

Out-of-School Time Program Opportunities For Youth Citywide

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RAUL GARCIA OFTEN ASKS PARENTS TO CLOSE THEIR EYES AND IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES. As the founding coordinator of the Out-of-School Time (OST) program at the Polo Grounds Towers in Harlem, Garcia knows that OST can have a dramatic impact on the lives of young people and their parents. This is why he says he is not surprised when the parents quickly grimace, open their eyes, and tell him that there are some things they would rather not think about.

The program Garcia helped create — which is administered by Alianza Dominicana, an acclaimed community based organization — engages young residents of the Polo Grounds and the surrounding community in a wide variety of youth development activities that build on what they learn in school.

The OST initiative is led by the City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD),

which develops, coordinates and implements the programs, in collaboration with 11 other City agencies. There are currently 31 OST programs located at 25 NYCHA locations. During the past school year, more than 2,149 young people participated in these programs, in addition to 813 who took advantage of summer programming.

OST represents a bold new

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Young OST participants at Alianza Dominicana in Harlem.

Out-of-School

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approach to providing youth development opportunities beyond the final school bell. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced the launch of OST in September 2005, and it is estimated that more than 65,000 young people will be served by OST programs during the 2005-2006 school year, making it the nation's largest municipally funded after-school initiative. Its aim is to ensure that quality after-school programming is available to all youth in the City.

OST program instructors develop close relationships with the young people they serve, which allow them to design activities that appeal to the entire group.

For example, the theme of this summer's programming at the Polo Grounds was "Our Heritage." Field trips were organized to various museums and cultural institutions, including the Jewish Museum, the African Burial Ground, and the Museum of the American Indian. The objective was to help young participants develop a stronger appreciation for the great diversity and history of New York City.

OST is also a valuable resource for parents and guardians, who find comfort in the knowledge that their children's after school, holiday and summer hours are being spent in a structured and nurturing environment.

For Garcia, the importance of OST can be summed up with a simple fact — last year, 33 of his 34 students advanced to the next grade. To find an OST location near you, call 311 or DYCD at (212) 788-5647.

