**Evaluation of the Beacon Community Centers
Middle School Initiative:
Report on the First Year**

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Summary

This report describes the first-year implementation of the Beacon Community Centers Middle School Initiative, launched in September 2007 by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). The initiative enrolls participants in grades 5-8 in structured programming developed and delivered by New York City's 80 Beacon Community Centers to meet the needs of these youth. Reflecting recent research on the importance of support for under-served middle-grades youth, the Middle School Initiative offers activities and services to enhance the intellectual, physical, emotional, and social growth of young adolescents.

Overall, the 80 Beacon Centers were successful in recruiting and serving large numbers of middle-grades youth, as the Centers implemented the first year of the Middle School Initiative. During the first school year, Beacon Centers were each expected to serve 150 middle-grades youth while continuing to provide services to other youth and adults in the community. Across the initiative, Beacon Centers exceeded this goal, enrolling a total of 14,575 middle-grades youth and 31,252 other youth and adult participants during the 2007-08 school year. On average, each Beacon Center served 182 middle-grades youth and 391 adults and other youth. Beacon Centers also provided summer programming to 7,323 participants in grades 5-8 and to 9,233 other participants, averaging 93 middle-grades youth and 117 other participants per Beacon. These counts were possible because the Centers began using DYCD Online, the agency's electronic data management system, in September 2007 to record data about program participants and activity offerings, including data on participant enrollment and attendance.

Overall, middle-grades participants averaged 208 hours of program participation during the school year, just shy of the 216-hour expectation set by DYCD. Over the summer, middle-grades participants attended an average of 187 hours of programming. During the 2007-08 school year, participants engaged most frequently in recreation activities, followed by academic-enhancement activities and by arts and culture activities. During summer 2008, middle-grades youth participated in recreational activities most frequently, followed by arts and culture activities.

Consistent with the Beacon model, the Centers reached out to families and community members to keep them informed about the initiative, recruit participants, and seek advisory input. Over a third of the Centers employed a paid or volunteer parent liaison to coordinate outreach. Virtually all Centers reported regular communications with families through phone calls and meetings. Centers also connected with their host schools and with other youth programs operating in the same school buildings.

Centers relied on staff and volunteers in varied roles to deliver programming, involving 30 staff members each, on average, with 14 staff working as part of the Middle School Initiative in each Beacon Center. Many Beacon staff members were college students or teenagers. Many of these young staff members had previously been Beacon youth participants, then Counselors in Training, and then volunteer or paid staff. Although Beacon directors spoke highly of their staffs, they said that finding, hiring, and retaining qualified staff was a challenge.

In general, the combination of the Middle School Initiative and the new data requirements in 2007-08 caused Beacons to reduce program activities that were not part of the new initiative. The addition of an intensive, structured program component for middle-grades youth represented a change from the Beacons' broad, inclusive program model, which emphasizes responsiveness to community needs. Available evidence suggests that the intended shifts toward more intensive, structured programming have largely been accomplished for at least a portion of the Beacons' efforts. This evaluation will monitor these changes and measure their effects on participating youth over the next two years.

Background and Goals of the Initiative

In September 2007, DYCD launched the Middle School Initiative in the 80 Beacon Community Centers located throughout New York City. The Beacon Centers, first established in the early 1990s, provide varied services to youth and families in New York City neighborhoods. Community-based nonprofit organizations operate the Centers in public school buildings during non-school hours. Beacon Centers are typically open during the school year from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays, and from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the summer. The Centers have a history of commitment to the safety and healthy social and emotional development of both youth and adults. The Beacon model integrates supports for youth and families through activities and services reflecting local community needs and interests.

Forty-four provider organizations operate the 80 Beacon Centers, with many providers operating more than one Beacon. Of the 80 Centers, 58 are operated by one of 22 provider organizations currently serving more than one Beacon. Beacon Centers are distributed across the city's boroughs, with the most Beacons (27) in Brooklyn and the fewest (four) in Staten Island. Sixty of the 80 Beacons are located in public host schools that serve middle-grades students, and 20 are located in schools with no middle-grades enrollment. Among the 80 Beacon Centers, 31 are housed in schools that also host an Out-of-School Time (OST) program funded through DYCD. Among these, 25 of the co-located OST programs are operated by a different provider organization, and six are operated by the same organization that operates the Beacon. Among the Beacons co-located with an OST program, 16 share space with an OST program that serves middle-grades youth. In addition, 16 Beacons currently serve as providers for the city's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) foster-care prevention programs. These Beacons are responsible for providing preventive services to families with youth at risk of foster-care placement, by providing social-work services, alcohol and substance abuse prevention, health services, parenting skills instruction, housing services, and employment and job training services.

The Beacon Middle School Initiative is intended to improve the lives of young adolescents in grades 5-8 by providing high-quality, structured out-of-school-time experiences through the Beacon Centers. The implementation of the Beacon Middle School Initiative coincides with efforts of the New York City Department of Education to improve educational services and outcomes for middle-grades students, especially those with the greatest needs, including youth in the low-income communities served by the Beacon Centers. Current research shows that disadvantaged students run the risk of falling off track for academic success and

healthy development as early as middle school. A recent study examining adolescents' progress toward graduation found that failure in high school can be predicted as early as middle school, a time when youth may become involved in risky, dangerous behaviors (Balfanz & Herzog, 2006). As students in the middle grades seek to forge their identity as adolescents, many need the support of community resources to engage in activities that encourage physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth. Research findings stress the need for coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive approaches to positive youth development, based on strong partnerships between schools and social service providers to help middle-grades youth achieve success in high school and beyond (Eccles & Gootman [Eds.], 2002).

The Beacon Middle School Initiative seeks to address these needs by providing regular, structured programming for youth in six core areas during out-of-school hours:

- ■ Academic enhancement
- ■ Life skills
- ■ Career awareness and school-to-work transition services
- ■ Civic engagement and community building
- ■ Recreation, health, and fitness
- ■ Culture and art

In the Middle School Initiative, services in these areas are delivered within a program setting that also includes drop-in activities, community events, and structured programming for other age groups based on local needs. In its 2007 Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Beacon Centers that introduced the Middle School Initiative, DYCD stated that it expected each Beacon to serve at least 200 middle-grades youth annually through the delivery of at least 216 hours of service per youth. In 2007-08, the first year of implementation, each Beacon Center was expected to serve at least 150 middle-grades youth, while continuing to serve elementary and high school-aged youth as well as adults.

In addition to school-year services, the Middle School Initiative also provides summer learning opportunities. Research in this area suggests that there is a pressing need to provide low-income youth with opportunities to continue their learning over the summer months. Studies have shown that when student test scores from the fall are compared to scores from the previous spring, low-income students are likely to show a significant loss (Burkham, Lee, LoGerfo, & Ready, 2004). Despite low-income students' academic gains during the school year, the gap between low-income students and their more privileged peers grows over the summer, resulting in what researchers have termed "summer setback" (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007). While higher-income students often make steady increases in learning over the summer, their lower-income peers tend to experience a decline (Heyns, 1978). Higher-income students' access to enriching summer experiences—from trips to libraries and museums to participation in organized sports and arts activities—appears to put them at an advantage upon their return to school after the summer break (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001). The Beacon Middle School Initiative attempts to meet this need for summer learning opportunities by providing youth with structured, engaging summer activities. DYCD encouraged (but did not require) each Beacon Center to enroll and serve 75 middle-grades Middle School Initiative youth in summer programs.

Evaluation Design and Operations

DYCD has contracted with Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA) to conduct a three-year evaluation of the Beacon Community Centers Middle School Initiative. The evaluation is designed to inform DYCD about the operational issues involved in administering the new initiative, program-level implementation patterns, including the relationship between the middle-grades model and the Beacons' other programming, the characteristics of youth served by the new programming and their patterns of program participation, the extent to which programming is meeting the needs of participating youth, and the circumstances in which these services are most and least effective.

The evaluation addresses the following questions:

■　　Does the Middle School Initiative programming administered by Beacon Centers meet reasonable expectations for effective implementation, especially in the areas of youth outreach, youth attendance, staffing, activity approach and content, family engagement, and integration with the other work of the Beacons?

■　　What are the educational and other developmental needs of youth who participate in the Middle School Initiative? How do these youth compare to nonparticipating middle-grades youth enrolled in the host schools and in the city's public schools generally?

■　　Does the Middle School Initiative promote participants' healthy development and educational progress?

■　　What program features are associated with positive participant outcomes?

For this report on the Beacon Middle School Initiative's first year, evaluators focused on the first question. Findings in this report are based on data collected from the following sources:

■　　**Survey of Beacon directors.** In June 2008, evaluators administered an online survey to all Beacon directors. Data reported are based on the 70 responses that were received from the 80 Beacon Centers, for a response rate of 88 percent.

■　　**DYCD Online.** Evaluators analyzed patterns of enrollment and participation in Beacon programs, based on data collected from all Beacon Centers, using DYCD Online, during the period September 1, 2007, to August 31, 2008. Evaluators also examined program-level data from DYCD Online describing the types of activities that Beacon Centers offered and the number of hours that participants attended each type of program activity.

■　　**Site visit interview and observation data.** Evaluators visited ten Beacon Centers in July and August 2008. These Beacons were selected in consultation with DYCD to represent a range of service approaches and innovative summer activities for middle-grades students. During site visits, members of the research

team conducted interviews with Beacon directors, staff, and middle-grades youth participants, and they observed program activities.

■ **Telephone interviews with Beacon directors.** The study team interviewed ten Beacon directors in June and July 2008. These Beacons were selected in consultation with DYCD to be part of the in-depth school-year study of the Middle School Initiative, and were purposively chosen to reflect a variety of characteristics of interest to the evaluation, including: (1) location across each borough; (2) location in both middle schools and other schools; (3) management by provider organizations with a single Beacon Center and with multiple Beacons; (4) location in schools with and without DYCD OST programs, (5) Beacons with and without ACS services on-site. (The in-depth program sample does not include Beacons whose summer programs were visited in June and July 2008.) Telephone interviews with in-depth program directors focused on operations, successes, and challenges of the first full school year of the initiative.

This first major report of the three-year evaluation of the Middle School Initiative includes information and analysis on (1) the adaptation of the Beacon focus to accommodate the Middle School Initiative, (2) promotion of high levels of youth enrollment and participation in the initiative, (3) the implementation of program content in the initiative's six core areas, and (4) conclusions and recommendations.

During the next two years, the evaluation of the Middle School Initiative will continue to collect data from Beacon Centers to examine implementation and to assess the initiative's effects on participants. Future reports will examine changes in program implementation and in participants' social and academic outcomes.

Broadening the Focus to Accommodate the Middle School Initiative

In the 2007-08 school year, as noted above, Beacon Centers launched structured activities to meet the needs of middle-grades youth in the six designated core areas. (DYCD refers to these as "targeted activities.") At the same time, Beacon Centers continued to offer drop-in activities, community events, and other services for youth and adults of all ages ("non-targeted activities"). This differentiated program approach shifted the allocation of Beacon resources and priorities by creating a new focus on structured programming that was specifically targeted to a single age group. Also in conjunction with the launch of the Middle School Initiative, DYCD began requiring Beacon Centers to use DYCD Online to track youth-level data on program enrollment, attendance, and activity participation. The analyses and findings that follow describe the adaptation experiences of the Beacon Centers as they implemented the Middle School Initiative in its first year.

All Beacon Centers have shifted their focus to emphasize programming for middle-grades youth. As shown in Exhibit 1, all Beacon directors reported that, since implementation of the Middle School Initiative, their Beacon Center offers more programming for middle-grades

youth than in previous years. In response to DYCD requirements that Beacon Centers offer structured programming that requires sustained participation, about three-quarters of directors also reported that they are tracking program attendance (79 percent) and assigning youth to specific activities or groups (72 percent) to a greater extent than in previous years.

Exhibit 1
Program Director Reports of Effects of the Middle School Initiative on the Beacon Center, in Percents *(N=70)*
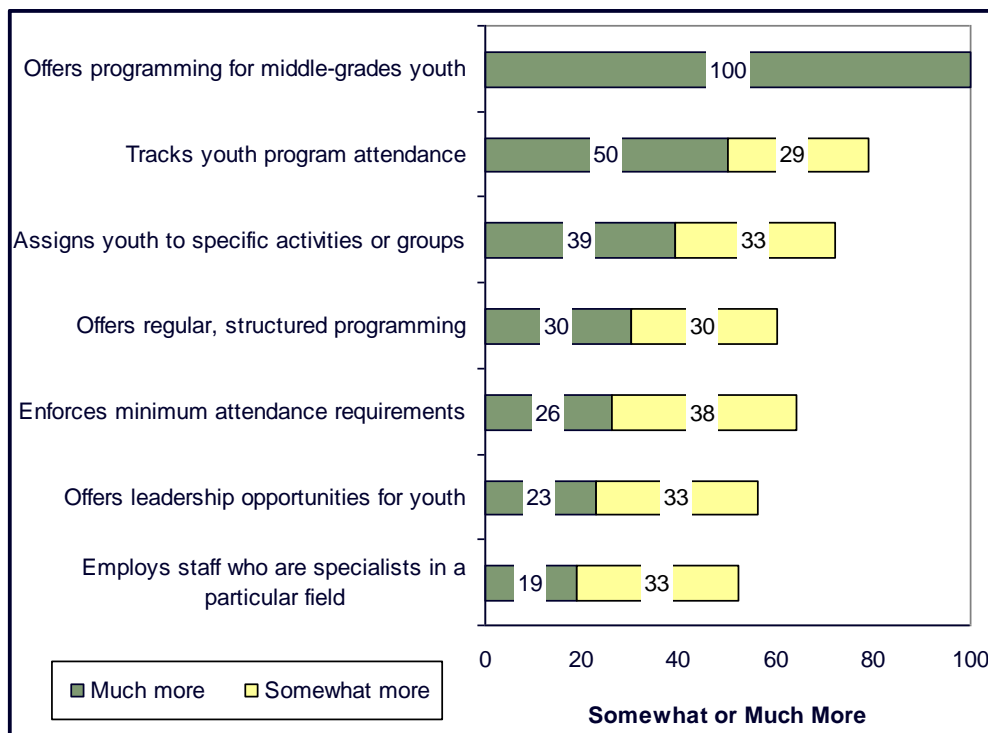

Exhibit reads: One-hundred percent of Beacon directors reported that their Beacon Center offers much more programming to middle-grades youth since the implementation of the Middle School Initiative.

Centers have cut back on programming for participants that are not part of the Middle School Initiative. Beacon Centers receive an operating budget of $400,000 each year from the City of New York, and Beacon provider organizations provide an additional 10 percent cash match of this amount. This level of funding did not change with the introduction of the Middle School Initiative, challenging Beacon Centers to expand their program model within existing budgets. In survey responses, Beacon directors indicated that, as they adapted programming to implement the Middle School Initiative, resources that typically supported programming for participants in other age groups were redirected to support the Middle School Initiative.

About a third of Beacon directors reported that, since the beginning of the initiative, they have offered less programming for high school youth (33 percent of responses) and elementary-grades youth (28 percent). Some directors also reported that they have offered less programming

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for adults and, specifically, that they reduced vocational programming (28 percent) and classes for parents (23 percent). As one Beacon director noted in an interview:[1]

> *What we struggle with is that the new initiative focuses on middle school. When you are reallocating more to middle school, you get the sense that everyone else is icing on the cake. It makes us rethink and move our resources.   We [now] have fewer counselors for elementary…I have to lobby for resources for middle school. We want to serve our community as we have before, but do I know we'll be able to serve elementary in the future or will it all be middle school? It's a balancing game…*

Promoting High Levels of Middle-Grades Participation

This section reviews youth recruitment, enrollment patterns, attendance patterns, program retention over the summer, and participant characteristics.

Recruitment Methods

Beacons used their established reputation in the community and the schools to recruit middle-grades youth. While 97 percent of Beacon directors said that their Middle School Initiative programming opened enrollment to all interested youth in that grade range, most Beacons had to adopt specific recruitment strategies to enroll the required number of middle-grades youth. Building on Beacon Centers' history of delivering youth programming, more than half of all Beacon directors said they recruited middle-grades youth through their existing pool of participants. Sixty-one percent of directors said that, when they recruited youth for the Middle School Initiative, they targeted those youth who were already Beacon participants. Sixty-one percent also said they targeted those youth with siblings who were Beacon participants.

Directors collaborated with local schools and other community organizations to encourage middle-grades youth to enroll in the school-year program. Sixty percent of directors said that they recruited youth who were recommended to the program by teachers or school counselors. Directors communicated with principals and teachers in local schools, and some sent staff to PTA meetings and parent-teacher nights to recruit students for the Middle School Initiative.

> *First thing I did, I had a discussion with the main school that sends us kids. I talked with the principal and explained to him, in detail, the goals of the initiative and what we offer, what programs there would be for his kids, the hours we were open. I also worked with the teachers and told them about what we could do in terms of tutoring.*

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[1] The italicized inserts shown throughout the report are direct quotes from interviews conducted in the summer 2008 site visits and spring/summer 2008 telephone interviews. The quotes represent the experiences typically described by interview respondents and are consistent with survey-based findings, unless otherwise noted.

We had to go out into the community to recruit. We went to different middle schools around the area and met with the parent coordinator and guidance counselors to spread the word.

Some Beacon directors reported challenges in recruiting middle-grades participants who would attend regularly because the Center was not located in a middle school or it was competing with other youth programs. Beacon Centers that had difficulty recruiting middle grades youth tended to be those housed in schools that did not include these grades. Some of these directors commented that the nearest middle school was too distant from their Beacon and that this distance made it difficult to meet participation requirements for the requisite numbers of middle-grades youth.

The fact that the nearest middle school is a half mile away is a problem. We are not close so it is hard to get them to come over here, but we are working on it.

Eighty-five percent of directors said that competing after-school opportunities presented a challenge to their program's ability to implement the Middle School Initiative. According to survey data, the majority (87 percent) of Beacon Centers were housed in schools that also hosted other after-school programs.

Middle school is more competitive, because there are so many other CBOs [community-based organizations] in the neighborhood providing the same services, with a bunch of [after-school] programs in the same schools.

Our challenge here is that we also have an OST-funded program in the building. It serves middle school youth, and it is run by our provider organization. To meet targets, that is a lot of recruitment that has to take place because the youth in our building are already attending another program. Because we have the OST competitors here, it is not that easy to recruit middle school youth.

Beacon summer programs reported very few problems recruiting middle-grades youth. Directors reported that recruiting youth for the summer was not a challenge because there was great demand for summer camps and because Beacons have a large pool of participants who look to the Beacon for summer youth programs.

Summer is, I'm not going to say easy, but people are champing at the bit in March. They want to know, "What's going on in summer camp?" Kids come from out of the area for summer camp, from Flushing, etc... Normally, every year we have a waiting list. The summer program is free. Parents work and who's going to be home? They want to know ahead of time that kids will have a place to go.

Continuity is really important. We've been known for running year-round programs in the community for a long time. We've been taking care of their kids from September to June, Monday through Friday. Also on Saturday, we have an open house. By having that year-round mentality, parents know, "I don't want my child sitting at home all summer, let's use the program."

*We do not advertise much because we do not want a 300 person wait-list. A lot of how
we get them is word of mouth. There are not a lot of free programs for teens in the area.
There are many programs for elementary-age kids but not so much for the middle school
ones. We have repeat customers and then, as soon as they age out, their younger siblings
are on the way to the program.*

Patterns of Enrollment

During the first year of the Middle School Initiative, Beacon Centers served 14,575
participants in grades 5-8 during the school year and 7,323 during the summer months. The total
unduplicated count of middle-grades participants who attended school-year or summer activities
or both was 20,269. The total unduplicated count of participants of all ages who participated in
either school-year or summer sessions or both was 53,846. Evaluators limited analyses of
enrollment and participation to participants in kindergarten through twelfth grade who attended
Beacon programming for five days or more in the program period (school year or summer) and
to adults who attended Beacon programming on at least one day. Evaluators used a lower
participation threshold for adult participants because activities and events geared toward adults
included more stand-alone opportunities that did not require multiple days of attendance to
establish participation.

During the school year, middle-grades participants accounted for 32 percent of the
population served. In the summer, youth in grades 5-8 represented 44 percent of the total
Beacon population. On average, Beacon Centers surpassed DYCD's charge to enroll 150
middle-grades participants in the initiative's first year, with an average enrollment in school year
2007-08 of 182 youth, as displayed in Exhibit 2. During summer 2008 programming, there were
no specific requirements for the number of youth to be served, although DYCD encouraged
Beacons to enroll 75 middle-grades youth; on average, Beacons enrolled 93 middle-grades youth
during that period.

While the RFP for the Middle School Initiative and the DYCD Online data system
distinguished between middle-grades participants "targeted" for the initiative and other, "non-
targeted" middle-grades participants, evaluators found the distinction between these groups to be
imprecise. Many Beacon Centers determined targeted and non-targeted status based on a youth's
level of participation compared to DYCD's expectation, rather than on a difference in
programming and services received in the Middle School Initiative and in other Beacons
programming. Therefore, analyses of participants and participation presented in this report
combine data from these two groups and describe aggregated results for all Beacon middle-
grades participants.

Exhibit 2
Beacon Centers' Average Middle-Grades Enrollment, by Center Characteristics

Program Characteristics	2007-08 School Year			Summer 2008		
	Number of Beacons	**Average Enrollment, Grades 5-8**	**Average Enrollment, Other Ages**	**Number of Beacons**	**Average Enrollment, Grades 5-8**	**Average Enrollment, Other Ages**
Total	80	182	391	79	93	117
Borough						
Bronx	13	173	366	12	81	122
Brooklyn	27	164	412	27	107	133
Manhattan	15	122	521	15	86	129
Queens	21	199	313	21	82	88
Staten Island	4	289	245	4	112	98
Program Location						
Host school serves middle grades	60	194*	377	59	92	97*
Host school does not serve middle grades	20	146*	433	20	94	180*
Grade Levels Served by School Year OST Program in Host Schools						
Middle grades served	16	237*	374			
Middle grades not served or no OST program	64	168*	395			
Beacons with ACS						
ACS Provider	16	142	443	16	103	142
Not an ACS Provider	64	192	377	63	90	112
Providers Operating One or More Beacons						
Single Beacon	22	187	402	21	89	110
More than one Beacon	58	180	386	58	94	121

* Indicates the difference between subgroups is significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

Exhibit reads: 80 Beacon Centers were included in the analysis of 2007-08 school year programming.

Analyses revealed statistically significant variations in enrollment patterns based on characteristics of the Beacon Center, including its location and by the presence of an OST program serving middle-grades youth in the same building.

■ **By program location.** Beacons located in schools that served middle-grades youth reported higher average enrollments of youth in those grades (194), than

did Beacons in schools that served only elementary or high school youth (146). This difference was statistically significant. During summer programming, there were no notable differences in the middle-grades enrollment of Centers housed in schools that served the middle grades and in other schools (92 and 94, respectively).

- ■ **By presence of an OST program serving middle-grades youth.** Beacons located in schools that also hosted an OST program serving middle-grades youth in the school year had higher average middle-grades enrollments than did Beacons in schools without an OST program. Beacons located in schools that hosted an OST program serving middle grades youth enrolled an average of 237 youth in grades 5-8, and Beacons housed in schools that either had no OST program or had an OST program that did not serve middle-grades youth enrolled an average of 168 middle-grades youth. Analysis of Year 3 DYCD OST enrollment data show that, at 15 of the 16 Beacon Centers that were co-located with an OST program serving the middle grades, some middle-grades youth were enrolled in both the Beacon and OST program. At each of these 15 Beacon Centers, the number of middle-grades participants who were enrolled in both the Beacon and the OST programs ranged from 1 participant to 117 participants, with an average of 29. Because school-year OST programs did not necessarily host a summer program, these analyses were not conducted with summer attendance data.

    A reason for the high Beacon enrollment figures in co-located Beacon sites may be that, in those communities where schools house both an OST middle school program and a Beacon, a great demand exists for after-school opportunities. Another possible reason for the pattern may be that Beacon and OST programs are coordinating to recruit and attract youth to the many programming options offered at the school location. Underlying these possible interpretations of the high, sometimes overlapping middle-grades enrollments of co-located Beacons and OST programs is the fact that Beacon middle-grades activities are offered every school-day, while OST program services are typically provided only three days a week.

Attendance Patterns

On average, Beacon middle-grades participants attended programming for slightly fewer than the 216 expected hours during the first year of the initiative. On average, as shown in Exhibit 3, middle-grades participants participated in 208 hours of programming during the 2007-08 school year and in 187 hours during summer 2008. Thirty-four percent of middle-grades youth met the 216-hour requirement, while 66 percent of middle-grades participants did not, as displayed in Exhibit 4. Among the 66 percent of participants who did not meet the 216-hour threshold, 18 percent participated in 101-215 hours of programming, 17 percent participated in 50-100 hours of programming, and 31 percent participated in fewer than 50 hours of programming. During the first year of Middle School Initiative programming, only participant hours accrued during the 2007-08 school year counted towards the DYCD participation

requirement. Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, participation in summer programming preceding the school year will contribute to overall hours of participation. The evaluation will use a sum of summer and school year hours to compare participation against DYCD expectations for participation in future years.

Exhibit 3
Distribution of Targeted and Non-Targeted Activity Hours
Among Middle-Grades Participants

Participant Category	2007-08 School Year				Summer 2008			
	N	Average Hours in Targeted Activities	Average Hours in Non-targeted Activities	Average Total Hours	N	Average Hours in Targeted Activities	Average Hours in Non-targeted Activities	Average Total Hours
All Middle-Grades Participants	14,575	170	38	208	7,323	143	44	187

Exhibit reads: During the 2007-08 school year, 14,575 participants attended targeted activities for an average of 208 hours. During summer 2008, 7,323 participants attended targeted programming for an average of 187 hours.

Exhibit 4
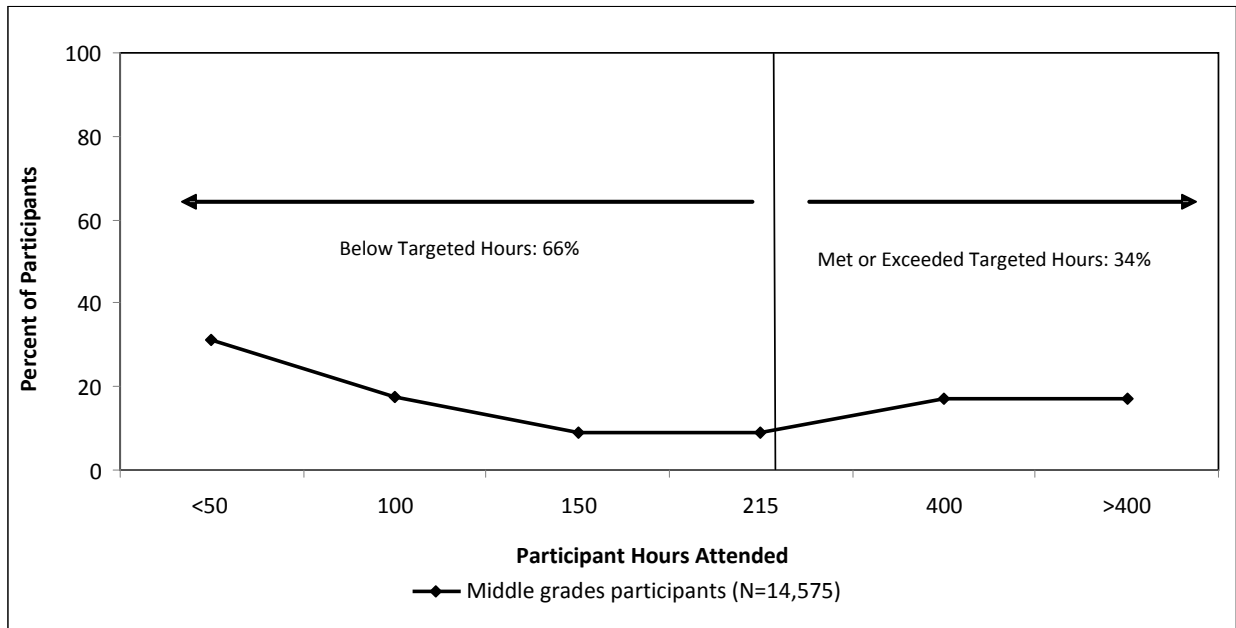**Percent of Middle-Grades Participants Who Met Participation Target**

Exhibit reads: Sixty-six percent of middle-grades participants did not attend the Beacon programs for the targeted number of hours, while 34 percent met or exceeded the target.

Site visit data revealed that Beacon directors did not have a clear sense of whether middle-grades participants' summer hours should contribute toward the 216-hour threshold set by the Middle School Initiative. Some Beacon directors were under the impression that, if a participant had already accumulated 216 hours during the 2007-08 school year, those participants should not be considered part of the initiative and should not accumulate any more program hours during summer 2008.

Program Retention

A useful indicator of demand for the Beacon Middle School Initiative, as perceived by participants and their parents, is the rate at which youth who participate for one year then return for another season of programming. Because the initiative was in its first year of programming in the first year of the evaluation, this study's analyses examined retention across the 2007-08 school year and summer 2008.[2] In 2007-08, 4,037 Beacon participants of any age participated in both 2007-08 school year and summer 2008 programming. Forty percent of participants who attended both sessions were listed as being in grades 5-8 either during the 2007-08 school year or during summer 2008 or both.

Among the 79 Beacons included in both 2007-08 school year and 2008 summer analyses, all retained one or more participants from school year to summer programming. Beacon Centers retained an average of 50 participants across the 2007-08 school year and 2008 summer programming, with the 79 Beacon Centers retaining between two and 265 participants each.

Among the 7,323 middle-grades youth who participated in summer programming, almost a quarter participated in Beacon programming during the 2007-08 school year, either at the same Beacon or a different one. Among the 14,575 middle-grades youth who participated in Beacon programming during the 2007-08 school year, 11 percent also enrolled in summer programming either at the same Beacon or a different one.

Consideration of participant retention across summer and school-year programming as a measure of participant satisfaction is constrained by the fact that there are far fewer participant slots available during the summer than during the school year, and therefore not all interested youth can enroll in the summer session. Further, Beacon directors reported that summer programming carries far stricter attendance requirements because of the high demand for spots, so youth who have multiple summer obligations were generally not allowed to enroll in Beacon summer programs.

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[2] One Beacon Center was excluded from analyses of summer programming because of problems with data entry, resulting in impossibly high numbers of activity hours for this Center. Analyses of summer programming are therefore based on data entered by 79 Beacons into DYCD Online.

Participant Characteristics

Middle-grades youth accounted for nearly one third (32 percent) of the Beacon population served during the 2007-08 school year. Within this group, 17 percent were in fifth grade, 32 percent in sixth grade, 26 percent in seventh grade, and 25 percent in eighth grade.[3] Another 39 percent of Beacon participants were adults, and 12 percent of the Beacon population were high school youth. Seventeen percent of Beacon participants were in grades K-4.

During 2008 summer programming, middle-grades youth accounted for nearly half of all participants (44 percent). Participants in grades K-4 were another 37 percent of enrollment, high school youth comprised 9 percent, and adults made up the final 10 percent. Because the DYCD Online tracking system was newly implemented in Beacon Centers in 2007-08, evaluators could not compare these data with those collected prior to the start of this initiative.

Within each program period, middle-grades participants generally reflected the overall demographics of the Beacon population, as illustrated in Exhibit 5.

According to data in DYCD Online, most middle-grades participants did not face significant language barriers. During the 2007-08 school year, for 84 percent of middle-grades participants, their primary language was English. The next most common primary language for middle-grades participants was Spanish (13 percent). Nearly all middle-grades participants were considered to be proficient in English (97 percent). During summer programming, English was the primary language of 88 percent of middle-grades participants, and Spanish was the primary language of another 8 percent. Again, nearly all 2008 summer middle-grades participants (98 percent) were recorded as proficient in English.

Small differences in school-year and summer enrollments point to a lower rate of summer involvement in Beacon programming by Hispanic/Latino middle-grades participants. Evaluators hesitate to speculate on the cause of this difference. This difference is not evident among Beacon participants who are not middle-grades students.

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[3] In New York City, many fifth-grade students attend an elementary school serving grades K-5. The available data do not permit analysis of the percent of fifth-grade students in the Middle School Initiative who attended elementary schools compared to those who attend middle schools, because data on the schools attended by Beacon participants are incomplete in DYCD Online.

Exhibit 5
Beacon Participants' Demographic Characteristics, in Percents

Total Number of Enrolled Participants	2007-08 School Year		Summer 2008	
	Middle-Grades Participants *N=14,575*	All Other Participants *N=31,252*	Middle-Grades Participants *N=7,323*	All Other Participants *N=9,233*
Grade Span				
K-4	-	25*	-	67*
5-8	100	-	100	-
9-12	-	18*	-	16*
Adults	-	57*	-	17*
Gender				
Male	56*	57*	52*	51*
Female	44*	43*	48*	50*
Race/ethnicity				
American Indian	1	1	1	1
Asian American	8	6*	9	8*
African American	34*	40	43*	41
Hispanic/Latino	39*	38	35*	38
Pacific Islander	<1	<1	<1	<1
White (non-Hispanic)	9*	8	7*	7
Other	9*	7	6*	6

* Indicates the difference between school-year and summer participants is significant at the p<0.01 level.

Exhibit reads: During the 2007-08 school year, among those participants who were not in the middle grades, 25 percent were in grades K-4.

Implementing Program Content in the Six Core Areas

A central design element of the Middle School Initiative is delivery of structured programming in six core program areas, as listed earlier:

- Academic enhancement
- Life skills
- Career awareness and school-to-work transition services
- Civic engagement and community building
- Recreation, health, and fitness
- Culture and art

To track Centers' provision of programming in these areas, the DYCD Online system includes a field in which Beacon Centers indicate the core area that aligns with each program activity.

Youth Participation in Program Activities

As displayed in Exhibit 6, during both the 2007-08 school year and summer 2008, across targeted and non-targeted programming, recreation, health, and fitness was the most common core activity area offered by the Beacons. Academic activities and culture/arts activities were also frequently offered. Beacon Centers offered fewer program opportunities related to civic engagement/community building or career awareness/school to work transition, with less than 10 percent or less of all activities devoted to those core areas.

Exhibit 6
Total Activities in Each Core Activity Area, in Percents

	2007-08 School Year		Summer 2008	
	Targeted Activities	**Non-targeted Activities**	**Targeted Activities**	**Non-targeted Activities**
Core Activity Area	*N=2,257*	*N=1,799*	*N=1,946*	*N=1,517*
Recreation, health, and fitness	34	39	40	49
Academic enhancement	22	26	17	16
Culture and art	21	16	24	21
Life skills	12	9	12	10
Civic engagement and community building	6	6	5	4
Career awareness and school to work transition	4	4	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100

Exhibit reads: Thirty-four percent of targeted activities offered by the Beacons during the 2007-08 school year consisted of recreation, health, and/or fitness activities.

During the 2007-08 school year, 68 percent of Beacon Centers offered activities in every one of the six core areas of the Middle School Initiative. All Beacons offered academic and recreation activities, 99 percent offered arts and culture activities, 95 percent offered life skills activities, 83 percent offered civic engagement activities, and 76 percent of Beacons offered career awareness activities. During summer 2008 programming, 24 percent of Beacon Centers offered activities in all of the core areas. One hundred percent of Beacons offered recreation activities, 92 percent offered arts and culture activities, 86 percent offered life skills activities, 85 percent offered academics, 57 percent offered civic engagement activities, and 33 percent offered career awareness activities. The difference between the percentage of Beacons that offered programming in each of the six core areas during the summer and the school year may reflect the fact that some Beacon directors said that they were not sure whether or not they were required to offer programming in all of the six areas during the summer.

Some Beacon directors were not clear on whether their summer programs were required to offer activities in each of the six core areas. Several directors said they understood that Beacon summer programming was not required to include activities in all six core areas, while other directors believed that offering programming in the six core areas was a requirement. Although every Beacon offered recreation, health, and fitness activities, Centers did not always provide programming in each of the other five core programming areas. While roughly two-

thirds or more of the Beacons offered targeted culture and arts, academic enhancement, and life-skills activities, fewer than half offered civic engagement/community building and career awareness/school to work transition activities.

Evaluators analyzed data on the activity participation of middle-grades youth, using the core area categorizations assigned by Beacon staff in DYCD Online. As shown in Exhibit 7, patterns of activity participation were similar across school-year and summer participants in all areas except academic enrichment, which was a much more prominent activity in the school year than the summer.

Exhibit 7
Average Hours Spent in Core Activity Areas by Beacon Participants in Grades 5-8

Core Activity Area	Mean Hours	
	2007-08 School Year *N=14,575*	**Summer 2008** *N=7,323*
Recreation, health, and fitness	83	86
Academic enhancement	73	27
Culture and art	23	33
Life-skills	17	28
Civic engagement and community building	6	10
Career awareness and school to work transition	4	3
Total	208	187

Exhibit reads: On average, participants in grades 5-8 attended recreation, health, and fitness activities for 83 hours during the 2007-08 school year. Summer participants in grades 5-8 averaged 86 hours.

Interview and site visit data illustrate how Beacons worked to keep systematic learning a central goal of Beacon activities, whether the activity was categorized as academic enrichment or not. Beacon directors described how they used engaging activity approaches in delivering cultural, artistic, and academic content.

Once you've engaged them you can always work in the academics. With sports we read about nutrition; they can read about calories. Once they read something they like, it attracts them.

Arts and Design Activity

In preparation for a fashion show scheduled at the end of the program cycle, participants brainstormed initial design ideas by sketching them out. Each participant needed to create four designs. While some youth were able to develop and draw their ideas quickly, others needed more encouragement from staff. Some youth said that they felt intimidated by the prospect of designing a garment that would be good enough to make at scale with fabric.

While working on sketches in groups at small tables, youth encouraged one another. They shared materials and complimented one another's designs. Staff members worked to keep youth optimistic and confident by offering supportive tips. One staff member said to a struggling student, "You're going to see with time how your drawings improve."

Martial arts is a mixture of traditional Japanese karate and judo and also learning basic Japanese. They're learning where certain parts of Asia are on the map. They're learning Japanese calligraphy. We have a broad sense of literacy and where you take what kids like and expand and build on that, showing how it relates to things that they like.

We use a multi-media approach to teach about local history, cultures, and ethnicities.
[They] explore their own ethnicity and their own feelings about themselves or about other cultures. Maybe going to the Tenement Museum, or making a medieval shield with characters, or sometimes it can be music related. They can put together a performance for parents' night about different cultures.

During the school year, youth participated in homework help on a regular basis, in addition to academic enrichment activities. Directors noted that, in grades 5-8, youth start to receive homework assignments that parents may not understand, especially those parents who are not fluent in English.

> **Integration of Academic Skills**
>
> Using a business plan that the group created to make and sell Rice Crispy Treats, 10 youth sat together as a group, as the instructor explained concepts of profit and initial cost. After discussion with the instructor, youth worked individually to calculate what price they should charge for their product. Youth structured the calculations based on the cost of the ingredients and other inputs.
>
> As youth determined potential prices for the treats, they offered answers eagerly. The instructor listened to participants' suggestions and elicited responses from those youth who were more reluctant to share the price they had calculated.

They also do the homework piece, and we really do that to help the parents. The parents need us to help the kids and get the homework completed because sometimes the parents cannot help their kids.

Beacon summer programs offered activities intended both to keep youth engaged and also to prepare youth for the upcoming school year. Many directors said that an important function of summer programming was to bridge the summer learning gap. Directors noted that, between the end of the academic year in the spring and the beginning of school in the fall, the youth they serve tend to lose ground educationally. Even though academics are not the primary focus of the summer programs, directors stressed their awareness of Beacons' role as a crucial support in the summer months.

Our goal is just to get them prepared for school. We collect report cards in the [beginning of the] summer. We tell their parents that their child will be getting help. We have two staff members who work with the school, and they came on board and they know the child. It's always good to have school staff on your own staff.

This year we have done more with middle school kids than before, with the journal-writing, reading, and math. We did half of that last summer. I don't think you should leave the academics alone all summer.

I think with summer camp you want the kids to have fun, to enjoy their summer. It's good, you know, to have the math and reading, that's important. We do progress reports at the end of the summer and during the year. At the same point you have to find that balance of having fun because, before you know it, they will be in school again.

One activity that was common across many Beacon summer programs was journal-writing. During these activities, youth wrote about topics of their choosing. The focus of journal-writing was to help youth develop a habit of writing regularly and with enjoyment.

For middle schoolers, we give them journal-writing instead of reading. They write about what they did or a topic that they chose. [In this activity] they have time to reflect on what they do throughout the summer.

A Beacon assistant director said that journal-writing was an opportunity to practice both writing skills and social skills.

Journal-writing is almost like conflict resolution. [It helps them] see a problem and then see a different way to handle the problem, to mediate better. Journal-writing is getting them to take the time to express themselves and to write their problems on paper. "It isn't a diary," is what we tell the guys, but it is taking the time to write out what you think on paper. You see that, if you can see your feelings on paper, you might see what those feelings are and think about a new way to present them.

Beacons sought youth input on programming by asking youth for informal feedback on programming and also through Beacon youth advisory councils. Directors said that they looked to youth to discern whether or not they enjoyed the programming being offered. Some said that they have comments boxes, while others said that their daily schedule includes time for reflection and discussion of the day's activities. Although directors said that the youth advisory councils are typically comprised of high school youth, some said that they have begun to integrate middle-grades youth into these groups, giving these youth a voice in guiding the Beacon.

Drama Activity

In this activity, nine youth used improvisation to act out scenarios provided by Beacons staff. As three staff members threw out scenarios, youth made quick decisions about who would act what part. They began acting the scene almost immediately.

Four youth volunteered for a skit in which one had to drive a car and the others were passengers with particular characteristics. While the four youth acted out the scenario, the youth who were not participating watched attentively alongside staff members and laughed uproariously as the members of the car scenario group played off each other's parts.

As soon as the car improvisation group hit its time limit, another small group formed to act out a scenario from *American Idol,* with judges, a host, and singers. Again, as students used improvisation to build off one another, both the audience of staff and youth as well as the actors themselves were unable to hold back their laughter.

While the mood was upbeat and the activity was noisy, youth stayed on task, with some gentle redirecting from staff when the group got too raucous. As the activity progressed through more scenarios, staff members reached out to individuals who were reluctant to participate and got them acting.

We have a Youth Advisory Council and an Adult Advisory Council, and we try to incorporate their ideas and suggestions, especially that the kids have. We have a schedule where every 45 minutes we have a new activity, [and] the kids help guide those activities. On Friday we have a more open schedule, and we have activities that the kids suggest: poetry, spoken word, discussion groups. The advisory councils meet four times a year. They meet separately, and then we bring them together as one.

We have a youth council. We ask for feedback, input and ask them things that they would like to see happen and that they would like to do. Middle school youth, they are at the level where they still need that guidance. We still need to facilitate, but we are giving them the opportunities. They are very good with that here. When we put on shows, performances, plays, the kids are the ones that are engaged in designing and writing it, and getting ownership of it.

Community Relationships and Partnerships

Beacons frequently reach out to families and the communities served by the Beacon. Since their inception, Beacon Centers have worked to serve their communities and to involve community members in Beacon activities. During the first year of the Middle School Initiative, 36 percent of Beacon Centers had either a volunteer or a paid staff member working as a parent liaison or outreach coordinator. When asked about their communication with the families of middle-grades participants, more than 90 percent of directors said that they either talk on the phone (94 percent) or meet in person (90 percent) with families at least once a month. In those Beacons that are located in schools that serve middle-grades youth, directors were more likely to have weekly telephone conversations with parents of these youth (72 percent), compared to the practices of Beacons located at schools that do not serve middle-grades youth (44 percent). This difference is statistically significant ($p<.05$ and $V=.25$). Roughly 40 percent of directors reported either holding scheduled meetings for parents or for family members at least once a month (43 percent and 40 percent, respectively). Beacon directors also reported that family members of participants often serve on the Centers' advisory councils.

While most directors said that they interact with the parents of participants on a regular basis, directors expressed a sense that the families of participants could be more engaged. In the director survey, about half of directors described the parents of Middle School Initiative participants as engaged in the Beacon at least to some extent. Eighty-four percent of directors said that involving the other 50 percent of families was a challenge. To involve more families in the Beacon, directors described their efforts to encourage adults to attend Beacon functions. In interviews, directors said that they hold activities for adults and encourage the families of Middle School Initiative participants to participate.

We have a very good Tae Bo class.[4] We have a bunch of parents who are involved in that. So they leave the kids here, and we provide childcare while they do their activity.

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[4] Tae Bo classes are fitness activities that mix elements of martial arts with aerobic exercise.

We have a GED and ESL program for adults. The parents of the children in the program attend the classes, so it is a single-stop shop for them.

As part of their program model, Beacon Centers convene external advisory councils that are comprised of representatives from around the community. Beacon directors said that, although the advisory councils change from year to year, they typically include parents, representatives from the host school, and other community members. They said that they looked to the advisory councils for guidance on how the Beacon can better serve the community. Some Beacon directors sought additional forms of input from the wider community as well. For example, a director distributed a survey to local businesses and homes, asking for their input on programming.

I network through the police precincts and fire stations. I did a community survey and printed out about 2,000 copies. My staff and I went out to buildings immediately surrounding the school and put a survey with postage under each door.

Beacons also connect with their host schools. Beacon Centers work with their host schools to negotiate everything from the use of space to the ways in which Beacon programming can support the school's instructional goals. As shown in Exhibit 8, three-quarters of Beacon directors said that they collaborated with school staff at least once a month regarding shared space. Beyond the logistics of using common space, Beacon directors also reported communicating with school staff about Beacon participants' academic and behavioral issues. Sixty percent of directors reported that they communicated with school staff regarding the needs or progress of individual students at least once a month. Directors also said that they speak with school staff at least once a month in order to stay aware of student assignments (57 percent), discipline policies (56 percent), and the school curriculum (51 percent). Beacon directors also reported that they help school staff to stay aware of the activities that are offered at the Beacon. Fifty-four percent of directors said that they speak with school staff about Beacon programming and activity content at least once a month.

While Beacon directors reported having frequent conversations with school staff, evaluation data also suggest that the Beacon Centers experienced challenges in their relationships with schools. Fifty-three percent of directors reported at least a minor challenge in the fact that the administration of their host school is not supportive of the Beacon. Fifty-eight percent of directors said that they experienced a challenge due to staff at Beacon participants' schools not responding to the Beacon's requests to coordinate services. These challenges did not vary based on the grade levels served by the Beacon host school.

Exhibit 8
Frequency of Communication between Beacon Directors and Host Schools,
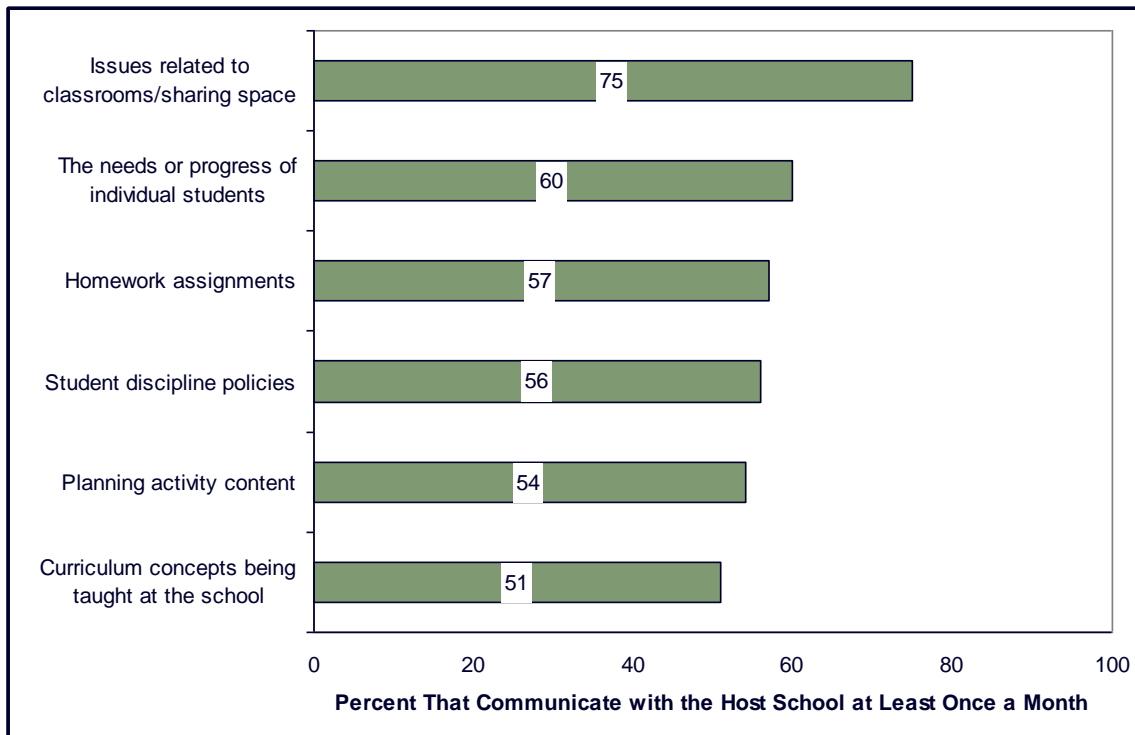**in Percents** *(N=70)*

Exhibit reads: 75 percent of Beacon directors report that they communicate with school staff at least once a month about issues related to classrooms and sharing space.

In those Beacon Centers where other youth programs are housed within the same school building, 79 percent of directors report that they coordinate with those programs. Among those 48 Beacons, 80 percent work with the other programs to manage program schedules. Three-quarters coordinate around recruiting youth, designing and selecting program activities, or assessing participant needs. Fifty-eight percent coordinate in recruiting and employing staff. Directors reported similar challenges and opportunities with coordinating recruitment and programming:

> *What we try to do is meet together before the school year, talk about what we're offering. We try to offer two different things, so once youth are done with the other program, they can come to our program. We keep it open so youth can go from one program to the next. It helps with our numbers.*

> *We have people [teachers] working at neighboring schools, so [they know the schedules of other programs] and we could mix-and-match the times. For example, if one school offered soccer until 4:30, the Beacon offered its soccer component at 5:30 so youth could do both.*

Program Staffing

According to the 2007 RFP, Beacon staff are required to meet New York State School Age Child Care requirements before being hired and are expected to attend 15 days of professional development each year. Beacon Centers may hire staff under the age of 18, but these staff may only work with middle-grades youth under the supervision of a staff member who is at least 18 years old.

Beacon Centers relied on staff and volunteers in varied roles to provide programming. Most Beacon Centers used a combination of small-group leaders, instructional specialists, and teenagers to staff activities. Overall, directors reported that their Centers averaged 30 staff members in total, with an average of 14 staff members working as part of the Middle School Initiative. Among Beacon staff and volunteers were a large number of younger adults and teens. Centers, on average, employed six college students and four teens. In addition to the teens who worked as paid staff, Beacons also involved an average of four teens who contributed to the Center as volunteers. Directors reported that the average Beacon staff member (not including the director) worked less than half-time (16 hours per week) at the Beacon; the number of hours worked ranged from 3 hours per week to 35 hours per week.

Beacon Centers located in schools that serve middle-grades youth were less likely to report that they had specialized staff who work only on the Middle School Initiative (57 percent) than were directors of Beacons located in schools that do not serve middle-grades youth (88 percent). The difference is statistically significant ($p<.05$, $V=.26$) and may reflect the fact that adopting the Middle School Initiative model requires fewer changes to programming by those Beacons that are located in middle schools, where Beacon staff are already in place to serve middle-grades youth.

Most directors who mentioned their struggle with funding said that paying for the staff necessary to run the program was a big part of the challenge. Many directors, however, said that they have been able to rely on a large reservoir of volunteers and youth Counselors in Training, in order to line up enough staff to run the program. Still, Beacon staff expressed concerns about their ability to hire all of the talented staff they need.

Many Beacon directors reported that they sought a staff made up of persons of different ages as a part of their staffing model. During the school year but especially over the summer, Beacon programs relied on teens to help staff programming for middle-grades youth. Beacon summer programs employed many Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) staff, in order, in part, to decrease participant to staff ratios. Operated by DYCD, SYEP provides summer employment to New York City youth between the ages of 14 and 21. Beacon Centers also operate training programs for participants who wish to transition into roles as Beacon staff members. Youth in these positions are sometimes referred to as Counselors in Training (CITs). CITs begin working with the Beacon as volunteers, with the goal of developing enough skills and experience to be hired in a paid position.

> *It is an interesting philosophy. He [director] brought in a more or less multi-age group of staff. Older staff, younger staff, most are former students who, after volunteering a*

number of times, become part of our staff. First, they were participants, then they became volunteers. It is clear that they really want to be part of this. Then, they eventually become paid staff. It's a growing process of community involvement. Some of them do come back.

You can't do a successful [program for] middle school kids without a high school program or the elementary program because they need the leadership experience, and middle school kids need to see where they are going.

Beacon directors said that, while younger staff members can provide the Beacon with affordable youth workers, their presence on staff sometimes presents challenges. The fact that young staff are so close in age to participants means that they need more guidance on how to conduct themselves in a professional way. Directors agreed, however, that overall there is a great benefit to having staff who are close in age to participants, because these younger staff members are able to relate to participants and give youth near-peer role models.

There is a thin line between staff and kid and friend. Beacon staff are young, so we try to send them to training to learn. Sometimes they cross that line, but it's a work in progress. Being closer in age is an asset. It's natural for college kids because of the hours. They have more in common with current events and music with kids. They are in school and are role models. We have staff that were in the Beacon when [they were] younger, [they] go to school, and then come back.

In the words of one youth participant: *I like our CITs because, when we're in the classroom, they don't choose the side of one of the kids. They share their love with everyone. They are like our parents in a good way. The group leaders talk to us. When our group leader left last year, we cried. We got really close to him.*

Centers look to hire staff, when possible, who have a history with the Beacon model. Beacon directors frequently spoke of staff who have "grown up" at the Beacon. These participants often began attending programming at the Beacon as young children, served as a volunteer or CIT, and then went to work at the Beacon in a paid position as they moved into young adulthood. While Beacon directors were eager to hire staff with Beacon experience, they also hired staff who come into the Beacon without any history with the Beacon because these new hires had the skills and competencies needed for the position.

[I tend] to hire as senior staff group leaders that are college students, who have been in the program longer and understand the mission and values of the agency. We help new people get that understanding if they don't have it. Look for people with some leadership experience no matter what type of program it was.

Beacon Centers employed staff who could help youth learn specific skills. For middle-grades programming, directors reported that it was important to hire staff with the necessary academic, artistic, and athletic skills. When asked about hiring staff for the Middle School Initiative, many directors said that they looked for staff who would be able to help youth learn new skills.

If we have somebody who can really teach them, some kids are not good in basketball, if we have a teacher who is skilled in those activities they can learn from them. There are two different ways you can do an activity, one is just to play and the other is to learn the skills. Giving them skills, teaching the skills to them would be better than just playing. Last year there was a teacher for tennis, some person who is a professional singer does the chorus with the children this year, and they are very good.

Directors took varied approaches to supporting academic learning. Sixty-one percent of Beacon directors said that their Beacon employs a master teacher or education specialist as a part- or full-time staff member. In interviews, some directors said they believed that youth would benefit from having middle school teachers leading academic activities. Beacon directors said that, while certified teachers are expensive for the program to hire, they provide valuable help with homework and academic activities.

I mostly try to use teachers in the after-school program. A lot of teachers are looking for work after school to make extra money. I have a good rapport with the teachers here. They work with all ages of kids… you know which staff is good working with different age groups.

Some directors said they believed that college students' closeness in age to participants was an asset in helping youth with the content of their homework assignments.

One reason that the college kids are good for the middle school kids is that they are closer in age and also because they know the curriculum that is being covered in school more than adults do.

In surveys, Beacon directors were asked to report on the roles played by various types of staff members working in their programs. As shown in Exhibit 9, college students were responsible for a range of roles, including assisting with academic activities (86 percent of Beacons) and tutoring youth (84 percent). Certified teachers employed by the Beacon Centers were most likely to be leading academic activities (73 percent) and tutoring youth (71 percent). In contrast, teen staff were most likely to be assigned to assist with non-academic activities (72 percent), and specialists to be leading non-academic activities (90 percent).

Exhibit 9
Distribution of Staff Roles by Staffing Category, in Percents *(N=70)*

Staff Categories	Tutor Youth	Lead Academic Activities	Lead Other Types of Activities (Arts, Sports)	Assist with Academic Activities	Assist with Other Types of Activities
College students	84	70	67	86	83
Certified teachers	71	73	42	65	42
Teen staff	62	33	37	60	72
Specialists	32	40	90	40	74

Exhibit reads: Eighty-four percent of Beacon directors reported that staff who are college students are responsible for tutoring youth. 70 percent of Beacon directors reported that staff who are college students spend at least some of their time leading academic activities.

Beacon directors hire staff who have strong interpersonal skills and enthusiasm for their work. Some directors said that, as long as the staff members are versatile enough to teach multiple activities, the most important trait they look for when hiring is an enthusiastic and positive attitude toward youth and toward the Beacon overall.

> *It's not so much the program but the staff. They enjoy [it] and they're passionate. We could have a great program but, if the staff is not enthusiastic, the kids will not show up. We could do underwater basket weaving with a great staff, and it would be packed.*

> *The staff who do art are very silly, they get the kids to try new things, they will not let them just sit there and do nothing, like even if they do not like it just try it, the kids start having fun, and they do not realize how much fun they are having.*

Directors expressed major challenges in attracting and compensating qualified staff. While Beacon directors spoke highly of the staff in place to lead Middle School Initiative activities, they also emphasized that finding and hiring high-quality staff and volunteers can be difficult. Among the staffing challenges that directors reported facing, an inability to offer potential staff members competitive salaries was perhaps the biggest problem; more than two-thirds of Beacon directors reported that this was a major challenge in their work, as shown in Exhibit 10. Similarly, half of all directors reported that not being able to offer enough hours of paid employment to prospective staff members was a major challenge in their work.

> *Staffing is a challenge. How are we going to spend that money? We want to do great huge things for the community and kids, but it forces you to get low-quality staff. I think this does a disservice to [the] community and children. Then having all the expectations met and keeping the children interested... we can't afford quality staff that children will engage with.*

Beacon directors also reported that simply finding qualified potential volunteers and staff members was a challenge. Among directors, 44 percent and 27 percent, respectively, said these were major challenges.

Exhibit 10
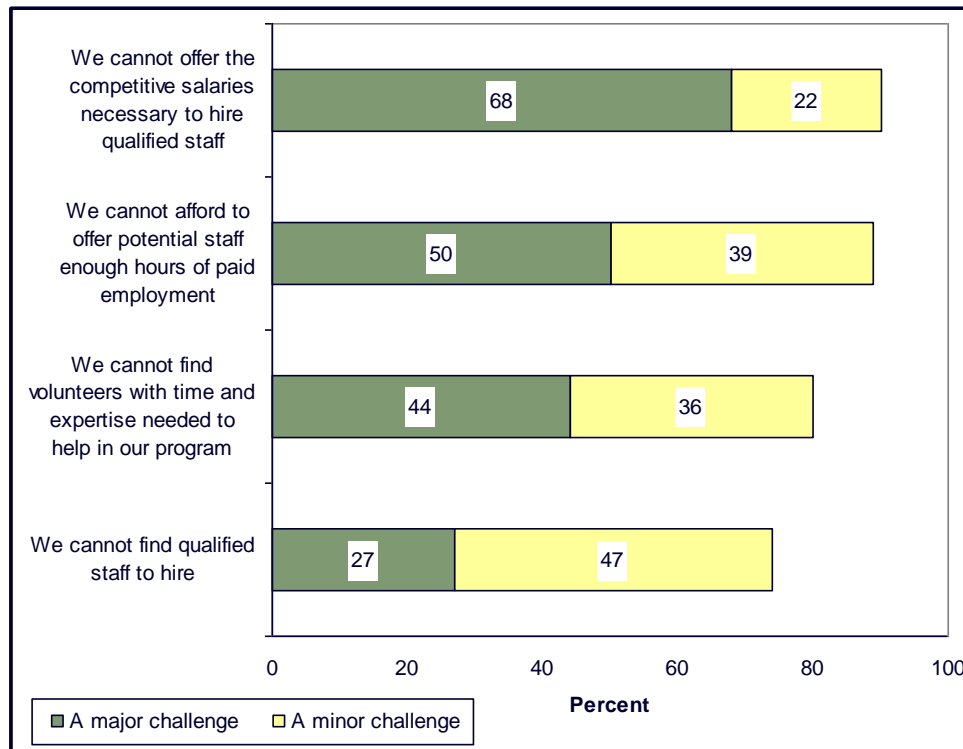**Staffing Challenges, in Percents** *(N=70)*

Exhibit reads: Sixty-eight percent of Beacon directors reported that not being able to offer the competitive salaries necessary to hire qualified staff was a major challenge.

Training and professional development are important in efforts to improve program quality. Beacon Centers worked to build staff skills and support their work with youth as part of the Middle School Initiative. Eighty-two percent of Beacon directors reported that they personally trained staff members on a variety of topics. Directors also reported that they structured staff members' work with youth by reviewing lesson plans (88 percent) or, less frequently, providing staff with externally developed curricula (28 percent).

When asked about staff training, 87 percent of directors said that they sent their staff to trainings offered by the Partnership for After School Education (PASE). Seventy percent of directors said that they sent staff to trainings provided by their own provider organization. Directors reported that staff most frequently received training on behavior and classroom management (83 percent), using developmentally appropriate practices (73 percent), and maintaining a healthy and safe environment (70 percent). Many directors noted that, when their staff attend training sessions, they often come back and share what they have learned with their colleagues.

We do trainings including CPR, working with hard to place kids/kids with problems, making math and English more fun and exciting. Sometimes I get lucky they [staff] go to fabulous training, and they come back and make a presentation to the rest of the staff.

Directors reported that they personally received training on program development and management (86 percent), maintaining a safe and healthy environment (69 percent), and delivering academics and enrichment (67 percent).

Overall, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of directors of Beacons that are operated by a provider that manages only one Beacon reported that limited professional development opportunities presented a minor or major challenge. In contrast, only 35 percent of directors of Beacons operated by a provider that manages multiple Beacons reported that limited professional development opportunities presented a challenge. This difference is statistically significant ($p<.05$, $V=.26$) and may reflect the fact that provider organizations that run multiple Beacons may have access to a larger network of resources that can be employed to support each Center.

In terms of the types of support that would most benefit their Beacon, each director expressed different needs for future professional and technical support. There were requests for longer and more structured workshops as well as more training opportunities for directors. Some directors also requested specific technical support workshops and professional development such as training in using data, program budgeting, and parent-staff communication. Some directors also said that they would like more training in using DYCD Online.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this report suggests that, in the first year of implementation of the Middle School Initiative, Beacon Centers were successful in shifting their scope of services to focus on programming for youth in grades 5-8. Findings from the first year of the evaluation illustrate the successes in the first year of the Middle School Initiative but also suggest ways to improve the initiative's effectiveness.

As Beacon Centers adapted their programming to implement the Middle School Initiative, resources were redirected to support the initiative's activity and data requirements. Data collected during the first year suggest that the Beacon Centers made substantial shifts in their programming as a result of the Middle School Initiative and requirements to implement attendance tracking. In particular, the addition of an intensive, structured component to a broad, inclusive program model had major implications for Beacon operations, especially in terms of the amount of staff resources that Beacon Centers needed to direct to middle-grades youth.

Providing programming for both the Middle School Initiative and for the other populations traditionally served by Beacons presented a challenge for most Centers. In order to manage the program demands, many Beacon directors reported that activities that were not expressly dedicated to middle-grades youth were offered at reduced levels.

During this first year of the Middle School Initiative, Beacon Centers served almost 15,000 middle-grades youth and more than 31,000 participants of other ages. During summer 2008, Beacon Centers served more than 7,000 middle-grades youth and an additional 9,000 participants of other ages. The average Beacon enrolled a mean of 182 middle-grades participants during the 2007-08 school year and a mean of 93 middle-grades participants during summer 2008. While it is not possible to compare these enrollment data to those of past years because data were not uniformly collected in previous years, all Beacon directors reported that their Beacon is serving many more middle-grades youth than in previous years.

Beacon Centers used their long-standing reputation as community resources for youth to recruit participants for the Middle School Initiative. Beacon directors drew on their existing pool of participants to recruit these youth and actively sought additional participants from the surrounding community. Beacon directors collaborated with staff from area middle schools, community members, and their provider organizations to recruit youth in grades 5-8. Beacon Centers that encountered difficulty recruiting middle grades youth tended to be those housed in schools that did not serve middle-grades youth. While qualitative data sources suggest that Beacon Centers housed in schools that offer competing after-school programs had trouble recruiting youth, DYCD Online data show that these Beacons enrolled large numbers of middle-grades youth.

The requirements of summer programming in the Middle School Initiative were unclear to some Beacons. Site visit and DYCD Online data confirm that there was confusion in some instances with regard to how summer programming fit into the landscape of the Middle School Initiative. DYCD Online data confirmed that only a quarter of Beacon Centers offered programming in all six core programming areas over the summer. Many Beacon directors and staff members reported that they were not sure whether their Beacon was required to offer programming in all six core areas over the summer.

Recommendations

Based on findings from the first year of the evaluation of the Middle School Initiative, the evaluators recommend that DYCD provide the following guidance and clarification to the Beacon Centers and their communities, in order to facilitate implementation of the Middle School Initiative and to improve the initiative's effectiveness:

- ■ Guidance on how Beacon Centers should balance increases in programming for middle-grades participants with reductions in other programming

- ■ Removal of the requirement that Beacon Centers assign targeted or non-targeted status to individual middle-grades participants

  Instead, evaluators suggest that DYCD and Beacon Centers examine overall participation in structured activities in the six core areas as a measure of middle-grades participants' engagement with the initiative. Beacon Centers are already capturing rich details about participant engagement in Beacon activities in DYCD

Online. Focusing program resources on keeping attendance data up-to-date and accurate would be a better use of Beacon staff efforts than the assignment and reassignment of targeted and non-targeted status flags, as is currently the case.

■ Provide further guidance to Beacon directors regarding how targeted hours should be counted

In particular, DYCD should correct a misunderstanding among some Beacon directors that they may not serve middle-grades participants for more than 216 hours in a program year.

■ Clarification on whether Beacons should offer programming in the six core areas during the summer

■ Encouragement and incentives, if needed, to improve Beacon Centers' reporting in DYCD Online on evaluation consent and school attended

Analyses for this report revealed that Beacon Centers generally achieved a high level of success in using the DYCD Online data system to capture demographic information about participants, their participation levels, and their program activities. However, certain fields of importance to the initiative and the evaluation are characterized by large amounts of missing data.

■ To participate in the evaluation of the Middle School Initiative, youth participants must have *active parental consent*. Beacon Centers are responsible for collecting parent consent forms, and DYCD Online includes a field to indicate whether a participant has parental consent for evaluation. In the first year of the Middle School Initiative, evaluation consent was not collected for 25 percent of middle-grades participants. (Among middle-grades participants for whom consent was collected, parents or guardians gave evaluation consent for 82 percent of participants and denied consent for 18 percent.) Ensuring that consent information is collected from the missing 25 percent of participants would increase the representativeness of survey data.

■ To measure educational outcomes of the Beacon Middle School Initiative, evaluators will link participants' DYCD Online data with their educational records from DOE databases. Two important indicators facilitate that process: information about *the public school attended and the student's unique DOE identifier* (known as the OSIS number). Although most participants have the name of their school entered into DYCD Online, the manner in which school names are entered is inconsistent, rendering these data only marginally useful. If data entry for school names were streamlined, perhaps by using a drop-down menu from which Beacons can select participants' home schools from a short list, it would be easier to determine where Beacon participants are enrolled in school and to identify

any associated trends. The database is also missing OSIS numbers, which are needed to link Beacon participants' DOE information.

Finally, evaluators recommend that DYCD review the question of whether Beacon Centers should be co-located with OST programs, especially those serving middle-grades youth. First-year data indicated tensions in recruitment of middle-grades students into co-located Beacons and OST programs, although it was not clear from the evaluation data whether that tension was on balance a negative or a positive, in terms of increasing and improving youth-development opportunities for middle-grades youth who need the services that Beacon Centers and OST programs provide.

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