

The Future of Youth Development

Building Systems and Strengthening Programs

NATIONAL
ACADEMIES *Sciences
Engineering
Medicine*



RELEASE WEBINAR

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Statement of Task

- Conduct a consensus study on learning and development of low-income youth in out-of-school time (OST) settings across the K-12 age span. Specifically:
 - **How can programs** specifically designed to serve K-12 youth from low-income households can **be characterized**; how and why do these characteristics vary among OST programs; are there patterns among the organizational dimensions related to community served, focus/purpose, geographic region, or other factors?
 - What is the **evidence on the effectiveness and outcomes of OST programs** for promoting learning, development, and wellbeing for children and youth from low-income households; how are these constructs defined and measured by programs and in research literature; do findings vary by subgroups of low-income youth experiencing additional forms of structural inequality?
 - What **approaches are linked to positive effects across a range of quantifiable outcomes**; How do results vary by demographic factors, program approach, and intersectionality with additional forms of structural inequality?
 - **How can existing policies and regulations for OST programs can be improved** to ensure high-quality opportunities for children and youth from low-income households, and how might these vary when low-income youth experience additional forms of structural inequality?
 - What are existing **gaps in the literature that can be addressed to produce more robust findings** about how OST can support learning and development for children and youth from low-income families, and how these may vary when youth experience additional forms of structural inequality?

Importance of Out-of-School Time (OST) Programs



Play a crucial role in positive child and youth development



Serve as a bridge between school, home, and the community



Offer safe, structured environments



Provide a chance to engage in meaningful activities, build relationships, and develop life skills



Support working parents and families

The Theory of OST

Positive youth development is the theory most associated with OST programs, offering approaches that recognize and emphasize the strengths of young people, their circumstances and relationships, and their individual agency



The OST Learning and Development Ecosystem



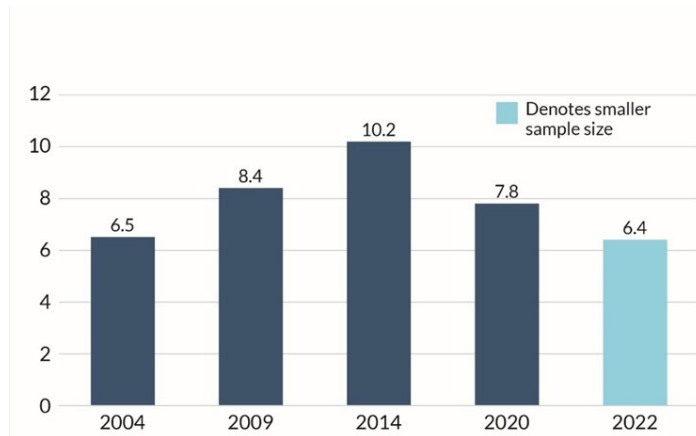
- *Intermediaries serve a critical function in coordinating, funding, and collecting data on OST systems and providing technical assistance to local programs*

The OST Workforce

Youth development practitioners: the adult leaders who guide children and youth through social, educational, and personal development within informal educational spaces

- 62% entered the field because they felt **called to make a difference**
 - 77% feel a strong **sense of commitment** to their work
 - Nearly 50% experience **stress or burnout**
 - **Low compensation** continues to be a challenge
- Challenges can lead to staff turnover, affecting program availability and quality

Programs and Participation Trends



Number of participants in out-of-school time programs by the millions

UNMET DEMAND:

- Grew to 24.6 million young people in 2020, with about 11 million children from low-income families reporting that they would participate in an afterschool program if they had access to one
- Black and Hispanic families have high unmet demand (60% for Hispanic children and 54% for Black children).
- Rural areas unmet demand grew from 39% in 2009 to 47% in 2020.
- Unmet demand highest for grades K-5 (56%) with grades 6-8 at 47% and 9-12 at 36%

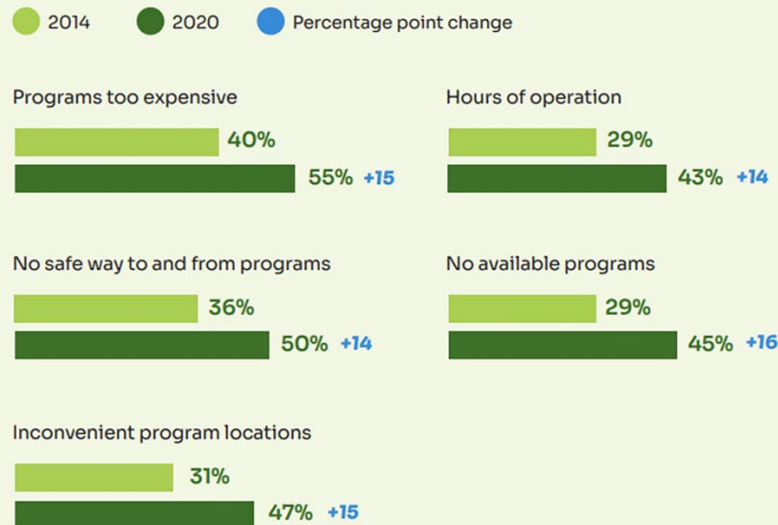
*Data from America After 3 PM survey

Factors Affecting Participation

- Program availability
- Program location
- Transportation
- Program costs and family resources
- Program awareness
- Family involvement
- Family perceptions and values
- Participant interests and motivations
- Program timing and competing activities

Example: Rural Families

Percentage of rural families reporting the following were an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program



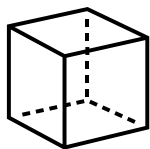
*Afterschool Alliance. (2021). *Spiking demand, growing barriers: The trends shaping afterschool and summer learning in rural communities.*

What Makes a Quality Out-of-School Time Program?

“Providing high-quality OST experiences for children and youth from low income and marginalized backgrounds requires strong OST systems and organizational capacity, a stable and well-trained workforce, and high-quality programming that is responsive to the needs of the populations being served.”

Program Quality

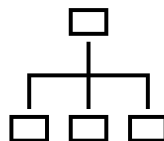
Program quality has been defined in many ways, but generally includes aspects of:



Physical Space



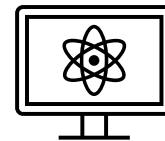
Psychological
Safety



Structure



Adult-Youth
Interactions

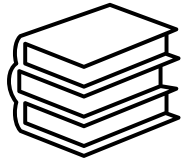


Learning
Opportunities

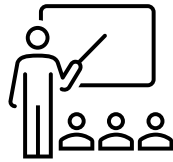
Studies that connect OST outcomes and quality exist but are limited. Additional research is needed to explore associations between specific indicators of quality and outcomes, and to provide additional guidance for focusing on or prioritizing elements of quality to improve outcomes for all children and youth.

Features of Positive Developmental Settings

The following have been found to be key features of positive developmental settings and contribute to program quality:



Adopting culturally sustaining practices and critical pedagogies



Building supportive relationships with program peers and staff



Honoring youth-adult partnership



Intentionally cultivating a positive program climate

Features of Positive Developmental Settings - Updated

Table 6-2: Features of Positive Developmental Settings—Annotated

- 1) Physical and psychological safety
- 2) Appropriate structure
- 3) Supportive relationships
- 4) Opportunities to belong and intentional cultivation of a responsive and inclusive program climate
- 5) Social contribution
- 6) Support for efficacy and mattering
- 7) Opportunities for skill-building
- 8) Integration of family, school, and community efforts
- 9) Adoption of culturally sustaining practices and critical pedagogies
- 10) Programs and structures that honor youth voice and choice

Current OST Funding and Policies

Federal: siloed and targeted

State and Local: tremendous variability

- OST programs face **increased burden** researching, competing for, and complying with onerous accountability measures across their funding portfolio.
- Complex grant applications make it **challenging for OST programs to develop a sustained funding portfolio**
- **Intermediaries provide timely supports**, but public and private funding streams can restrict funds for intermediaries, leaving them **underfunded and overstretched**

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Effectiveness and Outcomes of OST Programs



Effectiveness and Outcomes

Reviewed available literature on:

- Social and Emotional Learning
- Youth Identity and Culture
- Civic Engagement
- Academic Success
- Violence, Substance Use, and Risk Behaviors
- Physical and Mental Health
- Family and Peer Relationships
- Long-term Outcomes

Conclusions: Effectiveness and Outcomes

- OST settings **provide a responsive place for the social and emotional development** of children and youth, **provided they are well designed and offer high-quality experiences** that intentionally support these areas. Children and youth report that these programs and activities not only make them feel a sense of belonging and affirm their sense of self but also help them across a range of domains including responsibility, positive work ethic, social skills, and interest in civic activities. (Conclusion 7-1)

Conclusions: Effectiveness and Outcomes

- It is more **difficult for OST programs to impact outcomes** that require continuous, effective teaching, **like test scores and grades**. Though programs can sometimes exhibit effects on a few outcomes, they vary drastically in terms of access to resources, one of which is the ability to engage well-trained staff. However, **some OST programs have been shown to foster interest and engagement in specific academic domains and socioemotional skills that can help youth succeed in school**, which may lead to **better educational outcomes in the long term**. (Conclusion 7-2)

Conclusions: Effectiveness and Outcomes

- Not all OST programs are expected to demonstrate positive effects on all outcomes. OST programs are **most likely to affect outcomes that they intentionally support with specific program content** and opportunities that promote development.
- OST programs **vary in terms of quality** and the developmental experiences they provide. As a result, some studies show positive associations and others no effects. **Variation in program quality helps to account for differences in effectiveness.**

Conclusions: Effectiveness and Outcomes

- Future **research is needed to understand which quality features and experiences in which activities** are associated with positive developmental outcomes **for which groups** of youth.
- Future research can **capitalize on the strengths of multiple methods** to provide a deeper understanding of **what specific types of programs, experiences, approaches, and characteristics of program quality are linked to positive outcomes for which specific children and youth.**

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Recommendations



Ensuring High-quality OST Opportunities for All

1.

Support the funding stability of OST programs

2.

Increase investment in intermediary organizations to strengthen the organizational capacity of OST programs

3.

Advance program quality efforts to foster enriching, safe, and supportive OST settings

4.

Build stable, supportive environments and career pathways for youth development practitioners

5.

Improve understanding of the landscape of OST programs and participation, OST staff development, program quality efforts, and OST systems

6.

Improve understanding of OST program effectiveness and outcomes

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Goal 1: Support the Funding Stability of OST Programs



Supporting Funding Stability to Meet the Needs of All Children and Youth

Recommendations

1-1. Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should **support the funding stability** of OST programs by providing **long-term flexible funding** that allows for **general program support**, as well as funding for **staff compensation, indirect costs** (i.e., administrative or operating costs), **and robust evaluation**. Longer-term, more flexible funding allows programs to be responsive to and best elevate the assets and meet the needs of youth by reducing concerns around program sustainability and allowing the use of funds to build program capacity. Allowing use of funds for staff compensation and professional development supports the growth and retention of talent to design, run, and sustain high-quality programs.

1-2. Federal, state, and local funders should **increase coordination across funding streams** and **implement greater cross sector and interagency partnership to alleviate the administrative burden** on OST programs in researching and competing for grants and complying with grant requirements. Reducing administrative burden on program staff can enable them to focus efforts on growing programs and improving program impact.

Supporting Funding Stability to Meet the Needs of All Children and Youth

Recommendations

1-3. Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should **define funding priorities that align with priorities in the youth development field** and are **responsive to the needs and interests of participants, families, communities, and youth development practitioners**; funders should engage these groups in designing funding opportunities and application requirements.

1-4. Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should **reduce access and opportunity gaps for all children and youth by providing dedicated funding**, including funding for cross-sector partnerships, to help providers address common barriers to participation in out-of-school time programs. Funding can be used to provide transportation, offer financial incentives (e.g., through stipends, gift cards, transit cards), provide culturally relevant offerings, and conduct intense and focused outreach to support participation.

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**Goal 2: Increase Investment in
Intermediary Organizations to Strengthen
the Organizational Capacity of OST
Programs**



Increasing Investment in Intermediaries to Strengthen Organizational Capacity

Recommendations

2-1. The federal government and state agencies should **provide dedicated, sustained support and resources for entities that coordinate and support out-of-school time programs**, including city- and state- level intermediaries to improve infrastructure for program availability, accessibility, and quality. Philanthropic funders should coordinate and collaborate to direct funding to grow and sustain local and regional out-of-school time intermediaries to fill any gaps left by federal and state funding.

2-2. When allocating formula or grant dollars for OST programs to state or local education agencies, **public funders should prioritize or incentivize partnerships with local intermediaries** who can provide OST system level supports, such as grant allocation and monitoring, and the integration of quality improvement systems.

Increasing Investment in Intermediaries to Strengthen Organizational Capacity

Recommendations

2-3. In states or locales where no coordinating body currently exists, government offices or jurisdictions should **form or support coordinating bodies**, such as intermediaries or children's cabinets or their equivalent, which would work across youth-serving entities.

2-4. Local intermediaries should **continually identify gaps in access to out-of-school time (OST) programs and related barriers at the neighborhood level** (e.g., through needs-based assessments and mapping tools) to increase program participation.

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Goal 3: Advance Program Quality Efforts to Foster Enriching, Safe, and Supportive OST Settings



Advancing Program Quality Efforts to Foster Enriching OST Settings

Recommendations

3-1. Public and private funders should **support the development and implementation of quality improvement initiatives** that **provide ongoing technical assistance** to advance program quality efforts, including supporting efforts for intermediaries to build capacity for program providers to collect, analyze, and use data for continuous improvement.

3-2. Local intermediaries should **set a schedule and process for reviewing and updating program quality initiatives, associated assessment tool(s), and aligned supports** (e.g., data systems, professional development opportunities) for out-of-school time programs, reflective of evidence-based practices and research as well as evolving community strengths and needs.

Advancing Program Quality Efforts to Foster Enriching OST Settings

Recommendations

3-3. Intermediaries should **support cross-sector collaboration with school districts, local universities, and municipal agencies to share and analyze data** to support continuous improvement of program quality. This collaboration should include clearly articulate data-sharing agreements that allow for bidirectional data-sharing; public reporting of non-sensitive, de-identified data; and data systems that include information on youth development measures.

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Goal 4: Build Stable, Supportive Environments and Career Pathways for Youth Development Practitioners



Building Stable, Supportive Environments and Career Pathways for Youth Development Practitioners

Recommendations

4-1. State entities, agencies, and other regional funders, including philanthropic funders, should **strengthen investment in youth development practitioners** in out-of-school time (OST) settings so OST intermediaries and providers can **create opportunities to prepare and increase professional pathways** for the OST workforce.

4-2. Colleges and universities should **provide more opportunities for students** to pursue their interests in the youth development field, **including exposure to practical experiences and relevant coursework**.

4-3. The Office of Management and Budget should **establish and maintain a standard occupational classification for youth development practitioners** to build evidence on the workforce supporting out-of-school time programs.

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Goal 5: Improve Understanding of the Landscape of OST Programs and Participation, OST Staff Development, Program Quality Efforts, and OST Systems



Improving Understanding: The Landscape of OST

Recommendations

5-1. Federal agencies should utilize existing research or support new or existing research and/or survey efforts to **continually monitor supply and demand of OST programs, experiences of OST workforce, and identify which young people are and are not being served** in out-of-school time programs, in order to inform future federal policy and funding to meet the needs of children and youth from marginalized backgrounds.

5-2. Federal, state, and local government agencies that sponsor surveys and collect data on children and youth should intentionally and explicitly **collect data on participation in out-of-school time programs, including data that allow for examination of intersecting demographics**. Agencies should engage with youth development experts and youth-serving organizations to consider how best to collect data and shape survey questions. Data collected should be made publicly available.

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Goal 6: Improve Understanding of OST Program Effectiveness and Outcomes



Improving Understanding: OST Program Effectiveness and Outcomes

Recommendations

6-1. Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should **support research that examines a wide variety of outcomes** based on the goals of out-of-school-time programs. Funders should support large-scale, systematic experiments (i.e., randomized controlled trials) to **assess the efficacy of specific program designs and of specific program features**, examining a wide range of short- and long-term outcomes, and other rigorous quantitative (e.g., matched longitudinal quasi-experimental designs, natural experimental approaches, alternative designs) and rigorous qualitative research (e.g., case studies, ethnographies, mixed methods) that **include measures of participation, program duration, program quality, and implementation**.

In Their Own Words: Final Thoughts from Youth

“...program has been a ‘second home’ ...‘They always encourage me to go anywhere I want, do anything I want, and just be who I am.’”

“[The program] is a place where you can come and be safe...”

“[The program] ‘has changed my viewpoint on a lot of things [...] and it has changed the way I think before I react to certain situations [...] Your thoughts, words, and actions will determine your destiny.’”

The Future of Youth Development

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