

Update on the Third Year of Out-of-School Time Programs

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is pleased to present the third year evaluation report for the New York City Out-of-School Time (OST) Initiative.

Five years ago, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, DYCD, ten other city agencies and a broad cross-section of leaders from the after school, youth development and education fields embarked on an ambitious redesign of the City's OST system. We aimed to improve the delivery and quality of services, establish measurable outcomes and standards for accountability, use scarce resources more efficiently, support working families and target programs to underserved communities. The resulting initiative is now the largest municipally funded after school system in the nation, with 622 programs serving more than 81,000 young people throughout the City of New York during the 2008-2009 school year. Since its inception in 2005, the OST system has provided services to a total of 181,000 individual youth through out New York City.

In recognition of our commitment to innovation and collaboration, the City of New York received a 5-year, \$12 million grant from The Wallace Foundation to focus on OST system building. The grant finances long-term business planning, data collection, evaluation, support for pilot programs, and a communications campaign to build public awareness and understanding of OST. Together, The Wallace Foundation and DYCD are working to increase the **Quality, Reach and Equity**, and **Sustainability** of NYC's OST system.

Evaluation is central to DYCD's ability to ensure that OST programs are delivering high quality services to our youth, and to demonstrate the efficient use of taxpayer dollars. DYCD entered into a three-year contract with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to measure the success of the OST initiative. By making the case that youth benefit from high-quality OST programming, we hope to strengthen the public's favorable opinion of the initiative and ensure the sustainability of the OST system.

The first year's report, released in February 2007, focused on implementation and operational issues. The second year evaluation report, issued in March 2008, examined the quality of OST programming. The Year 3 report examines the entire first three years of the initiative, and links participant outcomes to high quality program features. DYCD is pleased that this year's evaluation identified significant improvements in program operations and strong evidence of high-quality services across our portfolio of OST programs. Knowing what outcomes our participants achieve and which program features are associated with these positive youth outcomes will help DYCD monitor existing programs and plan future initiatives.

THE YOUTH WE SERVE

- Over 181,000 youth have participated in the initiative since its inception, and enrollment has increased from year to year. Over the three years we served:
 - 51 percent girls
 - 39 percent African American
 - 38 percent Latino
- high-need student groups:

- 84 percent of youth eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch
- 20 percent classified as eligible for English Language Learner services
- 16 percent received special education or related services

PROGRAM QUALITY

- Programs offered rich content, including academic and non-academic activities
- Participants reported programs exposed them to new and engaging experiences
- Objective observations revealed that activities are generally successful at creating warm, welcoming, yet structured environments
- Youth reported positive interactions with peers and staff
- Programs employed staff members with diverse backgrounds (college students, professional specialists, certified teachers and teen staff)
- Programs received technical assistance funded by DYCD and provided staff with professional development opportunities
- Programs directors reported regular communication with school staff and used a variety of methods to communicate with families

EVIDENCE OF YOUTH OUTCOMES

Program Engagement

- On average, programs exceeded their targeted enrollment levels.
- Participants were engaged in a wide breadth of activities, especially those in elementary school programs.
- Programs reached a high standard of participant attendance, with elementary school programs continuing a trend of improving their average rate of participation. Older youth as a group surpassed their targeted level of participation.
- 37% of participants in Option I programs were retained from Year 1 to Year 2, and 39% were retained from Year 2 to Year 3. (Because participants are enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis, these numbers likely underestimate the percentage of participants who wanted to attend multiple years.)

Social and Academic Development

- Youth reported a high sense of belonging in their OST programs, and moderate levels of pro-social behavior.
- Participants reported high levels of academic motivation.
- According to Department of Education (DOE) records, OST participants attended school significantly more frequently at baseline compared to matched non-participants. Participants continued to attend school at a higher rate after one, two, and three years. There were no differences in changes in school attendance between the two groups.
- Participants reported moderate levels of academic benefits.
- OST participants and a matched group showed small improvements in performance on New York State standardized tests over the course of the OST initiative, with no significant differences in the size of the gains between the two groups.
- There were no significant differences between high school participants and matched non-participants on the cumulative number of course credits accrued after each year of OST

participation and on the number of New York State Regents exams that participants and non-participants had taken and passed.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PARTICIPATION, QUALITY AND OUTCOMES

Relationships between Participation and Youth Outcomes

- OST participants who attended the program for fewer than 200 hours had lower school attendance than did matching nonparticipants, while participants who attended more hours of OST tended to have higher school day attendance rates.
- There were no associations between program participation and youth-reported social or educational outcomes, scores on State reading or math tests (for youth in grades 3 – 8) or total credits earned (for high school students).

Relationship between Program Quality and Youth Outcomes

- Overall, there were positive relationships between the extent to which a program exposed youth to new experiences and several measures of youth social and educational outcomes.
- In general, measures of a supportive OST environment (e.g., positive relationships with peers and staff) were positively correlated with youth social and educational outcomes.

Relationships Involving Effective Partnerships and Supports

- The number of professional development opportunities in which OST staff members participated was negatively correlated with youth program participation, sense of belonging, and school attendance. This likely indicates that programs that are struggling to implement high quality programs take greater advantage of professional development opportunities.
- In programs that employed a greater mix of staff members, youth reported a greater sense of belonging in the program.

CHALLENGES

As in Year 2, some programs continued to struggle with

- implementing active learning opportunities through activities that built on each other in a sequenced manner (art activities were more likely to be rated higher on sequenced learning than other types of activities)
- meeting their targeted enrollment
- meeting their target levels of participation

ACTION STEPS

To address these challenges, DYCD continues to implement many of the steps begun after we received the Year 2 report:

To help programs with implementing higher quality activities, DYCD is:

- Using an observation tool that enables program managers to rate programs' quality and make referrals to technical assistance. Further, we are embarking on unifying this tool across all DYCD youth initiatives.
- Conducting training for program managers to ensure reliable use of assessment tools.
- Implementing several pilot projects to enhance quality programming, including the use of structured curricula to teach mathematics and literacy.

- Offering DYCD Scholars, a scholarship program for about 25 students who will receive a certificate in youth studies and 12 college credits.
- Partnering with CUNY to fund the development of course curricula in youth studies and course offerings at several CUNY campuses.
- Tracking outcomes of all youth attending after school programs.
- Developing sets of core competencies for front line youth workers and their supervisors to guide future efforts to create professional development opportunities for staff in the after school field. Core competencies and corresponding indicators for front line workers have been completed and are posted on the DYCD website at www.nyc.gov/dycd. They have been shared broadly with DYCD's technical assistance and OST providers, as well as partners outside the agency, and are now incorporated into DYCD's procurements and site visit tool.
- Offering in-depth technical assistance to a small number of organizations that serve a large proportion of our youth.

In recognition of the need to modify the OST high school model, DYCD released an RFP focusing on supporting youth in 9th grade to transition to and succeed in high school.

- 33 new "Transition to High School" programs were launched in September 2009.

We hope that this evaluation will be an ongoing source of information for all of those who have an interest in DYCD's OST initiative and out-of-school time learning in general. This report is available online at www.nyc.gov/html/dycd and www.wallacefoundation.org