



## Best Practice: Youth After-School Programming

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**City:** New York City

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### BEST PRACTICE

New York City's Out-of-School Time (OST) program (Department of Youth and Community Development) is the largest municipally-funded afterschool initiative in the nation. These high-quality programs offer a balanced mix of academic support, sports, recreational activities, and cultural experiences for elementary, middle school, and high school youth that enrich and reinforce what they learn in school. OST programs operate on most school holidays in order to meet the needs of working parents.

### ISSUE

The major part of a young person's life takes place outside of the school classroom: after school, on weekends, and during school vacations. Frequently, however, outside of the school classroom, many young people are without parental supervision and need to be in safe and supportive environments. This free time is optimal for developing a young person's social, emotional and academic capabilities. During the 2010-2011 school year, The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development Out-of-School Time (OST) Program, provides youth and families with access to 489 free programs located throughout the City. For immigrant youth in particular, these programs provide opportunities to practice English in a social environment, meet peers from other cultures, and learn about American customs while maintaining their own cultural identity.

In 2003, to complement his education reform efforts, Mayor Bloomberg formally launched the OST planning process, supported by a planning grant from The Wallace Foundation and assistance from the Fund for the City of New York. The goals of the OST planning process were to improve the delivery and quality of services, establish measurable outcomes and accountability standards, use scarce resources more efficiently, support working families and target programs to underserved populations. The OST Initiative officially began in September 2005.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The City and its partners came together to create a high-quality OST system offering safe and developmentally appropriate environments for children and youth when they are not in school. OST programs support the academic, civic, creative, social, physical and emotional development of young people and serve the needs of the City's families and their communities. Government, service providers, and private funders are partners in supporting an accountable and sustainable OST system. The City's approach centers on creating policies and interventions that maximize positive outcomes for children. As the City's largest human services contract-management agency, DYCD assumed the lead role in building an effective OST system. DYCD is research-based, data-driven, and committed to investing in strong, vibrant programs that share the City's vision of a revitalized afterschool landscape.

Students engaged in the OST program work with computers, get homework help, participate in community clean-up projects, enjoy painting studios, create artistic masterpieces, or learn teamwork through sports. Afterschool programs produce multiple benefits for young people in both the academic and social/emotional domains.

During the OST Planning Process, stakeholders agreed on nine common goals rooted in youth development principles that all high-quality OST programs should share:

1. Provide a healthy, safe environment
2. Foster high expectations for participants
3. Foster consistent and positive relationships with adults and peers, as well as a sense of community
4. Support the needs of working families
5. Support healthy behavior and physical well-being
6. Strengthen young people's academic skills
7. Support the exploration of interests and the development of skills and creativity
8. Support youth leadership development
9. Promote community engagement and respect for diversity.

The hypothesis is that if an OST program establishes appropriate structural and institutional requirements and incorporates process and content features that meet the nine goals, the result will be positive outcomes for youth including program engagement, social development, development of program-content skills, attachment to school and community and high educational performance.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Building on his commitment to improving the New York City education system, Mayor Michael Bloomberg began the OST reform initiative in the fall of 2003, inviting 200 community leaders and representatives from City Agencies, community organizations, parent groups, and foundations to attend an OST summit. Working groups drafted plans for quality standards and a streamlined infrastructure.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the City's lead agency in designing and implementing the new OST programs, worked in collaboration with 10 other city agencies including the Department of Education and numerous community partners. As a contracting and funding agency, DYCD drives accountability and change by funding programs based on analyses of data and promising practices.

DYCD dispenses funds to direct service providers through a competitive procurement process that awards contracts to community-based organizations based on an evaluation of proposals submitted in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP). The RFP specifies all program requirements and is informed by a rigorous planning process that is elaborate, participatory and incorporates research, planning and needs assessment.

The research undertaken by DYCD includes needs assessment, examination of current policy directions and program data, literature review (including evaluations and best practices), and identification of pertinent data sources. Various techniques are used to identify, assess and prioritize needs at the local level for programs funded through the RFP process. These techniques include analyzing trends among client populations, examining data such as the federal census, and obtaining community and service provider input through outreach to client populations and advisory bodies, including the Youth Board/Youth Council and the Community Action Board.

DYCD typically conducts focus groups with experts, advocates, current program providers, and participants to gather insights and recommendations from the field as part of the planning process. Focus groups provide feedback on the program strengths and weaknesses and current challenges faced by providers. DYCD program managers also highlight issues of concern and suggest improvements to existing program models.

Needs assessments serve to identify the need for separate competitions within the RFP, as well as geographic areas within New York City in particular need of services. These two strategies – creating separate competitions and geographic targeting – ensure that services reach individuals and communities that demonstrate the highest need.

The City used social, economic, health and demographic data to identify high-need areas and priority populations that correspond to the target populations of the programs to be funded. This data included: number of youth, number of foreign born, low-income individuals, unemployment rate, public school enrollments, educational attainment, labor force participation, English language proficiency, and statistics on risk factors for youth. The 2004 Out-of-School Time RFP allocated funding by school region based on an area's concentration of youth population, share of low-income youth living at or below 200% of the poverty level, and share of low-performing schools. In addition, 58 high-need zip codes have been targeted according to five demographic variables: youth population; youth poverty rate; rate of youth ages 16-19 years who are not in school, not high school graduates, and not in the labor force; number of English Language Learner (ELL) students in public school; and number of single-parent families with related children under 18 years of age.

In May 2004, DYCD released a concept paper, a narrative summary of the planned OST RFP including general requirements, key program elements and cost assumptions. Stakeholders submitted written comments, and DYCD used the feedback to adjust elements of the final RFP.

In every RFP and concept paper relating to youth programs, DYCD reiterates the fundamental tenets of positive youth development, framing them within the relevant programmatic context. Informed by its own experience as a funder of services and activities for youth, the experience of its providers, guidance from leading experts and lessons emerging from the research, DYCD strives not only to expand its reach but also to develop quality programming that will lead to improved outcomes for youth and communities.

The first OST RFP was released in December 2004. After a thorough review process, hundreds of community-based providers were funded to bring an array of new OST activities to youth across the City, with 60% of new programs placed in OST priority zip codes.

Beginning operation in September 2005, these OST programs offer a range of services, including academic skills enhancement, cultural enrichment, sports, recreation, community engagement, and leadership development. These OST programs are located in schools, community centers, settlement houses, religious centers, cultural organizations, libraries, public housing facilities, and Parks Department facilities. Elementary programs generally provide services 3-6 pm Monday-Friday, while middle schools have a more flexible schedule of 8 hours per week during the school year. Elementary and middle school programs are open for 10 hours (generally 8 am-6 pm) on public school holidays and vacations. Summer programs operate on the same schedule. Programs for youth under age 9 have a 1-to-10 staff-to-student ratio; for ages 10-12, the ratio is 1-to-15.

Key innovations of the OST program included DYCD's provision of technical assistance to OST providers to help them improve the quality of their programs and strengthen their organizational capacity to support programs, as well as capacity building for DYCD's staff in charge of oversight. DYCD also developed a web-based data system to collect detailed information on the system, program and participant levels to allow in-depth evaluation on an ongoing basis.

In 2006, DYCD and the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), in partnership with the City Council, launched the Cultural Afterschool Adventures (CASA) initiative. The initiative pairs nonprofit arts and cultural organizations with OST service providers to offer enriching and diverse experiences for participating youth. In its first 3 years, DYCD administered 163 CASA grants totaling \$3.2 million. Due to budgetary changes, the program was moved to DCLA with a budget of \$5.8 million in FY 2011.

In June 2007, DYCD issued an RFP to expand year-round OST programs serving elementary school students, and 112 new programs began operating in January 2008. Subsequently, in March 2009, DYCD issued an RFP outlining a new program model OST high school programs. The new OST High School Transition Program is designed to help young people navigate their way through adolescence and avoid dropping out. Programs began on September 1, 2009. The initiative features two programming priorities. The Transition to High School Program provides intensive interventions to students who are entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade to help these young people achieve on-time promotion. The Transition to Adulthood Program helps students in grades 11 and 12 prepare for college and/or entry into the workforce.

Also in spring 2009, the agency released a new RFP for technical assistance providers for OST programs. DYCD now has two-year contracts with The After-School Corporation and the Partnership for Afterschool Education to provide technical

assistance to providers in the areas of building organizational capacity, training for frontline staff, and information technology and data management

The City's OST system is strengthened through several public-private partnerships. The Wallace Foundation sponsored the OST planning process and is providing a five-year, \$12 million grant to support implementation and system building. OST is supported by a network of community-based organizations, foundations, and technical assistance providers, including The After-School Corporation (TASC), the Partnership for After-School Education (PASE), The Clark Foundation, Citizens' Committee for Children, and the Fund for the City of New York. In 2009, American Eagle Outfitters made a donation enabling the new High School programs to take 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students on college tours outside of New York City, and the JCPenney Afterschool Fund supported After-School Arts Partnerships to bring enhanced cultural programming to OST elementary and middle school programs. In 2010, DYCD partnered with the New York Community Trust and several other private funding partners to restore summer services to OST middle school programs slated to be cut due to citywide budget reductions.

## COST

In September 2005, DYCD launched the OST program as a three-year, \$200 million initiative. Mayor Bloomberg's FY 2008 Budget proposed a \$44 million increase to the City of New York's OST Initiative, bringing the total budget to \$105.3 Million in FY 2008, \$116.6 Million in FY 2009, and a reduction to \$110.7 Million in FY 2010 due to budgetary constraints. The projected budget for FY 2011 is \$109.1 million, which includes \$3.6 million in federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding. OST funding is included in the City's four-year financial plan and thus is a sustainable source of revenue for community-based organizations in years to come. This additional investment adds up to growth of more than 100% since the program's inception.

Today, the OST system consists of 489 programs provided at no cost to participants, in neighborhoods across the City. The programs, which are operated by 167 community-based organizations, are located in schools, community centers, homeless shelters, juvenile justice facilities, cultural organizations, libraries, public housing facilities, and Parks facilities. The City's comprehensive OST system will serve more than 61,000 children during the 2009–2010 school year.

	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
NYC OST Budget:	\$47 million	\$77 million	\$105 million	\$117 million	\$111 million
Budgeted number of youth served	47,000	65,000	78,500	73,500	60,500
Actual number of youth served	59,078	78,364	87,256	85,513	74,059
Number of OST sites	558	546	644	609	504

DYCD pays OST providers \$2,800 per elementary school child annually for year-round OST programs. In addition, the City makes substantial in-kind contributions to the OST initiative including space, security, snacks, training and curricula. Many OST providers supplement City support with private contributions to enhance these high quality afterschool programs. Additionally, \$6 million in private funding has been set aside for public/private programs.

## RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The Out-of-School Time (OST) Program has successfully provided a range of activities for young people. Since the program's inception, the number of youth served has increased from 59,000 to a peak of 87,000 with more than 100 new OST sites opened. A funding reduction coupled with a more robust OST High School model led to a lower targeted service level of 61,000 currently.

New York City's OST programs are free of charge and are located in every neighborhood across the City. They provide:

- Free, safe programs in a supportive environment
- A schedule that meets the needs of working parents
- Separate programs for elementary, middle school, and high school students
- Trained staff, familiar with the strengths and needs of young people
- Assistance in completing homework
- Healthy snacks

OST included a multi-year contract with Policy Studies Associates, a Washington, DC based firm, to conduct a longitudinal evaluation analyzing the impact of OST programs on children and communities.

Highlights from the recently released Year 3 evaluation report:

- Over 181,000 youth participated in the initiative in Years 1-3, and enrollment increased from year to year.
- Program directors are highly educated – 86% hold a four-year college degree or higher.
- Participants reported high levels of academic motivation
- 80% of parents rated their child’s program as “excellent” or “very good.”
- OST served high-need student groups – 84% of participants are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch.

## TIMELINE

- 1996 Through legislation introduced by the City Council, the New York City Department of Youth Services and the New York City Community Development Agency are merged to create the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).
- 2003 Youth-related programs, formerly under the Dept. of Employment, are added to (DYCD) under Local Law No. 52.
- 2005 NYC’s Out of School Time (OST) programs are implemented. The DYCD Out-of-School Time (OST) system is the largest municipally-funded afterschool initiative in the nation. OST describes the major part of a young person’s life that takes place outside of the school classroom – after school, on weekends, and during school vacations.
- 2007 Mayor Bloomberg announces the expansion of New York City’s Out of School Time (OST) programs, and DYCD releases an RFP to add 112 new sites for elementary school children.
- 2008 DYCD, with generous support from the Wallace Foundation, holds a system-wide Symposium entitled *Building Stronger Programs through Collaboration* at Columbia University. Marian Wright Edelman, President and Founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, offers the keynote address before more than 400 youth development professionals.
- 2009 DYCD launches a new program model for OST high school programs, with two main priorities: successfully transitioning incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders to prepare them for on-time promotion to grade 10, and preparing 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders for the transition to college and/or the workforce.
- 2010 DYCD partners with the New York Community Trust and several other private funders to restore funding for 31 middle school summer programs slated to be cut due to citywide budget reductions. The “Summer Matters” initiative is a true public/private partnership, with the private sector contributing 50% of funding need to restore the summer programming, matched by a restoration of City funds. All 31 programs operate for 6 weeks in summer 2010.

## LESSONS LEARNED

During the planning stages, data analysis was critical to winning support for the OST initiative. The City collected and mapped data on a wide range of demographic indicators to identify areas of greatest need. This helped support the reallocation of funding to fulfill our goals of reach and equity.

Ongoing data collection from all OST program sites through the OST Online system has helped DYCD to analyze participation and utilization. This real-time database helps DYCD to identify where technical assistance is needed.

Using an outside evaluator to conduct a longitudinal study of the OST system has been important for learning more about the effects of OST participation on young people. In addition, the evaluation helps to communicate our progress to funders and build support for expanding the program.

## LEGISLATION

Local Law No. 52 amends the New York City Charter and the Administrative Law of the City of New York, transferring the administration of youth employment and development programs from the former Department of Employment to the Department of Youth and Community Development.

OST programs are licensed by the State and required to comply with New York State School Age Child Care (SACC) regulations under Section 414 of the Social Service Law. In addition, OST programs operating during the summer are permitted by the City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene under Local Law No. 48.

## TRANSFERABILITY

Mayor Bloomberg is committed to the values of accountability, transparency and efficiency in government, and they are embraced by DYCD and the OST program. Information about DYCD's programs can be accessed online, benefiting other institutions interested in OST programs. The OST evaluations are published to help grow best practices in the OST field. The OST program requirements and RFPs are also available to the public on DYCD's website [www.nyc.gov/dycd](http://www.nyc.gov/dycd). DYCD participates in conferences nationally to share best practices and learn from other localities.

## CONTACTS

- Jeanne B. Mullgrav, Commissioner  
Department of Youth and Community Development
- Bonnie Rosenberg, Project Director, Out-of-School Time Initiative  
Office of the Mayor