| Paid staff positions | 36% |
| Opportunities to serve in official "officer" roles | 28% |

Source: Program surveys.

Note: High-retention programs are defined as those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. Only practices that were significantly correlated with retention are presented here.

Staff members also revealed how they embed peer leadership opportunities within activities. One provider described how in a jewelry class, "If one student picks up the process quickly, they can go to their neighbor and help them out," and the provider encourages students to do this. Another provider explained that youth in a hip-hop program learn the basics but collaborate with other youth who have been in the program longer to work on skill development.

These leadership opportunities may contribute to retention by giving urban youth a voice, a sense of belonging in programs, and a highly visible role in the programs—important connections they do not necessarily get elsewhere.

### Staff members staying informed about and connected to youth

The number of ways in which staff members stay informed about youth outside of the program emerged as the other distinguishing program practice of high-retention organizations (see Table 2.1). Staff members in high-retention programs go out of their way to develop relationships with youth and stay connected to their lives by using significantly more of the strategies we asked about to keep informed about youth outside of the program than do staff in lower-retention programs.

In more than two-thirds of the program interviews, providers suggested that their program works in large part because of the relationships developed between staff and youth. A provider in Chicago observed,

> I always refer to [great staff] as the pied pipers. . . . The kids are following them around . . . [and] clinging to them, because there's something about them that gives a message of "I really care about you, I really accept you for who you are, I really believe that you can be successful at what you do." And that all gets communicated to [the youth].

Table 2.3 shows that high-retention programs go far beyond merely providing opportunities to interact with staff informally and one-on-one. They make school visits, collect report cards, meet regularly with youth one-on-one, contact parents regularly, and know about and recognize the accomplishments of youth program participants outside of the program (see Table G.2 in Appendix G).

**TABLE 2.3**

## Strategies to Keep Informed About Youth

| STRATEGIES TO KEEP INFORMED ABOUT YOUTH | High-retention Program Usage Rates |
|---|---|
| Average number of ways (out of 5) that staff members stay informed about youth | 3.4 |
| Collect report cards | 77% |
| Meet regularly with youth one-on-one | 72% |
| Contact parents regularly | 66% |
| Publicly recognize youth accomplishments outside of program | 62% |
| Make school visits if needed | 59% |

Source: Program surveys.

Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. Only practices that were significantly correlated with retention are presented here.

In interviews, program staff members described why keeping informed about youth participants' activities, accomplishments, and behavior outside of the program can be so important for retention. Keeping up with busy youth reminds those youth that the programs are there for them, as this provider explained:

> Their lives are so full . . . and the afterschool program can very quickly fall to the bottom on their list of things to do. And I think just seeing us and being out in the school, seeing our faces. If you're there when they're walking out of their classroom, they're like, "Oh, let me check in with you."

Efforts to get to know youth outside the program, though sometimes difficult, help older youth make transitions between different activities and events in the course of their day. These efforts also enable staff members to learn about youth in different settings and to notice opportunities for support that they might not otherwise have a chance to observe. Two New York programs, for example, use report cards as part of their regular check-in with students both to keep track of their progress outside of the program and to assess the types of support they might need for the academic work.

The qualities of the staff members who are staying informed about and connected with youth also matter,

according to providers interviewed. Staff members who demonstrate consistently that they care about each youth support individual development and, at the same time, encourage continued participation. One New York practitioner noted that over time, "You see [how] that youth worker can get that kid to participate in different activities that they never thought they would do—by virtue of their personality, their charisma, their relationship."

Interview data suggest that, in addition to staying informed about youth, staff members in high-retention programs pay attention to what individual youth need and treat them with respect. We heard repeatedly that staff members are great listeners and can empathize with youth. Staff members call every youth by name and remember what is happening in their lives—good or bad. Authenticity was also cited as important. One provider emphasized that youth "know if you have prepared, they know if you're listening to them, they know if you value them, and they know if you're just giving them a line."

Some programs have staff members from the local community, which, for these programs, seems to create a very important connection to their youth participants. These staff members see youth in the neighborhood as well as in the program and know the challenges they face on a daily basis: "They understand some of the struggles

that these kids go through, and they can relate to it. And they have this awesome ability to just be patient with the kid, regardless."

## Distinguishing Structural Features of High-retention Programs

The program practices discussed throughout this chapter are embedded in structural features of the programs that can contribute to creating an environment conducive to retention. Therefore, our program survey was designed to better understand which structural features might be associated with retention. The structural features we examined in the regression analysis included the number of months the program runs, the number of days per week programming is offered, the location (school-based or community-based) of the program, the number of youth served, whether the program serves youth in close proximity (i.e., a neighborhood or school versus several neighborhoods or the city), and whether the program is the only one of its kind in the neighborhood.

Of the structural features we examined, the three that were significantly related to the percentage of youth retained for a year or more, after controlling for all the other practices that the programs engaged in, were

- Location in a community-based organization
- Enrollment of 100 or more youth per year
- Holding regular staff meetings about the program (30 or more minutes twice a month)

The community-based location of high-retention programs may be important because in many urban areas, "school is not a place where a lot of [members of] the communities will hang out all the time," as one provider said, even though in other areas schools can be a boon to OST program recruitment and to making connections with youth. High school students in particular have freedom to travel and, as some providers suggested, are not inclined to stay at their schools after the last bell. Additionally, youth have told programs that "they . . . sometimes don't come because the same young people who are disruptive in class are also there in after school, and 'I just sort of don't want to deal with that anymore.' " Finally, for many youth who feel disconnected from their

schools, community-based programs can offer strong alternative learning environments.

Being a larger program enrolling 100 or more youth per year might indicate a stronger organizational infrastructure and better resources that in turn contribute to stronger programs for older youth. A larger program may also provide more opportunities for youth to stay involved in the program as their interests change as well as more opportunities for peer interaction and new friendships. Indeed, we found that high-retention programs provided more opportunities on average for peer interaction than did lower-retention programs (3.6 versus 2.8). This difference, however, did not significantly relate to retention once size and other practices were taken into account (see Table G.3 in Appendix G).

A third structural feature—having regular staff meetings to discuss program-related issues—also was uniquely and quantitatively linked to retention rates. These meetings represent an intentional focus on program planning and management that may suggest intentionality in other facets of the organization, including the program's focus on youth retention. In addition, these meetings could provide opportunities for problem solving, professional development, and staff interaction that may boost staff members' morale and encourage them to stay involved with the program longer, which some providers suggested can keep youth engaged over time. Finally, these meetings provide a way for all staff members to know about issues that may have arisen with particular youth or activities. This awareness in turn allows staff members to support youth collectively.

## Promising Practices for Supporting Participation: Additional Survey and Interview Findings

In addition to the practices and features described above that statistically increased retention rates in and of themselves, providers commonly reported, through survey and interview data, an additional set of practices that support older youth participation in programs: practices to foster community, intentionally addressing the developmental needs of older youth through tailored

programming and incentives, and engaging families. Although we do not know conclusively whether these practices promote retention in other settings, we do know that they were reported by the programs in our study (both on the survey and in interviews) as being part of an overall "participation package." In addition, some practices mentioned by staff members were not asked about on the survey and surfaced only in the interviews; therefore, these practices were not tested empirically. We present these as promising practices because they may be linked to other aspects of participation, such as engagement or frequency, rather than retention. The practices discussed in this section should thus be viewed as being "potentially linked" to retention. Further research is warranted to better assess the relative merits of this additional set of practices.

Below, we present these promising practices as reported by high-participation program staff members and identified by the high-retention survey sample. To understand how widespread these practices are among the programs that retain 50 percent of participants for a year or more, we report what percentage of these high-retention programs employ them.

### Fostering a sense of community

According to more than half of the OST program providers we interviewed, helping youth feel connected to the program—through creating a sense of community, shared norms, and safety—is a factor in keeping youth engaged over time. Providers pay a great deal of attention to how they make youth feel in their organization.

In San Francisco, a provider noted that participants enter as individuals but "then they leave here as part of the group." Other program providers talked about their community as a "second family" or a "family environment." One New York provider explained,

> We're always here, we're always consistent, there's always a great lesson [and a] . . . a comforting feeling that "I can go to a place where people know who I am, they say, 'Hi' to me, [and] if I don't show up I'm going to get a call home." Follow-up is huge. . . . Kids start to feel like, "Wow, I'm actually missed."

Programs often foster a sense of community based on a shared interest. Many of the programs we interviewed, for example, incorporate hip-hop elements or create programming around hip-hop. One program found this activity particularly important for youth who are disengaged from school because it gives them a voice and a history to identify with. Youth then see that, as one provider put it, "You must learn what happened before you in order to really understand what you're doing." These positive connections to a larger community are critical for youth who might not have a community at home, in school, or elsewhere, just as the leadership opportunities discussed above may not be available to youth outside of the programs.

Connecting older youth with resources is another way OST programs help them feel part of a larger community that is caring and providing for them. Organizations in this study take seriously their charge to support youth in any way they can. One Washington, DC provider explained,

> And with that discipline [to learn in the program], we're like, "If you're this disciplined about art, if you're this disciplined about becoming a b-boy, imagine what you could do! . . . We are the resource to do whatever you want to do. You want to go to college? And you want to get your GED? We're the resource. What do we need to do? You want to go visit? You want to talk to somebody? We're the resource. Because you're here, now. We brought you in because this is what you wanted to do. Now we're the resource."

Finally, programs foster a sense of community by offering meaningful opportunities for youth to interact with their peers. Many youth, particularly in middle school, are motivated by friendships in their choices about which programs to attend and how long to attend those programs. Program providers emphasized in interviews that time for socializing is important for youth after school. Students may have to sit through a silent lunch during the school day or may have no recess during which to interact with friends, so it becomes important for OST providers to structure time for peer interaction in their programs. Some providers suggested they do so primarily by giving youth time to talk. Others

## THE ROLE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR RETENTION

One New York City program's high retention rates stem from an unusual source—youth commitment to long hours of extra work. Though some might think that requiring teenagers to give up their afternoons and weekends to attend rigorous classes with extra homework might inhibit retention, the experience of this program has proven different. Providing college advising and preparatory services, the program is offered 6 days per week. Youth often participate 2 to 5 hours per day beyond their regular school day and on Saturdays, attending sessions on SAT preparation, classes in math and reading, and writing seminars. Additional requirements include attendance at college panels; college and university field trips; and workshops on the college application process, college admissions, financial aid, and the freshman year.

The program staff's high expectations for student success are an important factor in youth participation. These expectations are expressed through challenging classes and coursework, and consistent, individualized attention that the large urban schools, which most of their students attend, cannot hope to replicate.

What exactly are these high expectations? They extend far beyond the usual goal of encouraging youth to graduate from high school to helping them see that they can "achieve things that they thought they couldn't. You don't just have to go to the neighborhood school, you can really get the full college experience, you can get a masters and Ph.D."

High expectations encompass challenging classes and the assumption that program participants take their responsibilities seriously and come to every class fully prepared. Consequences are clearly communicated and enforced. Far from discouraging youth from attending on a regular basis, the fact that staff members enforce high standards of behavior and accountability appears to support student retention. According to the program director,

> If they don't have the proper notebook, if they come to class unprepared, we pull them outside and let them know, "If this happens twice, you're suspended." And it sends a message in the classroom that "this is serious. Even though you've chosen to be here, we're business." And you know, ironically, I think this year we haven't lost one person because of that. . . . Kids really say, "Wow. They ARE serious about it."

Finally, underlying staff members' expectations for the youth in the program is a clear sense of care and concern. Youth seem to know that staff members hold them accountable because they are committed to their success. Perhaps this commitment plays the biggest role in the retention of students: They have forged a connection with a caring adult who takes the time to listen, teach, support, and consistently encourage them toward their highest potential.

described creating team-building exercises for participants, in which they emphasize that participation in OST programs offers an opportunity to meet new friends and connect with youth who have similar interests.

Middle school programs in particular have reported that cliques can be a powerful mechanism for keeping youth involved in the program: "If you can offer those cliques what they need in order for them to have a good time, then you have a better chance of them coming, enrolling, and staying." On the other hand, cliques can sometimes be a deterrent. A respondent in Washington, DC noted that friends often move from program to program together and can create situations that discourage other youth from joining certain programs. Indeed, survey analyses suggest a correlation between number of peers and retention; however, this relationship disappears once other features of the programs are taken into account. (See Table G.4 in Appendix G for more details.)

## Support for the developmental needs of older youth

In addition to providing participants with opportunities to build strong connections to the program and to peers, providers in this study shape their programs in ways that are interesting, relevant, and developmentally important for older youth. They recognize that program approaches that work for an elementary school population may not work for middle and high school students and therefore tailor their programming to that age group. In addition to leadership development (discussed above), they provide a diverse set of activities and services aimed at older youth, offer opportunities to develop skills, and provide developmentally appropriate incentives. (Chapter 3 further explores developmental differences, examining the differences in programming for middle and high school youth.)

### Diverse and developmentally appropriate programming

Program staff members stressed the importance of offering a variety of activities and services from which to choose in order to engage youth. For example, 63 percent of the high-retention programs in the survey sample offer youth employment, 72 percent offer targeted courses, 52 percent offer college preparation activities, and 85 percent offer academic activities. Similarly, 59 percent of the high-retention organizations offer services such as assistance with college applications, 24 percent offer GED help, and 52 percent offer links to jobs. (See tables G.5 and G.6 in Appendix G for more details.)

The staff members we interviewed also talked about more precisely targeting the activities and services toward the needs of older youth. In Providence, for example, there are chess classes and robotics classes that do not have wide appeal, but as one provider said, "The kids [who] are in those programs are totally committed to them. And they never miss [class]." In Chicago, providers observed that older students gravitate toward programs that are "culturally specific" to them or specific to their interests, which again can support sustained participation. As a result, these programs are often smaller than typical OST programs.

### Opportunities to foster success and build skills

Providers interviewed for this study offer older youth the opportunity to build skills in areas that are of personal interest to them, which, they noted, is likely to be particularly important for youth who may not feel successful in school. OST programs can often support youth in ways that schools and other institutions cannot. When youth feel successful in these nonschool settings, that feeling may translate into a more optimistic approach to school or other pursuits. In one Washington, DC program that focuses on soccer and literacy, for instance, program staff members create a culture that runs counter to what one provider described as the "test-heavy academic environment" that youth face in schools. In this program, participants can "write anything, and it doesn't have to be grammatically correct, and [they] can stand up and say it out loud, and somebody can be really proud of [them]."

Giving youth opportunities to work toward goals is another way these programs foster skill building. Apprenticeships and events such as poetry slams, exhibitions of work, and sports tournaments offer these types of opportunities. Apprenticeships are often intentionally structured to support youth in their development with the help of a "ladder" or a list of achievements needed to get to the next level of the program. Providers reported that this mix of choice and structure is effective in retaining youth. Participants can choose the skills they want to improve, and programs provide the structure and the advancement opportunities necessary to learn those skills.

Working toward goals often involves helping older youth with their expectations and paths after high school. Program respondents noted that youth continue to come back to their programs because they see a future payoff: OST programs can help youth forge a path to college or learn a skill that will help them in their careers. Experience in a youth program might be the first chance participants have to see that they can achieve their goals. One program in Washington, DC, for example, helped a student win a full scholarship to George Washington University; a staff member pointed out, "It's gotten the [other participants] to become more excited about

furthering their education because a lot of times they may have never seen anybody get a scholarship to college."

*Developmentally appropriate incentives*

The types of incentives used by OST programs vary across age groups. To promote attendance among older youth, the programs in this study use rewards and incentives such as jobs and school credit, and necessities such as food. Table 2.4 shows the various types of incentives used by the programs that retained 50 percent of their participants for more than one year (the high-retention programs).

Some programs have point systems that give youth incentives to work toward achievements such as levels of attendance. Other incentives include grocery-store gift cards, movie tickets, bus passes, and clothes. As providers pointed out during our interviews, incentives offer a way of supplying youth in high-poverty areas with some of their most basic needs, which can in itself encourage sustained participation. The providers using these incentive systems recognize not only that youth need to help support their families financially, but also that food and basic necessities are in short supply. Many youth would not have an afternoon snack if the program did not provide food. A program in Chicago, for example, found that providing hot meals attracts more youth. Similarly, incentives can help youth buy things they would not otherwise be able to—and that could even be a pair of socks:

> A lot of our students are economically challenged, or they're in situations where they don't have clothes. But nobody wants to say in front of your peers, "I don't have socks. I need socks." But it's a lot easier to say, "Oh, I earn my money. I'll buy my socks [at the program store]."

Although these incentives may help sustain youth involvement, many program providers reported that they are not the most important reason youth come to the program. One program staff member was quick to point out that while stipends, for example, help attract youth, "the relationship [with staff] is the biggest thing, even when the money falls out." Interestingly, only 16 percent of high-retention programs use financial incentives

**TABLE 2.4**

## Rewards and Incentives

| REWARDS AND INCENTIVES | High-retention Program Usage Rates |
|---|---|
| Average number of incentives (out of 6) | 2.7 |
| Field trips | 76% |
| Formal public recognition | 57% |
| Jobs | 35% |
| School credit | 24% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. Only practices that were significantly correlated with retention are presented here.

(compared with 24 percent that use school credit and 76 percent that use field trips as incentives), again suggesting that money alone does not persuade youth to stay in OST programs over time (see Table G.7 in Appendix G).

### Incorporating family engagement

Most of the programs that we surveyed reported that they use multiple techniques to engage parents, including interacting with parents informally, sending home information, or calling parents when appropriate. High-retention programs on average use 7.6 different ways to reach parents (see Table G.8 in Appendix G for the full list of techniques). As Table 2.5 shows, 80 percent or more reported holding individual meetings with parents, sending information about programs and community resources to parents, getting parent input through surveys and group meetings, and holding events for parents. Just over half (52 percent) reported going so far as to provide courses for parents.

While some providers told us in interviews that they saw family engagement as "essential," they also noted how difficult family engagement is for both programs and parents. Providers reported many of their own barriers to successful family engagement—including lack of staff capacity, resources, and funding—as well

**TABLE 2.5**

## Parent Engagement Activities

| PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES | High-retention Program Usage Rates |
|---|---|
| Average number of ways (out of 9) program tries to engage parents | 7.6 |
| Send information about program to parents | 100% |
| Hold events for parents | 95% |
| Hold individual meetings with parents | 85% |
| Send newsletters with community resources | 83% |
| Get parent input through surveys/group meetings | 80% |
| Provide courses for parents | 52% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. Only practices that were significantly correlated with retention are presented here.

as barriers for parents, such as having to be at work during afterschool hours. Providers expressed the fear that reaching out to parents could turn adolescents away from participation—that they might be "getting to that age where they don't want to listen to their parents. If their parents suggest it, then it's probably not [a] cool kind of thing." Among the programs surveyed, however, the choice to attend the program was made by the youth. A youth alone or youth together with their parents chose the program in 97 percent of high-retention programs. These findings suggest that programs that successfully engage parents may be cultivating ways to do so without undermining the increasing autonomy of their older youth participants.

The providers who did emphasize the value of family involvement to OST program participation reported that parents are critical in part because they can communicate the value of participation and the importance of consistent participation to youth. Among these providers, the overarching theme in their efforts to connect with families is their determination to encourage youth success and foster parents' recognition of that success. One Washington, DC program provider reported: "We

try to call parents especially when their child is doing well because I think so many parents have become accustomed to getting phone calls from the school district when [their] kid is doing bad." Another program in the city uses family communication to encourage parents' interest in youth activities and development, enabling families to track student progress, look for benchmarks, and celebrate successes. This outreach confirms programs' support for healthy youth development and staff members' real concern about participants, echoing our finding that this type of staff outreach is one of the distinguishing characteristics of high-retention programs.

## Promising Recruitment Practices

Recruitment practices per se were not a distinguishing feature of high-retention programs; however, providers repeatedly noted that their recruitment plan was critical to running a successful program. Overall, high-retention programs use more recruitment practices than lower-retention programs; programs in this study also address recruitment challenges with program practices aimed at finding the right fit between programs, staff, and youth, with implications for keeping youth engaged over time (see Table G.9 in Appendix G). This section addresses the recruitment practices reported most often both in interviews and on the survey.

### Getting the word out in the community

Our interviews and survey analyses highlight two commonly employed practices for getting the word out about programs: peer recruitment and staff recruitment in the community. Almost all OST programs in our sample, regardless of their retention rates, use word-of-mouth peer recruitment techniques, but our survey sample revealed that significantly more high-retention programs also had staff reach out to youth in the community. In fact, more than three-quarters of the high-retention programs reported using this strategy (see Table G.9 in Appendix G). Helping youth and parents understand an OST program's environment and reputation is a key strategy for staff in recruiting older youth to the program. Many of the programs we interviewed have a

particular identity that they want to convey to youth and parents. Others find it important to communicate their expectations for youth, particularly those programs that have high expectations, as described in the textbox on page 23.

At the same time, program providers have the sense that parents are sometimes less concerned with what the program is providing than with who is supervising the activities; thus, among the providers interviewed, communicating the program's reputation is critical for recruitment. Many parents want to know that the people their children are spending time with are "good people," which—for parents and for some youth as well—sometimes trumps what the youth are actually doing in the program.

## Using organizational relationships to connect with youth

Interviews revealed that programs that successfully recruit in schools devote time to developing relationships with teachers, principals, and, when one exists, the school's afterschool liaison. Relationships with principals are particularly important, according to program staff. As one New York respondent reported, "If the [program's] relationship with the principal is not good, the kids are not coming." In cities like New York and San Francisco, where principal empowerment is part of the school reform climate, principals have the power to make OST an integral part of the school day and to hold others accountable for program access and enrollment. Providers report that teachers' approval of and efforts to support school-based programs can also improve recruitment. One initiative director noted, "If [teachers] give us the thumbs up or if they give us the thumbs down, that can make or break us."

Based on their relationships with schools and individual teachers, some OST program providers are able to use school-day classroom time to make connections with youth. One OST theater program provider taught an English class, for example, to get youth interested in her program. In New York, a community-based legal education program runs lessons for eighth-grade students in underperforming schools and then invites the students

to fill out a preapplication form to the program if they are interested.

Working with schools can create recruitment challenges for OST programs, however, if they lack a good relationship with the school or if they have been placed in a school "cold"—that is, without any previous relationships—as one provider put it. In these cases, they have to work extremely hard to develop those relationships from scratch:

> Basically, the key is to get one adult in the building interested. . . . They understand the culture of the school, the culture of what happens, who might be interested in something like this, who wouldn't be, who's good with kids in the afterschool time, who isn't, and so my goal, when I go into a new school, is to find that one adult [who] can connect with kids and help us create from there.

Interestingly, high-retention programs are more likely to ask partner organizations to refer youth, again suggesting that the development of relationships is key to recruitment.

## Program attributes that are attractive to older youth

Two-thirds of providers interviewed reported specific features of their programs that are helpful for recruitment. Three features stood out: filling a gap in learning or available activities, offering youth their own space within the program setting, and distinguishing program time and activities from what happens in school.

### Filling a gap in learning or activities

Although most OST programs in this study operate in neighborhoods with other providers, many providers interviewed noted that their recruitment benefits because they offer a missing or underrepresented activity in their neighborhood or school—a new sport, a new technology class, or a new music class. According to one Washington, DC provider, they "fill a gap in a community." Program providers need to know who might be interested in these particular activities and target their recruitment accordingly. This targeted recruitment might mean that some specialized programs enroll smaller numbers of youth who are more likely to stay in the

program over time. According to one program director, "I don't mind having a smaller group . . . and in fact, that actually works out really well in a lot of our programs, and they're designed to allow us . . . more one-on-one interaction."

### Offering a welcoming space for youth

We heard from OST providers that, when making decisions about attending programs, older youth want to have a place for themselves that feels like home, where they know they will be safe, participate in interesting activities, and have time with their friends. Separate youth space can be important for older youth, particularly high school youth. This is likely to be particularly true in deeply distressed neighborhoods in which the street might be the only alternative youth space.

Some multi-age programs have teen rooms, while some programs geared just toward older youth have rooms with couches, a television, and a refrigerator when possible. Youth have some independence to visit with their friends and get snacks when they want to. These spaces give youth developmentally important opportunities to be independent and to forge connections with peers. They can also be spaces in which informal learning and mentoring take place.

### Making the program environment distinct from the school environment

Many of the program providers working in schools intentionally make their programs distinct from the school-day environment, in part to improve recruitment. They know older youth do not necessarily want to stay in the school building longer than they need to, and the programs thus go to great lengths to make their space feel different—from rearranging a classroom from its school-day set-up to making sure that content is structured differently from what students have been learning for the previous several hours. A provider in one Chicago program said, "From a developmental perspective, they're doing a lot that they don't get in the school day. So in school, you know it's the 'drill and kill,' and it's math and reading. . . . We really stress that this isn't more school." In addition, program content, even when academic, looks very different from what happens

in school. Youth get the chance not only to try things they might not have the opportunity to try in school, such as theater or jewelry making, but also to participate in hands-on, project-based activities and active learning through group read-alouds rather than worksheets and more passive activities.

## Summary

Our analysis has indicated important and new findings about the ways in which programs can keep youth engaged over time. First and foremost, the quantitative analysis identified five program characteristics that appear to increase retention rates in and of themselves, controlling for all other practices the organizations engage in:

- Offering multiple leadership opportunities to youth
- Staff using many techniques to keep informed about youth participants' lives
- Being based in the community rather than in a school
- Enrolling a larger number of youth (100 or more per year)
- Holding regular staff meetings to discuss program-related issues

Survey and interview data also revealed three commonly used program practices for improving participation: fostering a sense of community, providing youth with developmentally appropriate opportunities and incentives, and finding multiple ways to work with families. In addition, this study found a set of commonly reported recruitment practices. Although these practices were not found to be statistically significant in regression analysis, we suggest that these additional recruitment and retention practices warrant more attention and further investigation because they were identified by a set of programs that showed capacity to get and keep youth engaged over time.

These findings, taken together, indicate that programs that successfully retain older youth use a variety of intentional program practices to keep youth engaged over time; there is no single formula for improving retention. It is important to bear in mind that the program characteristics discussed in this chapter—both the

distinguishing practices and features and the additional practices—work within the mission and purpose of the OST programs to create an engaging and supportive environment for older youth. These programs endeavor to help low-income youth overcome not only the challenges they face in their daily lives but also socioeconomic forces and stereotypes about them in their schools and the larger community. As one high school program director explained,

> I want youth [who] are in our program to believe that they have options in life. They don't have to be trapped in a cycle of poverty. I want the youth to not feel that their character has to be defined by their skin color or their income level or their ethnic background or their gender. I think that there are certain intangible goals that are just things I feel very strongly about. I want people to come out with a sense of character and belonging, and the idea that they have the capabilities to do whatever they set their mind to.

# Developmental Differences Between Middle School and High School Programs

# Developmental Differences Between Middle School and High School Programs

Attention to developmental differences emerged in this study as central to OST providers' overall strategy for keeping middle and high school youth engaged over time. Providers we interviewed recognized that they need to be prepared for developmental changes as youth move from elementary to middle to high school and that if they don't anticipate what these changes mean for their programs, they are going to lose their participants' interest. They understood the developmental needs of older youth, what attracts them to programs, and how OST programs can support these age groups differently. This chapter reports on information gathered from interviews with leaders of the 28 programs in our interview sample, which were chosen based on their participation rates of 60 percent and above (see Chapter 1 for more on the interview sample).

This set of providers emphasized that each youth is on his or her own individual path, which requires programs to provide intensive individual attention. As a director of a Washington, DC program put it, "It's almost like we develop a philosophy that, in order to reach a kid, you've got to meet them where they are. And if you can meet them where they are, then you can take them somewhere else." As intensive and expensive as this individual attention may be, providers noted that it is critical to youth's development, compensating for the lack of attention many of the youth experience at school and at home. Program providers in this sample reported using many strategies for this individualized approach to working with youth: They have staff members who develop individual relationships with youth; they often allow for flexibility in scheduling and expectations; and they provide a variety of opportunities to allow youth to excel.

In addition to their understanding of the developmental continuum of adolescence, the providers we

interviewed noted differences in program strategies for working with middle and high school youth, based on the developmental stages of these age groups. For example, many programs intentionally organize activities in different ways for middle and high school youth. Middle school OST programs tend to have a variety of choices within some structure to allow youth to try out different activities that might interest them; they also provide youth with more time to hang out with friends. In contrast, OST programs for high school youth, occurring at a stage when many youth have clear ideas about the activities they like and want to learn more about, offer more specialized activities with fewer options for choice.

Regression analysis of survey data provided empirical evidence that the program features that were significantly related to retention—offering many leadership activities, staff keeping informed about youth participants' lives, being located in community-based settings, serving larger numbers of youth, and having regular staff meetings about programs—were similar for programs serving middle school youth and those serving high school youth.[xiii] However, interviews with program providers revealed differences in *how* these and other various practices are implemented and differences among the programs as a whole—issues that the survey did not explore. Thus, while we do not have empirical evidence showing that attention to developmental differences is a factor in retention, it did emerge as a central theme of our program interviews; therefore, like the promising

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xiii   None of the regression analyses we conducted yielded results that suggested a significant difference in the strength of association between the variable of interest and participation rates in programs responding about their high school versus middle school youth (i.e., in no case was the interaction term significant). Therefore, we concluded that these variables were similarly important in these two sets of programs.

## WORKING WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH: THE IMPORTANCE OF PEER INTERACTION AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The teaching artists from a theater organization in Providence concentrate on developmentally targeted approaches when working with middle school youth on problem solving and leadership development. Using best practices from the field and drawing from years of experience working with a wide range of youth, this organization prioritizes youth development and arts education principles when designing programming. Taking into consideration the importance of peer interaction and identity development during the middle school years, staff members structure programs and activities around student-driven positive reinforcement as a way for youth to learn to support, encourage, and help each other while also providing ample opportunities for peer interaction. As one staff member reflected, though it is important for middle school youth to see adults modeling a supportive learning environment, peer-to-peer education is also a powerful, influential tool with this age group, especially when developing important life skills such as giving and receiving constructive feedback:

> We think it's really, really important to teach [middle school youth] that language, [and] to really be a little bit more formal . . . to each other. That kind of feedback is not JUST coming from you to them . . . whenever they do a performance, it can't just be from me. It HAS to be from each of them. And then it turns to a point where I don't even need to be a part of it.

It's really about giving them the skills so that they can make each other better. And I'm just there to jump in when they need it. That's what the difference between elementary and middle school is.

Innovative and effective approaches to working with middle school youth come from understanding that youth at this age are just starting to explore different aspects of their identities as they develop and figure out more about themselves and how they want to fit into the world around them. Through activities such as acting, improvisation, pantomiming, and other theater arts games, youth in the program are actively encouraged to explore and "try on" different identities, committing to playing out characteristics or personality traits that they may not normally gravitate toward. Many youth find a voice and a receptive audience when they otherwise feel silenced and invisible at home or in school. Theater can help students form a strong, positive sense of self, because with "theater, in general, every single game forces you to be so many different things . . . it's all ABOUT changing identity."

In combination with the program's approach to developing a community of youth who actively support each other, the innovative, developmentally targeted programming engages middle school youth in perspective taking, team building, and fostering a confident, healthy sense of self.

program practices described in Chapter 2, it warrants further exploration.

## Middle School Programs

Program providers in our sample observed that middle school students are particularly difficult to recruit. Because these youth are in the process of developing autonomy, they are less inclined to participate in adult-supervised activities during nonschool time than elementary school students—they might want to play basketball at a local court but not in an afterschool program. They are also less inclined to break from their peer group to participate in program activities.

Other providers noted that middle school is a time when students begin to disengage from school as well as OST activities, especially those students who are over age for their class in school or otherwise lagging behind their peers. This disengagement, according to providers, emerges particularly during the eighth-grade year. Providers recognized that eighth graders need something different or something "older" geared toward their transi-

tion into high school, or they will not continue their participation in the program. Providers were also in tune with what middle school youth need to feel supported. The programs we interviewed had staff members who focus on listening, are patient with the inconsistencies of middle school youth, and use nonverbal communication and body cues to understand what their program participants need.

The following are some strategies that programs use to engage middle schoolers:

**Recognize middle schoolers' need to be with friends.** First and foremost, the providers in our sample incorporate ways for middle school youth to socialize. According to one middle school provider, "If a friend is doing it, they'll all want to do it." Programs structure their middle school activities to ensure that youth have time to do homework with friends, connect with friends before joining activities, or work with friends in small group activities. As Chapter 2 describes, peer interactions, although not a distinguishing feature, are correlated with OST retention rates for older youth. Our interviews suggested that successful programs for middle school youth are possibly even more creative in providing opportunities for peer interactions than high school programs.

**Provide structure and routine within an atmosphere of exploration.** One provider in Providence noted that middle school youth are "consistently inconsistent." Middle school youth are always changing, and staff members working with middle school students must have the ability to adapt as needed. But, in part because of this inconsistency, middle school youth, according to providers, need structure and routine to help them feel safe and to support their developmental needs.

Another provider described creating a "tight container" around youth participants' behavior. Routines in middle school are important for many aspects of the programs, from the sign-up process, to program activities, to transportation. Providers are intentional about providing constant reminders about enrollment to ensure that youth remember to sign up at the end of the day for a program they found out about at lunchtime. Program staff members distribute flyers, hang posters at schools, remind youth to sign up if they see them at

school, and even phone youth who have signed up to remind them to come.

Part of letting youth explore within structure and routine is being consistent; providers reported that consistency can "make or break" a program for middle schoolers. In Providence, one provider noted that the program gets "one chance" to hook middle school students. If things go wrong on the first day, it sets a bad precedent for retention. For instance, at the end of the day when youth expect to get on a bus to go home, "and then the bus isn't there to take [youth] back when the time comes, they're out, that's it. You lost them. That was your one chance, and you blew it."

**Use developmental stage to help youth try new activities.** One provider described the middle school period as "a tipping point" in which youth are still willing to try new things under the right circumstances, but could be just as likely to begin to close themselves off to new ideas and opportunities. As youth begin to disengage from school, OST providers pointed out that "it's the last chance to engage them." Given the need for middle schoolers to be with friends, providers use the peer group to facilitate program participants' willingness to try new activities. One OST program provider in Providence described how youth help their peers build skills:

> [If] someone is interested, but that skill for them isn't that strong, we can group them in an activity—maybe it's costuming. "Well, I know how to sew, and I can do this activity, and I can put this together." "I'm a really good graphic artist, but Suzy's kind of 'eh' about drawing; I can teach her how to do this." "I'm really good at reading and memorizing my lines. Maybe I can teach you how to memorize your lines."

## High School Programs

As youth move into high school, they face a different set of challenges and need a different set of supports, in addition to the "mainstays" described in Chapter 2, to engage them successfully in OST programs. By high school, youth are largely independent, making their own decisions about how to spend their time and exercising their increasing freedom. They are starting to think about what will come next for them postgraduation,

## PARTICIPATION AND COLLEGE ACCESS

Many of the high school programs in this high-participation sample use innovative strategies to tie programming to their participants' plans for the future. One of these is a community-based hip-hop program in Cincinnati.

A sense of family, respect, and community is immediately apparent when you walk through the doors of this program. It serves as a dynamic and empowering haven for youth and young adults aged 14–24 to engage in skill building and leadership development through participation in innovative and engaging hip-hop arts programming.

Participating in the program encourages youth to consider and plan for their futures. The organization follows a flexible program structure, where youth have the option of learning to record and produce music, brush up on their graffiti arts or hip-hop dance skills, or master the art of DJing. Youth can also have a meal, finish their homework, socialize with friends, or do computer research on college or career plans. Program participants not only have access to professional instructors and high-quality sound and arts equipment, but also form valuable connections with mentors—peers with expertise, older youth who have stayed with the program for many years, or adults who are college-educated or successful professionals, many of whom came from the same neighborhoods the youth come from and who understand the pressures and dynamics of the community. These mentors guide youth, expose them to resources and possibilities, and help demystify the path to their goals, enabling them to take steps toward fulfilling their potential.

Even as they increase their knowledge and skills in various forms of hip-hop, youth participants are being introduced to college and professional opportunities that they may not have been aware of or had access to before joining the program. Although formal academic, college, and career programming is not part of the official curriculum, these topics consistently come up in discussions. According to one college-age participant,

> This is a place where I see kids talk more about education. . . . They also have a sense that, "Okay, if I'm really [going to] be good at this, then I need to know how to perfect it. The way I can perfect this is to get a higher education." If you come from college like me and other youth that come in, there's a connection: "You know what? I wish I were where you're at, at your age." So as a give-back we've got the computers they go on [and explain], "This is how you fill out a college application; this is why you need the scholarship, leading into certain schools."

At the most basic level, the program gives youth the tools and creative license for self-expression and accomplishment through hip-hop culture. Perhaps even more important, participants are immersed in a supportive, familiar environment, and whether they are headed toward college, a career in the arts or law, or in another direction yet to be envisioned, youth are surrounded by peers and adults who provide individualized support and guidance to help them set high standards and achieve their goals.

and many have developed interests that they can pursue in youth programs. As a result, high school programs' efforts to retain youth are different from those of middle school programs, as a provider acknowledged:

> I think the high school programs are easy to run. I think a lot of times you have kids in a middle school program who may not want to be there, but it's used as a form of afterschool day care by the parents who are working. I think once you get to the high school level, most of the participants really are motivated to be there, and they're doing it because they *want* to—not because they *have* to.

Interviews revealed that the following strategies are important to the high-participation programs for high school youth in this study:

**Recognize that high school youth are motivated by content.** High school youth know what they want to learn during their out-of-school time. As a result, programs serving high school students in our interview sample tend to have a narrower, more content-based emphasis than the middle school programs—whether the program concentrates on law or technology or music.

Though some programs noted that it is harder to recruit high school students because they have so many more options and responsibilities than middle schoolers, many of the programs in the interview sample that were achieving high rates of participation among high school youth appear to be more targeted in their approach to programming; they understand that high school students are motivated by content to attend. At the high school level, choice may be important across programs in addition to within programs, so that high school students can best use their time to develop particular skills.

**Give youth more responsibility.** Many OST programs for high school youth look more like jobs than afterschool programs, preparing youth for the responsibilities of adulthood; the apprenticeship ladder at After School Matters is one example (see Chapter 2). Several programs mentioned the importance of having high expectations for youth (see textbox on page 23), and some tied these expectations to their retention rates. One program informs all its students that their middle names are "No Excuses"; another suspends youth if they come to activities unprepared. Both send the message that they "mean business" and carefully match consequences to behavior. Additionally, programs give youth more responsibility through mentoring so that high schoolers have the opportunity to work with younger youth or peers.

**Help youth on their path after graduation.** High school youth, according to one observer, are beginning to ask, "What about jobs? What about when I leave school? What's out there for me?" Programs reported addressing these concerns in a variety of ways. One high school program in our study is geared to college access and enrollment. Another supports college goals as an embedded part of the programming: College students participating in the program shepherd high school students through college research and applications (see text box on page 35). Similarly, apprenticeships and other job-related programs help youth build the skills they will need to succeed in a range of occupations after high school; these include job-specific skills, knowledge of appropriate workplace behavior and appearance, and problem-solving skills.

## Summary

The high-participation programs in this study pay attention to the developmental changes that youth experience as they move from elementary to middle to high school. Interviews with providers indicated that high-participation programs are structured differently to accommodate these developmental changes.

For middle school youth, providers

- Give youth opportunities to socialize throughout the course of programming, not just during designated times to hang out
- Create structures and routines to make youth feel comfortable and safe
- Take advantage of these youth participants' willingness to try new things, particularly through peer interaction

At the high school level, providers

- Organize their programming more around content and the particular skills older youth want to learn
- Give youth more responsibility through job-like programming, apprenticeships, and mentoring
- Provide formal and informal opportunities to explore and prepare for college and other postgraduation plans

By responding to developmental differences between age groups, these strategies create settings for youth that are tailored to their needs and that give them a foundation for continued learning and growth. Just as important, providers noted that they recognize and take seriously the development of individual youth and incorporate individual differences into their activities.

In chapters 2 and 3, we have explored our findings about program characteristics that support sustained participation and the different strategies that OST programs use with middle and high school youth. We turn now to our findings about city-level supports for participation.

# City-Level Supports to Promote and Sustain Participation

# City-Level Supports to Promote and Sustain Participation

By design, the programs in this study were all located in cities that have coordinating bodies responsible for developing and sustaining a city-level OST initiative. Thus, in addition to investigating recruitment and retention characteristics at the program level, as described in chapters 2 and 3, this study explored city-level strategies for supporting participation in OST programs for older youth. This chapter draws on interviews with the 47 city-level respondents to describe initiative-level supports for participation available in the cities and the ways in which cities implement those supports. Survey data and program interviews are used to explore which of these supports programs find the most beneficial and what challenges programs experience related to these supports.

## Overview of City-Level Supports

Each OST initiative included in this study reported that it provides a set of supports to programs that are aimed at improving access, enrollment, and sustained participation within and across programs that serve all children and youth.[xiv] Most of these supports do not solely target the improved participation of older youth; rather, they are part of the initiatives' overall efforts to build and sustain quality OST programming across the city. Nonetheless, when city respondents were asked to talk about the ways in which their initiatives support the participation of older youth, they reported providing the following five categories of supports to participation:

- Engaging in citywide recruitment efforts

- Coordinating/networking OST programs across the city
- Collecting and using information, including developing MIS
- Supporting citywide quality improvement efforts
- Coordinating and providing professional development and technical assistance

In addition, some cities were working toward developing two additional supports that they viewed as critical to improved participation for older youth:

- Engaging families
- Fostering collaborative relationships with school districts

Each of these supports is described below, followed by a discussion of programs' views of the supports the six cities provide.

### Engaging in citywide recruitment efforts

All of the initiatives in our study were directly supporting recruitment efforts through market research, social marketing, and/or recruitment fairs. *Market research* involves directly surveying both youth and parents about their ideas and perceptions of OST programming; *social marketing* targets youth using clear messaging to encourage youth to take advantage of OST programming; *recruitment fairs* are community events designed to provide information about OST programming and promote enrollment.

Two of the cities in our study, Providence and Chicago, hired a consultant to conduct market research by surveying youth and parents directly and to develop branding and marketing strategies. As a result of the data gathered, Providence's social marketing strategy consistently portrays hip-hop culture in order to attract the

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xiv  Funding in San Francisco comes through the Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF) or the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), not through Afterschool for All (AFA).

youth they are trying to reach. Providence, Washington, DC, and San Francisco provide professional development training to OST program leaders on how to market their program successfully to the youth population they serve. For example, Providence provided training on how to "sell the brand" of "it's cool, it's hip, it's Providence"; Washington, DC provided one-on-one training or strategy sessions on how to market or repackage programs or to target a different audience, usually in response to decreases in program recruitment or participation rates.

Market research has also allowed for youth input—another strategy to make programs more attractive. In Washington, DC, Project My Time sites conducted a thorough assessment of what youth want and need from programming. In Chicago, early focus groups with older youth revealed that teens in OST programs were on the whole disappointed: They did not like being mixed into programs with children of all ages, and they felt that they were used to babysit younger children. They also reported that the adults in the program didn't meaningfully engage them, and they instead wanted to be with adults who were experts in their field. In Providence, youth in focus groups said staff needed to be cool, fun, and interesting, while initiative leaders noted the importance of adult authenticity, caring, and appreciation of youth culture.

City-level supports have helped programs look beyond traditional methods of recruitment (e.g., flyers and newsletters) to employ the technology and social media platforms that middle and high school youth use. San Francisco's initiative, for example, has marketing material on its website (www.sfkids.org), and New York's Department of Youth and Community Development has Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter accounts.

All of the cities have formed partnerships with schools to support recruitment efforts. In three of the city-level OST initiatives, programs have the opportunity to recruit in schools during school lunch, during school-based information fairs, and sometimes during class time. Providence After School Alliance (PASA) organizes recruitment fairs early in the school year so youth can learn about the various afterschool activities offered in their AfterZone. Providers have reported that the initial interactions between youth and program staff at these

events are a determining factor in students' decisions to join programs. CincyAfterSchool partners with the city's Community Learning Centers, which are Cincinnati Public School neighborhood educational resource hubs, to organize and implement social marketing strategies to recruit older youth, and also works with school-based afterschool providers to develop program and activity marketing tools that are age-appropriate and targeted to appeal to older youth. Project My Time promotes recruitment and participation in afterschool programs by organizing recruitment fairs and promotional weeks, distributing information and other marketing materials throughout the community, and working with schools to do outreach through staff meetings.

Within these fairs, providers report that some strategies work better than others. Above all, programs need to have a hook: some tangible demonstration that will engage youth interest, whether it be a video or a piece of jewelry that youth participants would make in a program activity, or a taste of an activity itself such as a soccer demonstration. Successful recruitment also means repeated follow-up with youth, particularly in middle school. And though these fairs are important, many providers said they were recruiting on their own and did not rely solely on fairs to recruit youth.

## Coordinating and networking OST programs across the city

Often as a first step toward coordinating and networking OST programs, city-level initiatives in this study have created program locators, many of which are available on their websites. Cities use these tools to do outreach to families and youth and to better match programs with community needs and preferences, which in turn affects recruitment and retention. Families, programs, and youth use program locators to identify the programming options available to them.

Information about where programs are located helps cities address barriers to participation such as gang territories, transportation challenges, and school rivalries. In Chicago, for example, one respondent noted, "There are some times that maybe we have to make sure that several of us are doing the same thing because of gang

lines or some type of boundary that we're not aware of." Networking among programs builds on the community's knowledge about challenges to youth participation and enables programs to address those challenges; city initiatives are key to facilitating this knowledge sharing.

Many city-level respondents reported that another benefit of networking OST providers through city initiatives is the opportunity for programs to learn about other organizations' offerings, share best practices, and solicit help with challenges, all of which in turn can address issues of participation and retention.

### Collecting and using information, including developing MIS

A critical component of each city-level effort to connect and improve programs is an MIS used to track attendance and participation in the initiatives' funded programs.[xv] These databases have been crucial in understanding participation because they increase knowledge about attendance patterns within programs and across initiatives.

Providence, for example, mandated the use of youthservices.net, a customized participation tracking database, throughout its three AfterZones. This MIS can be updated by multiple users in real time, enabling initiative managers to access up-to-date data on a daily basis and to intervene quickly to provide technical support to programs experiencing drops in attendance. Using its data system, Providence not only enables programs to target recruitment to previous participants but also supports programs in placing individual phone calls to participants to encourage continued attendance. While PASA chose a single data system, other cities face the challenge of coordinating multiple data systems, which can create confusion and capacity problems for providers.

In addition to using citywide management information systems, OST initiatives in this study support and encourage programs to conduct their own evaluations and in some cases broker relationships between researchers and programs. For example, in Chicago the OST

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> ### Participation databases*
> - Four cities use customized databases from Cityspan.
> - One city uses a customized database from Cayen.
> - New York created its own database, DYCD Online.
>
> *See Appendix A for more information about city initiatives

Initiative has connected the Chicago School of Professional Psychology with tutoring programs to conduct pre- and postsurveys about socioemotional needs. Some cities, like New York and Providence, are implementing citywide OST evaluations, the results of which can be used to shape and inform programming to support improved participation.

### Supporting citywide quality improvement efforts

Each of the cities in this study is involved in efforts to improve program quality through the development and implementation of quality assessment tools. Some cities use an assessment tool based on existing and valid measures or standards such as the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). For example, PASA adapted the YPQA based on input from OST stakeholders across Providence to develop its own version of that tool, the Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA). Other initiatives, such as the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) in New York City, are encouraging the use of statewide assessment tools, such as the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) Program Quality Assessment Tool. Washington, DC and San Francisco are developing citywide "minimum standards" for quality programs.

While all of the cities in this study have quality improvement efforts in place, they have developed different strategies to incorporate quality assessment into the life of programs. Some provide incentives to programs for going through the process. For example, Providence has implemented an endorsement system for those programs considered to be high quality; endorsed programs earn an extra 5 percent in program grants from PASA. Chicago and Cincinnati provide targeted support to programs through training in the areas

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xv  In the case of San Francisco, the initiatives are funded by DCYF or SFUSD.

in which the program does not score well on quality assessments, while San Francisco, Washington, DC, and Chicago require action plans or improvement plans from programs to address deficiencies in their quality assessments. Chicago and Washington, DC are planning to use the results of quality assessments to assist in grantmaking decisions.

While quality improvement does not necessarily directly support participation, it can point to areas of improvement for some of the key program features that—as we know from this study as well as prior research—are related to sustained participation. For example, through Chicago's quality improvement pilot, the city was able to identify three areas for improvement across the participating programs: connections between OST and the school day, program planning, and curriculum. In San Francisco, initiative leaders hope that common program quality measures used across funding streams "will bring quality up, and as a result, bring more kids into the programs."

### Coordinating and providing professional development and technical assistance

Providers reported that professional development and technical assistance offered by city initiatives were indirectly helping programs with recruitment and retention, often by using the results of quality assessments to identify areas to guide staff development. The majority of initiative-level professional development opportunities are organized around the core principles of youth development; they include topics such as classroom management, youth culture, community mapping, and mental and behavioral health. Providence and Washington, DC both use the Building Exemplary Systems of Training (BEST) tool for youth workers, which delivers the national AYD (Advancing Youth Development) curriculum—core training in youth development principles, concepts, and practices.[xvi] Providence's training is provided two to four times per year, free of charge to youth workers across the city. New York and San Francisco provide professional development programs that explore how to work with

| Quality improvement tools used* |
| --- |
| • Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) |
| • Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA) |
| • Strive Six Sigma |
| • Search Institute's Developmental Assets Tool |
| • New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) Program Quality Assessment Tool |
| *See Appendix A for more information about city initiatives. |

older youth and the developmental differences between middle and high school youth. New York contracts with Partnership for After School Education, a New York City-based organization that promotes and supports quality afterschool programs, to provide comprehensive professional development;[xvii] San Francisco delivers professional development through the school district and the Department of Children, Youth & Their Families.

City-level investment in program staff through professional development is designed to support both youth retention in programs and the sustainability of the programs themselves. Respondents from every city noted that staff members who received training were more likely to remain with an organization long term, leading to continuing and successful relationships with the youth in the program; as noted in Chapter 2, providers reported that meaningful long-term relationships support better retention among youth.

### Emerging opportunities for cities to support participation

Two additional promising opportunities for cities to support participation were identified during interviews and supplemental discussions with city respondents: engaging families and developing relationships with school and district leadership.[xviii]

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xvi   See nti.aed.org/NationalBEST.html for more information.

xvii   See www.pasesetter.com for more information.

xviii   These issues emerged most clearly in conversations with the study's Community of Practice. See Appendix B for more information.

### Engaging families

As noted in Chapter 2, program providers reported that family engagement is critical to their work with older youth but difficult to implement well. In supplemental conversations, city-level respondents reported viewing family engagement as critical to OST participation, and some are developing city-level strategies to support and engage families.

Through their social marketing and public awareness campaigns, for instance, initiatives can build families' knowledge of the benefits of participation in OST programs—in particular, how OST programs for older youth can better position participants for postsecondary success. City initiatives can also help families be "good consumers" of programs by providing information and resources on program quality and ideas on how to help older youth make good choices.

In addition to working directly to engage families, city-level initiatives can build the capacity of program providers to ensure that family engagement is part of the "daily business" of their programs by supporting professional development on family engagement and by embedding family engagement in professional development in other areas. For example, program staff training in how to support learning and/or college preparation in OST programs can and should include the role of families.

### Developing school district partnerships to support learning

In interviews, providers and city-level respondents reported the importance of having effective working relationships with schools to support and improve participation. However, these relationships occur on a school-by-school basis, with little city-level coordination. Some city-level respondents indicated that, because education reform agendas in their cities view out-of-school time as a core learning support and strategy, they see an opportunity to form meaningful partnerships with school districts to support expanded learning opportunities.

In all cities in this study, the school district is involved in some way with the OST initiative; in San Francisco, for example, the district is one of the citywide collaborators in the Afterschool for All initiative. In another significant collaboration, New York's Department of Youth and Community Development developed a memorandum of understanding with the city's Department of Education (DOE) in which the DOE funds the use of school buildings when they would typically be closed and agrees to give programs access to schools during the school year and summer at no charge. The DOE also provides security, fingerprinting of staff, and snacks for OST programs in school buildings.

But the real benefits for participation are the connections around learning—how to combine the strengths of schools and OST to support youth across the district, how to share data about youth in meaningful ways, and how to get school and OST program staff working together districtwide to support students.

## Program Views on Participation in OST Initiatives

While all the cities in this study reported that they are directly and indirectly addressing issues of access, enrollment, and sustained participation by providing the supports described above, this study was designed to learn whether and how the supports actually help programs in their efforts to improve older youth participation in OST programs. Therefore, through interviews and our survey we sought the programs' perspectives on the contributions of initiative-level supports toward increasing recruitment and retention and asked what they see as both the value-added and the challenges of being part of an initiative and receiving support. We were particularly interested in exploring the degree to which the programs in this study are using these resources and examining whether there are any systematic relationships between initiative-level supports and higher rates of retention in OST programs.

This section reports on (1) the findings from the full survey sample to understand which, if any, initiative supports programs value as important to their participation goals (regardless of their ability to reach those goals) and to determine whether there were any relationships between reported use of initiative-level help and retention rates; and (2) the findings from the interviews with

TABLE 4.1

## Programs' Perceptions of City-level Supports

| Being part of an OST system has helped support program participation goals by: | Proportion of All Programs That Checked "Yes" (N=198) |
|---|---|
| Increasing connections or partnerships with other organizations | 79% |
| Providing funding | 73% |
| Helping with access to participation data | 70% |
| Providing training on how to use data to track and improve participation | 66% |
| Learning from best practices of other programs in the city | 60% |
| Providing training on strategies to increase youth engagement | 57% |
| Involving our program in an evaluation | 56% |
| Advocating for OST programs | 53% |
| Assisting in recruitment/referrals of participants | 52% |
| Marketing for the program | 45% |

Source: Program surveys.

the 28 programs we visited, during which we asked program providers about how they use initiative-level supports and what advantages and disadvantages they perceived regarding these supports. Though largely descriptive in nature, this information can be used to inform future city-level investments in OST and sets the stage for more in-depth exploration of the role of city-level supports in promoting participation.

The programs in our survey sample identified ways in which city initiatives were supporting their participation goals, but none of these efforts was significantly related to higher retention. Interviews with providers did, however, offer insights into the benefits and challenges of being able to access and receive support from initiatives.

### Value of city-level supports to program participation goals

When asked about the value of city-level supports to their enrollment and engagement goals, 72 percent of programs in the survey sample agreed that the initiative helped increase their enrollment of older youth, and 68 percent agreed that the initiative helped them increase engagement of older youth, suggesting that city

initiatives are supporting programs' abilities to attract youth and interest youth in their activities, and therefore contributing to programs' participation goals.

The survey also asked about the variety of services that cities might provide to support program efforts to engage older youth. Table 4.1 lists the 10 city-level supports that programs, regardless of participation rates, reported as being the most helpful in aiding their own participation goals. The top three were

- Increasing connections to other organizations (79 percent)
- Providing funding (73 percent)
- Helping with access to participation data (70 percent)

It is notable that of the top 10 supports, 4 relate to getting and using information (access to participant tracking information, training on using the data systems, learning best practices, and involvement in program evaluation). This finding points to the potential of city initiatives in continuing to support programs' efforts to use data to inform their recruitment and retention strategies.

The supports that providers identified as least helpful to their participation goals, with one-quarter or fewer positive responses, were

- Recruitment/referrals/interviewing of staff and volunteers
- Coordinating fundraising or grant writing
- Helping with budgeting or finances
- Providing curricula
- Decreasing competition for funding through coordination of initiativewide efforts

Interestingly, the only significant differences between high- and lower-retention programs' responses about their views of city supports were cases in which a greater proportion of *lower*-retention programs reported that certain supports were helpful for participation goals:

- 26 percent of lower-retention programs responded that the OST initiative was helpful with recruitment/referrals/interviewing of staff and volunteers, compared with 13 percent of high-retention programs.
- 43 percent of lower-retention programs responded that the OST initiative was helpful by providing in-kind resources, such as snacks, compared with 23 percent of high-retention programs.

The lower-retention programs may be in greater need of basic help with resources and capacity than the high-retention programs and would therefore find snacks and other donations as well as help with staff recruitment more helpful than high-retention programs would.

Program interviews, however, painted a more nuanced picture of the role of city-level supports in participation. Although the overall survey sample indicated that city-level supports were helpful, many of the leaders of the 28 high-participation programs in our interview sample reported feeling that they must rely more on their own program practices for recruitment and retention of older youth than on supports or services at the initiative level. Characteristics of the program interview sample suggest, in part, why this might be the case. Many of the programs predate the existence of the initiative in their city; about half of the surveyed programs have been in existence for 5 or more years, whereas the initiatives were

established within the last 3 to 6 years. Almost three-quarters (71 percent) of programs interviewed have been involved in their respective initiatives for 2 years or less. Since the programs we interviewed were already using many effective recruitment and retention practices when they became involved with the city initiative, they might not report that the initiative supports added value to what they were already doing. Further, many of the programs in this study were already part of a larger OST intermediary such as a Boys & Girls Club or a Beacon initiative and were therefore already receiving the kinds of supports from their parent organizations that the city initiative also provided.

## Managing city-level OST supports: benefits and challenges

Programs interviewed for this study were clear that some of the city-level participation supports created both benefits for and challenges to program implementation. This chapter concludes with a discussion of four issue areas that survey and interview data identified as having potential benefits to participation but are associated with inherent challenges: funding, program coordination and competition, data and evaluation, and quality assessment.

### Funding and funding stream issues

On the program survey, the vast majority (76 percent) of programs reported that funding from the initiative was helpful to them. It is no surprise that more funding would be helpful to overall program operations; several of the interviewed programs, however, explicitly made the connection between funding and its indirect impact on retention. Providers reported that funding can, for example, influence the number and quality of staff hired (which in turn affects staff–youth ratios and relationships), the training and technical assistance available, the number of programs and/or slots available, and program sustainability through supporting program quality and providing matching dollars.

In addition to the funding itself, program staff in San Francisco articulated the value of the role of initiative staff in helping the programs navigate the complexities of

the various state and local funding streams with different requirements. As one program director in San Francisco commented, Afterschool for All has helped "to demystify the convoluted funding for after school by bringing everyone into the same room to unravel it."

Funding from initiatives, however, comes with its own requirements, which often include goals for participation. Just over two-thirds of the programs surveyed (68 percent) indicated that they receive funding that stipulates specific participation requirements.

### Program coordination and competition

As noted in Table 4.1, a full 79 percent of programs surveyed reported that increasing connections or partnerships with other organizations helps support participation goals. According to the providers we interviewed, these increased connections to other programs have yielded several benefits for participation, including the ability to share knowledge about and connect youth to services, increased attention to quality, and greater awareness of weaknesses or needs in the initiative as a whole such as gaps in services or resources.

However, although programs acknowledged the benefits of coordination across the initiative, very few (24 percent) reported on the survey that the OST initiative decreased competition among programs; in fact, during the interviews, providers noted that competition has increased in some ways among providers for youth and for funding. For some, the structure of the initiative sets up competition for participants and funding:

> [Program competition] is one of the big criticisms that providers have of being part of [the initiative]. They love the idea of looking very intentionally at this work of engaging older youth. They understand that you need high quality. But they also feel as though our set-up makes them . . . have to compete for the same young people, and so then, in turn, the same dollars at any given site.

For others, the structure of school-based programs makes it difficult to meet attendance requirements because older youth have other conflicting activities or obligations. Having to be at a program at a certain time and attend the academic portion of the program often

conflicts, for instance, with sports practice, which can eliminate a large group of youth from enrollment.

### Data and evaluation: building knowledge while creating management challenges

Our study showed that the clear benefit of MIS is a better knowledge of participation and of how recruitment practices are working or need to be adjusted. But programs face challenges related to their use of initiatives' data systems, especially when it comes to training a frequently changing staff. Many programs have to use multiple databases (e.g., for different funding streams, for their larger organization such as a YMCA, and for the initiative) for attendance tracking or grant reporting, creating additional staff training needs and redundancies in data entry. One program in Chicago had five different databases into which staff members were entering information and still was planning to develop a sixth that would provide the data that the program itself needed for program improvement.

### Positioning quality assessment

Programs in each city are involved in quality improvement efforts, which, as noted earlier in this chapter, indirectly support participation. On the whole, programs appreciated the validation of their existing practices and procedures as well as the suggested steps for improvement that resulted from the quality assessments.

Programs expressed frustration, however, with the practice of tying program quality to participation numbers. Some program providers felt that their city initiatives equated the notion that youth "vote with their feet" with program quality, when in fact there can be many factors that cause enrollment or attendance to fluctuate, including friends switching programs together, the presence of new programs at a school site, and even the time of year. One concern expressed among programs was that punitive measures associated with participation levels might lead programs to recruit only youth whom they think will be "good" participants. One respondent noted, "They won't even try to reach out to these kids that are going to be a little bit more difficult."

## Summary

All of the cities in our study employ a set of city-level supports to improve access to and sustained participation in OST programs for older youth, namely

- Engaging in citywide recruitment efforts, including social marketing
- Coordinating/networking OST programs across the city
- Collecting and using information, including developing MIS
- Supporting citywide quality improvement efforts
- Coordinating and providing professional development and technical assistance

Some cities recognized the usefulness of their roles in supporting family engagement and developing district-level partnerships for improving participation and retention among older youth. None of these city-level strategies, however, appeared targeted to the participation of older youth in particular. Rather, they were part of overall initiative-building efforts to support the quality and sustainability of OST programs.

When the surveyed programs were asked whether the city-level supports helped with their enrollment and engagement goals, the majority responded that they did, and programs identified a set of supports—chief among them getting and using information—as being important to their participation goals. However, in part because of the nascent stage of development of the city initiatives, and in part because many programs in this sample appeared to already have well-developed infrastructures to support participation, high-retention programs in this study were not more likely than lower-retention programs to have used any of the available supports from the initiative. As the study's implications presented in our next chapter suggest, future investments to improve participation should consider these findings carefully to ensure that investments are wisely spent on supports that may end up making the biggest difference.

# CHAPTER 5

# Key Findings and Implications

# Key Findings and Implications

Policymakers and funders are increasingly aware of the many supports youth need for healthy development and a lifetime of learning. Out-of-school time programs are a critical component in this landscape of educational opportunities, particularly in low-income communities. Programs not only support specific learning outcomes for youth, but also provide many developmentally important opportunities that youth in these communities might not experience elsewhere. Particularly for older youth, OST programs can provide exposure to new opportunities, new environments, and new relationships that can sustain their interest in continued learning.

In this mixed-methods study, we described program characteristics (both program practices and structural features) that can help older youth become interested in OST programs and keep them engaged over time. Prior research has either relied solely on staff members' opinions about which characteristics are important, or examined these characteristics in isolation. For example, prior research has noted that participation rates for younger children are higher than for older youth, [20] and that having late hours is a practice that attracts older youth,[21] but these are isolated findings and do not provide solid evidence about practices that support retention. This study identifies a set of program characteristics that matter most when attempting to keep youth engaged for longer periods of time, using quantitative data from a large sample of programs on which we could conduct statistical analysis. Further, we are able to shed light on why these characteristics matter by using qualitative data to understand from program staff members' perspectives how these factors play out in the lives of the youth. The discussion of other commonly used practices (those not statistically associated with retention, recruitment strategies, and strategies that emerged in our interviews as useful) give the field opportunities for more discussion and research.

In addition to examining program strategies, this study explored the supports that city-level OST initiatives are providing to improve access to and sustained participation in programs and found that, although these supports did not necessarily help improve retention, programs reported that many of them were helpful for their program participation goals.

## Key Findings

**Five program characteristics (two program practices and three structural features) were identified that set apart the programs that were the most successful in supporting high retention: providing many leadership opportunities to youth in the programs, having staff keep informed about youth outside programs in several ways, being community-based, enrolling 100 or more youth, and holding regular staff meetings.**

These practices and features explained 38 percent of the variance in retention. Our analyses indicate that in this group of programs serving older youth, the ones that achieve relatively high rates of retention emphasize youth leadership and outperform other OST programs in their efforts to stay connected with youth; they are also more likely to be larger community-based organizations that give staff members regular opportunities to meet about their programs.

**There is an additional set of retention and recruitment practices that, while not statistically related to retention, were consistently reported as being important in engaging older youth. High-retention programs often employ these practices.**

Retention practices include fostering a sense of community through connections to program staff and peers, providing developmentally appropriate activities and incentives, and engaging families. Recruitment practices include using peers and staff as recruiters, using organizational relationships, and matching program attributes

to youth needs. These strategies may be associated with engagement and/or participation frequency, though more research is needed.

**The study found that the same five program features and strategies were significant in understanding how programs retain middle and high school youth, yet program leaders reported that there are also important differences geared toward meeting the needs of each age group.**

The factors that were quantitatively linked to retention were the same across the two age groups—keeping informed about youth participants' lives, providing many leadership opportunities, and the presence of certain structural features. However, our interviews with the 28 high-participation programs allowed us to better understand how these and other practices manifested themselves differently when working with middle or high school youth. Successful middle school programs give youth opportunities to interact with peers, create structures and routines to make youth feel comfortable and safe, and take advantage of their participants' willingness to try new things, particularly through peer interaction. High school programs focus their programming more on providing formal and informal opportunities to explore and prepare for college and other postgraduation plans; giving youth more responsibility through job-like programming, apprenticeships, and mentoring; and offering the content and the particular skills older teens want to learn.

**City-level OST initiatives employ a set of common recruitment and retention supports, but it is less clear that these efforts have made a difference in programs' ability to recruit or retain older youth.**

City initiatives provide a set of services to support participation: engaging in citywide recruitment efforts, coordinating information about programs across the city and helping programs network, collecting and using data on OST programs, supporting quality improvement efforts, and providing professional development and technical assistance to programs. They are also beginning to foster relationships with school districts and to work with families on a citywide basis. Based on city-level respondents' reports, these efforts may be increasing recruitment and participation at the city level.

The data collected for this study, however, provided little evidence that accessing these city-level supports (which were deemed useful by the programs surveyed) was directly related to the retention rates of individual programs. Helping programs to network, providing training in youth engagement, and helping with evaluation were three of the supports used by the greatest number of programs surveyed. Both high- and lower-retention programs, however, reported similar patterns of use of these and many other supports that they were asked about on the survey. In two cases where there were differences, it was the lower-retention programs that were more likely to use the supports.

In addition, programs reported that being part of a city-level initiative created new challenges having to do with data management, program competition, and tying participation numbers to quality within a high-stakes funding environment.

## Implications

Our findings can help programs move toward a more nuanced approach to recruiting and retaining older youth and help cities understand their role in supporting participation; the preceding chapters of this report document the most successful strategies used by programs and cities for doing so. In addition, these findings have implications for future investment and policy decisions about OST programming for older youth. Therefore, we offer a set of implications aimed at key decision makers—city leaders, funders, and others—whose goal is to continue to improve access to and participation in OST programs as part of their overall efforts to support learning and development and to create pathways of opportunity for older youth.

**The program practices that distinguish programs that achieve high rates of retention among older youth from those that do not can help guide the actions of program directors and city leaders as they try to improve participation within a context of limited resources.**

Our findings about the two practices that set high-retention programs apart—providing many leadership opportunities to youth in the programs and having staff members keep informed about youth outside programs

in several ways—can give other programs an idea of where to direct scarce resources. Because we know these practices support retention, city initiatives can target professional development and technical assistance efforts to ensure that these practices are implemented effectively.

The other practices that high-retention programs use, even though they did not prove to be significant in the regression analysis, warrant further attention. Although we do not know conclusively whether these practices promote retention in other settings, we do know that they were reported by the programs in our study (both on the survey and in interviews) as being part of an overall "participation package."

**Cities should consider offering a variety of specialized activities for high school youth.**

Choice is an important program component and a key feature of youth development, but it seems to matter in different ways for middle school and high school programs. Our interviews with program staff suggested that youth become more focused in their interests as they move into high school, which often means that they are in more specialized or single-focus programs. As a result, while activity choice within programs is developmentally appropriate for middle and high school students, high school students may also benefit from choice across a variety of more specialized programs. Cities can work toward this objective either by providing programs with funding to add specialized activities or by creating a variety of specialized OST opportunities for high school youth. In either case, cities should ensure that these opportunities are distributed across the city and create data systems to track youth participation and retention across a set of more specialized programs.

**OST programs' attention to developmental changes can support continuing youth engagement in OST programs.**

Understanding developmental growth can help programs retain youth longer as well as support their participants' transition from middle school to high school. High-retention high school program providers reported that their participants want programming to help them meet concrete goals, such as taking the SAT. Middle school programs reported that, particularly around eighth grade, youth stop attending because they

want a program that feels "older." OST programs can use this finding as an opportunity to create programming for eighth and possibly ninth graders that includes more responsibility and skills aimed at having a successful ninth-grade year. Cities can support these efforts by bringing OST providers and school staff together to create curricula for transition programs and establish a team approach to the transition. By supporting youth in transition from middle to high school, this collaborative effort could lower the dropout rates for particular schools.

**Family engagement matters for older youth participation.**

Program and city-level respondents alike clearly understand and value family engagement as a strategy to recruit and retain older youth, but are challenged as to how to implement effective family engagement strategies. Further, though family engagement practices were not statistically related to retention, high-retention programs in this study reported using more strategies to engage families than did lower-retention programs. Our findings have implications for city-level professional development efforts, which could be designed to include training on working with families. They also have implications for recruitment strategies, which should include reaching out to families in a variety of ways to persuade them of the value of OST participation for older youth.

**Supporting school–program partnerships can help recruitment efforts.**

Initiatives are in a strong position to influence and advocate for partnerships between school and district leaders and OST program leaders. They can increase youth access to programs by actively supporting the establishment and development of these partnerships. The stronger the partnerships between programs and schools, the more energy they can invest in targeted recruitment fairs and strategic marketing efforts during and outside of the school day. City-level initiatives can support partnerships not only by linking and connecting schools with OST providers, but also by helping programs and schools develop mutually beneficial goals and expectations; streamlined tools for data sharing; and clear, two-way channels of communication regarding students.

**Resources for organizational capacity are important to support participation.**

Our findings suggest that high-retention programs have strong organizational capacity and sound program management. These programs' staff members have time to go the extra mile, attend meetings and plan program-ming, network with other providers and schools, and attend professional development opportunities. In fact, many of the programs selected for our in-depth study were supported by large OST intermediaries (such as Beacon initiatives and Boys & Girls Clubs) that provide this kind of capacity building. These findings suggest that investments in direct service alone are necessary but not sufficient to improve retention, and that resources should be allocated to sufficiently support organizational development.

**Improved data-based decisions can improve participation.**

Cities use data in multiple ways to support participa-tion, including data about location of and access to programs, where underserved youth live, participation rates, and quality across the initiatives. Overall, programs reported that the city-level supports that enabled them to obtain and use information were helpful for improving recruitment and retention; however, they also reported challenges related to data collection and use that cities need to address. Initiatives can work, for example, to ensure that data collection and databases are supporting programs' work and that programs are spending their time managing data in ways that are helpful for partici-pation and are not sapping organizational resources. City initiatives can support programs' understanding and use of participation data in order to improve recruitment and retention. The next step in the coordination of data is to link OST data to other data systems, including those of schools, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of participation and outcomes across all the supports, including schools, available to youth in the city.

**City-level initiatives should work with programs for older youth to learn how to better support retention goals.**

All of the cities in our study employ city-level sup-ports to improve access to and sustained participation in OST programs; few of these strategies, however, appeared targeted toward the participation of *older* youth in particular. Rather, they were strategies that were part of their overall initiative-building efforts to support the quality and sustainability of OST programs. Although cities reported using strategies that directly addressed recruitment, such as social marketing, most of the strategies they employed addressed retention only indirectly. Further, none of these strategies supported high-retention programs' participation goals in a statistically significant way. Therefore, applying what we have learned about the high-retention programs in our study—and with the understanding that recruitment and retention are two sides of the same coin—it is important for cities to strengthen their recruitment and retention efforts, and find out from programs what is needed to promote the sustained participation of older youth.

## Concluding Thoughts

This research study has enabled us to identify a set of program characteristics that are important for retain-ing older youth, as well as a set of commonly used recruitment and retention practices that merit further investigation. We have focused our attention on older youth because middle school and high school youth in underserved areas need meaningful opportunities to find their individual pathways, stay engaged in school, and work toward college or other postsecondary education, all of which participation in a strong OST program can support. Our study results underscore the importance of strategic investments to increase and improve youth participation in quality OST programs as a way to support older youth on their pathways to success.

OST programs are increasingly part of an expanded learning approach to education, given the vital role that they can play in getting and keeping youth on trajectories of positive learning and development. Building on recent public- and private-sector investments and interest in expanding learning opportunities that encompass out-of-school time and summer learning experiences, it is more important and relevant than ever to deepen and refine our understanding of how to promote the sustained engagement of older youth in OST programs.

# Notes

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# Appendices

# Cities and Initiatives

## Chicago, IL

www.afterschoolchicago.org

### City initiative

The Chicago Out-of-School Time (OST) Project is a citywide afterschool initiative facilitated by the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (FSS) in partnership with After School Matters, Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District, and the Chicago Public Library. The Chicago OST Project started in 2006 with a grant from The Wallace Foundation and works to bring together city, education, and afterschool leaders to create capacity building, professional development, technical assistance, and data coordination opportunities to provide the city's youth with coordinated, high-quality afterschool programming.[1]

### Coordinating body

FSS spearheads the Chicago OST Project. Formerly known as the Department of Children and Youth Services, FSS was created by Mayor Richard M. Daley in 2004 to coordinate and fund more than 300 afterschool and social service organizations.[2] The department supports youth from infancy to age 18, provides resources for parents and caregivers, and offers the latest data, research, and best practices for the city's educators.

FSS supports the Chicago OST project in providing coordinated efforts to better serve Chicago youth through a citywide program and participant database for afterschool program providers, a website that serves as a hub of information for families and youth on afterschool programs in their community, a focused effort to support career preparation and youth employment, and a commitment to supporting afterschool program quality improvement.

### City demographic information

Approximately 2,800,000 people live in the city of Chicago.[3] Per-capita income in the city is $26,814, with approximately 20.7 percent of individuals living below the poverty level.[4] The population is 39.9 percent White; 34.6 percent Black or African American; 27.8 percent Hispanic or Latino; 4.9 percent Asian; and 0.2 percent American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander. 1.7 percent are of two or more races.[5] A language other than English is spoken in the homes of 36.1 percent of the city population.[6]

## Cincinnati, OH

www.cincyafterschool.org

### City initiative

CincyAfterSchool is the afterschool component of the Cincinnati Public School's Community Learning Centers (CLC) movement, which provides access to opportunities and services and engages families and youth in revitalizing their neighborhoods, all in one centrally located place: the local public school. CLCs are located on 20 school campuses across Cincinnati and offer families and youth access to health and social services as well as educational and recreational opportunities.[7]

CincyAfterSchool is a partnership between the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati and Cincinnati Public Schools.[8] Its mission is to engage "youth, parents, and the community to improve academic achievement and build healthy futures for all." Founded in 2004, CincyAfterSchool is supported by 21st Century Community Learning Center funds and other public and private support. The initial $5.1 million in 21st Century grants has grown to $25.5 million, and the school district has contributed Title I funds to the initiative.

### Coordinating body

The YMCA of Greater Cincinnati's Community Services branch is the coordinating body that facilitates CincyAfterSchool. The YMCA helps manage afterschool throughout the district and works with a CLC's lead agency and providers. The YMCA of Greater Cincinnati also provides programs, camps, and services for people of all ages throughout the Cincinnati region in 14 locations.

Cincinnati has many additional citywide collaboratives and regional planning efforts focused on youth. These include Cincinnati Youth Collaborative, Strive, United Way's Success by 6, Agenda 360, and Vision 2015.

### City demographic information

Cincinnati has a population of approximately 300,000 people.[9] The estimated per-capita income is $23,894 per year.[10] Cincinnati has an estimated 20.9 percent of families and 25.7 percent of individuals who live below the poverty level.[11] The population is 51 percent White; 44.4 percent Black or African American; 1.9 percent Hispanic or Latino; 1.4 percent Asian; and 0.1 percent American Indian or Native Alaskan. 2.2 percent are of two or more races.[12]

## New York City, NY

www.nyc.gov/dycd

### City initiative

In September 2005, The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) launched the Out of School Time (OST) Initiative to provide a mix of academic, recreational, and cultural activities for young people after school, on holidays, and during the summer. As of 2009–2010, the OST initiative consists of 516 programs citywide, all of which are provided at no cost to participants. The programs are operated by 175 community-based organizations and located in schools, community centers, settlement houses, religious centers, cultural organizations, libraries, and public housing and parks facilities.

The budget for the OST initiative has grown from $46.4 million in FY06 to $110.7 million in FY10.  This funding is included in the city's 4-year financial plan and thus is a sustainable source of revenue for community-based organizations in years to come. DYCD targeted 77 high-need zip codes for its programs, and 62 percent of participants reside in one of the priority zip codes.

More than 80,000 children and youth from kindergarten through twelfth grade participate in programming provided through DYCD. Programs offer academic support, cultural arts opportunities, recreational activities, enrichment, and civic engagement; most operate between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and on school holidays from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. More than half of the programs in the initiative are now year-round, so thousands of elementary and middle school-aged children have access to a full-time, comprehensive summer program.

### Coordinating body

DYCD—created through the merger of the Department of Youth Services and the Community Development Agency in 1996—works to provide quality youth and family programming across the city, including afterschool and summer programs, community-based services such as literacy programs for youth and adults, workforce development opportunities for youth (including a large-scale summer youth employment program), runaway and homeless youth outreach, and Beacon community centers.[13] The department administers city, state, and federal funds to these programs and provides additional support.

The key organizing principles DYCD employed in implementing New York City's OST Initiative included collaboration, quality, and accountability: DYCD created a comprehensive system that coordinates resources from 10 city agencies, most extensively with the city's Department of Education to secure space and resources. To ensure high-quality programs, DYCD invests in technical assistance and capacity building as well as direct services. Finally, DYCD's OST initiative introduced a new performance-based contract model that holds programs

accountable for reaching specific participation goals and reduces the funding amount provided to programs that do not reach those goals.

### City demographic information

New York City has an estimated population of 8,300,000.[14] Per-capita income is approximately $30,415 per year,[15] with an estimated 15.7 percent of families and 18.6 percent of individuals below the poverty level.[16] New York City's population is 44.6 percent White; 25.1 percent Black or African American; 27.5 percent Hispanic or Latino; 11.8 percent Asian; and 0.5 percent American Indian or Native Alaskan. 2.1 percent are of two or more races.[17] A language other than English is spoken in the homes of 47.8 percent of the city population.[18]

## Providence, RI

www.mypasa.org

### City initiative

Providence's AfterZones, coordinated by the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), act as networks of programs that make up a "community campus"[19] of programs, centralizing information and connecting schools, libraries, recreation, and community centers to organize and expand programs for Providence middle school youth. Youth have access to a wide range of activities throughout the year, both on school sites and in community organizations through the AfterZones. Transportation is provided to AfterZone participants throughout Providence. Each AfterZone is led by a community-based site management agency and is advised by a coordinating council comprising community, city, and school leaders. AfterZones share procedures in recruitment, scheduling, and other components to make it easier for youth, families, and providers to participate in the initiative.

### Coordinating body

PASA is a partnership between public and nonprofit afterschool providers launched in 2004 by Mayor David N. Cicilline.[20] The mission of PASA is to "expand and improve afterschool opportunities for the youth of Providence by organizing a system to ensure all youth access to high-quality afterschool programs and learning opportunities."[21] PASA serves as an intermediary organization that seeks to provide leadership, build systems and capacity, develop and revise policy, and leverage resources to achieve its mission.

PASA focuses its work on four systemic strategies to support the development of middle school youth: quality improvement and capacity building, including assessment, accountability, and the development of quality standards; the development of AfterZones for middle school youth; the development of a newly designed high school system (launched in 2009); and the creation of stronger connections with the school system through expanded learning opportunities.[22]

### City demographic information

Providence has a population of approximately 170,000 people.[23] The per-capita income of the city is $21,108, with 20.5 percent of families and 26 percent of individuals below poverty level. The population is 48.5 percent White; 14.5 percent Black or African American; 37.6 percent Hispanic or Latino; 5.7 percent Asian; and 0.9 percent American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander. 4.2 percent are of two or more races.[24] Of the middle school population in the school district, 91 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. A language other than English is spoken in the homes of 47.8 percent of Providence families.[25]

## San Francisco, CA

www.dcyf.org

### City initiative

The San Francisco Afterschool for All (AFA) initiative brings together a variety of stakeholders, including city departments, the school district, private funders, afterschool providers, and parent organizations that work together voluntarily to increase access to high-quality afterschool options for elementary and middle school youth. In late 2005, Mayor Gavin Newsom and the superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District pledged that the city and school district would lead the initiative and focus on coordinating resources

and efforts to increase access and quality. The initiative builds partnerships that facilitate sharing data, coordinating capacity building and professional development efforts, and targeting resources to meet youth and family needs.

### Coordinating bodies

The AFA initiative is led by the city Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF) and the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). DCYF uses local city tax dollars and a property tax set-aside called the Children's Fund to issue grants to community-based organizations that operate more than 140 OST programs. In addition to making grants, DCYF helps coordinate policy and programming efforts, provides technical assistance, and monitors and evaluates programs. DCYF also grants funds for child care, youth employment, family support, violence prevention, youth empowerment, and wellness services, in addition to funding the following OST programming initiatives:

- **Rec Connect Initiative**—created to provide a community hub of services for families in high-need neighborhoods, with community-based organizations providing OST programming in city recreation centers.
- **SF Beacon Initiative**—a public–private partnership founded in 1994 that supports community centers in public schools. The centers promote education, career development, arts and recreation, leadership, and health in children and youth. Beacons receive core funding from DCYF; they also receive funding from SFUSD and private funders.
- **SF TEAM**—an initiative started in 2001 to infuse literacy into afterschool programs, particularly programs that serve kindergarten through eighth-grade children and youth struggling academically. Funded by DCYF and SFUSD, the initiative provides oversight and technical assistance. Community-based organizations operate SF TEAM programs at 11 school-based afterschool sites throughout the city.

SFUSD also leads the AFA initiative. SFUSD operates its own set of afterschool programs, which are operated by district staff, called Child Development Center School-

Age Care programs. SFUSD receives state and federal afterschool funding from the California Department of Education and contracts with community-based organizations to operate afterschool programs at schools (called ExCEL programs). SFUSD provides training workshops, technical assistance, and monitoring for its afterschool programs.

### City demographic information

Approximately 800,000 people live in San Francisco.[26] The per-capita income of San Francisco is $46,015,[27] with 11 percent of individuals below the poverty level.[28] The population is 54.5 percent White; 6.5 percent Black or African American; 14 percent Hispanic or Latino; 31.3 percent Asian; and 0.8 percent American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander. 3 percent are of two or more races.[29] A language other than English is spoken in the homes of 45.2 percent of the city population.[30]

## Washington, DC

www.cyitc.org

### City initiative

The Project My Time (PMT) initiative seeks to provide enriching and engaging afterschool, weekend, and summer programming for middle school students to increase the likelihood of their completing high school.[31] PMT operates in 10 schools citywide. Each PMT site has a full-time site director who coordinates with multiple OST providers operating in each school building. The program operates daily from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m., and students receive a snack and homework assistance during program time.

### Coordinating body

The DC Children & Youth Investment Trust Corporation ("The Trust") is "a public-private partnership chartered by the District to help a wide variety of organizations improve the quality, quantity, and accessibility of services and opportunities for every child in the city. [Its] vision is that each child in the District of Columbia is given every opportunity to develop and grow into a healthy, caring, and productive adult."[32] The Trust works to

increase resources for youth and families, strengthen services for children and youth, and create an evaluation framework for these programs.

The Trust provides technical and financial assistance to many agencies and organizations serving DC's youth. In fiscal year 2007, The Trust granted more than $18 million to community-based organizations such as parent centers, OST programs, youth entrepreneurship and older youth programs, summer camps, adult literacy programs, lifelong learning coaches, and charter school improvements.[33] The Trust convenes public and private entities regularly and partners with programs to provide research and evaluation tools to DC's youth-serving organizations. In its efforts to maintain and improve quality programming, The Trust has developed OST standards derived from lessons offered by programs nationwide, the experience of The Trust's staff, and promising practices from DC's best programs.[34]

### City demographic information

Approximately 588,000 people live in the District of Columbia.[35] Per-capita income is approximately $41,144 per year.[36] The city is 36.1 percent White; 54.4 percent Black or African American; 8.5 percent Hispanic or Latino; 3.2 percent Asian; and 0.3 percent American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander. 1.7 percent are of two or more races.[37] A language other than English is spoken in the homes of 14.6 percent of the city population.[38]

# Youth Participation Community of Practice

The Youth Participation Community of Practice was created for practitioners, researchers, and other innovative educators across the country to have the opportunity to share and learn new practices and thinking around recruiting and retaining older youth in OST activities. With representatives from 12 cities across the United States, the Youth Participation Community of Practice created a learning community, and its members acted as respondents and partners in our research about older youth and OST participation.

The group convened regularly through interactive audio conferences to share knowledge, challenges, and new ideas about a wide range of topics in the afterschool arena. Meetings include:

**August 2008:** Discussion of Conceptual Framework of Older Youth and OST Participation Study

**October 2008:** Family Engagement: Systems-level Strategies for the Role of Families in Afterschool Participation

**December 2008:** Recruitment and Social Marketing Strategies: How City Systems Can Support Increased Participation

**April 2009:** Using Participation Data and Management Information Systems (MIS) in Afterschool Systems: How Data Can Support Youth Participation Issues

**June 2009:** Building City-level Initiatives That Support Afterschool Youth Participation

**September 2009 and April 2010:** Study Findings

The following list of Youth Participation Community of Practice Members shows their organizational affiliation at the time of data collection.

## Boston, MA

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## Cambridge, MA

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## Cincinnati, OH

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# Respondent List[i]

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i Titles and organizational affiliations correspond to data collection period.

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# Sample Selection and Description

This appendix outlines how we selected programs for participation in the study and describes the full sample of 198 programs that responded to the survey.

## Participation Rate Calculations

We asked each city to send us individual-level daily attendance data covering the 2007–2008 school year. In order to calculate average attendance rates for different subgroups of youth, we asked each city to send the records with demographic information attached, and with enrollment and exit dates, so that we would be able to calculate the attendance rate as the proportion of days attended out of the possible days that the youth could attend.[ii]

Table D.1 provides a rough summary of how we calculated the average attendance rates within each city. Two of the cities entered their data, and were therefore able to extract their data, in a format that met our request for attendance information. Three cities gathered daily attendance information, but they did not track enrollment or exit information electronically, nor did they have data that would allow us to know exactly how many days a program met. In these cases, we estimated possible days of attendance universally for all youth in the same program but used the maximum number of days that any youth in the program actually did attend as the base upon which a participation rate was calculated. The database of one of those three cities contained very few programs for middle school, so we needed to ask the city representatives to identify additional middle school programs based on their knowledge of those programs. Finally, one city had established its own way of examining participation rates to align with the needs of its

funder, viewing participation as the proportion of youth in a program who met a certain number of expected hours of participation; we used that city's format and definition.

In the next section, we provide more detail on how we selected programs for the survey sample, based on these various city databases.

## Sample Selection

To learn about practices that engage and sustain older youth participation, we sought programs that were already successful in these areas; therefore, we used the city-level MIS from the six participating cities to identify moderate- to high-participation programs. In addition to serving middle and/or high school youth, to be eligible for selection, these programs were required to

- Have at least seven participants
- Meet a minimum number of days, which differed by city[iii]
- Have an MIS participation rate of at least 50 percent in most cases, with 44 percent the lowest rate included in two cities[iv,v]

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ii  For example, if a youth enrolls after the start of a program, his or her attendance rate could be calculated to be lower than it should be if we could not eliminate the days prior to the youth participant's enrollment from the total possible days of attendance.

iii  Programs/Activities had to have taken place for a minimum number of days (i.e., we did not include 1-day events or very short-term programs). In New York City and Washington, DC, programs had to have met for at least 18 days during the school year. In Providence, the required minimum of days possible varied by the session during which the program/activity took place—approximately half the number of weeks that the session lasted. Programs/activities that took place during the fall or winter session were required to have met at least 6 days; spring session programs/activities had to have met at least 3 days.

iv  On average, about three-quarters (74.7 percent) of the programs in each city met the minimum 44 percent criteria, but this ranged from just under half (49.3 percent) to all the programs in a city meeting the minimum cutoff.

v  Because Cincinnati's initiative has fewer programs for older youth than the other initiatives in this study, we used this participation rate cutoff where data were available and developed a reputational sample for the rest of the survey and interview sample.

TABLE D.1
## Participation Rate Calculations

| | Participation Rate Calculation (based on 2007-2008 participation data) | High School Programs, Middle School Programs, or Mixed-age Programs |
|---|---|---|
| Chicago | Rate=days attended out of possible days (possible days varies for Family and Support Services data and will be universal for all youth within the After School Matters (ASM) program, based on maximum number of days of any child—did *not* reflect individual differences for youth enrollment periods), averaged across youth in the particular program | High school and middle school (only 5% of ASM participants were in middle school, so we did not include them in ASM data) |
| Cincinnati | Rate=days attended out of possible days (possible days is calculated universally for all youth within the program—does *not* reflect individual differences for youth enrollment periods because enrollment and exit dates were not available), averaged across youth in the particular program | High school and middle school |
| New York City | Rate=proportion of youth in a program who meet the city's designated criteria (108 hours for high school and 288 hours for middle school)* | High school and middle school |
| Providence | Rate=days attended out of possible days (possible days varies for each youth, depending on enrollment and withdrawal date), averaged across youth in the particular activity | Middle school |
| San Francisco | Rate=days attended out of possible days (possible days is calculated universally for all youth within the program—does *not* reflect individual differences for youth enrollment periods because enrollment and exit dates were not available), averaged across youth in the particular program | High school, middle school, and mixed programs |
| Washington, DC | Rate=days attended out of possible days (possible days varies for each youth, depending on enrollment and withdrawal date), averaged across youth in the particular program | High school, middle school, and mixed programs |

* This number, 288, varies slightly for middle school youth, depending on number of service days that the participant is funded.

Of the 362 programs that met the above criteria, we also asked that they

- Operate during the school year, alone or in combination with summer programming
- Not be solely focused on the prevention of particular behaviors and issues (e.g., teen pregnancy, substance use)

A total of 346 programs met these additional criteria and received a link to the program survey. Of these programs, 198 (57 percent) completed the survey. All results from statistical analyses (e.g., correlations and regression analyses) presented throughout the report

reflect responses by this group of 198 programs, referred to throughout as the "survey sample."

Table D.2 shows how participation of the selected "survey sample" compared with that of all of the programs serving older youth for which the cities collect participation data (the "full sample").[vi] We also display the same information for our "interview sample," those programs that we visited in person. The table shows

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vi   The table does not include data from New York City or Cincinnati. The participation calculations in New York City were not comparable to those of the other cities; because the bulk of the programs surveyed from Cincinnati were selected based on nominations, participation data were often not available.

TABLE D.2

## Participation Rates by Sample Including Ranges

| | Full City MIS Database Sample | | | Survey Sample* | | | Interview Sample** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Middle school youth | High school youth | Overall | Middle school youth | High school youth | Overall | Middle school youth | High school youth | Overall |
| | j=4 | j=4 | j=4 | j=4 | j=3 | j=4 | j=3 | j=3 | j=4 |
| | n=330 | n=649 | n=979 | n=72 | n=52 | n=124 | n=9 | n=8 | n=17 |
| Program-level averages | | | | | | | | | |
| Average participation rate across all programs | 54 | 70 | 65 | 70 | 71 | 70 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| Minimum program-level average participation rate | 1 | 2 | 1 | 44 | 45 | 44 | 63 | 66 | 63 |
| Maximum program-level average participation rate | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 93 | 98 | 98 |
| City-level averages | | | | | | | | | |
| Average city-level participation rate | 56 | 60 | 61 | 69 | 70 | 70 | 77 | 80 | 79 |
| Minimum city-level participation rate | 46 | 47 | 50 | 63 | 64 | 66 | 64 | 72 | 69 |
| Maximum city-level participation rate | 70 | 75 | 70 | 72 | 78 | 75 | 84 | 88 | 84 |

Source: City MIS database attendance data provided by the four cities with relatively comparable and complete data. The numbers for the survey and interview samples reported on this table are smaller than those for the full sample because they do not include the surveys and interviews from the cities that were excluded from this presentation of the combined participation rates. See footnote v on previous page.

Notes: j=number of cities; n=number of programs

Descriptive data include four cities based on MIS data provided by each city. Program-level values reflect the average across all participants within each program. City-level values were calculated by taking the average across all programs within a city and then taking the mean of the city-level averages.

*Six programs that completed surveys did not provide MIS participation data.

**One interview site did not provide MIS participation data.

the range and average of all programs across all cities as well as how the cities differed. (To calculate the city averages, we averaged the participation rate across all the programs within a city and then took the mean across the cities.)

As would be expected, given that we picked the sampled programs that met a minimum level for participation, the average participation rate for the survey sample is higher than that for the full database. In turn, the interview sample has an even higher participation rate. The table also shows that we found similar rates of participation for the survey and interview samples

between high school and middle school youth; however, the rates within the larger, full-city MIS database indicate that high school youth, on average, participate with greater intensity.

There is not much difference when comparing the program-level rates with the city-level rates. Because we received databases with variation in the number of programs within each city for which there were data, there was a chance that the program averages could be very different from the city-level averages. For instance, if a city's MIS included a very large number of programs relative to the other cities, then its data would weigh

more heavily in the program averages and could poten-tially pull the program average up or down. That did not turn out to be the case, however. In the text of the report, we present only the program-level analyses.

## Program Sample Description

### Program overview

The programs that responded to our survey have been operating in their current locations over a wide range of time periods, with half being fairly new (operating 5 or fewer years) and about 5 percent operating for more than 40 years. Only 36 percent are based in schools; 64 percent are community-based programs.

Many programs in our sample do not only operate during afterschool hours—almost one-third (29 percent) are open on weekends and during the week, and almost half (46 percent) serve youth throughout the summer as well as during the school year. The vast majority (86 percent) operate on certain days and times; only 14 percent are drop-in programs.

The median annual budget of participating programs was about $150,000, but varied widely with about 17 percent reporting incomes of $10,000 or less and about 9 percent reporting budgets of $1,000,000 or higher.

### Youth

Corresponding with the wide range in program budgets, programs range from very small to quite large—serving from 2 to 6,400 youth, with a median of 90 youth participants. Only 10 programs (e.g., YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs) serve 1,000 or more youth. Most of these youth are ethnic minorities and/or economically disad-vantaged. In the average program, 49 percent of youth are African American; 27 percent are Latino; 10 percent are Asian; 9 percent are White; 4 percent are mixed race; fewer than 1 percent are Native American; and 1 percent are from other ethnic backgrounds. In about two-thirds of programs, more than 75 percent of participants are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Although programs appear to be reaching many youth who could benefit from their services, in most cases the programs do not operate in particularly underserved areas; only about one-quarter (26 percent) are the only

program in their neighborhood with their particular focus.

While many programs that serve teens also serve younger children (39 percent), 61 percent serve only teens. Twenty-nine percent serve only middle school youth, 12 percent serve only high school students, and 14 percent serve both middle and high school youth. In addition, 6 percent serve both high school youth and young adults. Fewer than 1 percent serve only youth who are past high school.

### Staffing

Programs reported staffing their programs with a median of a little over six full-time equivalent (FTE) paid staff and four volunteers who work directly with youth participants. Of these, four FTE staff and two volunteers spend at least some of their time working with older youth. The staff-to-youth ratio is about 1 FTE staff member for every 17 youth participants in the program.

Programs also reported their staff-to-youth ratios within given activities separately for youth of different ages. Their reports suggest that the number of youth served per staff member in given activities increases slightly as youth get older: The median number of youth for each staff member in activities for elementary school youth is about 12, about 13 for middle school youth, and 15 for high school-aged youth (see Table D.3).

Staff members came to these programs with varied experiences and characteristics that could contribute to successful work with youth. For example, 62 percent of programs reported that most or all of their staff members who plan or lead activities for older youth reflect the cultural background of the youth they work with, and just over half (55 percent) reported that most or all staff members came to the program having previously worked with older youth. A quarter of the programs hired people who were neighborhood residents (27 percent), and slightly more than one-third (35 percent) of the pro-grams hired people with training in cultural competence or with some type of content specialization.

Programs either offer or require many different types of training for their staff. The vast majority offer training in curriculum and activity planning and implementa-tion (92 percent), regular monitoring and feedback on

**TABLE D.3**

**Staff Experiences and Characteristics**

| STAFF EXPERIENCE OR CHARACTERISTIC | Percentage of Programs Reporting That Most or All Staff Had This Characteristic Prior to Work in Program |
|---|---|
| Reflect cultural backgrounds of youth | 62% |
| Have previous work experience with older youth | 55% |
| Hold at least a 2- or 4-year college degree | 52% |
| Speak the language spoken by most parents | 49% |
| Have health and safety training | 44% |
| Have classroom/group behavioral management experience | 43% |
| Have content specialization (e.g., a professional from another field such as artist, computer specialist, etc.) | 36% |
| Have cultural competence training | 35% |
| Live in program neighborhood | 27% |

Source: Program surveys.

activity implementation (91 percent), youth and child development (86 percent), or classroom/group behavioral management (87 percent). A large majority offer training in health and safety (83 percent), mediation and conflict resolution (79 percent), or family engagement (67 percent). In more than half of the programs (58 percent), activity leaders had received an average of 10 or more hours of training in the last year. In most programs, activity leaders are given frequent opportunities to meet together without youth to discuss program-related issues. In just over half of the programs (54 percent), staff members meet for this reason at least twice a month.

**Programming**

The programs in our sample reported offering youth a wide variety of activities (see Table D.4). At least two-thirds offer enrichment activities (e.g., painting, drama, music), academic activities, opportunities for leadership development, or recreational activities. Programs also showed variety *within* their offerings: 72 percent reported offering four or more different types of these activities for youth to choose from. Youth participants seem to take advantage of the variety: In 45 percent of programs, 100 percent of youth were involved in more than one type of activity.

The programs offer a wide array of targeted services for youth. The most common are life-skills training and computer/technology programs, offered in at least two-thirds of programs (see Table D.5).

The programs also offer many leadership opportunities for youth, with at least two-thirds offering opportunities to volunteer in the program, have input into designing activities, or design or lead activities for their peers or younger youth (see Table D.6). Youth did not always take advantage of these activities, however: Only 20 percent of programs reported that all participating youth were involved in one or more leadership activities.

Beyond offering activities, programs strive to develop strong relationships between staff members and youth participants; only 3 percent of programs reported that youth–staff relationship building was not an explicit goal of the program. Programs reported fostering these relationships in a variety of ways: More than two-thirds (70 percent) reported that youth have opportunities to interact informally with staff members outside of specific activities, 81 percent provide opportunities to interact one-on-one with staff members, and about half (52 percent) reported that adults are assigned groups of older youth to look out for and develop relationships

TABLE D.4
## Types of Activities Offered

| TYPES OF ACTIVITIES OFFERED | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Enrichment | 79% |
| Academic | 71% |
| Leadership development | 70% |
| Recreational | 67% |
| Targeted courses/training | 61% |
| Prevention programming | 46% |
| Youth employment, apprenticeships, job shadowing | 42% |
| College preparation | 35% |

Source: Program surveys.

TABLE D.5
## Types of Services Offered

| TYPES OF SERVICES OFFERED | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Life-skills training | 74% |
| Computers/technology | 67% |
| Health (nutrition, reproductive health) | 58% |
| Violence prevention | 57% |
| Job skills | 49% |
| Volunteer/paid internal jobs | 48% |
| Drug prevention | 46% |
| Help with college applications | 43% |
| Sexual risk behavior prevention | 43% |
| Links to external jobs | 40% |
| GED help | 14% |

Source: Program surveys.

TABLE D.6
## Leadership Opportunities

| LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Volunteer opportunities | 70% |
| Opportunities to have input into designing activities | 69% |
| Opportunities to design/lead activities for peers or younger youth | 67% |
| Community service activities | 64% |
| Opportunities to shape program rules | 55% |
| Opportunities to work one-on-one with peers or younger youth | 53% |
| Youth council/Decision-making groups | 49% |
| Paid staff positions | 28% |
| Opportunities to serve in official "officer" roles | 18% |

Source: Program surveys.

with. About one-fifth of programs (21 percent) use one of these strategies, 47 percent use two, and 29 percent use all three to foster relationships between program staff and older youth. In addition, more than half (54 percent) reported linking youth with mentors (e.g., college, career, academic).

The vast majority of programs (88 percent) implement a variety of strategies to get to know youth outside of the confines of the program. Examples include collecting youth participants' report cards (58 percent), meeting one-on-one to see how things are going (61 percent), making school visits if needed (38 percent), contacting parents regularly (55 percent), or publicly recognizing good grades or other accomplishments outside the program (51 percent). A little more than two-thirds (70 percent) reported using more than one of these strategies.

### Recruitment and retention

Programs reported using several strategies to recruit older youth for involvement in the program (see Table D.7). The most common strategies, used by at least two-thirds of the programs, were asking youth to refer their friends (87 percent), visiting schools to get referrals (72 percent), and attending community events (70 percent). Programs typically use more than one of these strategies, and 60 percent use five or more.

To ensure active participation, most programs contact absent youth either formally (e.g., 55 percent reported that staff members are responsible for contacting youth who have been absent a certain number of times) or informally (e.g., 39 percent reported that staff members sometimes try to get in touch with absent youth). Several programs offer incentives for active participation, including field trips (65 percent), awards or gift certificates (54 percent), and formal public recognition (47 percent). Fewer reported offering jobs (21 percent), financial incentives (21 percent), or school credit (14 percent).

### Engaging parents

Although the programs we visited reported experiencing great challenges as they tried to engage parents, responses to our survey suggested that programs are not simply giving up on this goal (see Table D.8). At least 90 percent reported inviting parents to program activities, sending information home to parents, or talking with parents over the phone. Eighty-two percent reported using five or more of the strategies we asked about. About half (52 percent) reported that they are in regular contact with at least a quarter of participants' parents, and 20 percent have a parent liaison.

### Initiative-related activities

The programs in our sample had been accessing funding or services through their city's OST initiative for a median of about a year. Programs ranged from never having accessed the initiative (6 percent) to working with the initiative for a little more than 8 years (2 percent).

We asked programs several questions about their use of the city initiative and how they felt it had helped support the program's participation goals. As shown in Table D.9, the most frequent initiative-related activities reported by programs included attending workshops or trainings (92 percent) and conferences (89 percent) organized by the initiative. Other common initiative supports for programs include being observed by the initiative (87 percent) and receiving resources and materials distributed by the initiative (85 percent). Only about one-third of programs reported receiving help with fundraising and development.

Overall, providers reported that the initiative had helped them achieve their goals for youth. About two-thirds (68 percent) strongly agreed that the initiative helped to improve outcomes for older youth, 58 percent strongly agreed that the initiative helped increase enrollment of older youth, and the same proportion felt that the initiative helped increase engagement levels of older youth.

We also asked the programs whether they had received help in 26 different areas. The 10 areas in which the most programs reported receiving help are described in Table D.10. More than two-thirds of programs reported that the initiative had helped to increase connections with other organizations, provided their program with funding, or given them access to participation data.

**TABLE D.7**

## Recruitment Strategies

| RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Ask youth to refer their friends | 87% |
| Visit schools to get referrals | 72% |
| Attend community events | 70% |
| Go out in the community to tell youth about the program | 63% |
| Ask youth to refer their siblings | 61% |
| Run youth-led programs or events | 56% |
| Foster partnerships with other organizations that refer youth to the program | 50% |
| Offer stipends for participation | 24% |

Source: Program surveys.

**TABLE D.8**

## Strategies to Engage Parents

| STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE PARENTS | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Talk with parents over the phone | 95% |
| Send information about program home to parents | 93% |
| Invite parents to program activities | 92% |
| Hold events for parents | 89% |
| Meet with parents informally | 77% |
| Hold individual meetings with parents | 71% |
| Send parents newsletters with community resources | 68% |
| Get parent input through surveys/group meetings | 67% |
| Provide courses for parents | 40% |

Source: Program surveys.

**TABLE D.9**

## Initiative-related Activities

| INITIATIVE-RELATED ACTIVITIES | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Attend workshops or trainings | 92% |
| Attend conferences | 89% |
| Initiative performs observations | 87% |
| Receive resources/materials | 85% |
| Use participant tracking system | 82% |
| Submit participation forms for data entry | 78% |
| Receive technical assistance | 69% |
| Participate in a needs assessment | 69% |
| Contribute to decisions that affect broader initiative | 59% |
| Receive help with fundraising and development | 32% |

Source: Program surveys.

**TABLE D.10**

## Top 10 Types of Initiative Help

| TOP 10 TYPES OF INITIATIVE HELP | Percentage of Programs |
|---|---|
| Increase connections to other organizations | 79% |
| Provide funding | 73% |
| Increase accessibility to participation data | 70% |
| Train on how to use data to improve participation | 66% |
| Help programs learn best practices | 60% |
| Train on strategies to increase youth engagement | 57% |
| Involve program in an evaluation | 56% |
| Provide advocacy for programs | 53% |
| Help recruit participants | 52% |
| Help market the program | 45% |

Source: Program surveys.

# Analysis Description

To examine which program characteristics were most strongly associated with retention, we conducted a series of regression analyses. Our outcome measure was the proportion of older youth participants who attended the program for 12 or more months. We asked programs to include breaks in attendance. For example, if a youth participates for 1 month, then doesn't participate for 2, and then participates again for 1 month, that would yield a 2-month duration. Thus, shorter-term programs could have 12-month participants if, for example, youth attended a session, then came back to subsequent sessions of the activity, even after a break in attendance.

We considered 14 sets of practice measures to include in these analyses, corresponding to those factors that our literature review indicated were important for retaining youth

- Recruitment
- Safety
- Peer interactions
- Types of activities offered
- Types of services offered
- Staffing
- Program quality
- Rewards and incentives for participation
- Adult support (staff–youth relationships)
- Keeping up with youth participants' lives outside of the program
- Leadership opportunities
- Evaluation efforts
- Parent engagement
- Interaction with the out-of-school time (OST) initiative

Within each of these practice areas, we examined bivariate correlations between participation (i.e., the proportion of youth who participated 12 or more months) and all variables that fell under each practice measure

heading. For example, to measure parent engagement, we examined correlations between participation and 13 practices related to parent engagement—including having one-on-one meetings with parents, holding parent events, offering courses for parents, and having a parent liaison, as well as the proportion of parents with whom the program is in regular contact. Additionally, we included a variable indicating the number of activities the program implements to try to engage parents. We determined which measure within each of these practice groups had the strongest association with participation and used that measure in the regression to represent its practice group or construct. In two areas—safety and interactions with the OST initiative—the correlations between all related variables and participation were relatively weak, so they were not included in the final models.

We then tested regression models that included the 12 practice measures most strongly correlated with participation, namely

- The number of strategies used to recruit older youth (ranging from 1–8)
- The number of opportunities for peer interactions offered by the program (0–5)
- The number of types of activities offered to older youth (1–8)
- The number of types of services offered to older youth (1–11)
- The staff-to-youth ratio (calculated value ranging from 0–.71)
- How often activity leaders meet for 30 minutes or more to discuss program-related issues (6-point scale ranging from "never" to "weekly")
- The number of rewards and incentives offered by the program (0–6)
- The number of strategies used by programs to build youth–staff relationships (0–3)

- The number of ways staff keep informed about youth participants' lives outside of the program (0–5)
- The number of leadership opportunities offered by the program (1–9)
- Whether the program uses data for staff development and training (yes/no)
- The number of activities/events offered by the program to engage parents (1–9)

We also included five structural variables. These structural variables were included in all regression models that followed, whether or not they continued to be significant predictors of participation once other variables were included in the model:

- Whether the program served at least 100 youth (yes/no)
- Whether the program was school-based (yes/no)
- Whether the program served *only* older youth (yes/no)
- Number of months per year the program is open (out of 12)
- Number of days per week the program is open (out of 7)

After conducting the first regression model, which included the five structural variables and the 12 practice measures, we omitted the practice measures that were most weakly related to participation. We excluded measures one by one, until we achieved our "strongest model," which took into account the five structural variables and only those practice measures that made significant contributions to participation. As such, any measure that was statistically significant in this regression model was important in predicting participation, even after accounting for the five structural variables and the other practice measures that remained in the model at that point.

We tested these models on three different groups of programs: the full sample, programs that reported on their high school students, and programs that reported on their middle school participants. In the full sample, larger programs (i.e., those with 100 or more participants) and programs that were not school-based had higher proportions of youth who participated for at least

12 months. The more successful programs offered youth more leadership opportunities (the strongest correlate of participation in this model), used more strategies to keep up with youth participants' lives outside of the program, and were more likely to provide staff members with at least 30 minutes a week to meet and discuss the program.

The programs that reported on their high school and middle school youth each contained different variables that remained in their respective final regression models (i.e., variables that were significantly associated with participation rates once all other measures were included). As such, we wanted to test whether these variables were significantly *more* important in predicting participation in either the middle school or high school samples. To do this, we conducted a series of regression analyses that included our five structural variables and: (a) an interaction term for each of those five (one-by-one in five separate regression analyses); or (b) one additional variable (e.g., number of activities, number of services, etc.) and an interaction term between that variable and high school/middle school status.

Of the first five regression analyses that tested whether any of the structural variables made significantly larger or smaller contributions to the middle school or high school models, only one was significant: The number of months open was more important (in a positive direction) for high school programs than middle school programs.

The second set of 12 regression analyses tested whether any of the additional variables differed in their contributions to the high school and middle school models. None of this second set of regression analyses yielded results that suggested a significant difference in the strength of association between the variable of interest and participation rates in programs responding about their high school versus middle school youth (i.e., in no case was the interaction term significant). Therefore, we concluded that these variables were similarly important in these two sets of programs.

Interestingly, in our initial exploration of what was significantly associated with retention, we did not find a correlation between the intensity rate (the days per session attended) calculated using the MIS data and

the retention rate calculated from the survey data. This was true for the overall survey sample, as well as for the disaggregated middle and high school samples. We did find, however, that the MIS intensity rate was correlated with the survey ratings of the proportion of youth who come to the program every day, providing some validity to the respondents' ratings of their programs' youth participation rates. One plausible explanation for the lack of association is the nature of programming for older youth, as noted in the text.

# Twenty-eight Programs/Organizations Interviewed

## Chicago, IL

### Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development (BUILD), Inc.

www.buildchicago.org

Since 1969, BUILD, Inc. has worked in some of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods giving at-risk youth alternatives to the violence that takes away their positive potential. Applying a model of positive youth development, BUILD seeks to redirect the behavior of gang-affiliated youth and potential gang recruits in order to improve their chances of leading fulfilling lives. BUILD's mission is to engage youth at risk, in the schools and on the streets, so they can realize their educational and career potential and contribute to the stability, safety, and well-being of local communities. BUILD serves more than 3,500 youth annually in nine Chicago neighborhoods and throughout Cook County through its rehabilitation program in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. BUILD's comprehensive program model includes prevention, intervention, and BUILDing Futures (college preparation, career readiness, and leadership development).

### Youth Options Unlimited at Erie Neighborhood House

www.eriehouse.org

Erie Neighborhood House started as a church in 1870 and has evolved with the changing needs of the community into a nonprofit organization that works to support and provide resources for low-income, immigrant families. Erie House serves more than 5,000 participants per year through educational programming. The mission of Erie Neighborhood House is "to promote a just and inclusive society by strengthening low-income, primarily Latino families through skill building, access to critical resources, advocacy, and collaborative action."[39] Every year, the Youth Department, or YOU (Youth Options Unlimited), serves more than 150 youth between sixth and twelfth grades. It concentrates on seven areas: sports and recreation, academics, life skills, mentoring, parent involvement, noncore services, and leadership development. The YOU provides an enriching alternative to the streets after school with its wide variety of Expanded Learning Programs.

### Mikva Challenge

www.mikvachallenge.org

Founded in 1997, the Mikva Challenge is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that works with underserved Chicago high school youth to develop civic engagement and leadership skills so that they become active leaders in their communities. Mikva Challenge seeks to cultivate and strengthen civic leadership through programs that encourage youth to participate in three areas of civic engagement: policy making, activism, and electoral participation. Based on the belief that "the best way to learn leadership and democracy is to experience both,"[40] the mission of the Mikva Challenge is to "develop the next generation of civic leaders, activists, and policy-makers."[41]

## Cincinnati, OH

### Elementz

www.elementz.org

Elementz is a community-based hip-hop organization that provides youth and young adults between ages 14 to 24 with opportunities to explore, create, and excel in the hip-hop arts. Programming includes learning and supporting peer education in activities such as graffiti arts, music recording and production, hip-hop dance, and DJing, as well as opportunities for academic and college-preparatory mentoring and support. Elementz provides a safe, family-like space that fosters leadership development among staff members and youth participants and offers youth from Cincinnati neighborhoods access to state-of-the-art equipment, artists, and instructors.

### Espy Boys and Girls Club at Oyler Community Learning Center

www.bgcgc.org

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati provide afterschool and summer programming for youth in eight locations in the Cincinnati area. The mission of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati is to "create hope, opportunity and foster civic engagement by enabling all young people, especially those who need us most, where they need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens."[42] The Espy Boys and Girls Club, located at Oyler Community Learning Center, has numerous afterschool academic and enrichment activities as well as a special teen center for older youth to focus on age-specific programming and development.

### Families*FORWARD*

www.familiesforward.net

The Children's Protective Service of the Ohio Humane Society—doing business as Families*FORWARD*—is a charter agency of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, formerly known as the Community Chest. For more than 130 years, the Children's Protective Service has worked with schools to support healthy families in Cincinnati, especially families and youth who have suffered from neglect or abuse. With a new name and a new preventative focus, Families*FORWARD* has a mission to develop healthy, educated, and supported youth, and to serve as "a broadly implemented model for successful school-based, family-centered programs."[43]

### Powel Crosley, Jr. YMCA at Pleasant Hill Academy

www.cincinnatiymca.org/locations/powelcrosley/index.shtml

Powell Crosley YMCA, part of the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati, is the lead agency for the Community Learning Center (CLC) at the Pleasant Hill Academy, a preschool through eighth-grade school. Through its work with the CLC, Powel Crosley coordinates academic and enrichment activities at the school. Pleasant Hill has a magnet college preparatory curriculum for the older elementary and middle school students.

### Urban League of Greater Cincinnati at South Avondale School

### Urban League of Greater Cincinnati at Rockdale School

www.gcul.org

The Urban League of Greater Cincinnati, an affiliate of the National Urban League, was founded in 1949 with a mission to "eliminate the barriers of racism and level the playing field for all African Americans and others at risk by promoting their economic self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship through effective leadership in the areas of comprehensive employment, youth and family development, and advocacy."[44] As part of their work toward the organization's mission, the Urban League partners with Community Learning Centers and other nonprofit and community-based organizations to support programming that emphasizes leadership, networking, volunteering, and youth and family academic and social development. The Urban League serves as the lead agency that runs Cincy-AfterSchool programs at the South Avondale and Rockdale schools.

## New York, NY

### Groundwork

www.groundworkinc.org

Groundwork was founded in 2002 in Brooklyn, with a mission "to support young people living in high poverty urban communities as they develop their strengths, skills, talents and competencies through effective experiential learning and work programs."[45] Groundwork offers extensive afterschool and enrichment programs for middle and high school students, including literacy skill development, community service projects, tutoring and recreational activities, and an intensive, four-year Groundwork for Success program that supports academic achievement in high school and college, leadership development, and concentrated support with the college application process.

### I.S. 49 JCC/Beacon program—Staten Island Jewish Community Center (JCC)

www.sijcc.org

The I.S. 49 JCC/Beacon program is run through the Staten Island Jewish Community Center (JCC), an organization that is "dedicated to encouraging harmony throughout the community by providing facilities and programs that are open to all regardless of race, religion, creed, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or political affiliation."[46] Located in the north shore region of Staten Island, the I.S. 49 JCC/Beacon program provides more than 1,800 youth and adults monthly enrichment activities and resources, including afterschool, evening, and Saturday programming, as well as mental and physical health supports and services.

### Legal Outreach

www.legaloutreach.org

Founded in 1983, Legal Outreach is a community-based organization that supports eighth- through twelfth-grade students from underserved communities of New York City through an intensive legal education and academic program. In partnership with law schools, law firms, public interest organizations, and volunteers from various branches of the legal profession, Legal Outreach uses law education to develop youth leadership, self-confidence, and academic success and to encourage advancement toward higher education.

### College Readiness Program at Sunnyside Community Services

www.scsny.org/services

Sunnyside Community Services' College Readiness Program prepares high school students and recent graduates, ages 14 to 21, for the college admissions process. The low-cost program is designed to provide participants with a well-rounded understanding of the higher education system in order to make academic choices that will benefit them in the future. Through regular and advanced SAT classes, college/university admissions and financial aid workshops, college trips, college essay and application building sessions, reading/writing seminars, creative writing seminars, and individual advisement, students become well-versed in college admissions criteria, build their skills for standard-

ized examinations (e.g., SATs), improve their writing, locate scholarship opportunities, and complete necessary applications for college/university admissions and financial aid. Since 1974, Sunnyside Community Services has served youth, adults, and families in Queens with social services and educational programming such as English language learning courses and intergenerational tutoring, mentoring, and relationship-building programs.

## Providence, RI

### Cooking and Eating Club—Mt. Hope Learning Center

www.mthopelearningcenter.org

The Mt. Hope Learning Center is a community-based organization that seeks to "provide a safe environment in which the children and adults of the community can learn skills that will enable them to enhance their quality of life and have more productive futures."[47] In partnership with Providence After School Alliance, the Mt. Hope Learning Center offers the Cooking and Eating Club afterschool program for Providence middle school students. Youth learn cooking skills and make a variety of breakfast, lunch, and dinner foods, while having the opportunity to enjoy their creations in a supportive, educational group setting.

### Knight's Kick Soccer—Raising Hope

www.raisinghopeinc.org/

The Knight's Kick Soccer program is offered through Raising Hope, Inc., "a community-based nonprofit organization dedicated to providing afterschool and out-of-school time activities to minority children and youth for physical, intellectual, social, moral, and cultural development."[48] Along with other arts and enrichment activities offered through Raising Hope, Knight's Kick Soccer gives Providence youth the opportunity to engage in team-building and sports skills, motivating them to pursue and excel in soccer while also strengthening social skills, academics, and other aspects of their development.

### TeenzArt

www.kidzartri.com

TeenzArt is an arts and drawing program, under the KidzArt umbrella of creative arts enrichment programs,

offered by an organization of Providence artist educators. The organization's motto is that "if you can dream, you can draw," and through the TeenzArt program, youth learn and practice drawing techniques and ways to focus the mind through relaxation, breathing, and concentration exercises. Other programs and activities include a jewelry-making workshop and an exploration of other artistic outlets. Instructors incorporate academic learning and concepts into the projects, using works of art to tie into skills learned during the school day.

### Sun, Cars and Fun—Apeiron Institute

www.apeiron.org

Sun, Cars and Fun is an afterschool enrichment activity for middle school students, provided by the Apeiron Institute, an organization that seeks to promote sustainable living through teaching sustainable practices to schools, businesses, and communities in Rhode Island. Students who participate in Sun, Cars and Fun learn about recycling, sustainability, and environmental science while exploring the outdoors and finding fun and new ways to build small cars and other objects out of recycled or reusable materials.

### Young Actor's Playground—Traveling Theatre

www.travelingtheatre.org

The Traveling Theatre uses the arts as a vehicle to engage youth in creative learning by teaching and strengthening cooperative learning, literacy, problem solving, creativity, coping skills, and the self-confidence to face everyday challenges. The Young Actor's Playground (YAP) is one of 18 arts enrichment programs offered to youth in kindergarten through twelfth grades throughout the state of Rhode Island. YAP offers a broad overview of basic theatre skills such as improvisation, pantomime, and movement while promoting self-expression and civic awareness.

## San Francisco, CA

### GirlSource

www.girlsource.org

GirlSource is a nonprofit organization that has provided leadership and employment opportunities for low-income, high school-age girls in the San Francisco area since 1998.

Through the Technology and Leadership and Bound for Success programs, students benefit from paid job experience, skill building, individualized support for social and academic achievement, and life and career counseling.

### Japanese American Youth Services (JAYS)

www.jcyc.org/programs/jays.htm

JAYS is one of several youth programs offered through the Japanese Community Youth Council, an organization that has been serving San Francisco families since 1970. Through leadership and personal development activities, the JAYS program seeks to "empower youth by supporting their development as resources for themselves, their peers, their families, and their community."[49] Students participate in community service projects, trainings, and workshops where they learn and discuss topics such as conflict resolution, facilitation and communication skills, mental and physical health, and college preparation skills.

### Richmond Village Beacon

www.rvbeacon.org

The Richmond Village Beacon, a program of the Richmond District Neighborhood Center, was founded in San Francisco in 1998 with a mission to "provide a safe, fun, and supportive environment in the Richmond District for all youth and adults to explore and reach their full potential through youth development programming, supportive services, and adult enrichment activities in a school-based setting."[50] Through programming for people of all ages, the Richmond Village Beacon seeks to promote and foster a diverse, inclusive, and strong sense of community in its neighborhood.

### Stonestown YMCA

www.ymcasf.org/Stonestown/

The Stonestown YMCA is a full-facility YMCA that has served a community within San Francisco since 1954, offering myriad programs, courses, and other resources. Stonestown's After School Enrichment Programs (ASEP) are free programs focused on academics, enrichment, and recreation, offered at neighboring elementary and middle schools. Activities include creative writing, dance, language classes, and leadership and community service. ASEPs are a collaboration between Stonestown, After School for All, and the Department of Children, Youth & Their Families.

### The Fellas and Just 4 Girls programs at YMCA—Bayview Hunter's Point

www.ymcasf.org/bayview/what_we_offer/for_teens

The YMCA in the Bayview Hunter's Point area of San Francisco has two gender-specific programs—The Fellas boys program and the Just 4 Girls program—that are focused on leadership development, college access, career planning, and social and academic support. Both programs seek to build self-esteem and leadership skills and work to support positive youth development.

## Washington, DC

### DC SCORES

www.americascores.org

DC SCORES seeks to create a positive connection to school and community, inspire a commitment to creative expression, and motivate students to live healthy lifestyles through its program model that emphasizes creativity through poetry, physical activity through soccer, and positive changes in the community through service learning. DC SCORES is the flagship site of America SCORES, the nation's largest afterschool soccer and literacy program.

### Higher Achievement Program

www.higherachievement.org

The Higher Achievement Program provides middle school youth from underserved areas with year-round academic enrichment programs and preparation for top high school placement. Each year, hundreds of students in Washington, DC, Virginia, and Maryland undergo more than 650 hours of rigorous academic training. The mission of the Higher Achievement Program is "to develop academic skills, behaviors, and attitudes in academically motivated and underserved middle school children to improve their grades, test scores, attendance, and opportunities—resulting in acceptance to college preparatory high schools."[51]

### LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services

www.lifestarts.org

LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services provides mentoring, advocacy, academic, and social support and services to more than 1,000 youth and families annually in the Washington, DC area. LifeSTARTS promotes academic and social success with programming both in school and after school for youth ages 5 to 17. Formerly known as The East Capitol Center for Change, the organization became LifeSTARTS in 2007 with a commitment to engage and empower the community in working together to address the complex social issues faced by youth and families in the community.

### Multicultural Career Intern Program (MCIP)

www.checdc.org

The Multicultural Career Intern Program (MCIP) began in 1979 as a job-skills-development school for the Columbia Heights community in Washington, DC.  In 1989, MCIP merged with a DC public school to become Bell Multicultural High School. MCIP now serves more than 1,300 middle and high school students with a commitment to research-based practice, academic achievement, and community building. Along with an emphasis on academic enrichment, MCIP seeks to develop youth participants' life skills and to strengthen family connections.

### Words Beats & Life

www.wblinc.org

Words Beats & Life focuses on the transformative power of hip-hop arts to enhance individual development and self-expression, support academic and personal achievement, and build a strong community. Originating at a hip-hop conference at the University of Maryland in 2000, Words Beats & Life officially became a nonprofit organization and developed its first program, The DC Urban Arts Academy, in 2003. Words Beats & Life runs multimedia hip-hop arts programming, researches and produces a global journal of hip-hop, and works with universities to infuse hip-hop arts into the higher education setting.

# Practices and Features of High-Retention Programs

This appendix, a companion to Chapter 2, covers analysis of survey data from 198 programs. We were interested in the practices, strategies, and structures that were significantly associated with longer retention (participation for 12 months or longer) among older youth participants. As a first step, we wanted to identify what aspects differed between high- and lower-retention programs. We defined high-retention programs as those that retained 50 percent or more of their older youth for a year or more and lower-retention programs as those that did not; high-retention programs made up 42 percent of our sample.

The tables in this appendix present the usage rates of high- and lower-retention programs for a number of practices and structural features. The significance levels presented in the tables are based on our bivariate analysis comparing high- and low-retention variables. Many of these differences disappeared when we conducted our multivariate analyses; nevertheless, we present these tables for descriptive purposes. See Chapter 1 for more description of our data analysis and Chapter 2 for additional explanation of these analyses.

**TABLE G.1**

## Leadership Opportunities

| Leadership Opportunities | Usage Rates Among: | |
|---|---|---|
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of leadership opportunities (out of 9)*** | 5.6 | 4.1 |
| Community service activities*** | 81% | 54% |
| Youth council/Decision-making groups *** | 67% | 38% |
| Volunteer opportunities** | 82% | 59% |
| Opportunities to serve in official "officer" roles** | 28% | 11% |
| Opportunities to design/lead activities for peers or younger youth* | 76% | 61% |
| Paid staff positions* | 36% | 19% |
| Opportunities to have input into designing activities | 76% | 62% |
| Opportunities to work one-on-one with peers or younger youth | 60% | 47% |
| Opportunities to shape program rules | 57% | 55% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE G.2
## Strategies to Keep Informed About Youth

| Strategies to Keep Informed About Youth | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of ways (out of 5) staff members stay informed about youth*** | 3.4 | 2.2 |
| Make school visits if needed*** | 59% | 24% |
| Collect report cards*** | 77% | 45% |
| Meet regularly with youth one-on-one*** | 72% | 51% |
| Contact parents regularly* | 66% | 49% |
| Publicly recognize youth accomplishments outside of program* | 62% | 47% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001


TABLE G.3
## Structural Features

| Structural Features | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Program is community-based (not school-based)*** | 46% | 20% |
| Program serves 100 or more youth*** | 68% | 36% |
| Staff members meet 30 or more minutes twice a month about the program*** | 75% | 41% |
| Number of months the program is open per year*** | 11.3 months | 7 months |
| Number of days program is open per week*** | 5 days | 1 day |
| Program is open only during school year*** | 17% | 53% |
| Program serves smaller service area (e.g., school population or neighborhood) | 53% | 56% |
| Program is the only one in the neighborhood with its focus | 34% | 25% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE G.4

## Opportunities to Interact With Peers

| Opportunities to Interact with Peers | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of ways (out of 5) program offers opportunities to interact with peers*** | 3.6 | 2.8 |
| Leadership bodies (e.g., youth councils)*** | 64% | 36% |
| Groups to plan activities** | 87% | 65% |
| Performances or presentations | 72% | 57% |
| Activities often structured around small groups of youth | 72% | 68% |
| Time to hang out informally with peers | 67% | 54% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE G.5

## Activity Types

| ACTIVITY TYPES | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of activity types (out of 8)*** | 5.7 | 4.1 |
| Youth employment/apprenticeship*** | 63% | 28% |
| College preparation*** | 52% | 23% |
| Leadership*** | 88% | 60% |
| Academics** | 85% | 64% |
| Targeted course/training* | 72% | 53% |
| Prevention | 57% | 41% |
| Enrichment | 85% | 76% |
| Recreation | 70% | 65% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE G.6
## Services for Youth

| SERVICES FOR YOUTH | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of services offered (out of 11)*** | 6.7 | 4.5 |
| Assistance with college applications*** | 59% | 29% |
| Sexual risk behavior prevention*** | 62% | 31% |
| Links to jobs** | 53% | 29% |
| GED help** | 24% | 7% |
| Paid jobs in the program** | 59% | 38% |
| Violence prevention** | 71% | 48% |
| Job skills* | 59% | 38% |
| Health* | 70% | 52% |
| Computers | 76% | 64% |
| Life Skills | 80% | 68% |
| Drug Prevention | 56% | 41% |

Source: Program surveys.

Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001


TABLE G.7
## Rewards and Incentives

| REWARDS AND INCENTIVES | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of incentives (out of 6)*** | 2.7 | 1.8 |
| Jobs*** | 35% | 8% |
| School credit** | 24% | 7% |
| Field trips** | 76% | 54% |
| Formal public recognition* | 57% | 39% |
| Financial incentives | 16% | 23% |
| Awards/gift certificates | 62% | 49% |

Source: Program surveys.

Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE G.8
## Parent Engagement Activities

| PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of ways (out of 9) program tries to engage parents*** | 7.6 | 6.3 |
| Hold individual meetings with parents*** | 85% | 62% |
| Send information about program to parents** | 100% | 89% |
| Send newsletters with community resources** | 83% | 61% |
| Get parent input through surveys/group meetings** | 80% | 60% |
| Provide courses for parents* | 52% | 32% |
| Hold events for parents* | 95% | 85% |
| Invite parents to program activities | 97% | 90% |
| Meet with parents informally | 84% | 74% |
| Talk with parents by phone | 95% | 95% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE G.9
## Recruitment Strategies

| RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES | Usage Rates Among: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | High-retention Programs | Lower-retention Programs |
| Number of recruitment strategies (out of 8)** | 5.3 | 4.5 |
| Getting the Word Out | | |
| Ask youth to refer friends | 85% | 88% |
| Recruit at community events | 79% | 66% |
| Staff members go into communities to tell youth about programs** | 76% | 55% |
| Ask youth to refer siblings | 61% | 60% |
| Recruit through youth-led events | 64% | 53% |
| Using Organizational Relationships | | |
| Visit schools to get referrals | 76% | 67% |
| Partner organizations refer youth** | 63% | 42% |
| Incorporating Attractive Program Features | | |
| Offer stipends to recruit youth | 27% | 22% |

Source: Program surveys.
Note: High-retention programs are those that retain 50% or more of their youth for 12 months or more. If the usage of a practice statistically differed between the two types of programs, it is noted with asterisk(s).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

# Appendix Notes

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