



School's Out New York City Initiative Year 2 Technical Report: Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The Comprehensive After School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC) comprises more than 900 programs serving young people enrolled in Grades K–12. Through its network of providers, COMPASS NYC seeks to offer programs with a balance of academics, recreation, enrichment, and cultural activities to support and strengthen the overall development of young people. With an increase in funding and commitment by Mayor Bill de Blasio and his administration, the COMPASS NYC system is projected to serve 97,000 youth with a budget of \$247.3 million.

The COMPASS NYC middle school model, better known as SONYC (for School’s Out NYC), is designed to serve as a pathway to success for youth in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The programming model seeks to offer youth choice in how they spend their time, provides rigorous instruction in STEM and literature, and offers activities that support youth leadership development.

As part of the 2014 expansion, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) contracted with American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct an evaluation of the SONYC initiative. This report contains the methods and findings from the second year of the evaluation, which focused primarily on activities that would continue to deepen our understanding of program implementation and of stakeholder perceptions. AIR examined perceptions of principals, program leaders, and youth, developed and pilot-tested a youth leadership development scale, and conducted a descriptive scan of the SONYC initiative and participant information to provide DYCD with an overview of who is participating in SONYC programs and in what ways.

Key findings from the second year of the evaluation suggest the following:

- The SONYC initiative is serving the intended population and has increased enrollment and programs available to youth, families, and the community. Accomplishments during 2015–16:
 - There were 66,598 youth enrolled in SONYC programs, an increase of 7,853 youth from 2014–15.
 - There were 511 programs, an increase of 52 programs from 2014–15.
 - The average number of days that youth attended programming was high, 93 days for school year programming (in comparison with 87 days during the 2014–15 school year).
 - Programs offered the largest percentage of time during the school year in enrichment activities, followed by physical activity and healthy living and leadership development.
- School principals, program directors, and youth report positive perceptions of their SONYC program. Principals and program directors also reported an overall positive perception of the program design and delivery, especially with respect to the climate and culture of the program and the activities. In open-ended responses from program directors, principals, and a subset of youth that participated in focus groups, there was

general agreement that activities (both the quality and the variety) were the most emphasized strength of the program.

- Principals and program directors report generally positive perceptions of the program's partnerships with schools, families, and the community and agreed about the success of those partnerships; responses were slightly less positive in the area of partnerships than in other areas of interest measured during the evaluation. Program directors also were less positive in their responses overall than principals. In open-ended responses, there was some general agreement that communication and alignment between the school and program is an area for improvement.
- The majority of principals and programs directors agreed that the SONYC program in their school is contributing to improvements both at the school generally and among youth who participate, and that the program is targeting relevant outcomes. Program directors were significantly more likely to report that the program targets key youth outcomes (aligned with their partner school or community organization) than were principal respondents. The majority of responding principals suggested that the program is primarily targeting academic outcomes and then social and behavioral outcomes and the opposite was true of program directors. The majority of youth who participated in focus groups stated that they saw positive changes in themselves because of the program.

AIR also conducted activities that would inform future evaluation activities, methods, and processes (that is, the development and pilot of a youth leadership survey) and these yielded useful information. Findings from the psychometric analyses of the youth leadership survey indicate that the reliability of the scores for the main constructs was within acceptable ranges, survey items fit the rating scale model, and the rating scales functioned well.

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