A NEW DAY FOR YOUTH:

Creating Sustainable Quality in Out-of-School Time

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I. Quality Programs in Out of School Time

Recently, I went to visit afterschool and summer programs across the country, observing programs from Boston to Kansas City to San Francisco. I always enjoy spending time talking to staff and students, watching the activities and assessing the various forms of learning. I always leave enriched as well as in awe of the great commitment of staff serving children and youth with few resources and little support. Against many odds, programs thrive and kids engage in productive relationships with each other and mentoring adults. Yet, along with a sense of exhilaration and hope, I typically experience feelings of realism and frustration: I find myself thinking about the level programs could reach if they had a well-compensated and long-term workforce, if there were more training and technical assistance available, and if evidence would play a larger role in programming. What I typically see are programs that are quite mixed; fortunately they now tend to be "mixed positive," as compared to ten years ago.

But what lens do I use when I make these assessments about quality? This is a good place to start this paper as we all ask ourselves what quality of programs we want to systematically replicate and sustain in cities, suburbs, and rural areas across the country. As I reflect on this question, I realize that I instinctively focus on three main questions: Are the kids engaged in intentional learning experiences that provide choice, fun, and depth? Are the adults available, organized, knowledgeable, and caring? And are the procedures and rituals clear and leadership supportive of staff and children? Obviously, when I can answer of all these questions positively, I have encountered ideal conditions, which we know are extremely rare. Interestingly, the impressions from even short visits to programs correspond with much of the growing research in the area of quality

programs and positive outcomes for youth. I have also found that visitors, evaluators, and specialists tend to agree when they witness an exemplary program. In fact, the informal "inter-rater reliability" of groups of visitors to programs is often very high both for exceptional and mediocre programs.

While research on OST (out of school time) and afterschool is still a young field of study, there is growing evidence that participation in afterschool programs can result in positive outcomes in youth (Schwartz & Noam, 2007). These outcomes can include academic learning, social-emotional learning, changes in behavior, and increased interest and engagement in learning. Yet not all programs achieve such positive outcomes. A report based on a ten year study of 120 youth programs states, "Most of the effective organizations in this study are overflowing, with waiting lists of eager youth...However, in these same communities, other youth organizations go empty and resources unused because young people assess their programs as uninspired and their settings impersonal. They head instead for the streets or empty homes. Youth will not migrate to just any organization" (McLaughlin, 2000). More studies are beginning to distinguish between the quality of different OST and afterschool programs and finding that positive outcomes are associated with regular attendance, not of just any OST program, but of *high-quality* OST programs (McLaughlin, 2000; Vandell & Reisner, 2007).

So what elements need to be in place to create a "high-quality" OST program? Until relatively recently, little research existed on best practices in afterschool and OST programs. In the past decade, however, as a result of the increased assessment of programs as well as the need for programs to demonstrate their effectiveness in order to receive funding, the field has begun to produce research on best practices in afterschool

and OST programs. The research in this field of study is still relatively weak, particularly in terms of methodology, but it represents the first steps in identifying key elements in high-quality OST programs. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the data is correlational as opposed to proving a cause and effect relationship.

Currently, the research on best practices in afterschool and OST programs can be divided into three categories: (1) meta-analyses of studies from the field that examine a broad spectrum of afterschool programs (2) studies that identify commonalities between high-performing programs and (3) research based on theory and expert opinion. We will briefly review the existing literature on best practices in afterschool and OST programs from all three types of research.

In describing features of positive developmental settings for youth, Eccles & Gootman (2003) include: physical and psychological safety; appropriate structure; supportive relationships; a sense of belonging, mattering, and efficacy; positive social norms; opportunities for skill-building; integration of family, school, and community. These conclusions are based on theories of positive youth development and empirical research on youth experience in a variety of settings.

A report conducted by the RAND Corporation (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005), acknowledging that data pertaining to quality in OST programs is extremely limited, borrowed from the literature of youth development, school-age care, and education. Based on a combination of meta-analyses of empirical evidence as well as expert opinion, the report described the following as characteristics of high quality programs: a clear mission; high expectations and positive social norms; a safe and healthy environment; a supportive emotional climate; a small total enrollment; stable, trained personnel;

appropriate content and pedagogy with opportunities to engage; integrated family and community partners; frequent assessment. A report commissioned by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (Miller, 2003) also created a list summarizing features of high quality programs based on literature from the field. She included all of the characteristics mentioned in the RAND report and as well as adding some additional characteristics including: adequate funding; appropriate space; the inclusion of youth voice; opportunity for choice in activities; staff who understand participants' cultures and can support healthy identity development; strong management and leadership.

In a study solely examining high-performing programs (as measured by academic outcomes), Reisner, White, Russell & Birmingham (2004) and Birmingham, Pechman, Russell & Mielke (2005) linked the following characteristics to positive academic outcomes: staff quality as measured by staff education level, certification, and training; intentional, high intensity academic/cognitive activities and high intensity sports activities; intentional relationship building; broad variety of enriching activities; strong leadership.

As mentioned earlier, McLaughlin (2000) studied 120 programs over the course of ten years and looked for commonalities across effective programs. In defining effective programs, she considered positive academic outcomes as well as positive youth development outcomes (such as increased self-confidence or sense of civic responsibility). Although the programs achieving positive youth outcomes varied in many ways (such as type of program, location, and activities), McLaughlin found a few critical elements that unified the most successful programs. First and foremost, she described all of these effective programs as "intentional learning environments," that is,

programs that were not content merely with keeping kids of the street, but that were deliberate in their efforts to create opportunities for learning and growth. She also observed that the most effective programs were youth-centered (built around youths' strengths and involving youth voice), knowledge-centered (high-quality instruction, challenging content, and activities with a clear focus on learning), and safe, caring communities with strong relationships providing youth with social capital through relational resources and connections. In addition, she found that effective programs were assessment-centered, not by using traditional tests, but by providing constant oral feedback and recognition as well as authentic culminating events and public displays.

One meta-analysis of almost 200 evaluations of afterschool programs examined how elements in program implementation and the daily experiences of youth in programs correlated with positive learning outcomes (Honig & McDonald, 2005). The authors found that programs that encouraged group engagement tended to be more effective (in terms of youth learning) than those in which youth worked individually. Their findings also supported practices including: youth participation in authentic and meaningful work; the inclusion of skilled and accessible mentors; building a strong, valued identity within a program.

A recent report conducted by Vandell et al. (2006) examined the effects of "promising afterschool programs." They identified promising programs by observing the following "key process features": supportive relations with staff; supportive relations with peers; student engagement; appropriate structure; opportunities for cognitive growth; mastery orientation; chaos; over-control. When they conducted their evaluation,

they found that programs that met their criteria for "promising programs" were associated with positive outcomes in youth who regularly attended them.

In a more focused study of afterschool programs in Massachusetts, the United Way of Massachusetts solicited a report studying "what counts" in afterschool programs (Miller, 2005). They found that youth engagement in programs, staff engagement with youth, and communication with families were correlated with positive youth outcomes (as measured by a tool that assesses academic outcomes as well as youth development outcomes). They also found that education background of staff and director, staff turnover, and communication with school personnel were linked to positive youth outcomes. Notably, they found that where a program was located (i.e. community-based versus in schools) did not influence program quality.

Although there are a growing number of studies documenting variables that appear to be associated with positive youth outcomes, there is still a need not only for more rigorous empirical data, but, more specifically, for research examining the differential importance of these variables. Currently we have a composite picture of elements that are associated with high-quality programs, but is it possible to separate these variables? Are there some variables that are more important than others? Where should efforts and funds be focused when working with limited resources? These are questions that have yet to be answered in any decisive manner through empirical research.

Yet we have made a great deal of progress in the last decade, in part jolted by the negative findings of the Mathematica study that prematurely analyzed afterschool programs in a start-up phase (Dynarski et al., 2003). Although there remains a need for

more rigorous empirical evidence about what are the most important elements necessary to create high quality afterschool and OST programs, already, we can start seeing trends in characteristics that distinguish high-quality afterschool programs. Almost all of the studies concur on the importance of certain elements including: safety; staff training; relationship between staff and youth; intentional, developmentally appropriate, and authentic learning; strong leadership.

A framework to approaching quality OST programming:

In this report, I attempt to address the question: "What do nonprofit OST organizations need to make and sustain necessary improvements to provide high quality programs?" Unfortunately, there is no research that we can build upon that shows that there is one essential missing ingredient that can transform OST programs. Instead, at the Program in Education, Afterschool, and Resiliency (PEAR), at Harvard University and McLean Hospital, we developed a framework with three sides of a triangle to organize the growing number of lists created by various studies of quality features in OST programs. Through this framework, we see that there are some elements that cut across the various studies, despite the fact that different studies employed different data-gathering strategies and are grounded in different theories and methods. Our goal was not to include every variable, but to focus on the variables that were strongly recurring. In fact, we found that the majority of features found to be associated with high quality programs fit in three general areas. We arrange these three areas in a triangle framework to indicate the need to address all three sides of the triangle to create high quality OST

programming. We refer to this as the "Quality Triangle," portrayed in the following

image.
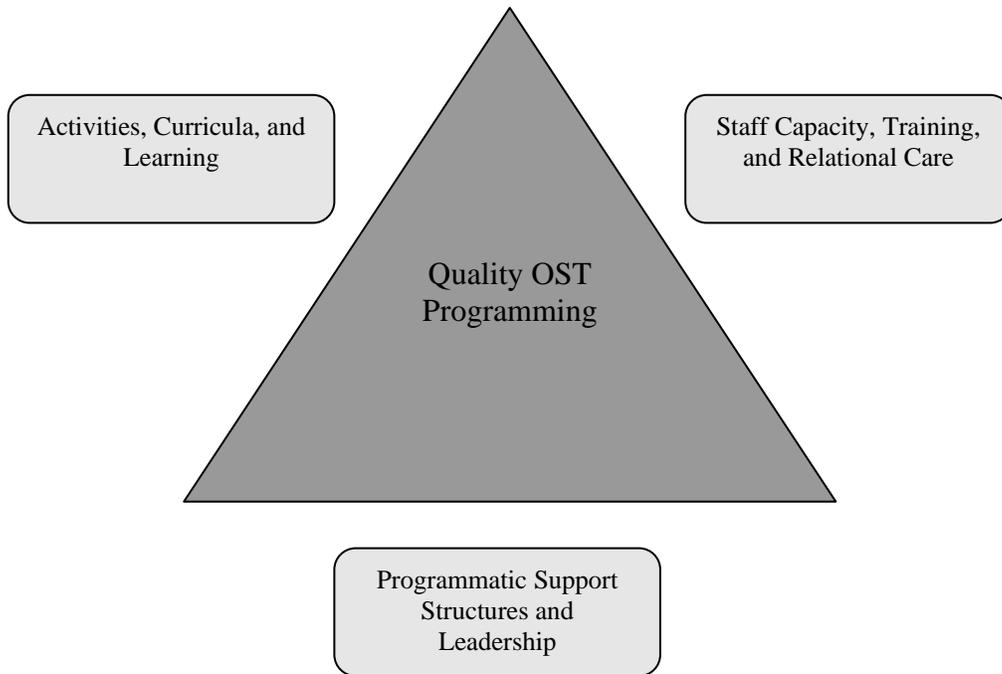
In Table 1 (below), we synthesize the literature on quality OST programs by

organizing the features associated with high-quality programs into our framework.

Table 1. Features of Quality OST Programming (based on the literature of quality OST programs)

	Features/Variables				
Activities, Curricula, and Learning	Intentional learning; structured opportunities for skill-building	Engaging and developmentally-appropriate curricula and materials	Authentic, relevant, and meaningful activities	Group engagement; belonging; strong valued identity	Variety of activities; choice; youth voice
Staff Capacity and Training, and Relational Care	Staff retention	Engagement and relationship with youth	Community climate and psychological well-being	Youth-to-adult ratios	Education level and training
Programmatic	Management	Participant	Integration of	Clear goals	Professional

	Features/Variables				
Support Structures and Leadership	(sustainable funding, space, safety, certification, transportation, attendance tracking etc.)	recruitment and retention strategies	family, school, and community efforts	and mission; strong leadership; sufficient structure	development and professional climate

II. Besides the Typical Problems: New Threats to Establishing Quality OST Systems

Although there is still a need for more specific research on what are the most important factors in establishing quality OST programs, we already know a great deal about what quality programs look like. So what is standing in the way of achieving quality among all OST programs?

There are a number of well-known obstacles. The field lacks sustainable sources of funding. As a result, in many programs staff are underpaid and staff turnover is high, education level among staff and directors is low, quality materials are scarce, and space is shared. Additionally, the field has not yet developed into a viable *profession*, and lacks standards, training, and career possibilities. In order to have stronger leadership and staff in OST programs, both of which are essential components of quality programs, it is critical that we address issues of compensation and career viability.

Yet in addition to these often-discussed barriers to establishing quality OST systems, there are also some interesting new obstacles that are arising as the field becomes more mature and, ironically, more professional. Over the past decade, we have asked for more organization, professionalization, and standards for the OST field. In order to reach a status that approaches that of teachers and social workers, as well as to procure funding to make a career in OST possible for more people, a clear system has to

be in place. For this to happen, some set of intermediary organizations, such as school districts or municipal or state agencies, have to claim this space and oversee it to ensure that it is up to standard. With this claim comes more secure funding, but also regulations and directives.

We are now at the cusp of what was hoped for: a societal recognition that afterschool and summer programming are here to stay and that they play an important role to play in children and youth's lives. Such programming more realistically aligns the work hours of parents to the school and programming hours of kids. There is bi-partisan support for OST programs at the federal and state level as well as intense interest and financial support from foundations. Yet no one pays long-term for this extensive social experiment without laying claim on the content and structure of this time. And the very nature of informality and exploration can become endangered as structure and standards are imposed.

There exists a tension in the field that must be carefully navigated. With sustainability and infrastructure, which the field sorely needs, come regulations and standards. Although it is not good for children to be in programs with too little structure and verifiable standards, it is also not good for them to be in overregulated, bureaucratized environments. The latter is particularly true since OST is often one of the few environments that can make space for youth initiative. In addition, OST and afterschool programs' important role as an "intermediary space" existing between schools and communities (see Noam, Biancarosa & Dechausay, 2003) can be threatened as OST is claimed by one organization or institution.

One example of such as threat is the movement toward extended day schools. Although extended day supports the sustainability of OST programs, it is dangerous because it places OST funding, and therefore OST programming, under the control of schools. OST and afterschool programs are then at risk of becoming merely an extension of school instead of a unique intermediary space that can help to bridge schools and communities. There is no way to address this issue without addressing the funding streams. For an in-depth discussion of the issue of extended day and youth development OST programs, refer to the PEAR Webinar at www.pearweb.org/webinars.

The professionalization of the OST field can function as double-edged sword as well. It can lead to greater staff retention and a better-educated and better-trained staff, all of which are clearly needed. But professionalization also can bar nontraditional workers from the field, such as young people who have not yet chosen a career path or community members who can relate well to the participants but may not have the educational requirements for a more professionalized field.

To address these new threats to the field, we believe a two-pronged approach is necessary. It is important to create structure while allowing flexibility—that is, the two sides of any resilient system. There is a need for funding and incentives to create standards for quality and to provide the support to achieve such standards. At the same time, it is important to protect the intermediary space so OST programs can be welcoming environments for families and community members to work in or to visit. It is also essential to retain in the OST field its role as a creative, experimental learning ground that attracts social entrepreneurs and can interact with public education without becoming an extension of it.

III. How can funders contribute to the creation of quality OST programs?

We have discussed the literature of quality OST programs. We have also discussed dangers to achieving the ideal of sustainable programs. We will now discuss additional roles funders could play in creating quality OST programs and influencing priorities, policies, and practices across the country. This task of providing advice is not simple, as there are so many intangibles, commitments, and political agendas. Any strategic advice-giving can easily be perceived as naïve. The field of quality research is far less crowded than that of advisors to foundations who want to suggest new directions. To protect from those perceptions, I will focus on possible, not definitive, strategies. These recommendations stem from a mixture of the research findings discussed in this paper as well as my own experiences in the field of practice, training and teaching, policy activities, and advising to state and national governments, local municipalities and foundations that began in the 1990's and continues to this day.

Most everyone who has some knowledge of the OST field agrees that there is no sustainability for the field without addressing the issue of compensation and creating a viable career path. Without higher compensation and benefits, there will be no end to high staff turnover and low staff education and training. To create a sustainable, quality field, it will be necessary to increase salaries for full-time jobs and tie this increase to training. The field needs to create a career path where staff can move on a job ladder, where each step comes with increased experience and education and leads to increased compensation. This is clearly one area where funders can play a role. But it would go far beyond the capacity of most private foundations to fix this problem. A large part of this funding will have to come from the public and governmental sector, but foundations can

play a role in highlighting the urgency of this issue. We know from other sectors that salary and job security alone do not guarantee quality systems and that other elements have to be addressed as well. I believe, however, that quality initiatives must be tied to financial and time incentives among staff so as not to burden an already overtaxed system further and to assure buy-in at all levels.

The Quality Triangle, in conjunction with the productive, though by no means conclusive, research can help organize a strategic perspective. As mentioned earlier, the research is not yet at a point where it can point to a few recurrent variables and state that they are more important than others, though we hope the field will soon produce such research.   But we still have to make decisions about which of the elements in the Quality Triangle and the long list of features described in Table 1 hold the greatest promise to transform and sustain the system. It is thus not only the research that drives us here, but also a framework and a theory of change. All policy decisions should be evidence-based, but evidence alone will never ensure the correct strategic decisions. The interpretation of data, along with in-depth theory, will always be essential in making far-reaching decisions.

In our recommendations, we are working from three presuppositions:

1. Quality in OST programs is encompassed by the three sides of the Quality Triangle, and thus a one-sided approach will not impact the field sufficiently. It is necessary to address quality from all three sides—Activities, Curricula, and Learning; Staff Capacity and Training; Programmatic Support Structures—so one can count on a three-way interaction effect.

2. There are many features one can choose from for each side of the triangle, but our experience has shown us that three of these features are centrally important for many reasons that we will explore later: *leadership, relationships, and intentional learning.* From our perspective, these are essential ingredients of quality. They are elements that recur in almost all of the research on quality OST programs. Moreover, *relationship* and *learning* have long held a place as central tenets of OST programming.

3. A systemic approach to all sides of the Quality Triangle is necessary—not only in areas such as fiscal stability and management, but also in areas such as staff relationships with youth and intentional learning. Although some might argue that realms such as relationships and learning must be approached at the individual level, I believe that if we hope to achieve quality OST programs at the city-wide and national level, we must create system-wide supports that "lift all boats."

We will now address each side of the Quality Triangle by suggesting a possible venue of change for each side, ensuring that all recommendations are practical, can be quickly put in place, can be carefully evaluated, and tie in to the essential issues of funding and creating a career ladder.

A. Leadership
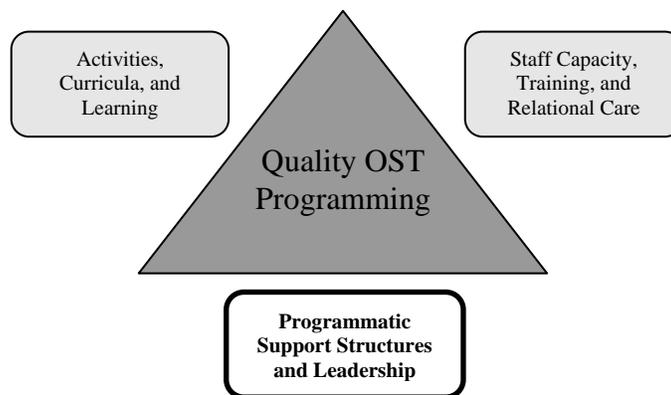
The first area we will address is leadership, which falls within the category of programmatic support structures. There is an increasing recognition of the need for leadership and management training in nonprofit and public sector organizations (e.g. Paton & Mordaunt, 2001; Nutt & Backoff, 1996). By investing in OST leaders, funders can amplify the effects of their investments since the leadership plays a significant role in determining the rest of the programmatic support structures—including quality of management, mission, availability of professional development/professional climate, recruitment and retention strategies, and integration of family, school, and community efforts. Moreover, strong leadership is the best way to ensure a resilient system that can balance the need for structure and flexibility at a time when the field is going through significant transition.

Leadership training certification already exists in some states, and leadership meetings occur in some cities. But I recommend taking this further by making a major push to ensure that the nonprofit management knowledge developed at universities, think

tanks, and by master practitioners reaches many cohorts in the OST field. The rationale is simple: those OST programs that are thriving typically have a committed, mission-driven leader who not only has strong youth development skills, but also strong managerial skills. But too many afterschool programs lack such a person at the helm.

We need to create a pipeline for leaders in OST to enter programs in business schools, public administration schools, and other university settings. One effective model is an intensive summer institute, similar to the ones that business schools offer for business executives. These institutes could cover skills including financial and administrative management, grant-writing, budgeting, leadership styles, mission development, staff supervision, and much more. In addition to focusing on internal management skills, programs could also address the larger issues facing the field including understanding the needs of communities and the infrastructure and advocacy work necessary to build the field (Mirabella & Wish, 2000).

To reinforce and solidify learning from the summer institutes, we recommend that leaders continue to meet periodically throughout the year in cohorts. Participation in these cohorts would come with some form of coaching to ensure the implementation of what has been learned in the real setting of programs (or clusters of programs). Moreover, if OST leaders focus not only on running their own individual programs, but also on becoming coalition leaders who are involved in the larger system, this will lead to further professionalization of the field, more sustainability, and opportunities for OST leaders to exchange and advance ideas about best practices in the field. Such a training system would greatly increase the number of OST programs with skilled leaders who can implement high-quality programming, as well as well as further the professionalization

and sustainability of the field. Participation in these training programs would result in university credits when desired and a certificate at the end. In addition to providing OST leaders with essential management skills, this type of training could have the extra benefit of raising the status of the work that leaders in the OST field are doing.

To support OST leadership, funders can work with universities to support summer institutes for OST leaders. They can provide financial incentives for leaders to participate in such training and cohorts by dedicating a small part of program directors' salaries to participation in leadership cohorts and thereby guaranteeing that leaders will take part in this field-building work. They can also help by supporting city-wide initiatives to create leadership cohorts and teams. Such investment in developing the leadership in the OST field can have significant effects on quality and sustainability of the field.

We make this recommendation with the caveat, however, that such training programs should only be established if funders are willing to invest a significant amount in the endeavor. It is not enough to have leaders attend a few workshops and to provide them with a certificate at the end. Instead, we recommend establishing collaborations with business schools that already possess great expertise in leadership training, as well as working with OST programs to identify the specific skills OST leaders need. This would allow leaders in the field to gain the training and support they need to execute the challenging job not only of running individual programs but also of building a field.

B. Staff Relationships with Youth
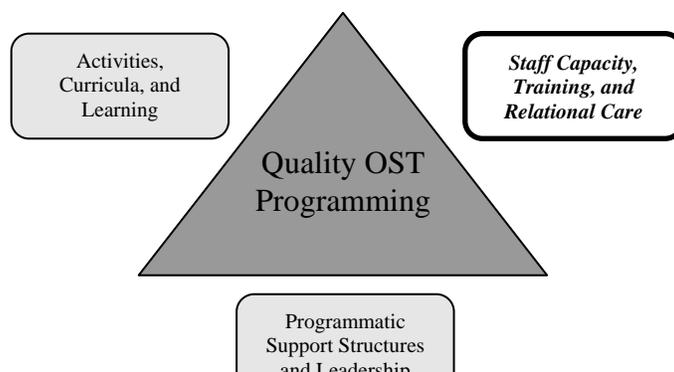
The second area where I recommend funders direct their support is in the area of relationship-building in OST programs. Practically all of the literature on quality OST programs points to the need for strong, supportive relationships within programs (Birmingham et al., 2005; Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2003; Honig & McDonald, 2005; McLaughlin, 2000; Miller, 2003; Reisner et al., 2003; Vandell et al,, 2006). Moreover, there already exists a significant amount of research linking involvement in mentoring relationships and positive developmental outcomes (see Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). An evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program showed that participants in the mentoring program were less likely to start using drugs and alcohol or to hit someone, and they showed improved school attendance and performance and improved peer and family relationships (Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995). While this type of data has not yet been gathered about the effects of mentoring relationships within the OST context, it is clear that OST offers a unique setting for adults to build close relationships with youth.

Research also shows that teacher-child relationships in schools can be significant in predicting academic and behavioral outcomes years later in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). In fact, Pianta, Stuhlman & Hamre (2002) point out that, since relationships with supportive nonparental adult mentors have been shown to have beneficial effects, it

makes sense to identify groups of adults who are in positions to develop such relationships with children and youth. They use this argument to bring the focus onto the potential of teachers to build relationships with students, but this argument also applies to the potential of OST staff to build relationships with kids. In fact, since OST staff members face less academic pressure than teachers, they may be in a better position to develop mentoring relationships with kids, since they have greater opportunity to engage in the informal conversation and activities that can result in strong relationships between youth and adults (Rhodes, 2004).

Yet, for too long, relationships have been seen simply as a byproduct of OST programming, instead of at the very heart of the work. As a result, there remain many unanswered questions about relationship-building between staff and participants in OST programs. In recognition of the important role relationships play in OST programming, it is necessary to further investigate how to develop and strengthen this area. How does one create a program where staff and youth develop close, trusting relationships? Can the relational aspect of working with youth be taught, or is it mostly defined by personality and charisma? Is it important to recruit staff from similar backgrounds as program participants? Are there certain questions that can be asked at interviews that could reveal if an individual would be successful at relationship-building? Is it possible to create training programs and provide technical assistance that would teach OST staff how to build close relationships with youth?

There is a wealth of literature about relationships spanning the research on attachment, mentoring, family relationships, psychotherapy, counseling etc. A first step in understanding relationships in OST settings would be to collect the state of the

knowledge that we have in these areas. Another step would be for funders to have individual programs observed and work to strengthen the particular social capital that programs have. They also could give programs access to relationship experts who can help with behavioral issues and strategize with programs about how to strengthen the bonds between the young people and the adults.

Already, the relationships found in many OST programs are a primary strength of the field. But some programs continue to display a level of yelling, shaming, and disorganization that makes productive relationship-building impossible. It is not because staff members do not believe in the principles, but because they have not learned how to translate these ideals into the complex practice in which they are involved. Because of the interest and the strong foundation, there is a huge amount of capital to build upon, and thus relationship-building is an area in which OST programs can excel rapidly. Staff members need training to allow them to navigate the complex patterns of communication that kids bring so that they can build relationships with *all* types of kids. In addition to the youth development field, the clinical and counseling fields hold a reservoir of expertise in these areas that have not yet been sufficiently put to use in OST settings. The importance of training staff in relationship-building skills has already been demonstrated in community-based and school-based mentoring programs. Staff who participate in pre-service training and staff who receive ongoing training and support are more likely to report building close relationships with youth (Herrera, Sipe & McClanahan, 2000).

Concretely, we recommend that funders work with cities and nationally to create training frameworks in this area that combine certification and credit-bearing courses with site-specific observation and coaching. The existing structures of city-wide

intermediaries that coordinate many programs within a given city, together with higher education institutions, could focus on this task of creating such frameworks. Staff training in relationship-building could serve as a model for how to increase the skills of the workforce and, through the added certificates and courses, could begin to create a job ladder upon which staff members could rise. For this to be successful, the work would also have to be tied to the state-wide career latticework that exists in cities such as Boston, New York, and Chicago. In addition to training and certificates, programs could also provide ongoing, monthly case discussions about typical complexities staff encounter in building supportive relationships with children and youth. By providing regular support and training for relationship-building, programs could strengthen this critical area of OST programs.

C. Intentional Learning
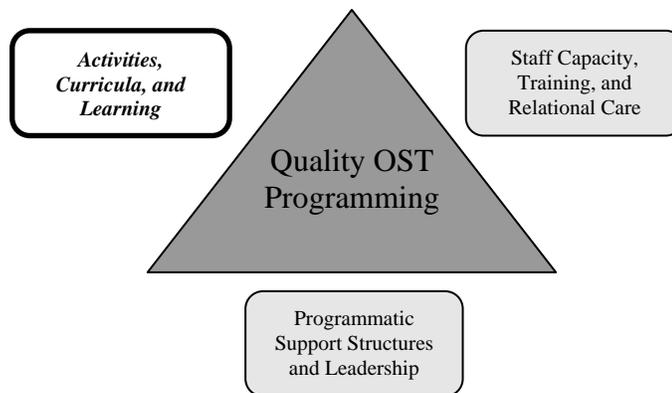
The final area where I recommend funders focus their efforts in order to improve and sustain quality in OST programs is the area of intentional learning. McLaughlin (2000) emphasized the need for programs to intentionally create opportunities for youth to learn and grow by creating what she describes as an "embedded curriculum," with specific goals behind every activity in which students engage. Similarly, when outlining

features of positive developmental settings, Eccles & Gootman (2003) describe the importance of creating opportunities for skill-building. Yet before a program can create opportunities for youth learning, it is necessary for the program to have clear goals as to what learning they want youth to achieve.

One of the most important ways funders can support programs is by helping them set realistic, clear, strong, and developmentally appropriate goals. Again, much of this work can happen through the intermediary organizations, but the work has to become more focused and intentional. A great deal of talk exists today about evidence-based practice, but the first step is to achieve something I will call "goal-based practice." Without having clear learning goals about what programs expect participants to learn during their time in OST, it is impossible to have intentional learning. Too many programs have vague goals that make it difficult to create an intentional learning environment around those goals. Other programs still are in the stage where their goals relate not to engaged learning, but simply to keeping kids off the street or giving students a place to do homework. If we want to create programs that achieve positive youth outcomes, including academic and developmental outcomes, it is necessary first for programs to define what outcomes they hope to achieve and for staff to coalesce around those goals. Once a program has goals, they can then create intentional learning environments designed to achieve their goals. Clearly, this topic also relates to strengthening the quality of the leadership programs, since the leader must guide this planning.

Funders and foundations can support this process by providing the consulting frame and best practices for defining goals and creating intentional learning environments

aligned with those goals. Even more importantly, funders can give programs small grants to devote regular time for the whole staff to come together and discuss program goals and program design. Too often, OST programs are forced to devote all staff planning time to managing day-to-day concerns. By providing small grants paying for extra time in which staff can focus on defining their goals and creating intentional learning around those goals, funders can support youth learning and positive youth outcomes as well as supporting a strong, professional climate among staff and a strong mission for the whole program.

Finally, programs should not have to invent all of their intentional learning materials and activities from scratch. In fact, too often programs create their own materials when high-quality, heavily-researched materials already exist. An ideal example lies in afterschool and summer science programs. Already, a wealth of materials for informal science learning has been developed by science museums. These materials are rarely used by OST programs, however. In fact, a recent study of science learning in generic afterschool programs found that 68.5% of the 753 sites sampled created their own curricula (Dahlgren, Noam & Larson, 2008). Clearly, this is not the most efficient nor most effective system. By working closely with intermediaries who are already beginning such work, funders can sponsor the sharing of best practices across the country in areas such as sports, arts, science, civic engagement, homework, and academic enrichment. One example of an effort to support individual programs in choosing curricula is SEDL's Consumers Guide to Afterschool Resources (SEDL, n.d.). This website includes descriptions and expert reviews of math, literacy, science, and technology afterschool curricula, providing guidance to programs making decisions about which curricula best

aligns with their context and goals. It is not enough, however, to merely to distribute manuals or help programs choose curricula. We recommend offering meetings, demonstration, and coaching to help programs effectively implement curricula to meet their goals. Providing support to programs in creating clear goals, choosing curricula that aligns with those goals, and implementing that curricula will allow programs to realize positive academic and development outcomes for children and youth.

Conclusion:

The time is ripe for a bold set of initiatives. Clearly, the field has already made great progress. Key stakeholders are beginning to come together across the country, helping to create much needed support to strengthen the integrating functions of intermediaries and to bring mayors, school districts, and many other institutions together. Data collection systems have been created and disparate programs have been tied together into hubs, extended schools, or full-service community approaches. All of this work will need to continue and, in fact, is even more needed as the economy turns, possibly making public and philanthropic contributions harder to come by and, thus, programs more vulnerable.

In this paper, I argue that the issue of quality and the problems facing the OST field cannot successfully be addressed from the fiscal and administrative side alone, or, for that matter, from any one side alone. If one believed the only relevant issues were around funding and administration, it might make the most sense to fully support the take-over of the OST field through school districts since public funding might be more secure and administrative systems are in place. But that is illusionary, as it would not

guarantee quality and it would sacrifice some of the major assets of OST, such as its role in bridging schools and communities and families. So we will have to continue to build an intermediary space where funding streams come from many sources and coordination is based on a private-public combined agenda.

By studying successful programs and cities where significant progress has been made (Noam & Miller, 2002) and examining literature from diverse fields of study, including OST, education, psychology, and business research, I have arrived at the conclusion that a three-way approach is essential. Any strategy that only addresses some of the sides of the triangle, but not all three, will have far less success. I have proposed an agenda that focuses on three elements from the Quality Triangle:

1. The creation of a cadre of stronger OST leaders

2. Providing training and technical assistance for the staff to do what everyone agrees is one of the most important assets of OST programs: create strong, caring relationships

3. Providing support to help programs become more intentional in goal-setting around learning.

If we make progress in all three areas, we will have addressed the sustainability and quality issues together. Kids will want to be in OST programs, which will address issues of recruitment and attendance. Parents will become strong advocates for OST since they will not want to lose these developmental spaces for their kids. Suburban and rural families will want for their children what children in cities are getting and will replicate the model. Trained leaders will be able to harness these efforts in coalition-building with schools, hospitals, and many other organizations. All this is a significant agenda, but it is

one where progress can be rapid, particularly if the work can happen through the existing channels and if funding can allow for the best minds to work together on creating this initiative and tying it to city and state initiatives around compensation and career ladders. Those who will benefit most will be the young people in this country who will engage in rich learning, developing academic and non-academic skills while building strong, caring relationships with adults. A dream? Maybe. But the research clearly points in one direction and, while more studies are still needed, we now have enough collective knowledge to take a decisive step forward.

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