Evaluation of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Out-of-School Time Programs for Youth Initiative:

Results of Efforts to Increase Program Quality and Scale in Year 2

Executive Summary

Christina A. Russell
Monica B. Mielke
Elizabeth R. Reisner

Policy Studies Associates, Inc.

January 2008

Prepared for:
Department of Youth and Community Development and
The Wallace Foundation
New York, New York

Executive Summary

The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) launched the Out-of-School Time Programs for Youth (OST) initiative in September 2005. At the same time, it contracted with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of OST. This report summarizes evaluation findings from the second year of the OST initiative, 2006-07.

In its 2005 Request for Proposals under the initiative, DYCD described its OST vision as follows: "A quality OST system offers safe and developmentally appropriate environments for children and youth when they are not in school. OST programs support the academic, civic, creative, social, physical, and emotional development of young people and serve the needs of the city's families and their communities. Government, service providers, and funders are partners in supporting an accountable and sustainable OST system." Accordingly, DYCD designed the components of the OST program to reflect this vision. The largest program component, known as Option I, funded OST programs for youth in elementary, middle, and high schools in neighborhoods throughout New York City. Expectations for Option I programs varied by the grade level served, with programs for younger youth expected to provide more programming hours and hence more comprehensive services to youth attending programs on a more frequent basis, compared to programs serving older youth. Option II was designed to support OST programs that would use private match funds to subsidize at least 30 percent of their OST budgets; these programs would serve youth at any grade level. Option III programs were to be operated in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Recreation and offered at Parks sites; these programs would also serve youth at any grade level.

Based on the first year of OST operation, evaluation findings identified avenues for improving the effectiveness of OST programming as the initiative matured and programs became more fully established in their schools and communities. Although programs successfully enrolled students in the first year, they struggled to maintain high youth participation rates, suggesting a need to establish program policies and activity offerings that encouraged regular participation. While programs in the first year consistently provided safe and structured environments for participants in the out-of-school hours, they experienced challenges in delivering innovative, content-based learning opportunities that engaged youth. Programs also experienced challenges in recruiting well-qualified staff members, pointing to a need to develop effective practices for staff recruitment and for development of staff skills.

In the second year, the evaluation examined recent evidence of programs' efforts to improve program quality and scale. In particular, evaluators looked for evidence that programs had established structures to support high-quality staffing

and effective partnerships, were delivering rich program content through activities that also fostered positive interpersonal relationships, and were engaging youth in programming to develop their skills in both social and content-based areas. Evaluators also examined the extent to which programs increased the number of youth served and their level of program attendance.

Scope and Extent of OST Programming in Year 2

During the 2006-07 school year, evaluators examined data from a total of 536 OST programs that offered services throughout New York City and reached more than 69,000 participants, up from 51,000 participants in the preceding school year. Approximately two-thirds of these youth were enrolled in school-based OST programs and the remaining third in center-based programs. These programs served youth of all ages. More than 40,000 participants were served by OST programs located in zip codes identified as in high need of services for youth.

This increase in the scale of services reflected a considerable additional investment in OST programming throughout the city. According to data on funding levels presented in the initiative's online management information system, DYCD awarded more than $66 million to OST programs in Year 2, a substantial increase over the $44 million awarded in Year 1. The median second-year award was $100,000, compared to $73,000 in the first year, and grant awards ranged from $3,100 to $514,000.

Evaluators identified a representative sample of 15 OST programs from which to collect additional data. New York City Department of Education (DOE) data on participants in these 15 in-depth study sites confirmed that the OST initiative reached New York City students who could benefit from the support of high-quality programs. Across these programs, 85 percent of youth were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (compared to approximately 82 percent of youth citywide), 21 percent were classified as eligible for English Language Learner services (compared to 13 percent citywide), and 14 percent received special education or related services (equivalent to the 14 percent rate citywide).

In addition, OST participants' prior performance on the English Language Arts (ELA) and math tests (administered to all New York City students in grades 3-8) indicated that participants were at risk academically compared to students citywide. Forty-nine percent of OST participants scored at performance levels 3 or 4 on the ELA test, indicating that they were performing at or above grade level, compared to approximately 57 percent citywide. Fifty-four percent performed at this level in math, compared to 57 percent citywide.

In contrast, the data also suggested that OST participants were at least as engaged in school as were students citywide. The average school attendance rate

of elementary-grades participants in the year prior to OST participation was 92 percent, equivalent to the citywide rate. Middle-grades participants, however, had a higher school attendance rate than did their citywide counterparts (95 percent, compared to 90 percent), as did high school participants also (90 percent, compared to 81 percent).

Structural and Institutional Program Features

In the second year of the OST initiative, programs continued to develop policies, strengthen partnerships with schools and families, and build on their efforts in the first year to establish strong foundations for high-quality programming. In particular, OST programs and DYCD both worked to improve staff recruitment and training, addressing one of the primary challenges reported in Year 1.

Program focus. Program directors almost unanimously reported that providing a safe environment for youth was a major objective of their OST program (97 percent) and that they aimed to help youth develop socially (93 percent).

Highlighting a possible tension between social and academic goals, evaluators found a small but notable decline from Year 1 to Year 2 in the percent of program directors who identified academic improvement as a major objective of their program. In the second year, 80 percent of program directors reported that one of their major objectives was to help youth improve their academic performance, compared to 88 percent in the first year (V=.11). In contrast, more program directors reported in Year 2 that a challenge in providing high-quality programming was that the principals of the schools their participants attend would like the program to be more academically focused (47 percent, compared to 39 percent in the first year; V=.10). Despite this challenge, more than half of program directors (59 percent) believed the quality of their relationships with schools had improved in the second year.

Strategies for participant recruitment. Effectively recruiting students continued to pose a challenge to program directors. Forty-five percent reported youth dropping out because they lost interest as a challenge, and 43 percent identified youth not attending the OST program regularly enough to have enriching experiences as a challenge.

Overall, strategies for participant recruitment remained much the same in Years 1 and 2. As in their first year of operation, an overwhelming majority of Option I program directors (90 percent) reported that they offered open enrollment to all youth who were interested in attending the program. In addition, at least half of program directors reported that they targeted youth who were

recommended by school-day teachers or counselors (55 percent) and youth with siblings already attending the program (50 percent).

Program director and staff qualifications and responsibilities. In Year 2, DYCD required any elementary- or middle-grade OST program that served at least 100 youth to hire a full-time program director, reflecting the need for one person working full-time to coordinate the multi-faceted components of the OST program in each site. Survey findings confirm that OST programs generally complied with this expectation. In addition, program directors had strong educational qualifications. Eighty-six percent of program directors had completed a four-year college degree or higher, and 37 percent had a master's degree or higher. Seventeen percent of program directors reported that they were certified to teach.

Program directors reported that finding qualified staff was a lesser challenge in the second year of the OST initiative than in the first. In Year 2, only 16 percent of program directors reported that finding qualified staff to hire was a major challenge, compared to 48 percent in the first year of the initiative. In fact, 42 percent of program directors reported that finding qualified staff to hire was not a challenge at all, while in the first year all program directors reported that this was at least a minor challenge (V=.54). One reason for programs' improved capacity for staffing may be that most programs were able to retain at least half of their staff from the first year of the initiative (68 percent of directors reported that at least half of their staff worked in the program in the previous year).

OST programs employed staff members with varied qualifications and prior experiences to carry out roles in implementing program content and supervision. By hiring staff with a mix of experience levels, programs worked within their budgetary constraints. Although a large proportion of programs employed certified teachers and activity specialists to provide targeted programming on a more limited basis, in general, programs relied most heavily on non-certified and non-specialist staff.

Technical assistance through the OST initiative. In the second year of the OST initiative, DYCD made efforts to more closely align the focus of technical assistance workshops and consultations to program needs. In addition, DYCD improved its methods of tracking program referrals to technical assistance services to ensure that programs received relevant assistance. Perhaps reflecting these improvements in communications and targeting of technical assistance, during the second year of the OST initiative program directors reported higher levels of satisfaction with the technical assistance that DYCD provided than they did in Year 1.

Program staff members (other than directors) also took advantage of technical assistance opportunities offered in Year 2. Eighty percent of staff members surveyed reported attending a workshop, 56 percent participated in an

on-site consultation, and 42 percent attended an institute or conference. Only 9 percent of staff members reported that they did not participate in any technical assistance in Year 2. Program staff members were also generally satisfied with the technical assistance they received through DYCD. Forty-four percent felt the training served their purposes completely, while another 46 percent felt it was a good start.

Overall, when asked to compare the technical assistance they received during the first and second years of the initiative, 62 percent of program directors either agreed or strongly agreed that the professional development they received through the OST initiative was more useful in the second year. Fifty-five percent reported that the professional development their staff received was more useful. Program directors were also more satisfied with DYCD's approach to program monitoring in the second year: 64 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that DYCD's monitoring approach was more effective in the second year.

Implementation of Process and Content Features

Program activities. Achieving positive outcomes for participants requires that program activities be reasonably diverse and capable of promoting personal development. Reflecting program objectives, activities varied somewhat by grade level. In Year 2, elementary-grades programs most often offered homework help, visual arts and crafts, group academic instruction, organized reading activities, and learning games. Middle-grades programs offered a similar roster of activities, with an additional emphasis on organized team sports. High school programs were more specialized, and each targeted a smaller set of program activities. These activities tended to be more civic-oriented than in the elementary- and middle-grades programs and to be more focused on social development.

Content delivery strategies. Overall, youth participants expressed a strong degree of satisfaction in the extent to which participation in OST program activities exposed them to new experiences. However, through activity observations, the evaluation concluded that programs often struggled to design and implement activities that provided youth with the opportunity to actively engage in learning through hands-on activities, discussion, or meaningful choices and roles.

Fostering positive relationships. OST programs consistently developed positive relationships among youth and between youth and staff in Year 2 of the initiative. In surveys, participants overwhelmingly reported positive relationships with program staff members and with their peers. Observer ratings of activities confirmed that programs were developing participants' personal and social skills.

Participant Engagement in OST Services in Year 2

Program enrollment. In the second year, DYCD more strictly enforced standards for program enrollment and participation, with a policy of retaining funds for programs that did not achieve established targets. On average, Option I programs successfully scaled up to meet and exceed their targeted enrollment levels. Option I programs had a total target enrollment of approximately 50,000 youth, based on the contracts awarded by DYCD. In practice, programs actually served more than 70,000 students from September 2006 through June 2007. Elementary-grades and middle-grades programs were especially successful at meeting or exceeding their enrollment targets (90 percent and 79 percent of programs, respectively), while high school programs fell slightly short of their goal (57 percent of programs reached the target). Overall, 80 percent of Option I programs met or exceeded their enrollment targets.

Program participation. Across all grade levels, Option I programs successfully increased their participant-level attendance over Year 1 levels, although elementary-grades programs continued to struggle to achieve attendance goals. As noted earlier, elementary-grades offered more program service hours and expected more hours of youth attendance; high school programs offered the fewest hours with the fewest hours of attendance expected. On average, elementary-grade Option I participants attended an average of 359 hours during the year, compared to the 432 hours they were expected to attend. This represented an average of 83 percent of targeted hours, which is an increase from the 72 percent of targeted hours attended by elementary-grades participants in the first year. Overall, middle-grades participants nearly achieved their targeted number of hours of participation: on average, middle-grades participants attended 213 hours of the 216 hours expected at the middle-grades level.[1] This was a substantial increase over the 159 hours attended, on average, by middle-grades participants in Year 1. Finally, high school participants exceeded the targeted number of hours of participation, attending on average 105 hours in the second year of the initiative, 29 hours above their target of 76 hours and several hours higher than during the first year (97 hours).

Association between enrollment duration and participation. OST programs typically enroll participants on a first-come, first-serve basis. Returning participants are not necessarily guaranteed enrollment for a second year. However, evaluation data reveal especially high levels of program engagement by returning participants. On average, two-year participants attended their OST program more regularly than did participants who enrolled for the first time in Year 2. Two-year elementary-grades participants attended an average of 399 hours during the 2006-07 school year, compared to 359 hours for one-year participants (d=.20). Middle-grades participants enrolled for a second year

[1] DYCD expects middle-grades participants to attend 75 percent of the required 288 hours, which equals 216 hours. Similarly, high school participants are expected to attend 70 percent of the 108 required hours, which equals 76 hours.

attended 253 program hours in Year 2 (exceeding their target by 37 hours), compared to 213 hours for one-year participants (*d*=.26). Two-year high school participants also attended substantially more hours than did one-year participants (135 hours, compared to 105 hours; *d*=.29). (Neither these associations nor others presented in this report should be interpreted to imply causality, however.)

As part of its efforts to provide comprehensive out-of-school time services to families throughout New York City, DYCD also funded certain OST programs to provide services to youth during the summer of 2006. Participation in OST summer programming was associated with higher rates of participation during the 2006-07 school year. Students in elementary-grades programs who participated in OST services in the summer of 2006 and the following school year attended, on average, 441 hours in Year 2 (*d*=.40). Middle-grades summer participants attended an average of 294 hours in Year 2, on average (*d*=.52). However, programming was not offered in all programs, and summer enrollment was not guaranteed to school-year participants.

Associations between program features and program participation. The evaluation found significant associations between certain staffing patterns and attendance rates in Option I OST programs. In particular, programs that hired at least some young staff members had higher program attendance rates than those without these young staff members. This was true for college student staff members (66 percent, compared to 57 percent; *d*=.49) as well as high-school age staff (67 percent, compared with 61 percent; *d*=.35). In addition, programs with school-day paraprofessionals or aides on staff had higher attendance rates than those without (69 percent, compared with 61 percent; *d*=.41). One explanation for this pattern might be that the presence of these younger staff members in addition to more experienced educators appealed to youth, who could identify and forge connections with staff closer to their age. Another possibility is that lower wages for less experienced staff allowed programs to increase the number of staff employed in the program and thus increase the amount of staff attention to each program participant.

Year 2 program attendance was also positively associated with programs' efforts to engage families, supporting a finding of the importance of family outreach. In particular, programs with a parent liaison on staff had a higher attendance rate than programs without a parent liaison (68 percent, compared to 62 percent; *d*=.32). The intensity of program communication with parents was positively correlated with attendance rates (*r*=.29). Although each form of communication with parents was positively associated with program attendance rates, certain types of parent outreach occurring at least a few times a month were associated with particularly strong attendance effects: holding individual meetings with parents (*d*=.68), sending materials home to parents (*d*=.55), and having conversations with parents over the phone (*d*=.49).

Based on program directors' reports of the intensity of certain types of activities in their program offerings, evaluators found evidence of positive associations between program attendance and a program's focus on academics, arts, and physical recreation:

- Programs that reported a higher relative intensity of academic activities tended to have higher attendance rates (r=.26).

- Analyses found a positive relationship between the degree to which a program focused on activities in the arts and the attendance rate (r=.19).

- Programs that engaged participants in physical activity more frequently tended to have higher attendance rates (r=.19).

In addition, for elementary-grades programs, there was a positive association between the intensity of activities focused on youth development (e.g., conflict resolution) and program attendance (r=.19). This relationship was not significant for middle-grades or high school OST programs. There were no notable associations between the intensity of career development or civic engagement activities and program attendance.

Social Development Outcomes of Youth

OST programs encourage positive youth development, in part by giving participants opportunities to interact in relaxed settings and fostering positive interactions among youth and between youth and adults. In the second year of the OST initiative, participants reported a strong sense of connection to their OST program as well as a moderate level of engagement in prosocial behaviors.

Program-level analyses revealed specific program features that were associated with positive social development outcomes among participants. In general, when program content included a strong focus on civic or social development programming, participants experienced measurable benefits in their sense of belonging and prosocial behaviors, such as helping or complimenting other youth.

- The extent to which a program focused on youth development (e.g., conflict resolution, peer discussion, socializing) was positively correlated with participants' reports of engaging in prosocial behaviors (r_s=.38).

- There was also a positive relationship between a program's level of civic programming (e.g., discussion of current events, service projects) and participants' sense of belonging (r_s =.32).

- A program's focus on career development activities (e.g., career exploration, field trips to businesses) was positively correlated with participants' reported sense of belonging (r_s =.20).

In addition, the extent to which programs provided opportunities for youth leadership was positively correlated with youth reports of their sense of belonging within the program and of engagement in prosocial behaviors. Participant-level analyses found a positive relationship between the number of leadership opportunities in which a youth participated in the OST program and their sense of belonging in their program, for both middle-grades participants (r_s =.24) and for high school participants (r_s =.52). For middle-grades students, there was a positive association between participation in leadership opportunities and reports of engagement in prosocial behavior (r_s =.38).

Across all grade levels, analyses found a positive relationship between participant reports of the quality of their interactions with peers and their reports of their sense of belonging in the program (r_s =.61). This association was significant and strong for elementary-grades (r_s =.65), middle-grades (r_s =.56) and high school (r_s =.72) programs. Among middle-grades participants, there was a significant positive relationship between reported interactions with peers and engagement in prosocial behaviors (r_s =.23).

The evaluation also revealed a positive correlation between a participant's reports of interactions with program staff members and their sense of belonging in the OST program (r_s =.68). This correlation was significant and strong at all grade levels, but particularly for high school youth (r_s =.79) and elementary-grades youth (r_s =.71). For middle-grades youth, reports of positive interactions with staff members were also positively correlated with reports of engagement in prosocial behaviors (r_s =.22).

Youth Academic Outcomes

OST programs contribute to improving academic outcomes for youth by offering activities geared towards building the skills and knowledge that can contribute to school success and also by reinforcing students' perceptions of themselves as individuals capable of academic success. In Year 2, participant survey responses indicated a moderately high level of self-reported academic benefits due to OST participation. Elementary-grades participants were more likely than their middle-grades and high school counterparts to report academic benefits as a result of OST programming (r=.15 for the difference between elementary and middle; r=.14 for the difference between elementary and high). Elementary-grades participants recorded an average score of 3.10 on a four-point scale, while middle school participants averaged a 2.84 and high school participants averaged a 2.86.

Participants in the second year recorded a relatively high mean on the academic motivation scale. Again, there were notable differences in the level of academic motivation based on grade level, with elementary-grades participants reporting the highest levels of academic motivation, with a mean of 3.48 on the four-point scale, followed by middle school participants (3.20; r=.22) and high school participants (3.11; r=.29).

Analyses revealed specific program components that were associated with positive academic outcomes among participants, including staffing patterns, participation in technical assistance, and program content or focus. Staffing patterns were especially well associated with student reports of academic outcomes. For example, participants in programs that hired some high-school staff reported greater academic benefits than participants in programs that did not (r=.22). Participants in programs with some high-school staff also reported higher levels of academic motivation (r=.24). As noted earlier, programs typically hired staff members with diverse qualifications, and high-school staff were supported by more experienced staff members. Among programs that employed high-school staff, 89 percent also employed college students, 73 percent hired activity specialists, and 65 percent employed certified teachers. In program observations, high-school staff were frequently observed serving as support staff and tutors: a possible explanation for the correlation between the presence of such staff and participants' reported academic benefits is that programs with high-school staff were able to provide more individual attention to youth, such as one-on-one or small group tutoring.

Academic motivation was somewhat higher in programs without a master teacher on staff (r=.22) and in programs without specialist staff (r=.30). This finding suggests that programs were more likely to engage professional support when they served populations who were struggling academically or most in need of additional support services. Similarly, participants in programs without specialist staff reported greater academic benefits (r=.30).

Program efforts to develop staff skills and to engage families were also positively associated with academic outcomes. In particular, evaluators found a positive relationship between a program director's self-reported level of participation in technical assistance and participants' academic motivation (r_s=.36). There was also a positive relationship between the frequency with which program directors communicated with parents and both academic benefits (r_s=.24) and academic motivation (r_s=.27).

Not surprisingly, evaluators also found a positive relationship between the extent to which a program focused on academics and participants' self-reported academic benefits (r_s=.25). In addition, participants in programs that used a published or externally developed curriculum reported higher levels of academic motivation than participants in programs that did not (r=.42).

Middle-grades participants who reported taking on more leadership roles in their OST programs tended to report greater academic benefits (r_s=.29) and academic motivation (r_s=.21).

Programs that fostered positive relationships among youth and between youth and staff also demonstrated positive academic outcomes. Across all grades, analyses found a positive relationship between participants' reports of their interactions with peers and academic benefits (r_s=.54). There was also a positive association between interactions with peers and academic motivation for elementary (r_s =.56) and middle-grades participants (r_s =.38).

Systems Outcomes

Opportunities for provider organizations. Overall, the majority of executive directors reported that the DYCD initiative had increased their organization's capacity to serve more youth and families either to a great extent (53 percent) or somewhat (27 percent). Executive directors' reports of the opportunities the DYCD initiative offered their organization reflected the same patterns as in the first year of the initiative. In Year 2, executive directors most frequently reported that the OST initiative had "to a great extent" or "somewhat" increased opportunities for training and technical assistance for their staff (75 percent).

More than half of directors also reported that the initiative had increased opportunities to partner with city agencies (64 percent), cultural organizations (61 percent), and a public school (60 percent). This finding of increased partnerships with public schools was greater in Year 2 than Year 1: 32 percent of executive directors reported that, compared to other out-of-school time programs, their DYCD OST programs established linkages with surrounding schools much more or somewhat more, while 25 percent reported this in Year 1 (V=.19).

As earlier noted, in the second year, DYCD began enforcing attendance and enrollment requirements by withholding a percent of funding from programs that did not meet participation targets. Perhaps related to this policy, executive directors' survey responses reflected increased focus on participation tracking. In Year 2, 39 percent of directors reported that their OST-funded programs tracked student program attendance more than their programs funded through other sources, compared to 17 percent who reported this experience in Year 1 (V=.38). While the DYCD policy may have contributed to increased participation rates—as reflected by higher enrollment numbers and higher rates of daily attendance—executive directors reported that it was a challenge to meet these standards. Fifty-one percent of executive directors reported that meeting DYCD's enrollment and attendance requirements was a challenge, significantly more than the 40 percent who reported this challenge in Year 1 (V =.12). In general, more than half of

executive directors (55 percent) reported that the administrative burden associated with the initiative presented a challenge for their organization.

Not surprisingly, evaluators found notable differences in the capacity of organizations with out-of-school time budgets greater than $500,000 and organizations with smaller budgets devoted to out-of-school time programming. In particular, compared to organizations with smaller out-of-school time budgets, provider organizations with at least $500,000 devoted to out-of-school time were more likely to provide their staff with employment benefits, paid professional development, and opportunities for promotion.

However, there was also evidence that the OST initiative is helping to increase the capacity of provider organizations with small OST budgets to offer high-quality programming. Executive directors were asked to compare their organization's DYCD-funded OST programs to other out-of-school time programs sponsored by the organization. Directors of organizations with small OST budgets were more likely to report notable differences between their DYCD-funded programs and their other programs. In particular, organizations with small OST budgets were more likely than providers with large OST budgets to report that their DYCD OST programs complied with city and state child care regulations somewhat more or much more (30 percent, compared to 8 percent; V =.29). Organizations with small OST budgets were also more likely to report that their DYCD OST programs adhered somewhat or much more to strict standards about hiring and screening qualified staff (32 percent, compared to 10 percent; V =.28).

Meeting the needs of working parents. Parent survey responses indicated that the OST initiative is filling a need for structured after-school opportunities in New York City. Seventy-three percent of parents reported that the OST program was the only structured program their child attends after school.

Overall, parents were satisfied with the quality of the OST program in Year 2. Sixty-one percent of parents rated the program as "excellent" and an additional 20 percent said it was "very good." However, the survey responses also demonstrated that parents felt that there was room for improvement in the quality of OST programming. Overall, slightly less than half (46 percent) of parents strongly agreed that the OST program helped their child academically, and this opinion differed significantly by grade level.

Parents of elementary- and middle-grades OST participants also reported that the availability of the OST program improved their own opportunities. Eighty-four percent of parents reported that they work outside the home, including 64 percent who work 35 hours or more per week. Sixty-five percent of parents strongly agreed that the program hours fit their needs, and more than half strongly agreed that the OST program met their needs by making it easier for them to keep their job, work more hours, or attend school.

Conclusions

In Year 2, OST programs increased both their enrollment and participation rates. Programs scaled up enrollment to serve more than 69,000 youth throughout New York City. Rates of individual youth participation also increased substantially compared to Year 1, indicating that programs were successfully recruiting and retaining participants. In addition, programs reported that they improved the quality and capacity of their program staff by hiring staff members with varied experiences and qualifications and by staff participation in internal and external professional development opportunities. Programs offered both academic and non-academic activities to youth but had to balance competing priorities from schools, which typically sought a focus on academic programming after school. Based on principles established in youth development research, evaluators found a need for more youth opportunities for active, hands-on learning.

In Year 2, the evaluation identified a core set of program quality features that were associated with high levels of program participation and with positive social and academic outcomes. The evaluation will continue to track these features and their associations with participant benefits in future years, in order to understand the settings and conditions that are associated with positive youth outcomes. At this point, the most important such features appear to be the following:

- Youth have opportunities to interact with their peers.
- Youth interact with and develop positive relationships with staff.
- Youth are exposed to new and engaging experiences.
- Youth have the opportunity to participate in both summer and school-year programming.
- Programs offer a variety of both academic enrichment and non-academic activities, including arts, recreation, and civic engagement.
- Programs staffing patterns include younger staff members supported by more experienced staff.
- Program directors and staff participate regularly in professional development.
- Programs communicate with schools regularly about student learning objectives.

- Programs reach out to engage families through a parent liaison and/or special events for parents.

In Year 3, the evaluation will continue to collect data from OST programs to explore the associations among these program-quality features, youth participation patterns, and youth outcomes.

As the programs become increasingly well established in their schools and communities and as they scale up youth enrollment and participation, future evaluation reports will employ multivariate analysis approaches and develop a program quality index that rates programs on a combination of these quality features.