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# **School's Out New York City Initiative Year 3 Technical Report: Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

The Comprehensive After School System of New York City (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. The COMPASS NYC middle school model, better known as SONYC (for School’s Out New York City), 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 science, technology, engineering, mathematics (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 third year of the evaluation (2016–17), which focused primarily on activities that would continue to deepen understanding of program implementation (including stakeholder perceptions) and youth outcomes. AIR surveyed program staff who work directly with youth and family members of youth participants about their perception of the program. AIR also surveyed youth in a representative sample of SONYC programs to better understand youth leadership attitudes and skills. Finally, AIR 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.

The following are key findings from the third year of the evaluation:

- The SONYC initiative is serving the intended population and has maintained enrollment and programs available to youth, families, and the community. Accomplishments during 2016–17 include the following:
  - An increase of 2,406 enrolled youth in the SONYC initiative from the 2015–16 program year, with a total 2016–17 enrollment of 67,452 across 509 programs (a decrease of two programs from the previous year, which is likely the result of contract rearrangement)
  - A high average number of days (92) that youth attended programming, demonstrating maintenance of the participation level of 93 days during the 2015–16 school year
  - Programs offering the largest percentage of activity time in enrichment activities, followed by physical activity and healthy living and leadership development, which has remained relatively constant across the evaluation years (2014–17) with the exception of the leadership development category, which saw a marked increase in average percentage of time that youth spent from Year 1 (2014–15) to Year 3 (2016–17)
- SONYC programs employing program staff who have multiple years of experience in the fields of youth development and out-of-school-time programming, although staff may be newer to their current SONYC program.

- SONYC program staff report participating in professional development that covered a variety of topics, with the majority indicating program safety, youth development, and working with the community as the top three. When asked if there were additional training topics and opportunities that would enable staff to do their jobs better, respondents suggested that additional training and workshops focused on skill development, engaging with youth, and program planning support would be helpful.
- Staff and families agree that the program is welcoming to families; however, staff responses suggest room for improvement in family engagement more broadly and, more specifically, in involving families in making decisions related to the program.
- Staff and families agree that the SONYC program provides opportunities for youth to develop leadership attitudes and skills. Youth report high perceptions of their leadership attitudes and skills, with the most favorable responses in the area of inner/self characteristics (motivation, self-awareness, and persistence).

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