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Update on Second Year of Out-of-School Time Programs

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is pleased to present the second year evaluation report for the New York City Out-of-School Time (OST) Initiative.

Four years ago, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, DYCD, ten other city agencies and a broad cross-section of leaders from the afterschool, youth development and education fields embarked on an ambitious redesign of the City's OST system. We aimed to improve the delivery and quality of services, establish measurable outcomes and standards for accountability, utilize scarce resources more efficiently, support working families and target programs to underserved communities. The resulting initiative is now the largest municipally-funded afterschool system in the nation, with 644 programs serving more than 80,000 young people throughout the City of New York during the 2007-2008 school year.

In recognition of our commitment to innovation and collaboration, the City of New York received a 5-year, \$12 million grant from The Wallace Foundation to focus on OST system-building. The grant finances long-term business planning, data collection, evaluation, support for pilot programs, and a communications campaign to build public awareness and understanding of OST. Together, The Wallace Foundation and DYCD are working to increase the **Quality, Reach and Equity**, and **Sustainability** of NYC's OST system.

Evaluation is central to DYCD's ability to ensure that OST programs are delivering high-quality services to our youth, and to demonstrate the efficient use of taxpayer dollars. DYCD entered into a three-year contract with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to measure the success of the OST initiative. By making the case that youth benefit from high-quality OST programming, we hope to strengthen the public's favorable opinion of the program and ensure the sustainability of the OST system.

The first year's report, released in February 2007, focused on implementation and operational issues. The Year 2 evaluation examined the quality of OST programming. DYCD is pleased that this year's evaluation identified significant improvements in program operations and strong evidence of high-quality services across our portfolio of OST programs.

THE YOUTH WE SERVE

- 78,364 participants in Year 2
 - 51 percent girls
 - 37 percent African American
 - 37 percent Latino
- Served high-need student groups:
 - 85 percent of youth eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch

- 21 percent classified as eligible for English Language Learner services
- 14 percent received special education or related services

POSITIVE FINDINGS

Promoting Quality and Expanded Scope of Services

The OST initiative:

- Served 34 percent more participants in Year 2, with
 - a larger percent of programs in all levels meeting enrollment targets,
 - more programs meeting attendance targets, and
 - high school programs exceeding attendance targets.
- Improved Director and staff satisfaction with DYCD-sponsored technical assistance.
- Offered a breadth and range of activities associated with better outcomes for youth.
- Increased provider organizations' capacity to serve more youth and families.
- Identified a core set of program quality features associated with high levels of participation and positive social and academic outcomes.

Staffing

OST program directors:

- Are highly educated: 86 percent hold a four-year college degree or higher.
- Reported that finding qualified staff was less challenging in Year 2.
- Employed certified teachers and activity specialists to provide targeted programming in a large proportion of programs.
- Relied heavily on non-certified and non-specialist staff for day-to-day operations, allowing for a high staff-to-participant ratio.

Youth Social Outcomes

OST participants:

- Expressed a strong degree of satisfaction with the extent to which OST program activities exposed them to new experiences.
- Consistently developed positive relationships with staff and other youth.
- Experienced measurable benefits in their sense of belonging and pro-social behaviors.

Youth Self-Reported Academic Outcomes

OST participants:

- Reported high levels of academic motivation.
- Achieved higher academic benefits when in programs with a strong focus on academics.
- Expressed higher levels of academic motivation when in programs that used published or externally developed curricula.

Parent Satisfaction

Parents of OST participants:

- Rated the program as “excellent” or “very good.” (80%)
- Reported that OST made it easier to keep their job, work more hours, or attend school.

- Said one parent: *“I am a working parent, so the availability of this program helps me to keep my only child safe after school...I believe that my son is a leader, but having him be a part of this program has helped him grow into his own person. I am also concerned about him being exposed to negative people and environments so knowing that he is in a positive child-centered place makes me feel good.”*

PAST AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Many challenges that were described in the first year of the initiative were addressed in the second year, including:

- Improved data collection via OST Online, with further improvements expected in Year 3
- Increased rate of participation for program attendees, with further improvements anticipated in Year 3
- Higher Director and staff satisfaction with technical assistance services

Nonetheless, some challenges remain, including:

- Meeting high school enrollment targets
- Providing participants with hands-on activities, discussion, and meaningful choices

ACTION STEPS

DYCD has already taken several steps to address these challenges.

To help OST high school programs meet their enrollment targets, DYCD will:

- Share best practices learned from its Teen ACTION programs, which focus on service learning.
- Focus the Year 3 evaluation on models of high-quality high school programs to identify best practices for recruitment, enrollment, and programming.

To help programs with implementing higher quality activities, DYCD is:

- Utilizing an observation tool that enables them to rate programs' quality and make referrals to technical assistance.
- Conducting training for program managers to ensure reliable use of assessment tools.
- Developing several pilot projects to enhance quality programming, including the use of structured curricula to teach mathematics and literacy.
- Offering DYCD Scholars, a scholarship program for about 25 students who will receive a certificate in youth studies and 12 college credits.
- Partnering with CUNY to fund the development of course curricula in youth studies and course offerings at several CUNY campuses.
- Embarking on a project to track outcomes of all youth attending its after-school programs.
- Developing a list of core competencies of front line youth workers to guide future efforts to create professional development opportunities for young staff.

- Exploring associations among program quality features, youth participation patterns, and youth outcomes.

We hope that this evaluation will be an ongoing source of information for all of those who have an interest in DYCD's OST initiative and out-of-school time learning in general, and we encourage you to tell a friend or colleague. It is available online at www.nyc.gov/html/dycd and www.wallacefoundation.org.