Increasing Opportunities for Alexandria City Youth

Four Things Elected and Appointed Officials Should Know

1 Youth on average **spend 80-percent** of their waking hours outside of school, and many young people are alone after the school day ends. A focus on middle school years is of high importance as communities across the country tend to see **declines in out-of-school (OST) participation** after students transition from elementary school to middle school.

2 **OST programming supports** social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development, reduces risky behaviors, promotes physical health, connects youth to supportive adults and mentors, builds life skills, connects youth to enrichment activities, and provides a safe and supportive environment for children and youth.

3 OST programs provide a **significant return-on-investment**, with every $1 invested saving at least $3, through increasing youth's earning potential, improving their performance at school, and reducing crime and juvenile delinquency.

4 **Partnership with youth** is crucial: It benefits organizations as well as the youth themselves. Programs developed in partnership with youth are more likely to be effective at engaging the population and, therefore, to have a greater impact.

Call to Action

Continue to champion and support policies that expand access to a wide variety of OST and community-based activities so that all youth have equitable access to inclusive, accessible, diverse and age-appropriate programming.

Identify policies and systematic support that will help to right-size existing OST program capacity and meet community needs, while also building capacity to expand program offerings. Public policy determines what services will be provided to residents and the level of those services. Organizational policies provide guidance, clarity, consistency, accountability and efficiency. Supportive policies include expanding the current definition and scope of out-of-school time, creating a shared community goal to ensure all youth have access to out-of-school time activities, establishing a culture of inclusionary practices, committing to shared use policies, exploring new funding opportunities and pathways and committing to a systems approach to provide robust staff professional development/training.

Background

The Youth Support Network - ACT for Alexandria, with financial support from the City of Alexandria (City) and Frank & Betty Wright Foundation, in collaboration with a multitude of stakeholders, commissioned Weber Moore Partners, LLC to conduct a **community-wide study**. The study 1) documented and mapped the current state of OST and community programming for K-12 students 2) identified the hopes, needs, and barriers experienced by youth, families and providers related to OST activities with a focus on middle and high-school students and 3) developed recommendations for a community-wide call to action about the value and importance of expanded learning programs for children and youth.

What We Learned from the Community

- Community members agreed that OST can help students succeed in life, yet many youth do not participate in OST programming. This is an untapped market and opportunity.

- To make youth-informed programming a priority, a culture shift in how we design opportunities and communicate about them is needed.

- One size does not fit all – families and youth want inclusive, accessible, diverse and age-appropriate programming.

- A potentially inequitable geographic distribution of OST activities needs to be further explored.

- A coordinated, community-based approach is needed to support a robust OST environment.

- Better communication and promotion of programs is a must. There is a need to move away from industry terminology; How activities are described needs to match audience needs and wants.

- Professional development/training and technical assistance would support providers in program delivery that meets consumer needs and demands.

Collaboration is Essential

OST stakeholders in the City should continue to build on their strong foundation of community partnerships while building a sustainable systems approach to OST programming that is youth-informed and offers a diversity of activities that are accessible and available to all youth. A key component is evolving the Youth Support Network's role and responsibilities to serve as the central community engine (Hub) supporting a robust OST environment that fosters collaboration and provides coordinated support to community organizations, government agencies, schools, and other partners dedicated to improving the equity, quality, and continuous innovation of youth-serving programs in the City.

In supporting this work to advance youth opportunities, OST providers, school administrators, parents, youth, elected and appointed leaders, and community leaders need to work together. Each of these stakeholders plays a valuable role:

- **OST providers** deliver diverse programming and activities, involve youth in program development, and engage in progressional development and quality improvement initiatives.

- **School administrators** support school and district policies that facilitate more programs and opportunities, such as shared use, transportation assistance, fee supports.

- **Youth and parent advocates** influence school and community opportunities, including identifying barriers and needed supports. Youth and families are the consumers of these programs, ultimately driving program participation and engagement.

- **Elected and appointed leaders** champion and support policy and operational solutions that enable expanded access to OST programs through financial investment, and providing community resources (transportation/bus routes).

- **Community leaders** identify opportunities to support OST activities through shared space, staffing, volunteers, innovative program design and financial support.

For More Information

Alexandria-City-Youth-Report

Report Appendices

Contact

Caitlin Brown
Youth Network Support Manager
caitlin.brown@actforalexandria.org