

# City Strategies to Engage Older Youth in Afterschool Programs

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## About the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families

The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns it represents.

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute), a special entity within NLC, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers, and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

Through the YEF Institute, municipal officials and other community leaders have direct access to a broad array of strategies and tools, including:

- Action kits and other publications that offer a menu of practical steps that officials can take to address key problems or challenges.
- Technical assistance projects in selected communities.
- Peer networks and learning communities focused on specific program areas.
- The National Summit on Your City's Families and other workshops, leadership academies, training sessions, and cross-site meetings.
- Targeted research and periodic surveys of local officials.
- The YEF Institute's monthly webinar series.

To learn more about these tools and other aspects of the YEF Institute's work, go to [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef).

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## About The Wallace Foundation

The Wallace Foundation is an independent, national foundation dedicated to supporting and sharing effective ideas and practices that expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. Its three current objectives are: strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement; enhancing out-of-school learning opportunities; and building appreciation and demand for the arts. More information and research on these and other related topics can be found at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

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## About this Guide

Lane Russell, associate for afterschool at NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, and Sharon Deich, Heather Clapp Padgett, and Amy Cox of the education policy consulting firm Cross & Joftus served as the authors of this strategy guide. Audrey M. Hutchinson, the Institute's program director for education and afterschool initiatives, provided guidance and oversight to the development of the guide, and Clifford M. Johnson, the Institute's executive director, provided overall editorial direction. Kim Eisenreich provided helpful comments and edits, and Michael Karpman provided additional editorial support. Alexander Clarke was responsible for the strategy guide's design and layout. Preparation and distribution of this strategy guide were made possible by support from The Wallace Foundation.

# City Strategies to Engage Older Youth in Afterschool Programs

STRATEGY GUIDE

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## Executive Summary

A wide body of research shows that consistent participation in high-quality afterschool and summer programs, also called out-of-school time or OST, provides substantial benefits to children and youth and their communities. Youth are more prone to engage in juvenile delinquency, substance abuse and other risky behaviors after 3:00 p.m. if there are few positive OST programs available. Municipal leaders are also well aware of the impact of high school dropout rates on crime and unemployment, and are increasingly supporting out-of-school learning opportunities as a strategy for promoting school and career success.

Recruiting, retaining and engaging youth of middle and high school age is challenging work because they are a mobile population that can “vote with their feet,” and programs are not always accessible, interesting, or relevant. Sometimes, older youth do not even know what programs are available after school and over the summer. As the OST field matures, researchers, foundations, advocates and local leaders and providers are paying closer attention to the opportunities and benefits that high-quality programs can provide to youth ages 11-18 and how to overcome the barriers that inhibit their participation.

This strategy guide provides cities with guidance on how to create enriching, relevant and supportive OST environments for middle and high school youth that will help put them on a path to success. The guide outlines key strategies that show the most promise for maximizing scarce local resources for the benefit of older youth, coupled with city examples from small, mid-sized and large cities.

The practices described in the guide draw upon research on the unique developmental needs of middle and high school aged youth and what seems to work best in recruitment and retention of these youth. Ideas are presented for creating citywide “infrastructure” to help ensure that older youth not only attend OST programs, but do so at high rates of participation in order to maximize gains. Many of the ideas require little or no additional spending, but instead encourage creative use of partnerships and policies to achieve positive results for older youth. Cities may consider incorporating each of the following broader strategies and then tailoring individual activities to their unique local circumstances, rather than viewing the strategies as a “menu” of options:

### **1. COORDINATE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY.**

To ensure more OST programs meet the needs of older youth, municipal leaders may start by identifying what those needs are, work to make programs more accessible and support efforts to market programs to youth. City leaders may also track participation and the impact of programs to guide their efforts. Municipal leaders are well positioned to develop a clear, citywide strategy and bring together key local agencies and community organizations to better coordinate their efforts around common goals.

### **2. ENSURE PROGRAMS ARE OF HIGH QUALITY.**

Older youth will participate in greater numbers when OST programs meet a high standard of quality: activities are well-run, program staff are well-trained and youth can provide input about the types of activities offered. Cities can improve program quality by setting clear standards and creating a mechanism to measure programs against those standards. Local leaders can also work together to connect OST program staff with ongoing professional development and develop a standardized, basic skill set that staff need to offer high-quality programs.



### **3. OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF RELEVANT PROGRAM OPTIONS.**

The type of programs available can be modified to better reflect the wants and developmental needs of older youth, who tend to gravitate toward academic, arts, recreation and science programs. These youth also seek programs that will help them gain useful skills and reach their long-term goals.

### **4. PROMOTE COLLEGE ATTENDANCE AND WORKPLACE READINESS.**

Increasing the number of youth attending and completing college and preparing youth for the workplace are increasingly important goals for municipal leaders. Some city officials are dedicating resources to programs that help youth navigate college entrance or provide an authentic work experience. In many cases, local business partners and institutions of higher learning can offer vital support to these programs.



## Introduction

High-quality programs offered during the out-of-school hours, including the summer months, can be an important strategy for keeping children and youth safe, developing their social skills and reinforcing what they learn in school. Researchers have found that the benefits of OST participation are especially large for middle and high school aged youth, increasing graduation rates, providing workplace skills, preventing early pregnancy and reducing juvenile crime.<sup>1</sup> Yet for many older youth, opportunities to engage in high-quality OST activities are quite limited. Many communities focus on providing services for younger children because of the need for childcare, but older youth also have important needs that OST programs can address.

Currently, the majority of participants in out-of-school time programs are younger children, while participation lags among middle and high school aged youth.<sup>2</sup> Some cities have too few OST programs designed for older youth, or these youth do not know what programs exist. Other barriers to participation include limited transportation or inaccessible locations, which may be unsafe. Municipal leaders are in a unique position to take action and become champions for these programs. Mayors, councilmembers, and other municipal leaders can convene stakeholders, use their “bully pulpit” to build public will and educate the community about the importance of programs for older youth, and help align community and city resources.

A growing body of research about what works best for older youth emphasizes that OST opportunities must be distinctly different from programs offered to younger children. Middle school students need OST experiences that focus on choice, leadership opportunities, cultural enrichment, health and wellness and a chance to give back to their communities. High school students need college preparation, access to higher education opportunities and exposure to careers and workforce training. Older youth, particularly high school aged youth, are often better served by more targeted, in-depth curricula that address a specific area of interest. Additionally, OST programs can address a number of demands that are unique to these age groups, including high school completion, credit attainment and recovery, violence prevention, and workforce and postsecondary readiness.

*Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time* offers a set of city-level practices for recruiting and retaining older youth in OST programs, along with characteristics that are common to high-retention programs. These practices include:

1. Engage in citywide recruitment efforts;
2. Coordinate information about programs across the city;
3. Collect and use data on OST programs;
4. Support quality improvement efforts; and
5. Provide professional development and technical assistance to programs.

The Harvard Family Research Project and Public/Private Ventures, with support from The Wallace Foundation, recently conducted a study to find out how programs successfully keep middle and high school aged youth engaged. *Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time*<sup>3</sup> revealed how city leaders can increase participation among older youth in OST programs. The recommendations in this strategy guide draw heavily on the research foundation in the *Engaging Older Youth* study.

<sup>1</sup> Sarah N. Deschenes, Amy Arbreton, Priscilla M. Little, Carol Herrera, Jean Baldwin Grossman, and Heather B. Weiss, with Diana Lee. *Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/publications-resources/engaging-older-youth-program-and-city-level-strategies-to-support-sustained-participation-in-out-of-school-time>  
<sup>3</sup> A recent survey conducted by the Afterschool Alliance entitled, *America After 3PM*, found that of the 8.4 million young people in the U.S. who are attending afterschool programs, only 18 percent are in middle school and 12 percent are in high school. [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/press\\_archives/america\\_3pm/Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/press_archives/america_3pm/Executive_Summary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Deschenes et al., *Engaging Older Youth*.



This guide describes four strategies that municipal leaders can employ to ensure that high-quality OST opportunities are available to meet the needs of middle and high school aged youth in their communities. When used together, these strategies can increase participation in high-quality OST programs, thereby maximizing the programs' benefits.

The four strategies are:

1. Coordinate systems to support effective service delivery.
2. Ensure programs are of high quality.
3. Offer a wide variety of relevant program options.
4. Promote college attendance and workplace readiness.

Each strategy is described in detail below and includes descriptive city examples to demonstrate how municipal leaders are using these strategies in communities across the country. Many of these efforts have been instituted with little or no additional funds. In many cases, city leaders have leveraged the authority of their offices, engaged key stakeholders or encouraged alignment among city agencies and local nonprofits to create program delivery systems that are effective in engaging older youth.





## Strategy 1: Coordinate Systems to Support Effective Service Delivery

In order for youth to reap the full benefits of participation in OST programs, the programs must be of high quality, and youth must participate regularly, with frequent attendance in the same program for at least a year.<sup>4</sup> A growing body of research suggests that cities should carefully consider how their various resources and approaches work together to reduce barriers to participation and encourage youth to attend OST programs. These recommendations draw upon findings from the *Engaging Older Youth* study and RAND Corporation's recently released *Hours of Opportunity*<sup>5</sup> report, which both highlight the importance of strategic, coordinated, data-driven approaches to reduce barriers to program attendance, such as transportation or the location of activities. Since older youth make their own decisions on which OST programs to attend, cities can also boost participation by aligning communications efforts and marketing programs directly to youth.

The strategy of strategically aligning and coordinating systems to support effective service delivery may involve a variety of action steps that foster consistent participation by older youth. These action steps include:

- **Conducting market research to identify programming needs and wants:** Older youth are especially selective about the types of programs they will attend. When adults seek their input about desired program offerings, they will be more likely to participate. Information from focus groups, surveys and existing data can help cities more efficiently allocate resources to support the OST programs that best meet the needs of older youth. Such information can also be used to engage key stakeholders.
- **Providing transportation and offering programs in accessible locations:** Youth are more likely to attend programs that they can easily reach and where they feel safe. Providing transportation to and from programs can expand access and increase participation. Locating programs where youth feel most comfortable, where more youth are present, and where youth can easily attend can also increase participation.
- **Aligning data collection systems to provide information about program effectiveness:** Cities can collect data from youth-serving agencies and nonprofits to understand local trends in youth program participation. A management information system provides valuable insight into which programs and locations are the most popular.
- **Strategically marketing programs to increase awareness and recruitment:** There are many things competing for the time and attention of older youth. To ensure that youth are aware of the full range of OST alternatives, municipal officials can use their existing communication channels, partner with stakeholders to raise awareness of program options, and conduct recruitment campaigns.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Susan J. Bodilly, Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Nate Orr, Ethan Scherer, Louay Constant, and Daniel Gershwin. *The Hours of Opportunity*, Volumes I, II and III (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2010). <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/key-research/Documents/Hours-of-Opportunity-1-Lessons-After-School-Summer-OST.pdf>



## **CONDUCT MARKET RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY PROGRAMMING NEEDS AND WANTS**

Market research is the exploration of how, why and what services are used and desired by consumers. It can help municipal leaders and OST providers design programs that more closely align with the needs and wants of older youth. The process of conducting research, including focus groups and surveys, can also promote “buy-in” as youth and families feel that they have a real voice in how programs are designed and implemented. A careful study of the “consumers” of OST programs using market research data can assist municipal leaders in identifying specific types of programs that are in greatest demand, helping them use resources more efficiently by maximizing older youth participation.

### **Nashville, Tenn.: Market Research Surveys and Focus Groups**

At the end of 2008, the Nashville Afterschool Zone Alliance (NAZA) identified and surveyed OST providers to better understand the OST landscape in Nashville. The city recognized the need for a strong youth voice during planning and implementation of a “zone” model that would serve middle school aged youth in particular, geographically defined areas. Using surveys and focus groups with middle school students, parents and neighborhood groups, NAZA partners collected the perspectives of young people and their families to better understand which OST opportunities they desired. Members of the NAZA marketing and communications workgroup developed the focus group questions, led the focus groups and gathered the data.

Nashville youth and their families played an active role in suggesting names for the “zone” model at their school and in determining how to attract young people to participate in programs. Students reported that they would attend programs offering sports and games, music recording, art, mixed media, fashion classes, mentoring, computer training, and time outside. During one focus group, the young people expressed concerns about students dropping out and highlighted a need for mentors and for programs addressing issues faced by homeless youth. The focus groups intentionally engaged young people who were not already involved in OST activities. These youth expressed interest in participating in a NAZA youth leadership committee to direct future actions of the “zones.” By listening to youth voices, NAZA is developing high-quality programming that is responsive to community needs, concerns, and desires.

In 2009, Mayor Karl Dean supported NAZA as the sole new initiative in his proposed budget. NAZA was able to use a \$400,000 appropriation from the Nashville Metro Council to launch the Northeast Zone in January 2010. Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) matched city funding with in-kind facilities, transportation, and staff support, and community partners leveraged more than \$100,000 through federal and other grant funds. Mayor Dean serves as chair of this public-private partnership, and the director of MNPS, Dr. Jesse Register, serves as vice-chair. During the first year of the pilot zone, the number of students in structured afterschool programs more than doubled in the Northeast Zone.

The city plans to launch six or seven zones to cover the geographically diverse county, with the launch of a second zone having occurred in January 2011. The Metro Council approved \$600,000 in its fiscal year 2011 budget to support the “zones.” This city funding helped leverage \$250,000 from a private foundation. Ultimately, the success of the initiative will depend on its ability to attract and retain students. The initial market research and subsequent involvement of students in suggesting activities are key features of the city’s recruitment and retention strategy.



## Conducting Market Research for Out-of-School Time Programs

The Wallace Foundation has published a resource manual for using market research to guide OST program planning. Starting with market research in the program planning phase ensures that programs address the needs of the community. The tool walks users through each of six major steps involved in an OST market research initiative:

1. Form an OST market research task force;
2. Engage stakeholders to build multi-sector constituencies;
3. Conduct background research;
4. Conduct primary market research;
5. Use the results; and
6. Implement a communications plan.

The tool also describes how market research is most effective when it is used on a continuing basis, most notably for tracking program attendance and monitoring OST program satisfaction.\* *Getting Started with Market Research for Out-of-School Time Planning: A Resource Guide for Communities* is available on the Wallace Foundation website at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

\* Julianne Pokela and Ingrid Steblea, with Jeffrey Steblea, Linda Shea and Elizabeth Denny. *Getting Started with Market Research for Out-of-School Time Planning: A Resource Guide for Communities* (New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation, 2007). <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/after-school/collecting-and-using-data/Pages/Market-Research-for-Out-of-School-Time-Planning-Resource-Guide.aspx>

## PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION

Municipal leaders can promote participation by helping youth get to and from programs more easily. Youth often lack the ability to travel to a program location or do not feel safe doing so alone. Some cities have found creative ways to provide transportation to programs or have rearranged program locations to better suit youth participation. Examples of transportation solutions include:

- Adjusting city or school bus schedules and/or changing bus routes to accommodate afterschool program schedules.
- Utilizing buses intended for detention or for children with special needs.
- Working with local transit authorities to provide free public transportation passes to older youth or make bus passes available at a lower cost.

### Saint Paul, Minn.: Circulator Buses

Saint Paul is home to two youth “Circulator” buses. The Circulator bus is a free, accessible neighborhood transportation system that connects young people with high-quality OST programs at libraries, parks, recreation centers, schools and community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA. In addition to helping young people participate in enriching learning and development experiences, the buses serve as a community development tool by bringing together neighborhood partners and promoting program coordination. Youth Job Corps workers ages 18-21 are on each bus to ensure the safety of the children.

The West Side Neighborhood Learning Community launched the first Circulator bus in 2003 to address transportation barriers that affected youth in the neighborhood. Six years later, the West Side Circulator bus celebrated its 100,000th ride. Building on the success of this initiative, the City of Saint Paul launched an East Side Circulator in 2007. Currently, the Leap Forward Collaborative and other community partners



are testing a new route for this Circulator bus with technical assistance from the city. Local officials are considering additional strategies to encourage youth ridership, including connecting walking/biking routes to the Circulators and a campaign by the Saint Paul Youth Commission and Metro Transit to increase youth ridership on public buses.

## **OFFER PROGRAMS IN ACCESSIBLE LOCATIONS**

Older youth, unlike younger children, often prefer to attend programs outside of their school buildings and can make more independent decisions about where they choose to spend their time. Therefore, program locations have to be able to attract their attention. Some examples include:

- Promoting a mix of school- and community-based programs, which provides greater options and the potential for easier access. Community-based programs can also attract youth who feel more connected to their neighborhoods than to their schools and who may be reluctant to remain at school after the bell rings.
- Collaborating with partners to think creatively about potential program locations. City leaders may consider partnering with local retail facilities and malls or other teen-friendly, accessible places.
- Using geographic information system (GIS) mapping. GIS technology allows municipal leaders to analyze information in the form of maps, charts and reports that reveal local patterns and trends. Crime and school attendance data, for example, can be overlaid with information on OST program availability and attendance to produce a useful, visual representation of high-need areas. Using data generated through these methods, municipal leaders and their partners can make better decisions about program locations and activities for older youth. They can also use GIS data to identify and address barriers to participation, including gang territories or school rivalries.

### **Niles, Ill.: Niles Teen Center**

The Niles Teen Center provides a structured and safe environment for local teens to receive homework assistance, play games, socialize with peers, and participate in community service opportunities and educational enrichment programs. Since September 2007, the teen center has been strategically located in a retail shopping mall to ensure convenient access for young people via public transportation and a “hip” place to be. The facility space for the teen center is relatively small at 1,500 square feet, and the center serves 20-30 teens per day. Because of its location in the shopping mall, the teen center also serves teens from several surrounding communities with varying demographics. The teen center staff provide youth with programs and activities that meet their individual needs, including counseling support, tutoring, arts and crafts, and community service.

This center, funded entirely with city revenue, is considered a public service to the community because it keeps youth safe and occupied during the hours outside of school and eases parent concerns about what their children are doing after school. In return, the shopping center provides free signage space to advertise teen center programs and activities, and mall personnel distribute newsletters and email advertisements to their distribution lists. In addition, the mall security staff and video cameras help defray security costs.



## ALIGN DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Collecting data on which youth attend and how often they attend OST programs is vital to understanding participation trends. Such data can be used to inform program improvement and efficient allocation of city resources. The RAND Corporation's *Hours of Opportunity* report highlights eight cities' use of data systems to expand access to high-quality OST programs.<sup>6</sup> The report asserts that OST programs generate greater benefits when city and community leaders:

- Encourage program providers to track youth attendance and participation. Participation data can include the demographics of the youth served, school attendance, and attendance at library, recreation center and community programs. Data on how often youth attend and whether they continue attending for long periods of time are also important.
- Use a central management information system (MIS) to track and share data. Municipal officials can establish a citywide MIS that tracks participation within and across program sites. Adequate support and training can equip frontline staff with the skills needed to use this technology effectively.

### Louisville, Ky.: TraxSolutions

For over 10 years, a partnership of the Louisville Metro Office of Youth Development, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), Metro United Way and community organizations has promoted use of nFocus' KidTrax (now known as TraxSolutions) data and tracking tool by OST programs serving all age groups of children and youth. This tool facilitates sharing of aggregate and individual data on youth served by schools and OST providers. Students scan their bar-coded TraxSolutions cards at participating programs, and the cards also serve as library cards and discount bus passes. As participants swipe their cards at program activities, local partners are able to gather individualized data through the TraxSolutions computer software.

Community-based programs that receive city funding are required to use TraxSolutions and share data with JCPS. Additionally, the city and TraxSolutions staff provide outcome measurement training and assistance to community-based organizations in using the software.

### Providence, R.I.: Youthservices.net

The Providence After School Alliance (PASA), with support from former Mayor David N. Cicilline and current Mayor Angel Taveras, uses the Youthservices.net Web-based software to track participation and retention of youth attending the AfterZones, an innovative OST model offering a range of enriching activities for middle school students at neighborhood hubs. The Youthservices.net software is designed to meet the data collection, service management and program evaluation needs of the youth services sector and is able to generate information on attendance at the program, AfterZone, and citywide levels. On a daily basis, PASA staff can use the system data to organize transportation and identify which programs are under-enrolled and may need help with recruitment and retention.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bodilly, et al., *The Hours of Opportunity*.

<sup>7</sup> Lauren J. Kotloff and Danijela Korom-Djakovic. *AfterZones: Creating a Citywide System to Support and Sustain High-Quality After-School Programs* (Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, 2010). [http://www.issueelab.org/research/afterzone\\_outcomes\\_for\\_youth\\_participating\\_in\\_providences\\_citywide\\_after\\_school\\_system](http://www.issueelab.org/research/afterzone_outcomes_for_youth_participating_in_providences_citywide_after_school_system)



### **Tampa, Fla.: Identifying Underserved Areas**

Former Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio has worked with Hillsborough County Public Schools and the Children’s Board of Hillsborough County to develop an online program locator that helps improve access to after-school programs for middle school youth. By mapping the programs at all local middle schools, city recreation centers and community-based organizations, the city was able to identify areas needing additional OST services.

## **STRATEGICALLY MARKET PROGRAMS TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND RECRUITMENT**

It is often said about older youth participation that youth “vote with their feet.” Unlike younger children, where parents have a large say about which programs they will attend, older youth have additional options for how to spend their time. Because older youth do not have to attend OST programs, available programs need to be marketed to attract their attention. Local marketing efforts may be more successful if they leverage the combined resources of school, community organization and local government communication channels.

More cities are developing outreach strategies with guidance from market research in order to determine what methods will work best to attract older youth to programs. For example, cities have formed youth task forces to survey their peers and market OST programs – a particularly effective way to involve youth and design recruitment techniques.

City leaders are also taking advantage of social media to reach out to constituents. In some communities, these efforts involve using social media to provide a one-stop digital space with information about available youth-oriented options. For example, Providence, R.I., partners developed an interactive website with information on resources for young people throughout the city. The website includes a shared calendar, an opportunity locator, online communities and user-generated content. Municipal leaders can also support recruitment via social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. For example, in Des Moines, Iowa, the youth council uses a Facebook page to announce community events and activities for youth.

City leaders can also use their “bully pulpit” to bring stakeholders together for larger outreach efforts or encourage participation by hosting summits and program fairs. These initiatives increase participation in and awareness of local program options.

### **Sacramento, Calif.: Youth Empowerment Summit**

In June 2009, Mayor Kevin Johnson joined with other local organizations to host a Youth Empowerment Summit focusing on three older youth populations: those who are failing in school, have dropped out, and/or are involved with gangs. The summit consisted of workshops and discussions between youth and social service providers, and offered information about a wide array of in-school and afterschool programs, including postsecondary education, academic preparation and workforce development programs and other positive alternatives to gangs. The summit also offered information on financial management, mental health and substance abuse issues, and police involvement.



### **Hillsboro, Ore.: “Don’t Go Home, Go to The Zone”**

Hillsboro officials have established a popular afterschool initiative for youth in the middle grades called “The Zone,” which offers a wide choice of classes to keep activities fresh and hold students’ interest. The program includes enrichment classes, homework help, and intramural sports along with a safe place for young people to go after the school day ends.

In 2008, the city received a grant from the Washington County Commission on Children and Families for a marketing project. As a result, the city’s youth advisory group, supported by the parks and recreation department, created a marketing plan to promote the benefits of staying after school, with the slogan, “Don’t go home, go to The Zone!” They also created a mascot called Zone Boy who makes frequent appearances at school assemblies to promote the afterschool programs at the four middle schools.

The city evaluates the programs to measure success and identify necessary changes by surveying participants, parents, teachers and school officials. Participants complete surveys at the beginning and end of each class, providing regular feedback on their interest and satisfaction. This information is used to generate a list of recommendations for quality improvement. The marketing research and other outreach initiatives help the city emphasize the importance of student input to promoting participation in programs.



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## Strategy 2: Ensure Programs are of High Quality

Research suggests that the quality of OST programs can be an important factor in helping older youth graduate high school and achieve postsecondary and career success. Action steps for improving program quality and thereby encouraging youth participation include:

- **Establishing standards of quality programming:** Commonly accepted standards of quality offer guidelines for safety, program operations and staffing and help ensure consistency across programs.
- **Supporting ongoing professional development for OST staff:** Highly trained staff who sustain positive relationships with older youth play a critical role in enhancing program quality.
- **Providing leadership opportunities for youth:** Including older youth input into program design can increase their interest in participation.

### ESTABLISH STANDARDS OF QUALITY PROGRAMMING

High-quality programs support the sustained participation of youth, which enables those youth to fully reap the benefits that OST programs can provide. National organizations such as the National Afterschool Association (NAA)<sup>8</sup> have established program quality standards that many cities and states adapt to meet their local needs. In general, OST program quality standards offer detailed guidelines for the following categories:

- Stable and well-organized program administration;
- Safe physical space and equipment;
- Age-appropriate program curricula and design;
- Well-trained and supervised staff; and
- Parent and community engagement.<sup>9</sup>

Municipal leaders can promote program quality by advocating for citywide use of a shared set of quality standards and assessment tools to measure program quality based on the standards. One initial step city officials can take is to foster a dialogue among OST, school district and community leaders regarding the development of quality standards.

Once standards are established, many cities use assessment tools to monitor program quality.<sup>10</sup> These assessments can provide valuable information to guide youth worker professional development, determine funding priorities and identify resources that can bolster quality.

### Grand Rapids, Mich.: Expanded Learning Opportunities Network

Mayor George Heartwell is a longtime supporter of OST opportunities and a former co-chair of the city's Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Network, which enhances system-wide collaboration and pro-

<sup>8</sup> NAA also accredits OST programs through its relationship with the Council on Accreditation.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Caspe, Flora Traub, and Priscilla M. Little. "Beyond the Head Count: Evaluating Family Involvement in Out-of-School Time," *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*, no. 4 (2002). <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/beyond-the-head-count-evaluating-family-involvement-in-out-of-school-time>

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Yohalem and Alicia Wilson-Ahlstrom, with Sean Fischer and Marybeth Shinn. *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, Second Edition* (Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, 2009). <http://www.forumfyi.org/content/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition>



gram quality among OST programs throughout the city. The ELO network includes more than 45 organizations and individual stakeholders from area municipalities, school districts, law enforcement, public health, community services, libraries, colleges and universities, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses.

In 2001, the network adopted quality standards by using examples from other cities and holding in-depth conversations with the provider community in Grand Rapids. To become a network member, program providers must agree to use the standards. The network also endorsed HighScope's Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) tool to evaluate programs, and worked with the Forum for Youth Investment to train network providers on how to use the assessment tool. All 27 providers are currently trained and have signed an agreement to continually participate in trainings and evaluate two of their organizations' programs. Staff members are also trained to use YPQA and the Advancing Youth Development (AYD) curriculum through a train-the-trainer model.

## SUPPORT ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR OST STAFF

Research on OST program quality highlights the need for “stable and well-trained staff,”<sup>11</sup> and there is evidence that “meaningful long-term relationships with staff support better retention among [older] youth.”<sup>12</sup> The institutions and systems that provide professional development to OST staff therefore help increase the success of programs that serve older youth. Cities are using some of the following methods to provide high-quality professional development to youth workers and other program provider staff:

- Creating networks of providers to support information sharing;
- Working with local colleges or universities to offer courses, training and certificate programs for youth workers to enhance their knowledge of youth development or provide school-age care credentials.
- Providing funds to intermediaries that offer professional development based on nationally-recognized standards of basic youth worker skills. Sometimes, these trainings are extended to other local employees, such as parks and recreation departments, teachers, human services staff, law enforcement officials and juvenile detention center staff.

### Jacksonville, Fla.: After School Redesign Project

Beginning in 2007, former Mayor John Peyton's attention to crime reduction led to increased afterschool and summer programming for children and youth. His Jacksonville Journey anti-crime initiative – funded by the reallocation of more than \$40 million in reserve funds, federal earmarks and department cost savings in the 2009 budget – resulted in the expansion of strategies focused on law enforcement and deterrence, neighborhood safety and stability, education, positive youth development, intervention, and rehabilitation. Of the initiative funds, \$3.8 million was budgeted for OST programs managed by the Jacksonville Children's Commission (JCC), which became the coordinating entity for the city's OST activities.

JCC's Training Institute provides the Advancing Youth Development certificate, as well as training in the 40 Developmental Assets for workers in afterschool programs. School principals and other district leaders recently requested this training for their teachers, a significant step toward creating a positive, youth-focused environment for children and youth. JCC is also working with Florida State College at Jacksonville to adopt a system of credit-bearing courses in youth development that can lead to an associate's degree and ultimately a bachelor's degree in applied science. This program was piloted at Palm Beach State College in South Florida.

<sup>11</sup> Susan J. Bodilly and Megan K. Beckett. *Making Out-of-School Time Matter: Evidence for an Action Agenda* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), p. 106. <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG242.html>

<sup>12</sup> Deschenes et al., *Engaging Older Youth*, 41.



Going forward, JCC will continue developing its training program for youth workers through the After School Redesign Project, a comprehensive, three-year quality improvement effort focused on the city's school-based OST programs. The project will address core competencies, best practices in program leadership, and supervisory skill building. Current Mayor Alvin Brown has already committed to supporting the development of an OST system and its components, including the After School Redesign Project.

### **Philadelphia, Pa.: OST Professional Development Project**

Since 2008, Mayor Michael Nutter has prioritized raising high school graduation and postsecondary completion rates, with high-quality OST programs serving as a key strategy for achieving those goals. The Center for Youth Development at the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and the Out-of-School Time Resource Center at the University of Pennsylvania administer the city's professional development strategy. Their goal is to develop a coordinated, research-based professional development system that provides a diverse range of opportunities for OST staff to advance their skills in working with youth. The OST Professional Development Project is being shaped by needs assessments, workgroup meetings, and stakeholder feedback.

The city's OST intermediary, the Public Health Management Corporation (PMHC), also serves as the regional coordinator for Keystone STARS, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's early childhood education quality rating and improvement system. Keystone STARS standards cover school-age child care providers, and PHMC works to ensure that OST programs access the professional development, technical assistance, credit-bearing coursework, scholarships, certifications, and other supports available through Keystone STARS.

A unique feature of Philadelphia's professional development system is the wide range of opportunities for local youth workers to earn certifications and college credits through local institutions of higher learning. Based on an Advancing Youth Development curriculum, the Community College of Philadelphia and Eastern University offer a youth worker certificate program and degree credit. Arcadia University offers an afterschool education certificate program created by Foundations, Inc. The Pennsylvania Child Care Association also offers scholarships to assist youth workers.

## **PROVIDE LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH**

Many quality standards for older youth programs recommend youth input in program design and implementation. These recommendations are unique to OST programs for older youth, because of the positive developmental benefits of youth leadership and the increased likelihood that older youth will attend programs when they have "voice and choice."

Leadership opportunities also help youth feel more connected to their communities. For many older youth, the regular school day provides few opportunities to develop leadership skills or advocate for themselves and for other causes they feel are important. OST programs offering youth leadership and civic engagement opportunities can contribute to recruitment and retention, improved academic achievement and decreased delinquency.

City leaders can promote youth leadership by inviting young people to participate in working groups and city commissions, youth councils, and community service, among other strategies. In many communities, partnerships among businesses, schools, and local government connect youth with business leadership programs. Municipal leaders can also partner with programs and schools to develop service learning activities.



### **Salem, Ore.: Teen Action Teams**

The City of Salem's Teen Action Teams at North and West High Schools and its POWER program for middle school students offer a variety of youth leadership and service learning opportunities. The Teen Action Teams empower students to advocate for a drug-free school community by producing public service announcements and videos that are used in schools and by community partners. The students who participate in this program have organized Red Ribbon Week, participated in STOMP (Sales of Tobacco to Minors Prohibited) outings, and promoted other drug and alcohol prevention and awareness events at their schools.

More than 4,700 middle school students participate in the POWER program each year. The program offers safe, structured afterschool activities, with the city providing \$27,000 in unrestricted funds and dedicated staffing by a youth development coordinator. Numerous community organizations supplement this funding with in-kind and monetary donations.

### **Indio, Calif.: Mayor's Youth Advisory Council**

The Indio Mayor's Youth Advisory Council has played an important role in ensuring that other youth in their community have access to high-quality OST activities. For instance, the council alerted city leaders to the need for a teen center, and reported information from their research on other teen centers in the region to the Indio City Council. During these presentations, youth drew attention to the lack of community-based afterschool centers serving older youth. Their campaign was successful, and in September 2008, the city opened a new, 12,000-square foot teen center across the street from the local high school. Supported by city funds, the center offers many exciting activities, including a recording studio and computer lab. Other programs include life skills, education, sports and recreation, and programs that introduce students to four-year colleges and trades. Teen center members have created a committee to communicate their programmatic ideas and resource needs on an ongoing basis to the city council.

### **Hampton, Va.: Youth Civic Engagement**

Numerous leadership opportunities are available to youth through the award-winning Youth Civic Engagement model in Hampton, Va. Local youth have worked in the city planning department, distributed grant funding to local projects that benefit youth, and helped design a teen center with programs developed through youth-adult partnerships. Cities across the country have learned from Hampton's approach of offering pathways to service, influence over local government decisions, and opportunities for shared leadership.



## STRATEGY 3: Offer a Wide Variety of Relevant Program Options

According to the *Engaging Older Youth* study, “choice is an important program component and a key feature of youth development.”<sup>13</sup> Research further suggests that presenting older youth with a variety of choices may not be enough to recruit and retain participants. For example, programs that are culturally sensitive are most likely to retain older youth. Also, programs for middle school youth may not be of interest to high school students, who may want to build skills in specific areas rather than “try out” different types of activities.<sup>14</sup> The most popular programs for older youth focus on academics, sports and recreation, arts and science.

Older youth can also benefit from programs that help them overcome the challenging transition between middle and high school. Programs that provide information, skills and emotional support during this key transitional period can help prevent students from dropping out of high school. This section describes each of these options for offering relevant programs for older youth.

### ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS

One way to help older youth achieve their college and career goals is to provide them with extra time and support for academics. Additional academic support in the summer months can prove particularly beneficial for older youth who are at risk of falling behind, including those who need to recover credits in order to graduate on time. Municipal leaders can advocate for tutoring and mentoring programs, provide city employees with paid time off to volunteer or mentor in schools, work with school district leaders to offer programming at school facilities after the bell rings, and provide funding for quality programs. City leaders can also work with community partners to ensure that students have access to enrichment opportunities as well as remedial support. Debate leagues, chess clubs and science fairs help students build skills and enhance learning in the non-school hours.

#### St. Louis, Mo.: The Five Star After-School Program

Launched in February 2008, the Five Star After-School Program is a public-private partnership serving more than 400 students in five St. Louis area public middle schools. The program enhances school success for enrolled students by providing academic support, discussion groups, and community service and recreational activities. An evaluation of the program by the Public Policy Research Center at University of Missouri-St. Louis has shown an improvement in the grades of participating students, as well as teacher reports of improved academic achievement and behavior. Seventy percent of participating students with a baseline grade of “F” improved their scores by one or more letter grades. This program is reaching the most needy and academically at-risk students in St. Louis.

In 2007, Mayor Francis Slay asked Area Resources for Community and Human Services (ARCHS) and St. Louis For Kids (SL4K) to spearhead the After School for All Partnership (ASAP) in a citywide effort to expand access to afterschool programs. Five Star is just one of the programs this community collaborative supports. ARCHS secured the core funding for Five Star, assembled the various partners, provides fiscal and outcome oversight, and reports results to funders and the public.

<sup>13</sup> Deschenes et al., *Engaging Older Youth*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



### **Providence, R.I.: The Hub**

Building on the success of its middle school AfterZone model, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has partnered with Providence Public Schools and the Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex to create The Hub, a citywide system of high-quality afterschool opportunities for high school aged youth. These partners have also created a process that allows students to receive high school credit for participating in afterschool programs that are classified as expanded learning opportunities (ELOs). ELO programs include video game development, smartphone application development, English language programming, open source web development, environmental science, debate and more. Each ELO program wishing to provide high school credit must align its curriculum with the national Common Core standards and receive approval by the Providence Public Schools. A typical ELO curriculum consists of traditional afterschool and summer learning activities, but also incorporates internships with employers, independent studies in alternative settings, classes at one of the local college campuses and wraparound support services.

## **SPORTS AND RECREATION PROGRAMS**

The impact that sports and recreation programs can have on health and academic achievement should not be overlooked. Many programs combine physical activity with learning opportunities and teach leadership, teamwork, and self-discipline. Municipal leaders across the country partner with community organizations and schools to provide structured opportunities for youth to compete in a range of sports activities. In many cities, parks and recreation departments run a variety of programs; some work with citywide collaboratives to ensure their programs meet high standards. Other local agencies such as police departments may also devote resources to sports programs. Municipal leaders can encourage cross-departmental partnerships to ensure that youth have multiple sports and recreation options.

### **Santa Barbara, Calif.: Police Athletic League**

The City of Santa Barbara and its Police Athletic League (PAL) collaborate with Santa Barbara Unified School District and local groups such as the Club West Track Club to offer afterschool sports and special interest clubs and classes at four area junior high schools. The afterschool recreational programs are offered free of charge and have 700-900 annual registrants, with an average daily attendance of 300 students across the four schools.

Partnerships support these recreation opportunities. The parks and recreation department has developed a joint use agreement with the school district to manage the sports programs. The PAL provides sports uniforms and transportation, staffs programs, and coordinates a number of leagues, including boys' soccer and girls' basketball in the fall. Club West manages track and field programs, provides volunteers to coach students in track and field and cross-country events, and coordinates three local track meets for youth each year.

Local leaders combine an array of funds to raise the \$77,000 used to support the afterschool recreation program. The city provides \$20,000 in general fund dollars to support the three junior high school programs located in Santa Barbara. Fundraising activities provide additional support, and the program receives Proposition 49 funding from the state to provide homework assistance at one school site. The City of Goleta provides additional support for programs at the junior high school located in its jurisdiction through general funding and Community Development Block Grants.





### Seattle, Wash.: Late Night Recreation

The Seattle Parks and Recreation Department offers a late night recreation program on Friday and Saturday nights as a positive alternative for high-risk Seattle youth. Within selected park facilities, including local teen life centers, the city offers athletic activities such as basketball, volleyball, martial arts and other sports; tutoring; computer training; teen parenting programs; and cultural activities such as ethnic dance and bead-making. While the Late Night Recreation program is only one of many factors that may increase the safety of youth and reduce the risk that they will engage in illegal activity, the Seattle Police Department has reported an encouraging decrease in crime in some neighborhoods served by the program.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAMS

Older youth may have limited opportunities to explore painting, dance, music or theater during the regular school day. OST programs that support visual and performing arts education provide a critical service. By building on existing community resources, cities can improve programs, introduce new options, and maximize scarce resources. For instance, cities can:

- Engage local businesses, from dance studios to music halls, to support programs for youth. Often these studios or theater spaces are unused during the day when they could serve as the venue for an OST program under the supervision of local artists and experts.
- Create partnerships with arts organizations, museums, theater troupes and other local organizations to expand the number of older youth program options.
- Use existing city facilities, such as cultural centers, museums and theaters, recreation and community centers, and libraries to provide space for arts learning after the school day and during the summer months.
- Support efforts to embed artists and other arts organizations into youth services and programs that are already provided by the city.

### Denver, Colo.: Arts Street

In 1995, former Mayor Federico Peña's Office of Arts, Culture and Films founded the Arts Street program. The program provides job training to youth and young adults through creative skills development using visual, performing, and multimedia curricula. Art professionals worked with more than 1,350 youth in 2009, engaging adolescents in paid employment, internships, job placement or entrepreneurial training in creative fields of study.

The program starts with exploratory lessons with professional artists that introduce younger youth to a broad range of arts disciplines. Later, youth learn new skills by focusing on studio art techniques and core academics through research, analysis and technology. High school age youth gain workforce skills by participating in hands-on job training in arts fields. Youth receive an hourly wage of \$7.50 and work as apprentices to professional artists and partner organizations of Arts Street.

In 1999, Arts Street received a five-year U.S. Department of Labor Youth Opportunity Grant that helped bring the program to a new level. During that time, the city provided more than \$500,000 per year, as well as facilities, in-kind support, mentors and volunteers for Arts Street. In July 2005, Arts Street became an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization after the expiration of the federal grant significantly limited the program's funding. Despite reduced city and federal funding, the program has been able to sustain itself through private fundraising.



## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH PROGRAMS

In recent years, policymakers have focused greater attention on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education. Cities are working with community-based organizations, universities and businesses to provide OST opportunities focused on STEM learning. In other locales, municipal parks and recreation departments are partnering with environmental groups to expand OST opportunities to study nature, environmental issues, and green industries. Likewise, projects that create community gardens and animal sanctuaries can engage youth in exploring new career options.

### Michigan City, Ind.: Safe Harbor

Safe Harbor is the Michigan City Area Schools' (MCAS) afterschool program, which serves 1,200 students annually, including students from three middle schools and the only MCAS high school. The programs are made possible by a collaboration of 17 youth-serving agencies and have been operating for 12 years. In 2011, Safe Harbor engaged 46 youth ages 14 to 18 in a tech club, which refurbished donated computers, some from city agencies. The youth then donated and installed the upgraded computers at area nonprofits. The high school program also offers a robotics club and a science club. Safe Harbor is part of the city budget, with most funding derived from federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, as well as the United Way, the local education foundation, and the Michigan City Common Council.

### Saint Paul, Minn.: Conservation Corps

The City of Saint Paul, in partnership with the Community Design Center of Minnesota, provides youth ages 14-18 with environmental learning and job experiences as part of the Conservation Corps and East Side Garden Corps. These experiences include riverbank restoration, community gardening and opportunities to lead nutrition programming for younger children.

As Conservation Corps interns, youth can also learn about reforestation, storm water treatment and environmental stewardship. During the growing season, Garden Corps interns help plant and maintain the seven gardens in the East Side neighborhood, run a community-supported agriculture program, operate two farmers' markets, and sell produce to local restaurants. In the fall and winter, these interns further develop their entrepreneurial skills by creating and selling garden-related products.

Interns for both Conservation Corps and Garden Corps participate in weekly summer classes and field trips covering a wide range of topics related to food, personal health and the environment. During the school year, interns can continue to be active in their communities by joining the Community Peer Leadership Program, in which members research and make presentations on environmental issues to community groups and schools.

## PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT TRANSITIONS TO HIGH SCHOOL

The transition from middle school to high school represents a significant milestone in the lives of adolescents. High schools are usually larger and more impersonal environments than the schools that students attend in the middle grades. In addition, new high school students are often exposed to a greater diversity of peers and teachers, as well as an expanded choice of classes and extracurricular activities. Most students successfully complete the ninth grade. However, a significant group of students will struggle in this grade, and their success in navigating the transition will make or break their high school experience. In fact, a





growing body of research shows that difficult transitions to high school contribute to high dropout rates, low on-time graduation rates, and low achievement in American high schools.<sup>15</sup>

Many cities and school districts have begun implementing programs to address issues that arise at this critical juncture in adolescent development. Effective transition programs include some of the following elements:

- activities to provide students with information about their new schools and the social and academic support they may need to succeed;
- programming during summers between grades to promote readiness for the next grade level;
- strategies to promote parent involvement and communication with middle school and high school faculty; and
- OST programs led by caring adults who help ensure that ninth graders stay on track.

Municipal partnerships with school districts and community organizations can support OST programs that facilitate successful transitions to high school for incoming ninth-grade students. City leaders can also broker relationships with schools and youth-serving agencies to reach youth who are particularly vulnerable and in need of support.

### **Portland, Ore.: Ninth Grade Counts Program**

Through the Ninth Grade Counts program, Mayor Sam Adams and other city leaders in Portland have collaborated with community partners such as the Portland Schools Foundation to expand summer options for older youth as part of a continuum of educational services that help students graduate from high school. These summer opportunities include service learning and leadership programs, enrichment activities and academic support, simulated high school experiences, and field trips to learn about colleges and careers. Mayor Adams and former Multnomah County Chair Ted Wheeler worked to strengthen political will, community accountability, strategic alignment, and system capacity around the critical transition to high school and recruited businesses to participate in Ninth Grade Counts summer programs. Mayor Adams has also advocated for a free youth transit pass initiative in the city's budget to increase access to OST programs.

### **New York City: Transition to High School Program**

In 2009, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) launched the Out-of-School Time (OST) Transition to High School Program, working with 33 high schools to provide support services for close to 1,500 eligible ninth grade students. Through this one-year intervention, collaborating community-based organization staff support a targeted number of at-risk students as they adjust to the demands of high school. Staff help them address a range of educational, personal, and social challenges that arise throughout the year.

Key components of the OST Transition to High School Program include yearlong assistance, a counselor-advocate, orientation and support activities, and feedback to parents. Entering ninth graders enroll in this program either the summer before or at the beginning of the school year and move through the program with a group. The cohort structure fosters peer bonding, promotes a culture of learning, and helps students

<sup>15</sup> Karl Alexander, Doris Entwisle, and Nader Kabbani. "The Dropout Process in Life Course Perspective: Early Risk Factors at Home and School." *Teachers College Record* 103, no. 5 (2001); Ruth Curran Neild, Scott Stoner-Eby, and Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., "Connecting Entrance and Departure: The Transition to Ninth Grade and High School Dropout," lecture, Harvard Civil Rights Project and Achieve, Inc., Joint Conference, Cambridge, Mass., January 2001; John W. Alspaugh. Achievement Loss Associated with the Transition to Middle School and High School. *The Journal of Educational Research* 92, no. 1 (September/October 1998), 20-25; Anne Wheelock and Jing Miao. "The Ninth-Grade Bottleneck: An Enrollment Bulge in a Transition Year that Demands Careful Attention and Action." *School Administrator* (March 2005).



settle into the high school environment through activities such as mentoring, counseling, freshman advisories, summer bridge preparation, tutoring, sports and recreation, and service learning. Another important factor in the success of the program is the collaborative relationship between service providers and schools. The schools recruit struggling students and identify key personnel who provide ongoing feedback, support, student data and tracking information to community organizations.

City revenues fund the program, with DYCD providing up to \$900 per participant for school-year programs offering a minimum of 120 hours of service and \$1,350 per participant for year-round programs offering a minimum of 200 hours of service. The first year of the transition program was completed in June 2010. DYCD and participating providers have collected data on youth in the program and are working with Policy Studies Associates on a multi-year evaluation of the first cohort of students.

### **The Untapped Potential of Summer**

Research has shown that low-income middle school youth may lose more than two months of reading achievement over the summer while their middle-class peers make slight gains.\* Summer programs have the flexibility to offer a mix of academic, enrichment and “summer fun” that will appeal to older youth and enhance their success in school.

With bigger blocks of time available during the summer, youth can experiment with new interests or hone skills from sports to science. Youth can also work in the community or apprentice at a local business. In addition, many colleges and universities offer summer programs for older youth, and some provide summer coursework offering college or high school credit. Yet many cities lack a systemic approach to providing summer opportunities, leaving parents and youth to navigate a confusing maze of programs offered by a diverse array of public and private agencies. Municipal leaders can help bring coherence to summer opportunities by convening stakeholders to develop a catalog of public and private programs, create marketing tools, and coordinate resources and funding.

The National Summer Learning Association ([www.nsla.org](http://www.nsla.org)) provides information that city leaders can use to expand access to high-quality summer opportunities for older youth.

Harris Cooper, Barbara Nye, Kelly Charlton, James Lindsay, and Scott Greathouse. “The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review,” *Review of Educational Research*, 66, no. 3 (Fall 1996), 227-268. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1170523?uid=3739584&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21100996961973>



## STRATEGY 4: Promote College Entrance and Workplace Readiness

A growing research base shows that older youth respond best to OST experiences focusing on choice, leadership opportunities, cultural enrichment, a chance to give back to their communities, college preparation and access to higher education opportunities, health and wellness, and exposure to careers and workforce training.<sup>16</sup> Cities can wield their influence and resources to support OST programs that connect older youth to opportunities beyond high school. In particular, municipal leaders can bring business, postsecondary and school district stakeholders together to help students make a smooth transition from high school to college or work. This section highlights three action steps for supporting the efforts of older youth to attend college and join the workforce:

- **Help youth navigate college enrollment and financing:** To increase the number of youth entering and graduating from college, OST programs can provide information about college choices and financial planning.
- **Develop workforce and college readiness skills through mentoring:** High-quality mentoring programs help prepare youth for postsecondary education and the workforce by enhancing life skills, providing opportunities for youth to make a valuable contribution to their communities and promoting positive youth development.
- **Support workforce and postsecondary success initiatives:** Municipalities can provide youth with internship and apprenticeship experiences that provide work readiness skills and exposure to careers. City officials can also mobilize the business community and other partners to help youth gain a foothold in the labor force, and can work with colleges and universities to create supportive postsecondary success programs.

### HELP YOUTH NAVIGATE COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND FINANCING

Prospective college students are frequently overwhelmed by the process of identifying colleges and other postsecondary institutions they are interested in attending and to which they might be admitted. College hopefuls must also navigate a complex set of steps as part of the application process. Taking the SATs, meeting deadlines, completing financial aid applications, finding scholarship opportunities, writing essays, gathering recommendations and paying application fees can pose barriers to college entry.

Many students, particularly those whose parents did not go to college, need extra support in navigating the many hurdles to successfully applying to and seeking financial aid for postsecondary education. Institutions of higher education, community-based organizations and libraries can promote postsecondary access and readiness by providing financial aid information, assistance in identifying schools and completing applications, and job training.

#### Philadelphia, Pa.: PhillyGoes2College

Mayor Michael Nutter launched PhillyGoes2College (PG2C) in February 2010 as part of an effort to double the city's postsecondary completion rate within five to 10 years. With an office located in city hall, PG2C

<sup>16</sup> Deschenes et al. *Engaging Older Youth*.



offers a comprehensive website and phone hotline to provide middle and high school students with college planning guidance and referral information.

PG2C guides students through the college application process, and the website helps them explore postsecondary options based on their grades and test scores. PG2C also works with local university students, who assist applicants in writing essays for college applications and scholarships. Parents also receive information and assistance with completing financial aid forms. By recruiting and training 100 city employees to help parents and students complete required forms such as the FAFSA, the city increased the number of financial aid applications by 12 percent, resulting in more than \$194 million in additional financial aid for Philadelphia students. In November 2009, PG2C sponsored a series of college prep sessions and college fairs at its first annual College Awareness Week for several thousand middle and high school students, including a session on historically black colleges and universities.

### **Springfield, Ill.: College Assistance Program**

In 2007, former Mayor Timothy Davlin launched the College Assistance Program (CAP) Center at the city's public library to meet an ever-growing need for college access services. The CAP Center seeks to increase the number of low-income, minority and first-generation students in Springfield that attend college. In addition to providing individualized assistance, CAP partners with area colleges to offer hands-on financial aid workshops to families and helps them complete and submit FAFSA forms.

With a grant from Lumina Foundation for Education's KnowHow2Go campaign, the CAP Center launched the Take the Tough Classes Challenge program in 2008. This program, which served 47 eighth grade students in public school in its first year, introduces students in a fun way to the "tough" courses, encourages them to take college prep coursework in high school, and focuses on the skills, knowledge and behaviors needed to succeed in the global economy. In 2009, the CAP Center sponsored a College Expo and Pep Rally at the local shopping mall attended by more than 500 students and parents.

A visit from the National College Access Network (NCAN) helped inspire the creation of the CAP Center. With enthusiastic support from the mayor and his Office of Education Liaison (OEL), the city convened representatives of the school district, colleges and universities, the chamber of commerce, and other organizations to gauge support for the effort. OEL then developed the program in partnership with the Lincoln Library, where the center is housed and administered. The program was made possible by the Know-How2Go campaign, a \$58,000 grant through the state's library grant program and other state funding.

## **DEVELOP WORKFORCE AND COLLEGE READINESS SKILLS THROUGH MENTORING**

Successful out-of-school time mentoring initiatives connect youth with caring adults and can help prepare youth for life after high school. Municipal leaders can work with businesses to encourage city and company employees to be tutors and mentors. Paid leave for mentoring or tutoring programs can create incentives for employees to participate, and training opportunities can help them work effectively with older youth. For example, the City of Portland, Ore., is piloting a "City to Youth" program, which would allow eligible city employees up to four hours of paid time off each month to work with youth in approved programs. Other high-quality afterschool mentoring initiatives include:



### **Charleston, S.C.: Be a Mentor Initiative**

The Mayor's Office for Children, Youth, and Families collaborates with the Charleston Leadership Foundation on the Be a Mentor initiative. These partners organize mentor trainings and recruitment campaigns, support a mentoring network of service providers, and have created mentoring guides and a mentor directory. The city also provides a job shadowing program linked with in-school learning and assists schools in organizing mentoring programs, managing volunteers and developing resource tools and training. A mentor plan has been developed to focus on recruitment, training and increasing the capacity of programs to meet the needs of the community.

### **Memphis, Tenn.: STEP Program**

In June 2009, then-Shelby County Mayor and current Memphis Mayor A C Wharton, Jr., launched the STEP Last Dollar Scholarship and Mentoring Program. STEP helps students “take the next step in education and in life” by providing them with the “last dollars needed to afford state-funded community college and technical training programs in Shelby County.” The scholarship is available to first-year, full-time students enrolled at Southwest Tennessee Community College and the Tennessee Technology Center at Memphis. Scholarship recipients receive coaching and guidance through the STEP Mentoring Program, with support from a team of mentors known as the Mayor's 100 and a set of online tools focused on project-based instruction. Mentors work with youth to outline clear goals and action steps to achieve postsecondary success.

### **New York City: Afterschool STEM Mentoring Program**

The New York Academy of Sciences developed the Afterschool STEM Mentoring Program in partnership with New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) through the department's Beacon, OST and Cornerstone Partner youth programs. The program matches afterschool providers with graduate students who are members of the Academy's Science Alliance.<sup>17</sup> Graduate students receive training from Academy staff members and curriculum partners in STEM-related curricula and serve as instructors and mentors to elementary, middle and high school students in afterschool programs. Through the mentoring initiative, afterschool program participants are exposed to new and engaging curricula, learn from young scientific innovators and build strong relationships with positive role models.

## **SUPPORT WORKFORCE AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS INITIATIVES**

Afterschool and summer programs can complement what students learn in school and help them develop skills needed for success in college and the workplace. In addition to recruiting college-age mentors to work with middle and high school students, city officials can engage postsecondary institutions in sharing resources and knowledge, assisting programs with outcome measurement, and preparing youth for postsecondary education. Local leaders can also use the non-school hours to offer career exploration programs, internships, and summer jobs. Innovative programs are combining paid summer or school-year jobs with skill-building enrichment activities that connect in-school education and workplace experience. Cities such as Baltimore and Philadelphia have leveraged federal TANF and Workforce Investment Act grants with city and private funding to support large-scale summer employment programs.

<sup>17</sup> The Academy's Science Alliance is a program that provides support and career mentoring to 8,000 graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in STEM disciplines. In turn, some of these graduate students mentor youth in elementary and secondary schools through the Afterschool STEM Mentoring Program.



Some cities continue their youth employment programs into the school year and have developed work skills curricula, job shadowing and occupational skills credentialing programs. These programs typically target youth who are at least 14 years old, with progressive job responsibilities as youth get older. The municipal role differs from city to city depending on how the program is implemented, but many local officials spearhead campaigns for private investment and participation of the local business community. Businesses may either employ youth directly or provide financial resources for employment in public agencies, nonprofits or community service projects.

### **Riverside, Calif.: University Eastside Community Collaborative**

In 1994, the City of Riverside, University of California-Riverside (UCR) and Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) partnered to create and fund the University Eastside Community Collaborative (UECC). UECC enlists more than 80 college students in serving as tutors, mentors and program staff for about 800 local youth at Riverside schools and community centers. UECC provides afterschool programs through the city's Youth Opportunity (YO) center; programs include job training, a computer learning center and recreation, with services targeted toward reengaging students who have dropped out of school. Students participate in UECC's youth employment program for four hours per week during the school year and up to 20 hours per week in the summer in offices at partner universities. Graduate students mentor participating youth.

#### **Outreach to Low-Income Students**

Several competitive federal grant programs (e.g., GEAR UP, Upward Bound and other TRIO programs) support partnerships among colleges, middle and high schools and other organizations to increase the college attendance rates of disadvantaged students. These programs reach a relatively small number of students, and most have both an in-school and OST component. They can serve as one model for how institutions of higher education can be engaged in serving youth. While not all communities can access these grants, municipal leaders can work with local institutions of higher education to determine if there are opportunities for offering similar programs in partnership with local schools.

The City of Riverside provides funding and in-kind support to oversee and train UECC/AmeriCorps volunteers who work at Eastside Neighborhood parks and community centers, while RUSD provides funding, training and oversight for volunteers working in neighborhood schools. Mayor Ronald O. Loveridge, the RUSD superintendent, and UCR chancellor lead UECC's advisory board, which tracks education, social and quality-of-life outcomes in the Eastside Neighborhood. The city and school district are exploring similar partnerships with other higher education campuses to serve students in more neighborhoods.

### **Chicago, Ill.: After School Matters**

The structure of the After School Matters program in Chicago is similar to an "apprenticeship" model in which youth have the opportunity to gain work experience in areas such as the arts, science, technology and sports. While these programs are not traditional apprenticeships sponsored by unions that lead directly to jobs, they are designed to promote job readiness and help older youth develop workplace skills. Several city departments – parks, libraries, family and support services, and cultural affairs – partner with the non-profit After School Matters, community organizations, and schools to offer a broad variety of programs to thousands of youth. These youth can progress up a "ladder of opportunity" of pre-apprenticeships, appren-





ticeships and advanced apprenticeships that involve hands-on projects overseen by skilled professionals and prepare youth for internships and jobs. Students apply for apprenticeships and receive a stipend with an expectation of mandatory attendance.

### **Milwaukee, Wis.: Earn & Learn Initiative**

Mayor Tom Barrett led the establishment of the Earn & Learn initiative, which helps youth develop workplace readiness skills while working in wage-paying jobs at government agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, and local businesses. Youth ages 14 to 21 can participate in one of three different programs: the Community Work Experience Program, the Private Sector Job Connection, or the City Summer Youth Internship Program. During the summer of 2009, Earn & Learn provided more than 3,000 employment opportunities for Milwaukee's youth. The city was able to double the number from the previous year because of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding.

Local businesses play a critical role in the Earn & Learn strategy by helping prepare Milwaukee youth for success in the workforce. The initiative also benefits from a partnership with the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board, and is part of the city's Life Ventures Partnership, a collaborative effort to promote the future vitality of Milwaukee's regional economy by preparing young people to become lifelong learners, productive workers, and self-sufficient citizens.

### **Washington, D.C.: Summer Youth Employment Program**

The District of Columbia's Department of Employment Services funds the six-week Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), providing local youth ages 14 to 21 with high-quality summer work experiences through subsidized, structured placements in the private and government sectors. The program strives to help youth earn money during the summer months, provide a meaningful work experience, develop the skills and attitudes needed to succeed in today's economy, and gain exposure to different careers and industries. SYEP provides an environment where young people can interact positively with working professionals. In 2011, the SYEP provided 14,000 youth in Washington, D.C., with summer job experiences.







## Conclusion

The examples above highlight some of the strategies that city leaders can use to provide high-quality OST opportunities for older youth. These programs play an important role in helping youth develop the skills and confidence that will lead to success in school and beyond. It is important to note that a system of programs for older youth will naturally look different from programs for younger children because of the unique developmental needs of older youth. The challenge for municipal officials and other community leaders is to identify what programs youth need and want and to then build a system of opportunities reflecting their interests.

This strategy guide identified four key strategies for engaging older youth in OST programs:

- Coordinate systems to support effective service delivery, so that city resources, program approaches and program activities are aligned;
- Ensure programs are of high quality, with standards in place to assess program structure, operations, and staff training;
- Prioritize relevant and rigorous programming for older youth, which can build skills, increase participation and promote youth development; and
- Promote college attendance and workplace readiness by supporting youth in navigating the college planning and application process and offering hands-on career exploration opportunities.

These strategies do not necessarily require much additional spending. Instead, municipal leaders can often connect existing community resources to widen the range of high-quality OST programs available for older youth. By working with business leaders, universities, the arts and technology sectors, and many other partners, municipal leaders can create a more cohesive and sustainable system of supports that help older youth succeed. When older youth are positively engaged in OST programs that enable them to fulfill their potential, both youth and their communities are more likely to thrive.



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