



## OPPORTUNITY IN HARD TIMES: Building Out-of-School Time Learning Systems that Last

*Report on The Wallace Foundation Conference  
on Out-of-School Time Learning  
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This publication was produced as part of a commitment by The Wallace Foundation to develop and share knowledge, ideas and insights aimed at increasing understanding of how cities can develop sustainable systems of high-quality out-of-school time learning opportunities so that more children can realize the benefits. The views expressed by those cited in this conference report are not necessarily those of the Foundation. The report was written by Pamela Mendels, senior writer of The Wallace Foundation.

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## OUR MISSION

The mission of The Wallace Foundation is to enable institutions to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. We do this by supporting and sharing effective ideas and practices.

## OUR WORK IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME LEARNING

Building on our long legacy of support for a wide range of programs related to out-of-school time (OST) learning opportunities, the goal of our current work in this area is to help selected cities develop and test ways to plan and implement sustainable systems that increase overall participation in high-quality OST programs so that more children and youth attend often enough to gain developmental benefits. Wallace is currently funding such system-building efforts in five cities: Boston, Chicago, New York, Providence and Washington, D.C.

Experience to date suggests that a “coordinated approach” is a promising route for increasing the quality of and access to OST opportunities citywide. A 2008 Wallace Perspective, *A Place to Grow and Learn: A Citywide Approach to Building and Sustaining Out-of-School Time Learning Opportunities*, describes in detail this hypothesis and suggests that there are six “action elements” for achieving a coordinated approach to improving OST:

- *Committed leadership* – including top political, school, community and OST leaders, to secure funding and other resources and shape policies;
- *A public or private coordinating entity* – to manage the development of plans, link disparate OST players, build citywide attention and support for OST, and ensure that plans and performance stay on track;
- *Multi-year planning* – to set goals and priorities, develop ways to hold key players accountable for results and identify necessary resources;
- *Reliable information* – to document the needs and wishes of parents and children, track participation and identify underserved neighborhoods and families;
- *Expanding participation* – to reach more children and ensure that they attend often enough to benefit; and
- *A commitment to quality* – because quality programs are likeliest to benefit children and therefore scarce OST funding should be directed to delivering high-quality programming.

To learn more about our work and the knowledge being produced in out-of-school time learning, visit our website at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).



## OPPORTUNITY IN HARD TIMES: Building Out-of-School Time Learning Systems that Last

*How can emerging systems of high-quality out-of-school time (OST) programming in America's cities weather the current economic storm – and even emerge stronger? This was the question facing 108 OST decision-makers, experts and organizers who attended a two-day conference hosted by The Wallace Foundation. Participants included representatives from five cities that have been in the vanguard of recent efforts to build sustainable OST systems with Wallace support. Among the hopeful answers that surfaced at the gathering: think big, and use the current hard times as an opportunity to make bold changes that in the long run can bring the benefits of high-quality OST programming to the children and teenagers who need it most. The following are highlights of the conference.*

“If there are big changes you want to make, or things that you think should be different, a time of crisis can be a time to change them.”

With those words, Olivia Golden, an expert on children and families, helped open – and set the tone for – a Wallace Foundation gathering of leaders working on the challenge of creating sustainable, citywide systems to provide high-quality out-of-school time (OST) learning

opportunities to the children who need them most.

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*Crisis can bring opportunity, especially in those places where the ground has been laid for making prudent, fact-based decisions.*

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In many ways, the national outlook for after-school and summer programs could not have been more difficult to the 108 attendees at the conference held February 2-4, 2009

in Washington, D.C. After years of painstaking work to bring more and better OST to their communities, these OST decision-makers, providers and researchers were confronting a recession that endangered government and private support of their efforts, with no clear end in sight.

Still, participants at the gathering, titled “Out-of-School Time Quality: Financing for Sustainability,” voiced some optimism. It went beyond the hope expressed by many that the then-unfolding federal stimulus legislation would contain some relief for OST efforts in their cities. Repeatedly, attendees also referred to an idea gaining currency in the field: that crisis can bring opportunity, especially in those places where the ground has been laid for making prudent, fact-based decisions about how best to sustain OST programs and minimize the pain that the economy might inflict.

Specifically, the conference provided an opportunity to explore how to build sustainable systems of citywide, high-quality OST. Most of the attendees were part of Wallace's five-city out-of-school time learning initiative, launched in 2004 in New York City and Providence and now also including Boston, Chicago and Washington, D.C. (See box on p. 4 for brief descriptions of these initiatives.)

While each city has shaped its system-building initiative to its particular needs and circumstances, all of them seek to assemble six building blocks of durable OST systems:

- Committed leadership;
- Multi-year planning to set goals, identify needed resources and hold key players accountable;
- A public or private coordinating entity to keep those plans on track and help build citywide support for OST;
- Information systems capable of providing reliable data about participation trends and family needs;
- An emphasis on expanded participation by young people; and
- A commitment to quality programming, grounded in the research-backed idea that children are likeliest to realize OST's benefits when programs are strong.

This system-building work has required the adoption of new ways of working for OST. Installing computer-based systems to gather a single set of citywide program-participation data, for example, has been a significant departure for a field fragmented into many groups and agencies. So has working in coordination with others, rather than in isolation. But if

there was one particular cause for hope at the conference, it was the view that these system elements have formed a foundation for OST initiatives that could help programs weather the recession and emerge stronger.

“Sustainability goes beyond funding,” said Erica Harris, who directs the Office for Extended Learning Opportunities, which manages OST programming for the Chicago Public Schools. “In many cases it becomes a matter of making sure that enough people have skin in the game and are paying attention to what it is that you are doing, so that if it were to go away they would start saying, ‘Hey, wait a minute.’”

#### **FACING FACTS, RECOGNIZING POSSIBILITIES**

An opening panel discussion, titled “The Economic State of Our Cities: Challenges and Opportunities in Complex Times,” explored what

#### **THE FIVE CITIES IN WALLACE'S OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME INITIATIVE**

**Boston** – Boston After School & Beyond and the Boston Public Schools are working together to strengthen the city's out-of-school time system of K -12 programs by enhancing data collection and measurement; coordinating efforts of schools and community partners; and advocating for a coherent policy and funding agenda. For more details, visit: [www.bostonbeyond.org](http://www.bostonbeyond.org)

**Chicago** – Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services is working with After School Matters, a private nonprofit organization that features teen apprenticeships, to increase access to OST services for high school students and track participation. For more details, visit: <http://www.afterschoolmatters.org/>

**New York City** – The city's Out-of-School Time Initiative, administered by the Department of Youth and Community Development, aims to improve and expand OST opportunities in a range of school and other settings for children K-12. For more details, visit: [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/afterschool/out\\_of\\_school\\_time.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/afterschool/out_of_school_time.shtml)

**Providence** – The not-for-profit Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has created a network of neighborhood OST hubs, known as AfterZones, offering homework help, sports, arts and other programs to middle-school students. For more details, visit: <http://www.mypasa.org/>

**Washington, D.C.** – Project My Time, run by the not-for-profit DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corp., offers underserved middle-school students a variety of sports, arts and academic OST programs. For more details, visit: <http://www.projectmytime.org>

current urban economic conditions may mean for OST budgets, which depend largely on public funding and private philanthropy.

The facts presented were stark:

- A survey by the National League of Cities in December 2008 found that 87 percent of city finance officers reported that their municipalities had cut expenditures during the 2008 fiscal year and 80 percent expected further cuts for the 2009 fiscal year, said Clifford M. Johnson, executive director of the League’s Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. He added that because of the foreclosure crisis and weak housing market – and in contrast with previous recent recessions – it was unlikely that property taxes would offset weaknesses in the other two main sources of local financing, income and sales tax.
- Findings from a survey of nonprofits last November painted a similarly gray picture: some 75 percent of the organizations expected to see decreased funding and more than half had already experienced cuts, in many cases of more than 20 percent, according to William Foster, a partner in the Bridgespan Group, a consultancy to not-for-profit organizations, which conducted the poll.

And even as funding for services is shrinking, the need for them may be swelling. Golden, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, said the downturn could prove especially harsh for lower-income families who are the chief beneficiaries of many OST system-building efforts.

Offsetting these difficult realities, however, were several themes that conference speakers and participants alluded to repeatedly.

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*System elements have formed a foundation that could help OST programs weather the recession and emerge stronger.*

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The first was that hard times can trigger new ways of seeing and better ways of doing. As Wallace President M. Christine DeVita put it, “we know that sometimes scarcity can inspire innovation.” She wondered, for example, if stimulus funding for school renovations

could lead to a re-imagining of school-building design, so that it would better accommodate the needs of OST programming. Johnson said that now was the moment for OST planners to pursue previously overlooked – and potentially fruitful – partnerships with universities, which OST planners have begun tapping for assistance in everything from survey-taking to staff training, or with civic organizations such as Rotary Clubs, and with recreation-focused groups such as the United States Tennis Association which are reaching out to urban youth.

During a panel discussion on “School District and OST System Collaboration: Costs, Opportunities and Sustainability,” Mary Ellen Caron, commissioner of the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, added that new cost-consciousness could prompt a fresh examination of cities’ many publicly-funded OST activities to help ensure that program funding shores

## TIPS FOR HARD TIMES

OST policymakers, coordinators, providers and funders at the Wallace conference shared a wide range of strategies to turn the economic crisis into an opportunity to test new approaches for delivering higher-quality, more sustainable services.

For OST organizations:

- Put mission first – review all staffing and budgeting to focus on what's indispensable to achieving your goals.
- Tap new resources – including universities, civic associations such as Rotary, and recreational groups like the United States Tennis Association.
- Strengthen working relationships with school officials – so that OST and public education collaborate effectively in expanded learning initiatives.

For OST policymakers, organizers and funders:

- Get public funders to work together on new policies that free OST programs from red tape and disperse public money more efficiently.
- Gather and use reliable participation data to ensure that resources go to programs with a record of attracting and retaining students.
- Gather and analyze data that can correlate quality after school programs and children's development in and out of school – and share that data with school leaders.
- Redouble a citywide commitment to high-quality programming – by introducing assessment tools for OST staff or outside groups to evaluate program quality and identify and address weaknesses.
- Promote formal credentialing of youth development workers.
- Collaborate with emerging statewide after school networks to secure permanent OST state funding streams and to direct a portion of federal stimulus funds to OST.

up quality. In these times, Caron said, “getting our bang for our buck” is the goal.

Others suggested that now might be a moment to urge budget-minded public officials to take a hard look at government funding practices that encumber the OST field. Summer programming might free itself from burdensome budgeting complications, for example, if funding from four important but separate sources – schools, parks and recreation, child care and youth workforce training – were better integrated, a task that begins with getting representatives of the corresponding public agencies to sit at the same table and think creatively about solutions. “If there were ever a moment when we could make the case for maximizing and aligning existing resources, now is certainly the time,” said Ron Fairchild, executive director of Johns Hopkins University's National Center for Summer Learning. He spoke during a conference session on “Summer Learning: Connections and Costs.”

Citing his experiences in Albany, NY, Sanjiv Rao, director of the New York State Afterschool Network, said that government officials are eager to find “low- or no-cost ways to advance the field” not only in reducing administrative burdens but also in promoting quality and safety. “This goes to the point of ‘a crisis is a terrible thing to waste,’” Rao said. “We are definitely hoping that we can leverage the reality of cuts at the state level by saying, ‘Okay. If this is our reality, at least help us advance the field in other ways that will address quality and sustainability over the long-term.’”

A second optimistic theme voiced at the conference was that federal stimulus funding might provide new dollars for OST-related ventures ranging from education to summer jobs for teenagers. Since signed into law as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the measure provides what the Afterschool Alliance advocacy organization is describing as “tremendous opportunities” for the OST field, including \$1.2 billion in new spending for youth training and employment, support for school renovation, and a fund specifically for quality improvements in OST. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has been a leading propo-



ment of two education innovations that could bear fruit for OST: expanding learning time and opening up school buildings to serve as hubs of community recreational, social service and educational activity.

The third hopeful theme sounded by participants was less about the hunt for funding and more about how the new system-based approaches in OST are beginning to prove their mettle in their cities. These new approaches include:

- Developing a clearly-defined mission so that work is focused on what's most important;
- Collecting and analyzing information so decisions are based on hard data;
- Redoubling efforts to improve the quality of OST programming and increase participation so that children realize the benefits; and
- Collaborating with other institutions and organizations so that OST is supported by a broad base of resources and allies.

### **A TIGHTER FOCUS ON MISSION IN TOUGH TIMES**

Understanding the core purpose of an OST system-building effort was a refrain at the gathering. “What you need to know,” said Golden, “is, ‘what do I care about most? What’s my vision? What am I willing to give up on? What do I really want to keep?’”

Similarly, Foster of the Bridgespan Group urged attendees to identify “the core program areas that had greatest impact in their work” so they could plan effectively during the economic crisis for securing what was essential to their missions – and connect their fundraising more closely to their missions. Such an exercise was imperative for nonprofit leaders as they faced tough decisions on staffing and cost-cutting, including whether to lay off employees or reduce salaries, he said. “Realism is important,” Foster commented in a talk on *Scale, Quality and Sustainability: What’s the Balance in a Challenging Economy?* “Organizations that realistically assess their prospects and make the tough choices sooner do better.”

Gigi Antoni, who is leading a Wallace-supported effort in Dallas to bring more arts learning to that city’s children<sup>1</sup>, told the gathering that as the severity of the recession was becoming clear in the fall of 2008, organizers decided to focus on their effort’s core work, which includes lifting OST program quality in the city and bringing programming to “scale,” that is, to all 190 Dallas elementary and middle schools. That decision has had a major impact on Big Thought, the nonprofit organization that is managing the initiative, including consolidation of departments, reassignment of personnel and even a painful decision to forego about \$300,000 annually from a long-time private funder because the money was restricted to programming in a suburb beyond city limits. “That was money we left on the table. But it wasn’t moving us to quality and scale,” Antoni said. “If it doesn’t do that, it doesn’t belong in our budget.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Dallas initiative, called Thriving Minds, is being funded as part of Wallace’s Arts for Young People initiative. While it is not part of the Foundation’s out-of-school time initiative per se, it nonetheless has a major after school programming component. For further details, see *From Hip-Hop to Shakespeare: Dallas Blazes “Coordinated” Trail in Arts Education for City Young People*.

Similarly, keeping a clear focus on mission and core beliefs led the Boston Public Schools' Department of Extended Learning Time, Afterschool and Services to turn away \$50,000 in funding for an anti-substance abuse curriculum, said Dishon Mills, senior manager of the department, in an interview after the conference. The problem was that the program provided no staff training, thereby violating a core department belief that in order to be effective, frontline OST workers need to know how to present any material in a way that establishes a rapport with children. "We have this framework and we can add to it based on our children and families' [needs] – but the framework stays the same," Mills said.

#### THE POWER OF INFORMATION

A key early task, and major accomplishment, of the five cities in Wallace's OST initiative has been to establish management information systems capable of gathering accurate citywide data about OST enrollment, attendance and quality. It's been a difficult task for many sites,

requiring the development of new software as well as training for, and the cooperation of, the myriad program providers called on to use it. But throughout the conference, attendees made clear that the new habit of gathering reliable OST information is assisting them in a variety of important ways, includ-

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*"Information is power, and we believe in getting information out there."*

— Judith Kurland, chief of staff to Boston Mayor Menino

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ing: allowing program managers or outside organizations to pinpoint and begin to correct program weaknesses; enabling program staff to tailor programming to children's particular needs; and arming advocates with the data to make a stronger case for OST to policymakers and funders.

"Information is power," said Judith Kurland, chief of staff to Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, "and we believe in getting information out there."

Boston is among the few cities allowing organizations that run school-based OST programming to view (under strict privacy guidelines) an individual child's school information, such as attendance records and test scores. This arrangement is strengthening programming by allowing it "to provide very targeted interventions with students," Mills said. If the OST worker designated to review records sees that a child is failing at math, for example, she can respond by making sure that the after school program gives the student extra help in that subject.

Analysis of participation data was critical in shaping a policy decision aimed at improving programs in New York City, according to Christopher Caruso, assistant commissioner of out-of-school time at the city's Department of Youth and Community Development. A central finding from a multi-year, city-commissioned evaluation of New York's OST programming – that children who took part in school and summer programs had better overall program attendance and other "outcomes" than their school-year-only peers – clinched the case: "We would expand in ways that mandated that all of our programs now be year-round," said Caruso, whose agency oversees the Wallace-supported OST effort in New York City.

Attendance numbers also provide the Department of Youth and Community Development with smarter ways to cope with a 16 percent drop in OST funding, from a high of about \$121 million in the 2008 fiscal year to about \$102 million in the 2009 fiscal year. Instead of reducing funding for programs across the board, the city can use OST data to do the least amount of harm by focusing cuts on programs with relatively low participation rates. “We need to preserve those very things that, once the good times return, leave you with the core elements of your initiative,” said Jeanne Mullgrav, commissioner of the department. A panelist in the conference session on “Scale in an Economic Crisis,” Mullgrav emphasized that “sustainability is something we are thinking about day in and day out.”

In Rhode Island, managers from the Providence After School Alliance, which leads the Wallace-supported effort in that city, keep close tabs on attendance figures as they oversee the 60 different OST operators in the initiative. When they notice sagging numbers at a program, staffers contact its operator “in real time” to discuss solutions ranging from changes in programming to review of waiting lists and introduction of new recruitment methods, said Hillary Salmons, executive director of the Alliance.

As accurate attendance information continues to be collected across OST cities, the possibility also grows of rigorous, large-scale studies to better understand the connections between OST participation and specific developmental, social and academic benefits. Heather Weiss, founder and director of the Harvard Family Research Project and a leading OST researcher, said that one of the distinctive traits of the OST field is openness to examination that has led in recent years to studies exploring everything from program costs to the components of program quality. “Those investments give us real strengths to make the case for the value-added of out-of-school time,” said Weiss, who participated in a conference panel titled “Communicating the Value of OST Programs: Sustainability Strategies.”

Besides attendance data, OST organizers described a range of other information sources they are turning to in order to shape policy and opinion. A “geo-mapping” project of after school and youth program sites in New York City several years ago found a significant mismatch between where programs were located and where they were most needed – evidence that allowed the city’s Department of Youth and Community Development, or DYCD, to designate certain neighborhoods as high priorities for receiving support, said Elizabeth Reisner, a panelist with Weiss and principal and co-founder of Policy Studies Associates, Inc., the research group that is evaluating the New York City OST effort. “DYCD has been an exemplar of using data for improving programs and communicating to the city,” she said.

Market research is another source of data, one that has helped several sites better understand the OST needs and desires of children and families – insight invaluable to crafting quality programming. Officials from Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services worked with the local business community, state funders and statewide OST advocates to convene focus groups as they began planning for a campaign to press the state legislature for a first-time “dedicated funding stream” for OST. “We’ve learned a lot about what ‘Joe Jablonski’ is thinking in Peoria,” said Commissioner Caron during the panel discussion on school district and OST system collaborations. Among the telling findings – which the campaign will need to address – are widespread misconceptions among Illinois residents that OST is fully paid for

through Y's and other private youth organizations. In fact, out-of-school time programming in the state relies on a range of public and private sources that fall far short of making quality OST available to all the Illinois children and teenagers who need it.

#### **MAKING QUALITY "THE RULE OF THE DAY"**

OST planners have guided their work by the conviction that citywide OST systems can be sustained only if they promote strong programs. "We know from the research that quality is critical to children benefitting from out-of-school time, and we know that if they don't come, they won't benefit," said Nancy Devine, Wallace's director of community programs and moderator of a conference panel on "Efficient Management Techniques for Building Program Capacity." "We are all – government, funders – demanding that quality be the rule of the day."

Indeed, for Rao, the director of the New York State Afterschool Network, quality is central to determining whether the emerging OST systems can withstand the strains of the recession. "In an era of scarce resources, what makes programs more competitive?" he asked. "Well, those

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*"Those that are attending to quality are probably going to be more competitive in terms of securing funding and being sustainable."*

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that are attending to quality are probably going to be more competitive in terms of securing funding and being sustainable."

Enhancing quality and increasing participation have not been easy in the five cities in Wallace's initiative, but planners are trying to

make progress by using an array of different techniques. A number of cities have introduced programs to improve the capabilities of OST staff. New York City planners, for example, have worked with local universities to provide college-level training for frontline staffers. And Chicago planners worked with statewide OST advocates, human services officials and others to develop common training and credentialing for those who work in OST with adolescents, teenagers and young adults – not just those who work with younger children.

Several city efforts have introduced formal program quality assessments – in some cases conducted by OST funders, in others by the programs themselves for self-monitoring. In Providence, such assessments yielded the surprising finding that sports programs were well attended but were not giving students needed opportunities to develop leadership skills. OST organizers responded by offering youth development training for sports and recreation staff. "We get back to the provider right away with really good insight into how to improve their practice," said Salmons, of the Providence After School Alliance.

Improving quality for sustainability entails more than bolstering programming, conference attendees learned during a panel on Management Techniques for Building Program Capacity. A 2008 Wallace-commissioned report<sup>2</sup> that looked at high-quality OST providers in New

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<sup>2</sup> See John Summers and Lana Price, *Administrative Management Capacity in Out-of-School Time Organizations: An Exploratory Study*, Fiscal Management Associates, 2008, at the Knowledge Center at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

York City and Chicago found that many suffered from weaknesses in administrative management. These problems – in finance, human resources, technology and facilities – were serious enough to affect the organizations as a whole, according to Hilda Polanco, managing director of the consultancy for nonprofits that produced the report, Fiscal Management Associates. “We’ve come to the conclusion that the interaction and interdependence between program and management can make a significant difference in terms of the effectiveness of the programs,” she said.

In Washington, D.C., the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, which is acting as the coordinator of the Wallace-supported OST effort in that city, is offering specialized training in finance, human resources and other management areas where OST organizations typically need help. “What we are finding is that many of the organizations that we fund, while they are great organizations and do wonderful services, can’t fill out a 990 form,” said Millicent Williams, president and chief executive officers of the Trust, referring to a basic annual federal tax statement, filed by nonprofits, that many funders examine before making grant decisions.

#### **LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION**

Sustaining high-quality OST programming requires broad leadership and support, ranging from mayors and city department heads to superintendents of schools and the managers of community organizations that run OST programming. Forming alliances and ensuring that each participant is committed to, and has confidence in, the system-building work is essential if it is to withstand inevitable changes in policy and politics. That point was driven home by Salmons, of the Providence After School Alliance, when she described the emerging OST system in her city.

Salmons, speaking during a panel on “The Role of Coordinating Entities in Building Sustainable Systems,” said that steadfast support from Mayor David Cicilline, a leading advocate of OST, had been crucial to Providence’s OST initiative, which has created a set of neighborhood “hubs” of after-school programming for middle-school students. But support for this work also draws from top leaders of schools, the library system, the police, parks and recreation departments, and a wide range of youth-program operators. “If you are going to be sustainable, it has to be something that everybody owns beyond the mayor – because we don’t want to be vulnerable to political changes and shifts,” Salmons said.

Strong coordinating bodies, whether public or private, that bring these groups together are a critical element of a durable “infrastructure” of emerging citywide OST systems. Indeed, the Providence After School Alliance, a leading example of such a coordinating body, considers creating cohesiveness a big part of its job. Seeking to be seen as an honest broker among all the different OST parties, the group calls on its grant-writer to take time from her in-house duties to help program providers with the often daunting task of putting together grant proposals. Such gestures have helped establish greater trust among groups that otherwise might compete for scarce resources in a city with one of the highest child poverty rates in the nation, Salmons said. Relations have not reached “Kumbaya” levels, she quipped. But they have become collegial enough that the Providence After School Alliance can now approach a



group of providers and, without fear of touching off a grab-for-funds war, ask for a consensus on which organization among them would be the best suited for a particular grant. “To think that would have happened four years ago? There’s just absolutely no way,” she said.

Being viewed as an honest broker is particularly important today, given the changing economic climate. Mullgrav, the commissioner of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, said she resists any temptation “to sit in my office and hide,” and instead makes herself widely available to program providers and the public. “The key to our survival is ensuring that our constituents know what is going on, know the details, know how I am making those decisions,” she said.

### STRENGTHENING TIES TO SCHOOLS

Creating closer ties to schools has been a longstanding priority for OST system planners, who recognize that public education officials, principals, teachers and others are among the most essential players in the out-of-school time arena – the people who, among other things, hold the keys to the buildings where many programs operate, could help elevate programming that is tied to academics, and share a common interest and expertise in children’s learning and growth. The fact is, however, that schools and OST initiatives have carried on a sometimes

uneasy relationship for a number of reasons, including perceived competition for scarce public and philanthropic resources.

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*A small yet growing trend in education – expanded learning time – could help foster closer bonds between OST and public schools.*

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A small yet growing trend in education – expanded learning time (ELT) – could help change that picture by fostering closer

bonds between OST and public schools, thereby giving out-of-school time providers a strong ally in the quest for sustainability.

ELT initiatives extend the school schedule beyond the traditional school day or year to put more learning time into students’ lives. These initiatives have become more popular and attracted increasing notice in recent years, and a panel titled “Afterschool-School Redesign ELT Style: Implications for Nonprofit OST Organizations” described how some have incorporated out-of-school time organizations into the new school schedule. In 2006, Massachusetts launched an ELT initiative that today involves 26 public schools, said Jennifer Davis, co-founder and president of Massachusetts 2020, a policy and research group that helped design and carry out the effort. Each school has added 300 hours learning and enrichment time yearly for all students through additional or longer school days. Details vary from school to school: in some, cultural or community groups offer classroom programming tied to the core curriculum. In others, schools offer enrichment classes such as swimming, rock climbing or dance, taught by community groups or faculty, often in community sites. A similar project begun in New York City last fall involves 10 public schools that have expanded learning time by 30 percent, according to Lucy Friedman, president of The After-School Corporation,

which is helping to run the venture. Principals assume overall financial and programmatic leadership but work with a community organization that installs a fulltime coordinator at the school, she said.

These new expanded-learning relationships between schools and OST organizations have experienced some growing pains, as Friedman described at the panel: “Principals are not ready always to take control and organizations are not always ready to cede control,” she said. And Davis said that teachers in some low-performing schools in Massachusetts have expressed concerns that the enrichment OST activities can take away time or resources from academics. “Teachers are scared to death because their schools are on the failing list and there is pressure, pressure, pressure,” she said.

In another panel discussion, “School District and OST System Collaboration: Costs, Opportunities and Sustainability,” speakers suggested a number of ways to bring schools and OST closer together. One, said Harris, of the Chicago Public Schools, was to demonstrate to school

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*“There’s not enough time in the school day to prepare a youth to succeed in the 21st century.”*

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principals and other education officials that OST helps children in ways that ultimately help the classroom. “We’ve evolved in terms of people within the district understanding that after school is not glorified babysitting,” she said of

a community schools program that seeks to open Chicago school buildings for out-of-school time programming and a range of other services to neighborhoods. “That has been a long work in progress. Before it was: ‘It’s nice to have. It’s a bonus. It’s extra.’ But what we now hear from schools is, ‘It’s essential.’”

Making a persuasive case will require thoughtful use of the hard data that OST system-building is beginning to generate in the five city efforts that Wallace is supporting – particularly if the data provide educators with evidence of a correlation between OST participation and a more successful school experience for children. Mills, of the Boston Public Schools’ out-of-school time office, recalled advocating for one OST program that had been studied over time and that compared children who took part in it to schoolmates who had not. The research found a number of bright outcomes for the participants, including significantly higher school attendance rates. “For the price and for the impact, our question is simple: ‘What other intervention can you name that can boast these results?’” he said. “That’s how sophisticated we have to get as a field.”

Salmons said that the key point behind engaging OST providers in expanded learning schemes is that the responsibility of preparing children for productive lives needs to fall to many institutions, not just one. “How do we bring those key players together to create a new system, because, quite frankly, 50 percent of a child’s waking hours are spent outside of school?” she asked. “[There’s] not enough time in the school day to prepare a youth to succeed in the 21st century. Learning is not compartmentalized. Maybe we need to build a full day of learning that’s different, that’s enriching, that engages youth, that’s compelling to youth so they want to get on the school bus in the morning.”

## THE STATE ROLE

Beyond city borders, states, state leaders and the U.S. Congress have an important role in helping sustain citywide OST system-building efforts as well as spreading effective practices to other cities. Statewide after school networks, initiated in 38 states with the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, work with state policymakers, leaders in youth-development areas like education or juvenile justice and others to press state levers to advance OST. For example, the Illinois After-School Partnership, which represents various agencies and after-school initiatives statewide, is working with Chicago's OST project to support the introduction of a sustainable, "dedicated" state budget appropriation for quality OST. The New York State Afterschool Network has joined with the New York City OST effort to help revise state child care regulations so that they are less burdensome on program providers yet preserve high standards for safety and quality.

Golden of the Urban Institute told attendees that they needed to become familiar with their state legislators, because large amounts of funding from the federal stimulus package would shortly become available to states, leaving "a million decisions about where to put money" to be made in a short period of time. "They need to know about you and what you think is important," she told the conference-goers, "and you need to reach out and build networks."

For OST organizers in New Orleans, staying in touch with Congressional offices and keeping an eye on complicated legislative funding maneuvers have paid off, said Regina Warner, executive director of the Afterschool Partnership of Greater New Orleans<sup>3</sup> during a session on "Braiding Federal, State and Local Funding Streams." In 2007, OST advocates there learned that Congress was preparing a supplemental funding bill for Iraq that included an anti-crime appropriation for New Orleans, Warner said in an interview after the conference. The OST planners were able to argue successfully that a portion of the funding go to juvenile crime-prevention, leading to a \$1 million boost to OST programs in the city. "People invest a lot in relations with local government and state agencies," Warner said, "but they overlook that next level – the federal."

## FINDING THE RIGHT MESSAGES TO BUILD SUPPORT

The conference surfaced diverse views within the OST community about the nature of OST's benefits and how best to make the case to broaden public support. Caron, commissioner of Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services said that quality OST programs are a natural antidote to juvenile violence. Mullgrav, commissioner of New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development, cited the significant support OST programs provide to working parents. During the panel on "Communicating the Value of OST Programs: Sustainability Strategies," some audience members advanced the idea that all children are entitled to enriching activities, regardless of their families' income. Others urged tying

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<sup>3</sup> The Wallace Foundation is working with the Afterschool Partnership of Greater New Orleans to support quality summer programs in that city.

participation in OST to simple, school-related goals such as higher high school graduation rates. “It’s easily understood,” something “that appeals to both somebody’s heart and their wallet,” said Chris Smith, executive director of Boston After School and Beyond, a not-for-profit group that is working with the Boston Public Schools on the Wallace-supported OST effort in that city. Antoni, of Dallas, said that rather than emphasizing any specific benefits,

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*Although the economic crisis is frightening in its unprecedented proportions, it also could open new possibilities to those willing to be bold.*

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the most effective argument might be that OST is one vital component in what communities need to do to ensure that children grow into adults with the skills and character to thrive in the 21st century. “Tying out-of-school time to one highly-valued outcome, like kids not dropping out of school, scares me,” she said. “I believe that an

out-of-school time system contributes to a citywide effort to keep kids in school, but I don’t believe an out-of-school time system can do that by itself.”

#### **FACING UNCERTAINTY BY THINKING BIG**

Concerns about how to sustain OST system-building were apparent throughout the conference, but finding opportunity in the current tough fiscal climate provided the leitmotif of the gathering. Olivia Golden perhaps captured the essence of this spirit best in her opening remarks by laying out what she called “Five Rules for Times of Enormous Uncertainty.”

Her first rule was an admonition not to waste time and energy trying to predict incremental developments in events beyond control – for example, trying to guess what might or might not be included in every version of every legislative budget proposal. Rules two, three and four echoed key themes discussed throughout the conference: that a clear mission, useful data and strong relationships and alliances are the best routes to sustainability.

It was “Rule Five,” however, that resonated most: a call to the gathering to recognize that although the economic crisis is frightening in its unprecedented proportions, it also could open new possibilities to those willing to be bold. As Golden put it, “If you’re not scared, you’re not thinking big enough.”

## RELATED WALLACE PRODUCTS

Readers can download the following publications about out-of-school time, or learn about related upcoming research, for free at The Wallace Foundation's website at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org):

*Financial Strategies to Support Citywide Systems of Out-of-School Time Programs*, National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, 2009.

*The Cost of Quality Out-of-School-Time Programs*, Public/Private Ventures and The Finance Project, 2009.

*A Place to Grow and Learn: A Citywide Approach to Building and Sustaining Out-of-School Time Learning Opportunities*, The Wallace Foundation, 2008.

*Administrative Management Capacity in Out-of-School Time Organizations: An Exploratory Study*, Fiscal Management Associates, 2008.

*Strengthening Out-of-School Time Organizations: Three Views*, The Wallace Foundation, 2008.

*Getting Started with Market Research for Out-of-School Time Planning: A Resource Guide for Communities*, Julianne Pokela, Ph.D., et al., Market Street Research, 2007.

*Making Out-of-School-Time Matter: Evidence for an Action Agenda*, RAND Corporation, 2005.

*All Work and No Play: Listening to What Kids and Parents Really Want from Out-of-School Time*, Public Agenda, 2004.

*Multiple Choices After School: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative*, Public/Private Ventures and MDRC, 2002.





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- Strengthen education leadership to improve student achievement
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- Build appreciation and demand for the arts

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