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STAFFING AND SKILL-BUILDING IN THE DYCD OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME INITIATIVE: FINDINGS FROM 10 PROGRAMS

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Summary

This report focuses on 10 programs administered as part of the Out-of-School Time Programs for Youth (OST) initiative of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Drawing on data collected during the 2009-10 school year, the report describes the patterns and structures of implementation in these 10 programs as well as features intended to promote program quality and to shape the experiences of youth participating in these programs. Specifically, the report provides descriptive analyses in the following three areas: (1) the demographic characteristics, educational performance, academic motivation, and family support structures of youth served by the OST programs; (2) the management and staffing strategies that the OST programs employ in their efforts to provide a positive youth experience and sustain their programs; and (3) the content of OST programming as viewed through a skill-building and youth development lens.

While the experiences of these 10 programs are not necessarily representative of the OST program as a whole, they do reflect some of the experiences and diversity of the overall OST initiative. Among the programs included in this study, the evaluators identified strategies in four areas that may be helpful to all OST programs:

- **Staff meetings and professional development.** The experience of these 10 OST sites underscores the importance of staff and staff development. Their experience indicates that staff meetings and professional development opportunities need to be focused on substantive approaches for improving the quality of youth programming. In particular, program leaders need to guide staff to develop lesson plans that are skill-oriented and that incorporate elements of active learning.

- **Relationship with the school and school-day teachers**. Good relationships with schools and particularly with school-day teachers are essential to effective programming. Programs can maximize the contributions of school-day teachers working in after-school programs by enlisting them to help design program activities and develop lesson plans. School-day teachers can also contribute by serving as resources for OST staff training and development.

- **Program design**. Intentional program design, including an emphasis on skills-based and active learning strategies plus opportunities for youth voice, results in stronger programming. Programs should be encouraged to be explicit about their goals, strategies, and activities, emphasizing strategies that promote engagement and skill development.

- **Environment.** Although most OST programs provide safe and welcoming environments, positive youth development should not be taken for granted. Planned programming to strengthen relationships, particularly among youth but also between youth and staff, can promote positive youth development.

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Overview of the OST Evaluation and This Report

In September 2005, DYCD launched the OST initiative to provide young people throughout New York City with access to high-quality programming after school, on holidays, and during the summer, at no cost to their families. Consistent with the original design of OST, services are concentrated in high-need neighborhoods, targeting New York City zip codes with high ratings based on the size of their youth population, level of youth poverty, and number of youth disconnected from school or work, number of English Language Learners in public schools, number of single-parent families, and number of children eligible for state-subsidized childcare.

Policy Studies Associates (PSA) has evaluated the Out-of-School Time initiative of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development since the citywide initiative was launched. Previous evaluation reports have (1) described program results from efforts to scale up rapidly and serve large numbers of youth across New York City, (2) identified program features associated with high levels of program participation and positive youth experiences, and (3) also cited the implementation challenges that programs face in maintaining a well-trained, stable staff and offering engaging, skill-oriented program content (Russell, Mielke, & Reisner, 2009).

This report, focused on the fifth year of the OST initiative (2009-10), highlights the experience of 10 elementary- and middle-grades OST programs in operation since the start of the initiative. The report provides descriptive analysis in the following three areas: (1) the demographic characteristics, educational performance, academic motivation, and family support structures of youth served by the OST programs; (2) the management and staffing strategies that the OST programs employ in their efforts to provide a positive youth experience and sustain their programs; and (3) the content of OST programming as viewed through a skill-building and youth development lens.

The 10 programs included in the study were part of a group of 15 programs that were randomly selected at the outset of the initiative to be representative of all OST programs based on grade levels served and location in either schools or centers. The five programs that are no longer included in the study ceased operation or served only high school students. OST high school students are now served as part of a Transition to High School initiative that differs in structure and purpose from the elementary and middle grades programs. Although the 10 programs remaining in this sample are not necessarily representative of all OST programs, their experiences provide a window onto the larger group of elementary- and middle-grades OST programs.

This report summarizes data collected from the following sources during the 2009-10 school year:

- Spring 2010 youth survey data from 734 youth in grades 3 through 8 from the 10 OST programs (75 percent response rate)
- Spring 2010 survey data from nine of 10 OST program directors in the study

- Interview and activity observation data from site visits conducted in each of the 10 OST programs in spring 2010

- Participation and enrollment data from DYCD's data management system, known as DYCD Online, for the 6,247 youth participants at the 10 study sites in 2005-06 through 2009-10

- Student-level demographic and educational performance data extracted from the New York City Department of Education (DOE) databases, with a 72 percent match rate based on identifying information for all students enrolled in the 10 programs across the five years

The remainder of this report presents detailed findings regarding the youth served by the 10 OST programs, program management structures, and program features to support high-quality youth experiences. The report closes with specific recommendations from the evaluators, based on findings from the fifth year of data collection. An appendix presents findings drawn from the evaluator's observations across the entire multi-year study.

Youth Served by the 10 OST Programs

The evaluation collected data on the youth served by the 10 OST programs in the study through three of the sources listed above: (1) enrollment and participation data collected through DYCD Online; (2) student-level data extracted from DOE databases; and (3) survey data asking youth to reflect on their level of interest in school, their school success, and the types of educational support they receive at home.[1]

While the 10 OST programs in the study are not necessarily representative of the OST program as a whole, analyses of the data from these three sources showed that the 10 programs served youth who were demographically and educationally diverse, positive about school, and supported by their families.

OST Enrollment and Participation

The level of enrollment in 2009-10 in the seven elementary- and three middle-grades programs in the study sample was consistent with that in previous years, with a total of 1,757 participants attending school-year programming. Two-hundred-seventeen of these youth (13 percent of school-year participants) also participated in summer OST programming, which was offered by only six of the 10 programs and typically had a limited number of slots

[1] The evaluation team analyzed OST enrollment and participation data for students in all grades served by the programs in the study. Enrolled youth who attended for fewer than five days during the school year and following summer were excluded. The youth survey for this study was administered only to students in grades 3 through 8 who were enrolled in the program in January 2010. The New York state-wide achievement tests were administered only to students in grades 3 through 8. Analysis of the youth survey and New York state tests are for the subset of students enrolled in the program in those grades.

available, compared to the school year. Enrolled youth who attended fewer than five days of OST programming in 2009-10 (including summer) are excluded from participation totals.

Based on DYCD's program-level Rate of Participation (RoP) expectations for OST programs, the evaluation computed standards for the minimum level of programming that elementary-grades and middle-grades youth were expected to attend. According to these standards, elementary-grades youth were expected to attend OST programming for a minimum of 432 hours during the school year, and youth in the middle grades were expected to attend 216 hours. In the 2009-10 school year, participants in the seven elementary-grades programs in this study attended 352 hours of OST programming on average, with 31 percent of participants meeting the target level of participation. Participants in the three middle-grades programs attended for an average of 284 hours, with 49 percent achieving the minimum standard (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1
OST Participants' Expected and Actual Mean Attendance Hours

Hours of Attendance	Elementary *n=1,286*	Middle *n=472*
Expected hours	432	216
Actual hours	352	284
Percent of participants meeting expected hours	31%	49%

Note: The figures shown in this table are for the 10 OST programs in this study and are not necessarily representative of the OST program as a whole.

Exhibit reads: Elementary-grades youth were expected to attend OST programming for at least 432 hours. On average, they attended for 352 hours. Thirty-one percent of elementary-grades participants met the target number of hours.

The evaluation also assessed participants' retention in OST programming over time by identifying the participants who first enrolled during each program period since the start of the initiative in 2005, and determining what percentage of those participants continued enrollment in the subsequent programming period. These analyses do not account for participants "aging out" of the program when they complete the grades typically served by that program or for student mobility within the school system. These analysis limitations may result in the calculation of artificially low rates of retention, particularly when looking at three-year and four-year retention rates. In addition, budget cuts affecting the number of program slots available and program policies to enroll participants on a first-come, first-served basis may have prevented some interested students from re-enrolling in an OST program.

For each cohort of participants in these 10 programs, the one-year retention rate was roughly 40 percent. This rate is similar to that found in other studies of after-school

programs conducted by PSA, including previous evaluations of the DYCD OST program (Russell, Reisner, Pearson, Afolabi, Miller, & Mielke, 2006) and the evaluation of programs sponsored by The After-School Corporation (TASC) (Welsh, Russell, Williams, Reisner, & White, 2002). Two- and three-year retention rates were also consistent for each cohort, with roughly one quarter of participants remaining enrolled after two years and 12 percent of participants continuing enrollment after three years (Exhibit 2). As described below, on average returning participants responded more positively to survey items about their academic motivation and support structures than did first-year participants in 2009-10, suggesting a high level of intrinsic motivation and family encouragement.

Exhibit 2
OST Participants' School-Year Retention Rates, in Percents

First School Year of Participation	1-Year Retention Rate	2-Year Retention Rate	3-Year Retention Rate	4-Year Retention Rate
2005-06 (n=1,327)	41	23	12	6
2006-07 (n=1,337)	42	27	12	-
2007-08 (n=1,006)	40	22	-	-
2008-09 (n=886)	40	-	-	-

Note: The figures shown in this table are for the 10 OST programs in this study and are not necessarily representative of the OST program as a whole.

Exhibit reads: Forty-one percent of participants who attended the OST program for the first time in the 2005-06 school year continued to participate in the 2006-07 school year. Twenty-three percent continued to participate in the 2007-08 school year.

Demographic and Educational Characteristics

The 10 OST program sites in the study served a diverse group of youth in 2009-10, as evidenced in Exhibit 3. Slightly more boys (53 percent) participated in the program than girls (47 percent). Over half (58 percent) of all participants were Hispanic or Latino, and about one quarter (26 percent) were Black. These OST programs also served a significant number of English language learners and special education students. Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of participants were classified as English Language Learners, and 18 percent were designated as special education students.

Exhibit 3
Demographic Characteristics of OST in the 10 Study Sites, in Percents

Demographic Characteristics	Overall (n=1,614)
Gender	
Male	53
Female	47
Ethnicity	
Black, non-Hispanic	26
Hispanic/Latino	58
White, non-Hispanic	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	11
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0
Multiracial	0
ELL Eligible	23
Special Education	18

Note: The figures shown in this table are for the 10 OST programs in this study and are not necessarily representative of the OST program as a whole.

Exhibit reads: Among 2009-10 school year and summer OST participants in the 10 sites, 53 percent were male and 47 were female.

In the 2009-10 school year, New York State administered tests to youth in grades 3 through 8 in English Language Arts (ELA) in April and mathematics in May. Test-takers received a scale score and one of four performance levels—Level 1*: Below Standard*; Level 2: *Meets Basic Standard*; Level 3: *Meets Proficiency Standard*; and Level 4: *Exceeds Proficiency Standard.* Across the 10 OST sites, 33 percent of youth in grades 3-8 scored at Level 3 or higher on their ELA assessment, and 46 percent of youth in these grades scored at Level 3 or higher in math, suggesting a need for academic supports to assist the large percentages achieving at Levels 1 and 2. On average, OST participants in the 10 sites had a relatively high 94 percent school attendance rate, with 10 days absent from school in the 2009-10 school year (Exhibit 4). Analyses found no substantive differences in the educational characteristics of first-year and returning OST participants at the d>0.20 effect size level.

Exhibit 4
Educational Characteristics of Students at OST Program Sites

	ELA Percent scoring at…		Math Percent scoring at…		Average School Attendance Rate	Average Number of Days Absent
	Level 2 or Below	Level 3 or Above	Level 2 or Below	Level 3 or Above		
Overall (n=1,015)	67%	33%	54%	46%	94%	10

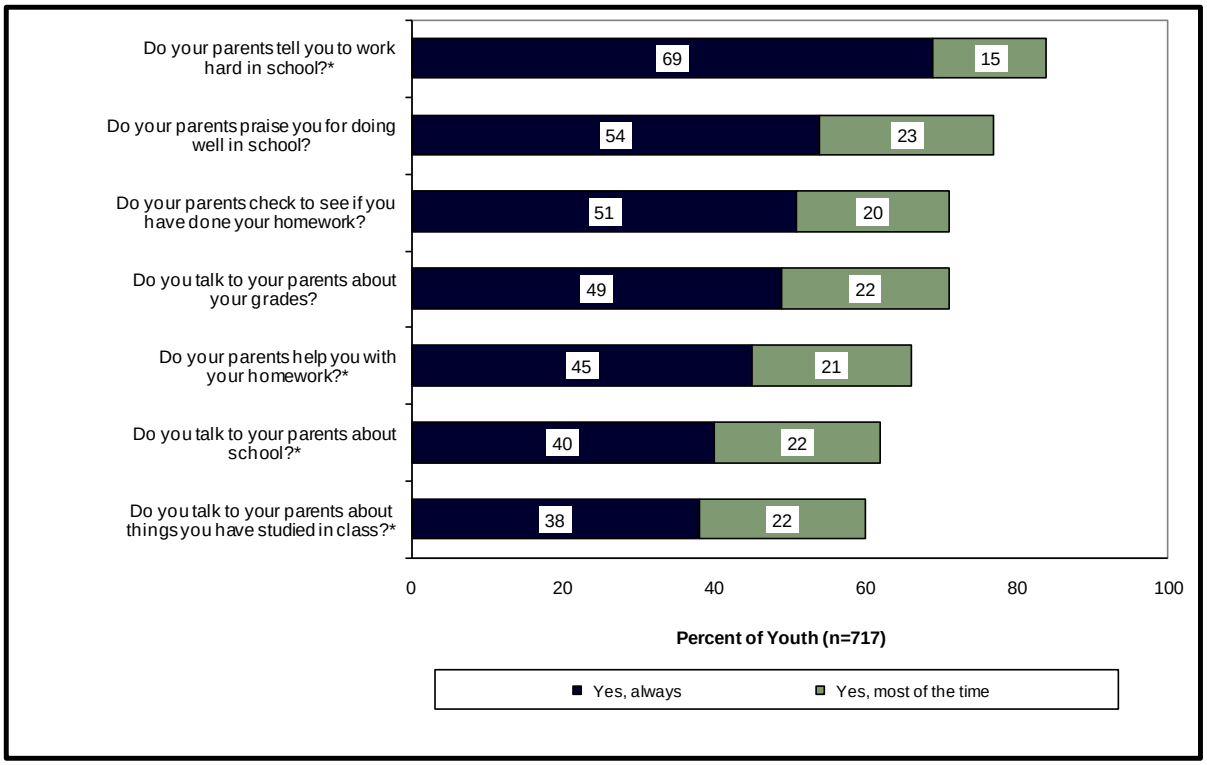
Note: The figures shown in this table are for the 10 OST programs in this study and are not necessarily representative of the OST program as a whole.

Exhibit reads: Among all OST 2009-10 participants, 67 percent scored at Level 2 or below on the 2010 ELA exam.

Home Support

OST participants in this study reported high levels of educational encouragement and support from their parents or other adults living with them. As shown in Exhibit 5, more than half of responding youth said that these adults "always" tell them to work hard in school (69 percent), praise them for doing well in school (54 percent), and check to see if they have done their homework (51 percent). However, the youth survey data also suggest that OST programs can play an important role in providing more concrete educational assistance to youth, reflecting findings from previous research indicating that homework help and academic support are core goals sought by families for OST programs (Russell, Mielke, & Reisner, 2009). In 2009-10, fewer than half of youth reported that their parents "always" help them with homework (45 percent), that they talk to their parents about school (40 percent), or that they talk to their parents about things they studied in class (38 percent).

Exhibit 5
Youth Reports of Educational Support Received at Home, in Percents



Note: * Indicates significant differences between first-year and returning participants ($p<0.05$, $d>0.20$)

Exhibit reads: Sixty-nine percent of OST participants indicated that their parents always tell them to work hard in school. An additional 15 percent of youth said that their parents tell them most of the time to try hard.

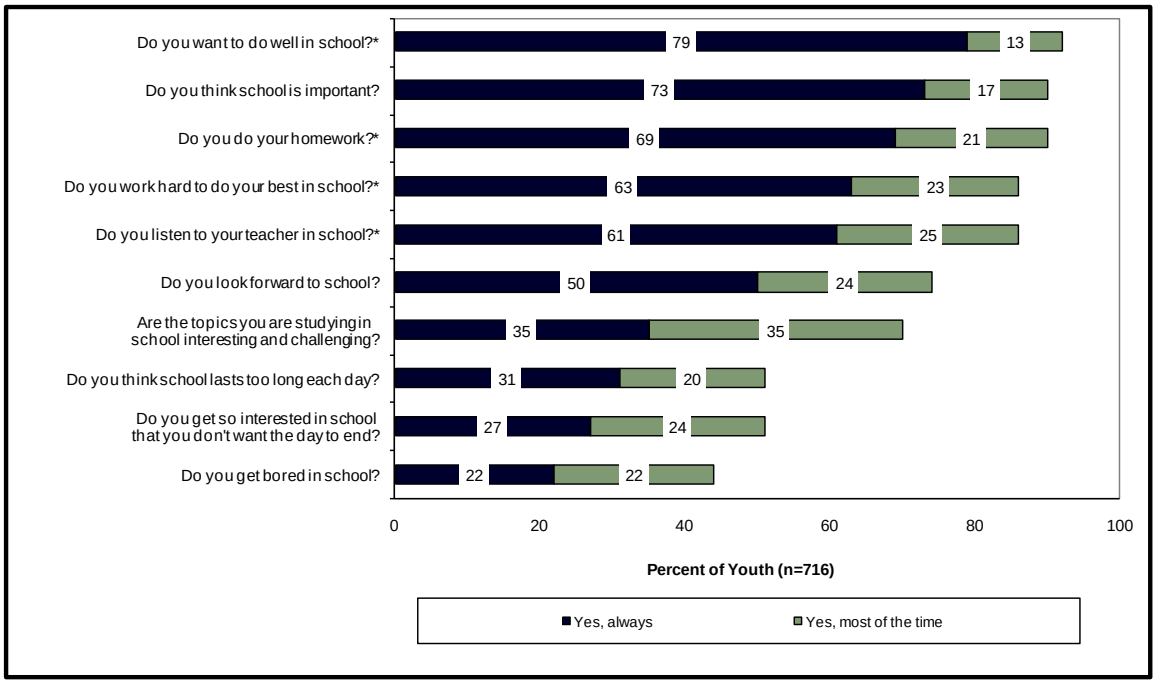
Youth who participated in OST programming for two years or more reported somewhat higher levels of educational support at home. When asked if their parents tell them to work hard

in school, 73 percent of returning OST participants said that their parents "always" tell them to work hard in school, while 63 percent of first-year participants responded similarly. Returning participants also reported talking about school and the things they have studied in school more than did first-year participants; 42 percent of returning participants said that they "always" talk to their parent about things they have studied in school, compared to 32 percent of first-year participants. Significant differences also existed among the amount of homework help youth receive at home, with 51 percent of returning participants reporting that their parents "always" help them with their homework, compared to 37 percent of first-year participants. These differences were statistically significant at $p<0.05$, with relatively small effect sizes ranging from $d=0.21$ to $d=0.30$.

School-day Experience

Participating youth reported generally positive levels of engagement with and attitudes towards school and school work. More than half of youth reported that they "always" want to do well in school (79 percent), think school is important (73 percent), do their homework (69 percent), work hard to do their best in school (63 percent), and listen to their teacher in school (61 percent), as displayed in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6
Youth Reports of Experiences in School, in Percents



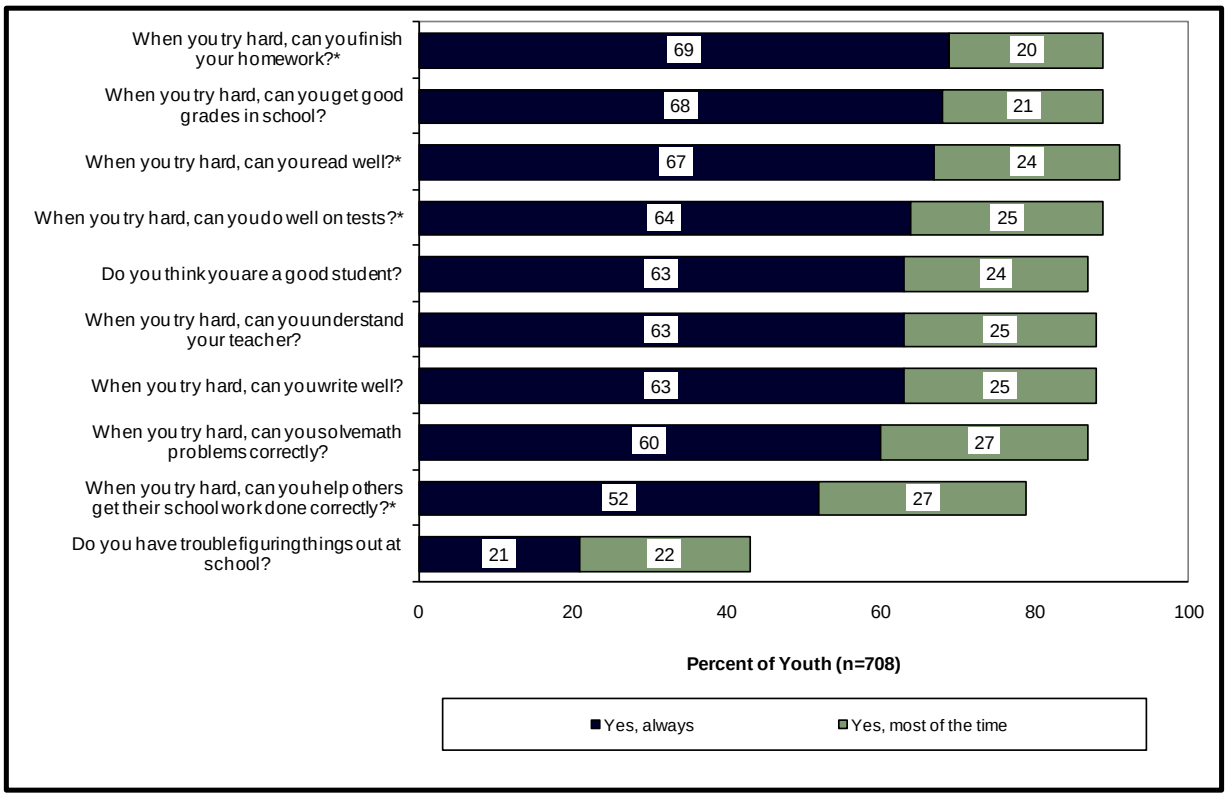
Note: * Indicates significant differences between first-year and returning participants ($p<0.05$, $d>0.20$)

Exhibit reads: Seventy-nine percent of youth said that they always want to do well in school. Thirteen percent of youth reported that most of the time they want to do well in school.

Students participating in OST programming for two years or more reported better experiences in school than did students in their first year of OST participation. Eighty-four percent of returning participants said they "always" want to do well in school, compared to 70 percent of first-year participants (d=0.34). In addition, more returning participants said that they always do their homework (74 percent vs. 61 percent, d=0.29), that they work hard to do their best in school (69 percent vs. 55 percent, d=0.38), and that they always listen to their teacher in school (67 percent vs. 52 percent, d=0.30).

OST participants overwhelmingly reported high levels of confidence in their academic skills, with more than two-thirds reporting that, when they try hard, they can always finish their homework (69 percent), get good grades in school (68 percent), and read well (67 percent), as shown in Exhibit 7.

Exhibit 7
Youth Reports of Confidence in Academic Skills, in Percents



Note: * Indicates significant differences between first-year and returning participants (p<0.05, d>0.20)
Exhibit reads: Sixty-nine percent of youth said that when they try hard, they can always finish their homework. Twenty percent of youth said that they can finish their homework most of the time.

Returning OST participants reported significantly higher levels of confidence in their academic skills than did first-year participants. For example, among returning participants,

74 percent reported that they "always" finish their homework when they try hard, compared to 61 percent of short-term participants (d=0.30). In addition, returning participants are more confident in their reading skills. Seventy-two percent of returning participants reported that they can "always" read well when they try hard, compared to 60 percent of returning participants (d=0.25).

Program Management Structures

High quality after-school programs adopt effective supervisory practices and stable program management structures. Collins and Metz (2009) found that effective program leaders are those who take "proactive and ongoing measures to minimize implementation barriers and create an environment conducive to high-quality program implementation." In 2009-10, evaluation interviews and surveys explored ways in which the 10 OST programs in the study ensured that appropriate program management and structures were in place to support staff, set attendance policies that promote youth engagement, build partnerships with schools, and employ a diversified staff.

Supports for Staff

Across the programs included in the OST study, supports for staff took two major forms, staff development and program stability, both of which are described below.

Staff development. OST program leaders supported staff through ongoing development that included staff meetings, observations, regular performance reviews, and targeted trainings. Eight of nine directors responding to the survey reported holding meetings for OST staff at least once a week; the ninth held meetings monthly. At one program serving elementary-grade youth, the director focused on helping staff improve their skills in classroom management and in implementing curricula at a consistently high level throughout the program. To accomplish this, the director systematically observed staff instruction using a structured tool to guide feedback, then met individually with staff to discuss ways to improve instructional practice and provide targeted support. As the director said, "It is the staff who form relationships with students, who are in the classroom teaching them, training them, helping them to resolve conflicts." She also explained that she held weekly staff meetings to help improve program processes and procedures and also monthly staff meetings that covered additional topics such as curriculum and instruction in more depth.

All nine program directors who responded to the survey said that they conducted reviews of staff performance. Eight directors observed staff leading activities, seven conducted formal one-on-one performance reviews, and seven held informal meetings and check-ins with staff members. All nine responding program directors said that the Partnership for After School Education (PASE), one of DYCD's contracted technical assistance providers, was a source of training and technical assistance for staff, suggesting that program directors were taking advantage of the professional development opportunities available to them. In addition, seven of the directors noted that their staff received training and technical assistance through their

provider organizations. Two received assistance from the host school, and two directors reported receiving technical assistance or training from their DYCD program manager. In general, off-site workshops were the most common form of training (eight programs), followed by attendance at institutes or conferences (five programs).

Program stability. Nearly all of the programs had consistent leadership, as measured by the program director in the 2008-09 school year returning for the 2009-10 school year. In addition, seven of nine responding directors said that more than half of program staff had worked in the program in the previous year, thus contributing to program stability. However, in the challenging budget climate of 2009-10, funding was a concern for many of the programs in the sample. Of the nine directors who responded to the survey, only two said that their programs received private grants in addition to OST funding from DYCD. One program director discussed the challenge of developing staff in the context of a tight program budget, noting, "Any program with more than 150 kids should have an assistant director. I'm trying to develop staff while I'm trying to help kids."

At least one program experienced challenges in maintaining a stable staffing structure. This program had experienced repeated program director turnover, which affected student attendance and overall program quality. According to the director interviewed, the absence of consistent leadership had led some parents to withdraw their children from the program. These challenges were reflected in the overall low rate of participation in this elementary-grades program: on average, participants in this program attended for 244 hours, compared to 352 hours for all elementary-grades programs in the sample.

Attendance Policies and Youth Engagement

Program attendance and engagement are commonly recognized indicators of a program's effectiveness. Prior evaluations of the OST initiative have concluded that regular program attendance is strongly associated with the development of the types of positive youth outcomes sought through the initiative (Russell, Mielke & Reisner, 2008). Successful programs, therefore, implement strategies to establish program policies that encourage regular participation. One elementary program in the study, for example, established clear attendance goals, and program leaders attributed the program's high attendance to their success in communicating these expectations to parents. Staff monitored attendance closely and contacted parents when youth were absent. When necessary, parents were informed that they would not be able to keep their child in the program if regular attendance was not maintained. Staff also made an effort to monitor whether participants were being picked up early from programming, communicating to parents that early pick-ups were disruptive to programming and learning. As the program director reported, "Anything before 6 p.m. is an early pick-up." On average, youth in this program attended for 390 hours, compared to the elementary-grades average of 352 hours among OST programs in this sample. At another elementary-grade program, the program director removed participants from the program when they accrued more than a week of non-medical absences, which may have contributed to a high average participation of 515 hours.

Similar attendance policies were also effective in a middle-grades program. In this program, the director established a new attendance policy that required participants to attend four days a week (up from two days). When participants did not adhere to the policy, the director contacted the parents. As he said, "I established strict, clear rules regarding attendance. [Participants] just can't leave when [they] feel like it." As a result, participants in this program attended for an average of 323 hours during 2009-10, compared to the middle-grades average of 284 hours.

Partnerships with Schools

Recent research suggests that after-school programs' relationship with school personnel can help increase teacher support and facilitate resource-sharing and access to physical space and student data (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010). Other research suggests that after-school programs that nurture strong relationships with teachers and principals also improve participants' homework completion, behavior, and initiative (Miller, 2005). High-quality programs, therefore, are likely to create communications mechanisms to link and align their programs with schools.

Program directors interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of developing relationships with school staff as a key component for the sustainability and quality of their OST programs. Positive relationships can help with student recruitment, facilitate communication about student progress, and provide access to school resources. As one director said, "This school is very nurturing. [Partnership is] in their mission statement. This is also aligned with [our] mission statement. [The school] has great administrators here who understand the need for partnership." Another director said that a strong communicative relationship with the principal enabled her to provide programming that she desired. "The more that [the principal] is in the loop, the more flexible she is."

Some programs in the study prioritized their communications focus on interactions around the needs of students. Six of nine program directors discussed homework assignments with school staff at least two or three times a month; another two discussed homework with school staff at least monthly. Five directors discussed the needs or progress of individual students with school staff at least twice a month, and three discussed this topic monthly. The director of an elementary-level program explained that she is included on the email list of school staff, so she is kept abreast of information that is shared by the school's administrators. This program also had a particularly close relationship with the school's math and language arts instructors. "They email me directly, and I visit them in their office." School and program staff shared information about particular students who were struggling academically or personally. "They understand the value that we bring, and [as a result of that] they invite us to be a part of the school," said the program director. Another elementary-level program director described his approach to cultivating a relationship with the program's host school. "When I started in 2006, I already knew some teachers. The first step was becoming a member of the parent association. I created a relationship with the parents and then I got to know the staff better. I speak to the teachers on [a] daily basis. They know who I am [and] the same thing with the administration."

Partnerships with schools were recognized as an important component of OST programming. However, even when directors indicated that they had an overall positive rapport with their host school, they identified shared challenges. Limited space, for example, was an issue for several programs, including those that otherwise reported a good relationship with school leadership. In surveys, four directors reported having conversations about sharing classroom space with school staff at least twice a month. The program director of an elementary-level program explained that, because space is very limited, the program was often bumped from a room when the school needed it for a program or event. She also explained that some activities would be of "higher quality" if they had better space. On the other hand, the director of another elementary-level program felt that the lack of space for programming was directly attributed to teachers' apathy in regard to the after-school program. During interviews, he explained that despite ongoing communication, the teachers were apprehensive about sharing classroom space with the after-school program. In both programs, activity observations confirmed that limited space affected the quality of activities.

Diversity in Staffing

In addition to fostering relationships with school leadership, employing a diverse mix of staff in OST programs can enhance the quality of programming by building on the natural strengths and experiences of each staff member to engage with youth on a personal level or to develop youths' interpersonal or educational skills. Prior evaluations of DYCD's OST initiative have found that having a mix of staff members in an OST program was positively associated with participants' sense of belonging in the program (Russell, Mielke & Reisner, 2009). Employing a master teacher was also positively associated with youth reports of belonging in the program and academic benefits. This evaluation probed deeper into the issues around staff diversity and found considerable diversity but little use of more experienced staff to train those staff with less experience.

Young staff. All nine responding directors reported hiring college students (ranging from two to 20 staff members) who took on varied program responsibilities. In eight programs, college students provided tutoring and homework help, assisted with culminating projects and events, and led non-academic activities (such as arts and sports). In seven programs, college students mentored youth.

Seven of nine directors also reported employing teen staff, who provided tutoring and homework help (six programs), and worked with more experienced staff to assist with culminating events or special projects (six programs) and with academic activities (four programs). These teen staff were also responsible for leading non-academic activities, and mentoring youth (four programs each).

School-day teachers and specialists. On surveys, six of the nine responding directors said that certified teachers worked in their program. The number of teachers on staff ranged from one to two teachers working six to nine hours per week (four programs), to five to six teachers working eight to 15 hours per week (two programs). The most frequent role of certified teachers was to provide tutoring and homework help (five programs), followed by leading

academic activities such as math, reading, or science (three programs). One elementary-level program hired school-day teachers to provide homework help, complementing the efforts of volunteers and staff from surrounding high schools and colleges. In observations, students in this site received one-on-one attention from teachers and from an academic specialist during homework activities. Two other programs (one serving the elementary grades and one serving middle grades) also used this approach, relying on school-day teachers to implement effective test preparation activities and homework help.

Five of the nine directors hired specialists to work in the OST program; four of these programs employed either one or two specialists. In all five programs, specialists led non-academic activities, such as arts and sports. They also designed activities in three programs and assisted with culminating events or special projects in three programs.

Roles in building program capacity. Overall, few program directors reported using their more qualified staff (such as teachers and education specialists) to build program capacity. In only two programs did directors report that certified teachers helped to design OST program activities, and in only two programs did teachers play a role in training other staff members. In addition, only four of the nine responding directors said that they have a master teacher or education specialist for the program, a role that has been consistently associated with positive youth outcomes in previous evaluations. Specialists did not help train other staff members in any of the five programs that employed them. In contrast, six programs involved less-experienced college students in designing program activities, and college students trained other staff members in four of nine responding programs.

Program Features to Support High-Quality Youth Experiences

Past evaluations have found that successful OST programs implement activities with varied, enriching, and engaging content that is designed to foster positive short- and long-term outcomes in participants (Russell et al, 2006). High-quality OST programs promote mastery through activities and strategies that provide their participants with both structured and unstructured learning opportunities and that promote participant autonomy, collaboration, and leadership (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Building on prior findings, this evaluation examined some key implementation strategies, including the use of intentional program design, provision of engaging learning opportunities, and support for positive relationships. The findings discussed in this section draw on an analysis of the data from the surveys of program directors and youth and from the site visits.

Intentional Program Design

Programs more successfully promote positive outcomes when they are explicitly focused on specific outcomes. Intentional, focused programming establishes a clear vision for the program from the start, as well as strong, directed leadership and sustained training and support to staff (Wimer, Bouffard, Little & Goss, 2008). The 10 programs in this study relied primarily

on informal assessments and on the use of lesson plans to identify student needs and develop targeted programming.

Assessment of program success. In 2009-10, some programs in the study took steps toward using data to gauge the success of their programs. However, use of data for program improvement was limited, aside from compilation of DYCD Online enrollment and participation data, which all directors reported monitoring. The most common source of information to gauge program success was informal discussions with family members, reported by seven of nine directors. Six directors said they use staff observations of youth to gauge program success, and four noted that they use the New York State Afterschool Network Quality Self-Assessment tool. Only three directors use student grades to determine program success, two use teacher reports, and two use assessments administered to students as part of the OST program.

To develop more focused programs targeting youth skills, some program directors required staff to set clear, attainable participant-centered goals. For example, one director described creation of an annual program vision statement so that staff could create targeted goals for themselves and their students. She said, "I asked staff to create a goal that they would like to achieve with their students. I didn't want a goal that was like, 'I want the students to stop having an attitude.' [I wanted the goals] to be deeper than behavioral management."

Lesson plans and curriculum resources. Seven of nine directors require most or all staff to submit some form of lesson plans on a regular basis, adding a degree of structure and intentional design to the program. The director of an elementary program noted that his goal was to implement activities that were interactive, and he expected his staff to share their plans with him on a weekly basis. Another elementary-level director reported that she set high standards for the delivery and content of activities. She said, "[My assistant director and I] review the lesson plans regularly and give feedback on age appropriateness and make sure that we have the supplies. We also pay attention to the end product. Did the children learn? Was it successful?"

In addition to program-specific lesson plans, five of the nine directors responding to the survey reported that they use an externally developed curriculum to guide program activities. These included KidzLit and KidzMath, Cook Shop, Adventures in Peacemaking, SPARK, After the Bell, and Passport to Manhood. The director of one program using the Cook Shop curriculum, which is designed to help youth learn about the properties of different foods, said, "It's very hands-on and the kids love it."

Program directors also reported collaborating with other organizations that work in their host school on programming opportunities. One elementary program partnered with both Harlem Seals and City Year to staff activities such as arts and crafts, sports, dance, yoga, cooking, and technology. According to the assistant director, the partnership with City Year, in particular, stood out as being important to their programming by providing staff support in classrooms and offering youth opportunities to participate in civic engagement and service projects throughout the year.

Engaging Learning Opportunities

Prior research indicates that when youth in OST programs are engaged in meaningful ways they are likely to learn more, experience better developmental outcomes, and participate for longer periods of time (Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Borden, 2005). Therefore, understanding how to foster engagement is critical to program success. This evaluation examined the use of two program strategies that support engagement: providing skill-based, active learning strategies and providing opportunities for youth voice.

Skill-based and active learning strategies. Successful after-school programs typically offer skill- and project-based activities that engage students in sustained, cooperative investigation (Bransford & Stein, 1993). These activities may address varied skills and content areas, providing youth the opportunity to learn a skill or complete a product that challenges them intellectually, creatively, developmentally, or physically. Integrating active learning approaches into programming does not guarantee student motivation and engagement. However, such approaches can address the mitigating factors that might affect student attitudes and experiences towards learning, such as the school environment and the participant's developmental stage.

Following these principles, a middle-grades program offered project-based learning activities designed around a field trip to the United Nations as ambassadors for the school and for the community. After the field trip, youth created art exhibits demonstrating what they had learned through a social or political stance. "[One student] opted to do an exhibit of issues that affected kids all around the world. Some chose [the issue of overpopulation] in China." They were also encouraged to create exhibits on social issues affecting students in their own community. Some students constructed an exhibit on subway cards because, at the time, the city of New York was considering discontinuing student subway cards. "They are trying to use art to send a message. They will be sending it to the Commissioner. They are really empowered and involved and are taking control," the director explained.

Another middle-grades program focused on skill-building activities in the arts. Students at this program had an opportunity to write lyrics and record music under the direction of the staff. Participants gained familiarity with music production and, ultimately, learned about the time and effort required to produce one song. One noted that, "The instructors help us practice using our voices and learn more about making music." A staff member said that the students would eventually perform the new material at the school talent show. The success of the program in engaging youth was evident in responses to the participant survey, in which 76 percent of youth said that the activities at this program interested them most of the time or always, compared to 62 percent of youth in other programs in the sample.

Although these promising activities were observed in the study, overall observations in the 10 programs suggested potential for increasing the level of skill-oriented activities, particularly in elementary-grades programs (Exhibit 8). Fifty-seven percent of non-homework activities observed at the elementary level focused on either building or practicing skills, while in the middle grades 83 percent of non-homework activities were skill-oriented.

Among skill-oriented activities at the elementary level, over one third (36 percent) targeted reading or writing skills, and 7 percent of skill-oriented activities targeted physical or athletic skills. At the middle-grades level, physical or athletic skills played a greater role in skill-oriented activities, accounting for one-third of the observed activities.

Exhibit 8
Observed Non-Homework Activities, by Level and Type of Skill, in Percents

	Elementary Grades	Middle Grades
Type of activity:	(n=28)	(n=24)
Skill building	18%	46%
Skill practice	39	38
Neither	43	17
Among skill oriented activities, skills addressed:	(n=14)	(n=18)
Reading/writing	36	22
Arts	29	28
Math/numeracy	14	11
Other	14	6
Physical/athletic	7	33

Exhibit reads: Eighteen percent of elementary-grades activities observed provided youth opportunities for skill-building, 39 percent provided skill practice, and 43 percent were not skill-oriented. Among the subset of skill oriented activities, 36 percent focused on reading/writing skills.

Opportunities for youth voice. As found in previous evaluations, high-quality programs typically have a process in place for encouraging youth leadership and input. Two programs serving elementary grades and one serving the middle grades offered structured leadership activities such as youth council, which gave participants the opportunity to provide feedback on how the program can best serve participants. Other programs also provided informal opportunities for leadership by soliciting youths' opinions about activity design. The director of an elementary program, for example, noted that the program has a suggestion box, used to integrate youth suggestions into the activities. Forty-eight percent of youth in this program reported that their opinions always count in the program. In contrast, 24 percent of all youth surveyed in the 10 sites reported that their opinions always count in the program.

In the activities observed, middle-grades youth were given more opportunities to select their activities than their elementary-grade counterparts. In 48 percent of middle-grades activities, youth were grouped by interest; they were grouped by grade in 52 percent of activities. Elementary participants, in contrast, were grouped by age or grade in 93 percent of activities.

Relationship Orientation

Supportive and trusting environments not only offer youth opportunities for growth, but motivate youth to participate long enough to develop and flourish. According to Eccles and

Gootman (2002), programs that foster supportive youth-adult relationships provide "reinforcement, good modeling, and constructive feedback for physical, intellectual, psychological, and social growth." Recognizing the importance of positive relationships, this evaluation examined how staff interacted with each other and with youth, as well as youth perceptions of the quality of these interactions and of their relationships with their peers.

Staff-directed relationships. Directors worked to develop a culture within their program that promoted positive relationships. For example, one director emphasized the importance of staff respecting each other so that students could then do the same. "We have that respect for each other, and we try to create a family atmosphere where we can pass it down to the students." She added that staff also make an effort to communicate positively in behavior management. She believes that youth are better able to trust staff when they are more forthcoming. "We used to reprimand them and not explain the reason, but now we tell them why we are reprimanding them. In everything we ask them to do, we try to relate it back to the real world. When they curse, we [are] truthful with them and tell them we curse but not all the time is appropriate."

The results from the youth survey confirm the presence of strong relationships overall with program staff, as illustrated in Exhibit 9. Across the 10 programs, more than three-quarters

Exhibit 9
Youth Reports of Relationships with Program Staff, in Percents

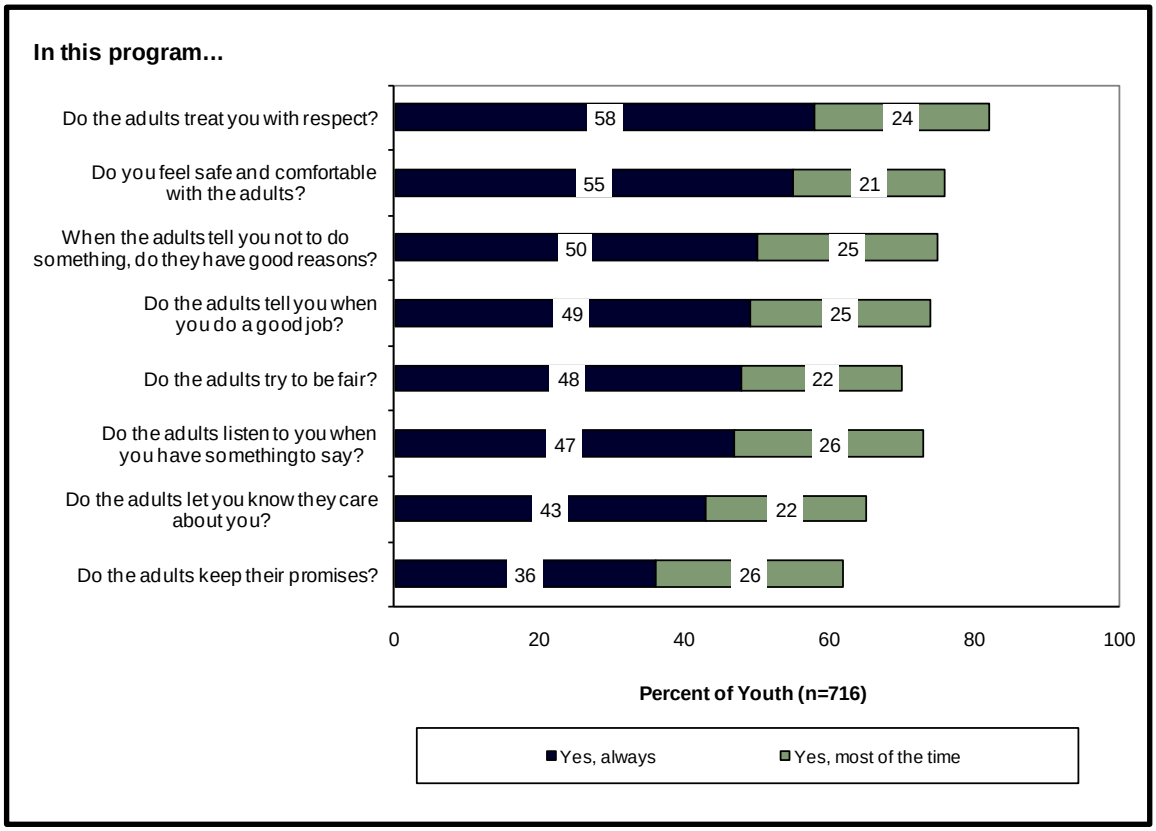


Exhibit reads: Fifty-eight percent of youth reported that adults at the program always treat them with respect. Twenty-four percent of youth said that the adults treat them with respect most of the time.

(82 percent) of youth said that the adults at the program treat them with respect always or most of the time. Youth also felt safe with the adults in their programs, with 76 percent of surveyed participants reporting that they feel safe and comfortable with the adults most or all of the time.

Support for youth. As shown in Exhibit 10, youth generally felt supported in these OST programs, although the responses left room for improvement in the individual support youth sensed from their program. Fifty-two percent of youth said that people at the program always help them when they need help, while an additional 23 percent said that this occurred most of the time. About a third said that they always feel close to people in the program, and that people in the program treat them like family (34 percent and 33 percent, respectively).

Exhibit 10
Youth Reports of Program Relationships, in Percents

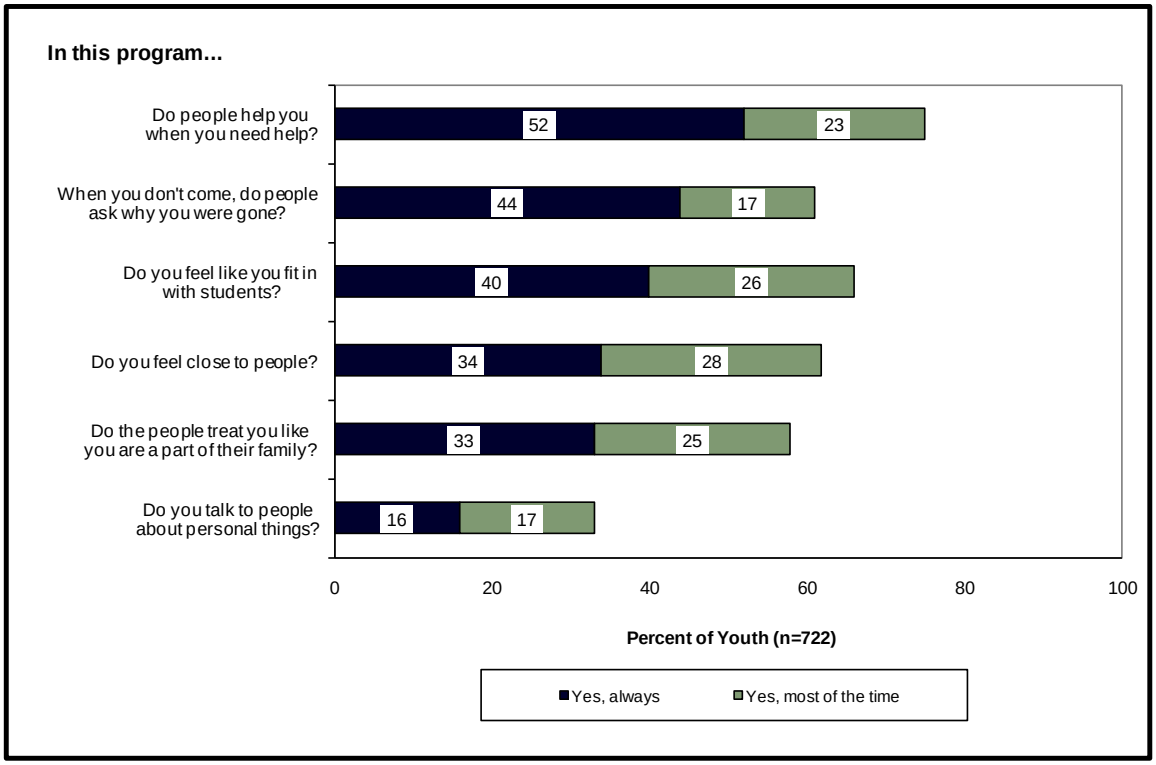


Exhibit reads: Fifty-two percent of youth reported that other people in the program always help them when they need help. An additional 23 percent of youth said that other people in the program help them most of the time.

Some programs intentionally incorporated opportunities for students to interact with adults on a personal level, discussing events and concerns in their life outside of the program. In one middle-grades program, for example, the activity coordinator explained, "I do a lot of talking and let them know what I'm dealing with that is pertinent to them. [For example,] I just graduated from college and I let them know about my [experience]. If [the students] are dealing with issues, then I or another staff member will take them aside to see if they want to talk about it." The coordinator continued, "Snack time is when the staff talks to the students and they get to air out what's going on

in their life." This outreach was reflected in youth reports of their experiences in the program, with 33 percent of youth reporting that they talked to people in the program about personal things.

Perceptions of peers. Youth ratings of their perceptions of their peers were relatively low when compared to other measures, as illustrated in Exhibit 11. Twenty-four percent of youth said that other participants always look out for others, and the same percentage said students always help others learn. Twenty-two percent said that students at the program always get along with others, and 20 percent said that they treat others with respect.

Exhibit 11
Youth Perceptions of Peers, in Percents

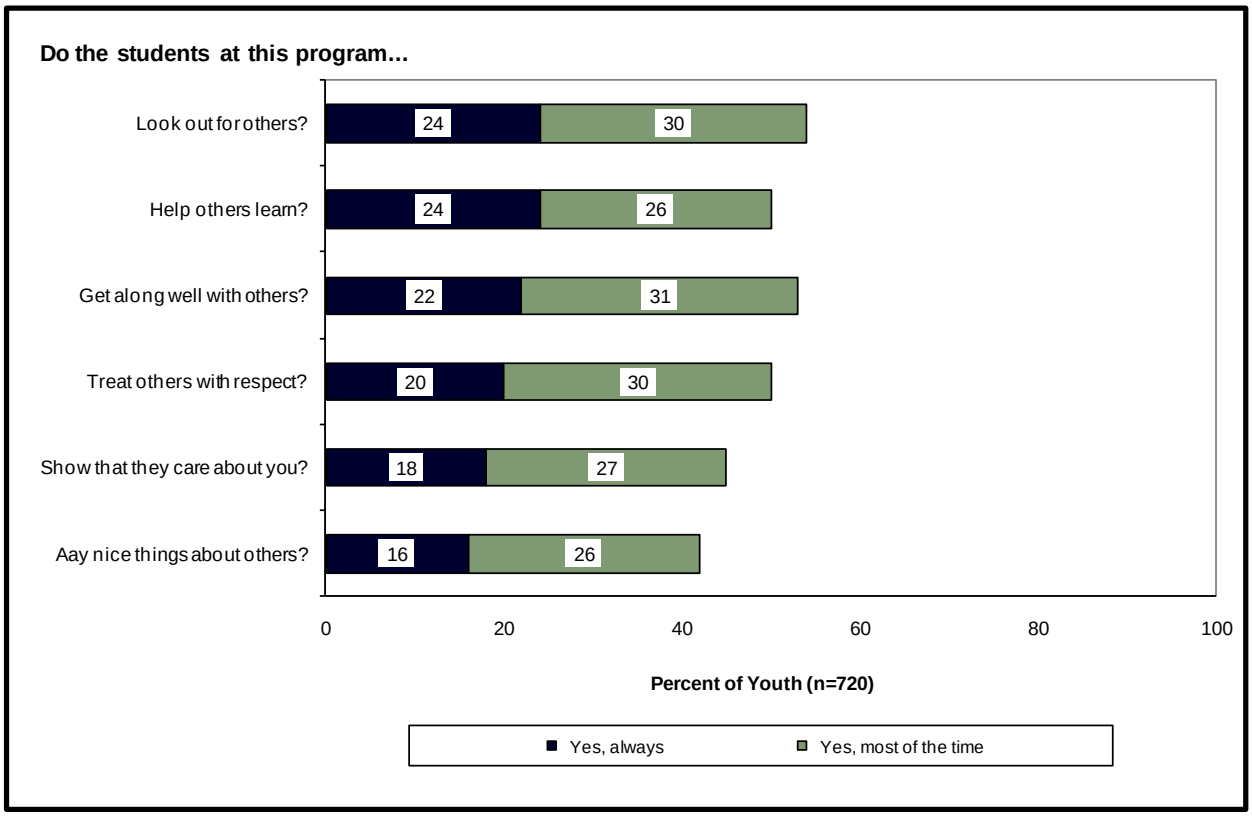


Exhibit reads: Twenty-four percent of participants said that other students in the program always look out for others; 30 percent look out for others most of the time.

However, in some programs where there is a specific focus on positive youth development, youth reported better perceptions of their peers. For example, in one elementary program where activities were explicitly designed around developmental assets, 30 percent reported that students in the program always show that they care about others, and 30 percent said that youth always say nice things about others. These percentages were higher than for the 10 sites in the study as a whole (20 percent and 18 percent, respectively). Another elementary program promoted positive peer relationships by offering older youth an opportunity to work with younger students during homework help. The program director and youth reported that the

older students enjoyed working with their younger peers and that the younger students valued the help that they received, with some expressing that they hope to serve in this role as well. One of the younger students said that she hoped to "help the little kids that don't understand their work." In this program, 29 percent of youth reported that students in the program always treat others with respect, compared to 20 percent of youth selecting this response in the 10 sites in this study.

Youth experiences in the OST program. Compared to their self-reports of academic motivation and success, youth indicated a more moderate level of overall satisfaction with their OST program, suggesting room for improvement in the way that programs engage youth and appeal to their interests and needs (Exhibit 12). Almost two-thirds of youth reported that they always felt safe in the program (64 percent), and that they always feel like they belong in the program (53 percent). However, only 34 percent reported that the activities in the program always interest them, and 24 percent of participants reported they always feel their opinions count in the OST program.

Exhibit 12
Youth Experiences in the OST Program, in Percents

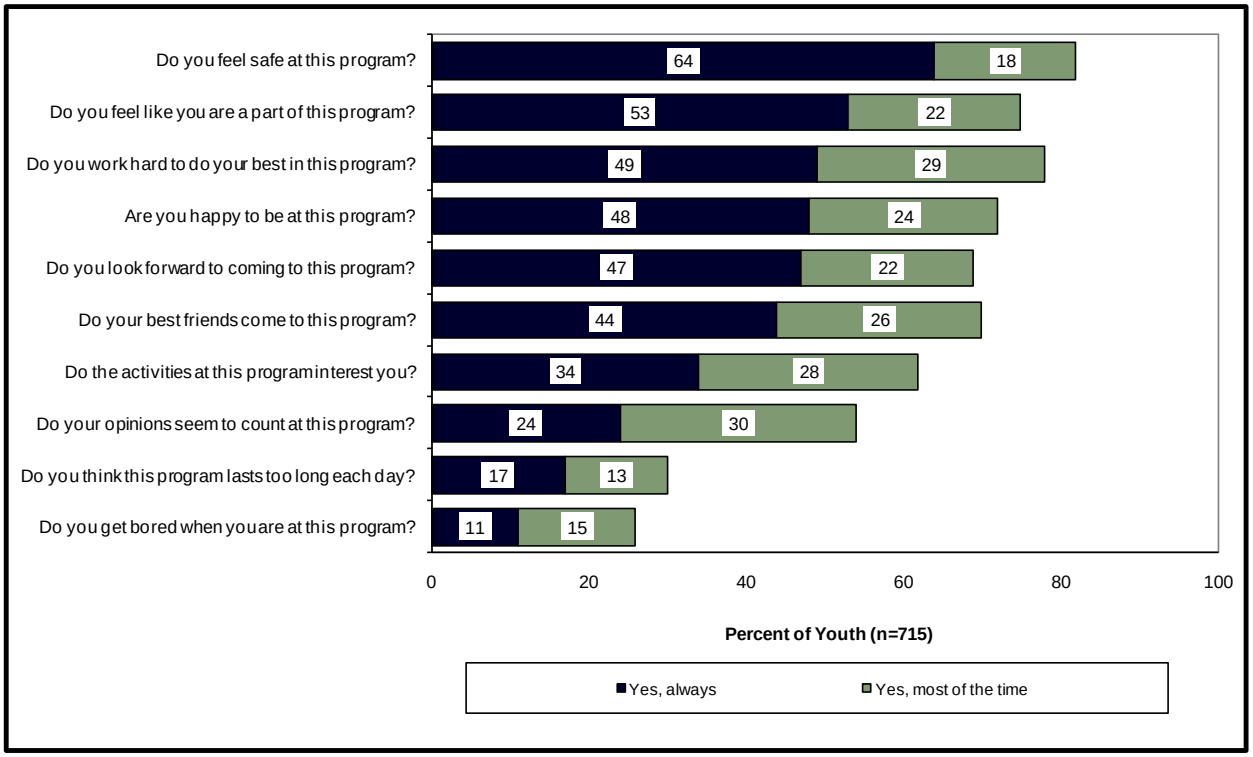


Exhibit reads: Sixty-four percent of respondents said that they always feel safe in the OST program. Eighteen percent feel safe most of the time.

When comparing returning youth to first-year OST participants, no significant differences existed on measures of youth experiences within the OST program. Noteworthy differences emerged from other comparisons, however. For example, youth reports of interest in program activities varied widely across the 10 programs. In one program, only 9 percent of

youth reported that they are always interested in program activities. Meanwhile, 66 percent of youth at another program responded this way. Despite the fairly positive overall responses, these varied responses across OST programs suggest that some more successfully engage youth than do others.

Recommendations

The findings presented in this report suggest that the 10 OST programs in this sample are serving elementary- and middle-grades youth who are motivated to succeed in school and whose families support their goals. An important aspect of the DYCD OST initiative is that programs should play an important role in bridging gaps with the school day by providing opportunities to youth that build their interpersonal as well as educational skills. The descriptions and analyses presented in this report lead to four recommendations regarding promising practices that can be adopted or strengthened in OST programs:

- First, the experience of the 10 OST programs underscores the importance of staff and staff development. Staff meetings and professional development opportunities need to be focused on substantive approaches for improving the quality of youth programming. In particular, program leaders need to guide staff to develop lesson plans that are skill-oriented and that incorporate elements of active learning.

- Second, good relationships with schools, and particularly with school-day teachers, are essential to effective programming. Programs can maximize the contributions of school-day teachers working in after-school programs by enlisting them to help design program activities and develop lesson plans and by asking them to serve as resources for OST staff training and development.

- Third, intentional program design, including emphases on skill-based and active learning strategies, results in stronger programming. Programs should be encouraged to be intentional and explicit about their goals, strategies, and activities, with particular emphasis on strategies that promote engagement and skill development.

- Finally, although most OST programs provide safe and welcoming environments, positive youth development should not be taken for granted. Planned programming to strengthen relationships, particularly among youth but also between youth and staff, can help promote positive youth development.

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Appendix
General Observations Based on the OST In-Depth Study

Over the course of the OST in-depth evaluation, PSA has identified important areas in which specific adjustments can improve OST programs.

Program Management Structures

Certain program management structures are essential to support high levels of youth engagement and learning in OST programs. Improvements in the following structures and their operations can have lasting benefits for programs:

- **Supports for staff**, particularly those that focus on staff development and staffing stability
- **Program policies that encourage regular youth participation,** which are well communicated to principals, parents, staff, and youth
- **Positive relationships linking OST programs and host schools** that extend beyond communication about space and homework assignments to staff-level interactions aimed at promoting student growth and learning
- **Employment of a diverse mix of staff** in OST programs to enhance program quality by building on the strengths and experiences of staff members with varied backgrounds

Program Features to Support High-Quality Youth Experiences

The following OST program features are especially important in promoting high levels of youth engagement and learning:

- **Clear, attainable program goals** (including specificity in lesson plans and curricular resources) and **use of data to track progress,** a capacity in which most OST programs need significant assistance
- Increased **opportunities to build cognitive skills, engage youth in learning, and encourage youth voice** in OST programming
- A focus on **positive relationships** among youth and between staff and youth, based on mutual respect