# Putting Data to Work for Young People

## GUIDEBOOK

A Guidebook for the Every Hour Counts Framework for Measurement, Continuous Improvement, and Equitable Systems

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Cover image: Youth at Harlem Lacrosse in Boston complete their practice with a team activity that fosters collaboration and teamwork.
Photo credit: Mark Curreri Photography, Boston After School & Beyond.

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# Introduction

Healthy, happy, thriving young people—that's what every community wants. Afterschool—by which we mean not just what takes place in the hours immediately after school but all out-of-school-time, summer, and expanded learning programs—is one of the ways communities help their young people stay safe, discover new interests, learn new skills, and prepare for a bright future.

Historically, however, afterschool has been a decentralized and disorganized field. Programs operate in isolation from one another and compete for a patchwork of funding from public and private sources. Civic leaders don't always know much about the programs in their communities. As a result, the families that stand to benefit most from afterschool may not be able to access it, and the programs that are available may not be of the highest quality.

Many communities across the country have come to understand that just paying for more of the same is not the solution. Instead, they are seeking to coordinate efforts and resources within the community, knitting programs together into a single, cohesive afterschool *system*, which includes a range of programming outside of school hours, during the day through expanded learning activities, and as part of summer programs. At the forefront of this work are nonprofit intermediary organizations responsible for a range of functions, including planning, raising and distributing funds, assessing the quality of programs, connecting program providers with training and coaching, communicating and advocating on behalf of

afterschool programs, and collecting and analyzing information.

This last task is among the most critical. In *Growing Together, Learning Together: What Cities Have Discovered About Afterschool Systems*, The Wallace Foundation says, "An afterschool system has many moving parts, but the oil that makes all the gears turn smoothly is data. Program providers, city agencies, schools, funders, families and youth—they all need up-to-date, accurate information to make sound decisions. City agencies, for instance, need to know where the demand for programs is highest, so they can allocate resources accordingly. Families, in turn, need to know where to find good programs with open slots for their kids."

Collecting data, knowing how to interpret it, acting on it effectively—all of these can be a struggle for intermediaries. There is a dizzying array of data out there. Many intermediaries waste time and energy collecting the wrong data in the wrong way. Disorganized or sporadic attempts can lead to confusion and frustration. To truly get the benefits of data, intermediaries need to be thoughtful and deliberate about what to collect, why collect it, how to collect it, and how to use it.

Every Hour Counts, a national coalition of expanded learning intermediaries, released a framework in 2014 to help intermediaries do exactly that. The framework focuses on a common set of outcomes that the intermediaries in the coalition hope to achieve through their afterschool system-building work and identifies ways of measuring progress toward each of those outcomes.

The framework groups outcomes into three levels: system, program, and youth. Every Hour Counts believes that positive outcomes at the youth level, such as exposure to enriching activities, depend on positive outcomes at the program level (e.g., improved program quality and responsiveness to community needs), which in turn depend on positive outcomes at the system level (e.g., effective advocacy for funding and afterschool-friendly policies).

For more on the link between system, program, and youth outcomes, see below and the **Theory of Change Diagram** on .

## The Link Between System, Program, and Youth Outcomes

Research shows that afterschool programs that target specific youth outcomes (e.g., leadership, academic learning, and social-emotional skills) can improve those outcomes if the programs are well designed and high quality, and if young people participate regularly. In reality, however, program quality in the afterschool field is uneven, and those who most stand to benefit from high-quality programs are not always able to access them. Programs and funders in a community do not always work together to strengthen the provision of afterschool as a whole. The purpose of afterschool systems is to address these challenges.

Afterschool systems bring together program providers, funders, schools, families, and other stakeholders to work toward common goals; make access to afterschool more equitable by tapping resources to create more learning opportunities and ensuring that those opportunities are available to underserved populations; support continuous improvement; incubate innovation; and secure support for afterschool from community leaders and the public to ensure that these efforts are sustainable. These are positive outcomes at the SYSTEM LEVEL.

When the system has established a network of providers, a set of common goals, and buy-in from the community, it is in a position to tackle the issue of program quality. It does this by developing common standards of quality, collecting and analyzing data to see how programs measure up to those standards, and supporting their efforts to learn from the data and get better. This leads to positive outcomes at the PROGRAM LEVEL, specifically higher-quality programs that are better able to meet the specific needs of young people in the community.

When there are more high-quality programs that are responsive to community needs, then young people will participate in greater numbers. They will be exposed to new and enriching experiences and ideas, which will help them build skills and develop healthy habits and beliefs. This is the ultimate goal: positive outcomes at the YOUTH LEVEL!
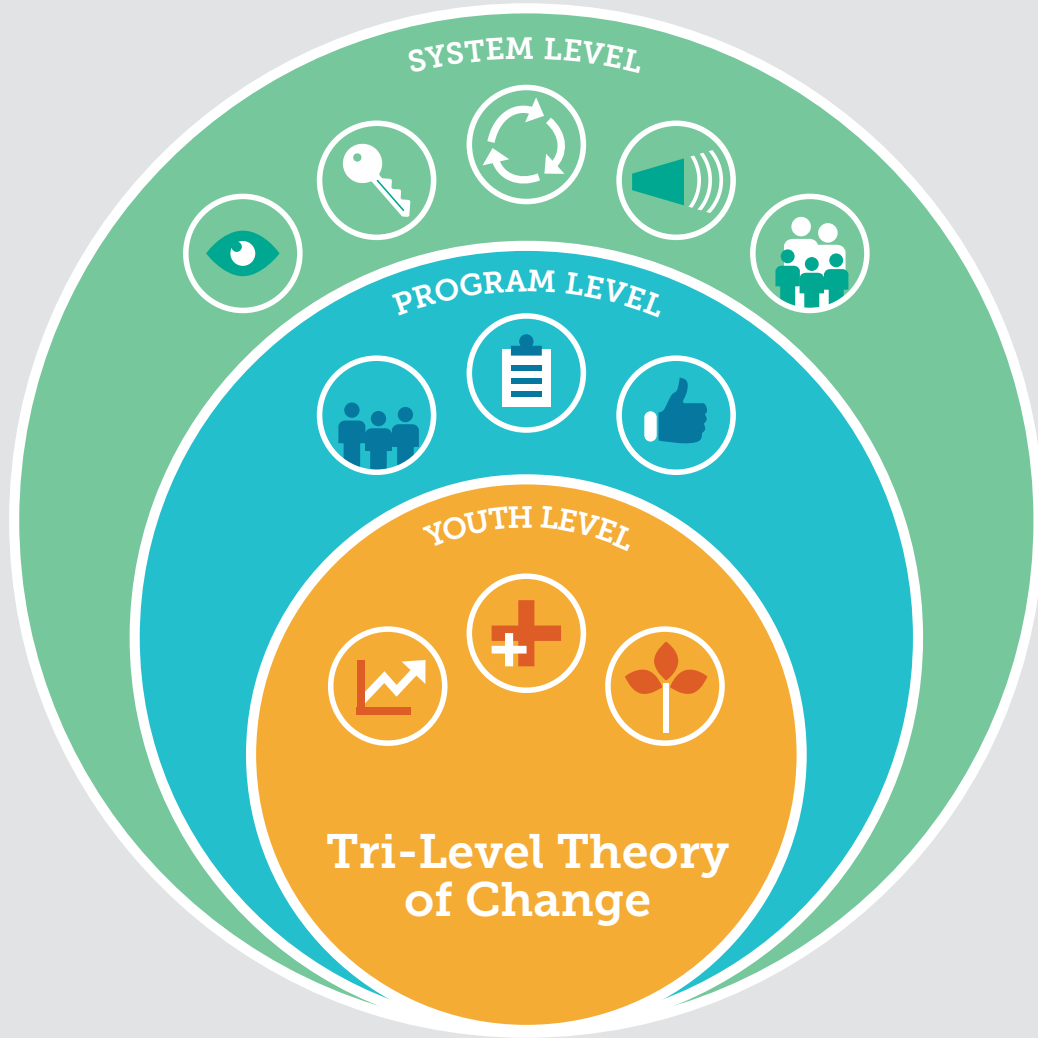
**SYSTEM LEVEL**

System-level elements describe characteristics of well-coordinated systems that lead to improved quality, scale, and sustainability.

**PROGRAM LEVEL**

Program-level elements describe characteristics of high-quality expanded learning programs.

**YOUTH LEVEL**

Youth-level elements describe a set of educational, social, and emotional skills likely to drive student success.

# An Updated Framework for Measurement, Continuous Improvement, and Equitable Systems

In 2014, Every Hour Counts updated the framework with support from the American Institutes for Research to keep up with advances and new questions being asked. It then engaged the RAND Corporation to evaluate efforts by intermediaries in three cities (Boston After School & Beyond, MA; Providence After School Alliance, RI; and Sprockets, Saint Paul, MN) to put the framework into practice. RAND researchers reviewed the quality of the data the intermediaries collect; the measurement tools they use; the condition of their databases; the way they store, process, and use data; the community context in which they operate; how each intermediary is structured; and the resources— human, technological, and financial—they bring to bear on their data-related work.

RAND and Every Hour Counts learned how each of the intermediaries went about incorporating the framework into their work, as well as the core challenges they experienced. For all three, the process spurred an evolution in thinking about the potential of afterschool and summer and about what it means to be an outcomes-focused intermediary. Sprockets used the framework to reevaluate how it functions as an intermediary. Boston After School & Beyond revised its logic model and theory of change so that they focused on specific skills and how to measure them. This had a ripple effect that led to changes in tools, processes, and professional development offerings. Adopting the framework helped Providence After School Alliance think about how its processes affect staff, the program providers it works with, and the broader afterschool community. As a result, it took steps to make its continuous improvement system more efficient and effective.

Other communities in Every Hour Counts' network have learned from the three intermediaries in the evaluation and embraced the framework as a way to help them meet their own needs. Philadelphia's intermediary, for example, used it to communicate its vision to foundations and city leaders, helping it secure a $2 million grant for afterschool programs.

Findings from the evaluation informed the latest revision of the framework and the development of this accompanying guidebook.

## Key Findings from the Evaluation

1. **The framework is about more than measurement.** The most important thing we learned from the experiences of the cities in the evaluation is that the framework is about much more than measurement. System leaders found it to be a powerful tool for setting goals, understanding and communicating the value of their work, and supporting continuous improvement of both the system and the programs within it.

2. **Organizational structure and community context determine intermediaries' goals, activities, and strategies.** Each intermediary in the evaluation had its own history, structure, level of resources and staffing, and relationship to program providers. Their goals, activities, and strategies varied accordingly. The latest version of the framework includes an expanded menu of system-level outcomes to reflect this variation.

3. **Data use—not data collection for its own sake—is the goal.** Data that is not used can be a waste of time and money, yet at least one intermediary in the evaluation was not using the youth outcomes data it collected. To avoid this situation, intermediaries need to periodically review the data they are collecting, whether and how they are using it, and whether it is serving its intended purpose.

4. **Intermediaries should aim to measure wisely, not measure everything.** Collecting and using data takes money, time, and expertise; some types of data take more than others. So they don't bite off more than they can chew, intermediaries should identify the pieces of data that they genuinely need and have the capacity to properly collect and use.

5. **Effective data use requires strong policies and practices**. The intermediaries in the evaluation faced organizational, technical, and political challenges to collecting and using data effectively. Another publication to come out of this project, *Putting Data to Work for Young People: A Ten-Step Guide for Expanded Learning Intermediaries*, offers a concrete plan for addressing such challenges.
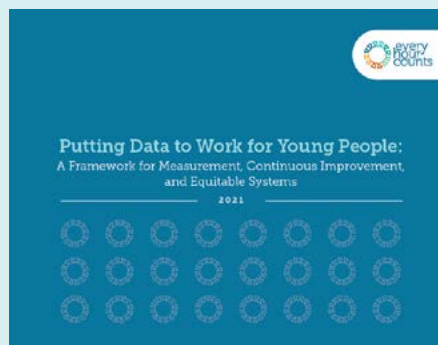
**To read** *Putting Data to Work for Young People: A Framework for Measurement, Continuous Improvement, and Equitable Systems*, **visit: www.everyhourcounts.org.**

## Components of the Updated Framework:

*Putting Data to Work for Young People: A Framework for Measurement, Continuous Improvement, and Equitable Systems*

The framework is an at-a-glance reference designed to help afterschool system leaders think through their data needs, plan for data collection and use, and carry out those plans.

The outcomes included in the framework are intentionally broad. To help afterschool system leaders customize the outcomes according to their own needs, the latest version of the framework includes the following components:

- **Indicators.** The factors that signal progress is being made toward a given outcome.

- **Data to collect.** The specific information systems can collect to keep track of indicators.

- **Options and considerations for measurement and analysis.** Helpful tips and ideas for working with data that come from RAND's evaluation.

- **Examples of how data can guide priorities and actions.** Ways to interpret the data and make use of the findings.

- For each outcome, we added **racial equity questions** designed to help systems think about whether their decision-making and work processes are equitable and inclusive, which young people are benefitting from their efforts, and the extent to which those efforts are culturally responsive.

**The outcomes include:**

**SYSTEM LEVEL**

**#1** The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool

**#2** Youth have expanded and equitable access to — and increased participation in — high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs

**#3** Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement

**#4** The system effectively advocates for policies and funding to support afterschool programs

**#5** Families and youth are satisfied with, connected to, and have voice in the afterschool system

**PROGRAM LEVEL**

**#1** Programs provide high-quality, equitable experiences to youth

**#2** Programs are intentionally designed and meet youth needs

**#3** Programs use management practices that enhance quality

**YOUTH LEVEL**

**#1** Youth have high rates of afterschool program participation

**#2** Youth are exposed to new and enriching experiences and content

**#3** Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs

## Why and How to Use This Guide

The framework is a reference tool designed to help afterschool system leaders think through their data needs, plan for data collection and use, and carry out those plans. The purpose of the guidebook is to give users of the framework practical information about each outcome. System leaders—whether they work for intermediaries, city agencies, school districts, community-based organizations, or statewide afterschool networks—can skim the entire guide to get a general "lay of the land" and then dig into the sections covering the specific data-related activities they plan to undertake. The framework and parts of the guide may also be helpful to funders interested in how best to support afterschool programs and track their investments. Appendix C: Afterschool Data Toolkit offers a wealth of additional resources—from assessment tools to sample data-sharing agreements and communications materials—drawn from the communities that participated in the study.

In the following section, Starting the Work, we offer step-by-step instructions for setting data goals, determining key questions to ask, and establishing data infrastructure. From there, the guide follows the format of the framework with sections on each of the three levels of outcomes—system, program, and youth. (We give each section the same label as the corresponding outcome in the framework: #1 for the first system-level outcome, etc.)  These sections present nuts-and-bolts information about each outcome in the framework: how data on a particular outcome might be used to improve the system, what to consider when selecting indicators to track and data to collect, and more fleshed-out options for

measuring and analyzing each indicator. Following the discussion of each outcome, there is a sample tracking table that provides concrete examples of the relevant data a system might collect and how it might be used to inform decision-making. Throughout the guide, there are examples of how the three intermediaries in the evaluation approached a particular outcome as well as outside resources that system leaders may also find helpful.

When discussing measurement options, we focus on activities that an afterschool intermediary could reasonably undertake with existing resources for the purpose of improving the system. The guide does not include all the kinds of research activities associated with a rigorous evaluation. Recognizing that, in some communities, resources for even basic data collection may be limited, we offer guidance on measurement tools that are commonly used, publicly available, and free of charge, as well as low-effort ways to gather information when official data collection activities are out of reach.

# Getting Started with the Framework

**The framework is not a checklist of data to collect. System leaders have used it to supercharge their planning, communications, and continuous improvement. To get the most out of the framework, we encourage users to:**

1. **Treat the framework as a menu of options.** The outcomes and indicators in the framework are presented in an order that we think will help communities make steady progress in their afterschool system-building work. At the same time, not every outcome and indicator will make sense for every system or for every program within a system. System leaders should focus only on those outcomes and indicators that line up with their system's goals—and their capacity to collect and work with data.

2. **Collect data only as the system needs and is ready for.** Different communities will be more or less ready to collect and work with data depending on where they are in the system-building process. Newer systems might be wise to start with youth attendance and a couple of system- and program-level indicators, while well-resourced systems might be able to take on more. The framework can help leaders understand what their system can handle now and what should be a future goal.

3. **Take a cautious approach to youth outcomes.** It is natural for systems and their funders to want data on youth outcomes. After all, the whole point of afterschool system building is to benefit young people. The framework does list a number of beliefs and

skills, both social-emotional and academic, that systems may seek to promote, but these can be difficult and costly to measure. What's more, many take years—not just a single six- to nine-week afterschool program—to develop. Systems looking to advocate for their work may be better off drawing on existing research that demonstrates the benefits of afterschool programs and afterschool systems. Then, rather than devoting precious resources to measuring youth skills and beliefs, they can focus on measuring and fostering the conditions that research has linked to better youth outcomes, such as program design and execution and youth attendance.

4. **To achieve equitable outcomes, consider how to build an equitable system**. Afterschool systems have always focused on the goal of making high-quality afterschool programming accessible to underserved youth and raising their rate of participation. We know that equity and inclusion must start with the processes and structures a community puts in place as it builds its system. The equity questions included in the framework are meant to help system builders think critically about these issues.

**With these tips in mind, you are ready to start using the framework and guidebook. We hope these resources help you crystalize your vision of a high-functioning afterschool system that nurtures young people in your community, figure out what it will take to get there, and track your progress along the way.**

# Starting the Work: Establishing System Goals and Infrastructure

Afterschool systems should not collect data just for the sake of collecting data or satisfying the demands of funders. Resources spent on measurement and analysis are resources that are not available for youth programming or staff development. Data should inform policies and practices, help providers strengthen programs, improve student outcomes, and communicate with stakeholders. To ensure that data is used and not just collected, system leaders need to take the time to develop a clear understanding of the system's goals, capacity, and priorities. Before using the framework, we encourage system leaders to walk through the following set of steps to help ensure that any data the system collects will be used to drive improvement. We encourage both newer and more established systems to go through these steps. From the evaluation of three community's efforts to use the framework, we learned that well-established systems can end up collecting data that it once considered important for decision-making but no longer need. The following steps and reflecting on the associated questions can help system leaders maximize the return on their data-collection investments.

1. **Determine your system's goals.** Any measurement should be linked to system goals. What are the goals of your system? Answering this question may require engaging with stakeholders such as a board, leadership committee, afterschool program staff, and/or youth. It is important to note the process may take time and require several conversations to gain consensus, particularly with regard to system priorities. Developing a clear logic model will help with this discussion. As you take account of your system's goals, it is also important to consider the structure of the system, the intermediary's role in it, and how the system goes about connecting with community stakeholders and program partners. What do these imply for system goals, and how you will go about achieving them? As you think about the system's goals for youth outcomes, consider whether you currently have the right program content and

## Resource Tips

**Systems without a current management information system (MIS) may want to consult the Forum for Youth Investment's comprehensive MIS system toolkit for guidance (https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Building-Management-Information-Systems-to-Coordinate-Citywide-Afterschool-Programs.pdf).**

**Systems looking for advice on how to strengthen their data collection and storage to support the use of data may want to consult RAND's Putting Data to Work for Young People (https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL350.html)**

staffing in place to achieve them. What forms of support will the system need to provide to programs in order to achieve those goals?

2. **Determine your organization's capacity for data collection and analysis.** There are three components to address:

   a. **Data infrastructure.** Do you have your own management information system (MIS) that collects information on programs and youth? What data does it include? Are providers using it? Is relevant data housed in any other MIS? Collectively, does the data meet current needs? Will it be sufficient for meeting system priorities, goals, and desired outcomes identified in the framework? If not, what additions/refinements are needed, and are they feasible?

   b. **Internal staff capacity.** What is the intermediary's current internal staffing structure, and what are the responsibilities and skill set of each member? Do staff have the appropriate skills to collect, analyze, and use data the organization is collecting?

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### 📖 Definition of Key Terms in this Guide

- **System leader:**
  The lead organization that coordinates actors and facilitates activities in the afterschool system.

- **Providers:**
  The organizations that develop and operate afterschool programs for youth.

- **Program:**
  The programmatic activity that youth register for.

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Determine if a dedicated person will lead your work with the framework or if duties will be divided among multiple staff members.

   c. **External research partners.** What external research partners does the system engage with? How do they support current research and communication efforts? What expertise do they have that you are drawing upon or could draw upon? Is the format in which they present the information to you easy for you to use? How can you engage these partners in furthering the system's work? Does it make sense to establish additional partnerships to expand the system's capacity?

3. **Develop a common set of definitions.** Creating a clear set of definitions at the onset of the work will help foster a shared understanding among staff and stakeholders of the system's data-related goals and plans. It is surprisingly easy for different actors in the system to attach different meanings to commonly used terms, making data collection and use more challenging. For instance, the term "program" could refer to (1) the organization providing the program (e.g., Boys & Girls Club), (2) the set of activities offered at one site (e.g., Boys & Girls Club at Ellington Middle), or (3) a specialized activity offered at one site (e.g., Computer Coding at Ellington Middle). Furthermore, a "program" could be something that occurs over one session or one year. What definitions make sense for one community may not make sense for another, so consider your own context when defining terms.

4. **Establish measurement plans that match the system's priorities and capacity.**
   The framework identifies several desired outcomes and indicators. Determine which outcomes your system is striving to achieve. For these outcomes, which indicators are most important for you to measure to drive system improvement?  Which do you have the capacity to measure now? Which will require capacity-building to measure in the future?

5. **Develop a data use plan.** A data plan will help you ensure that the system actually uses the data it collects—and uses it appropriately. To ensure that data gets used appropriately, you will need to understand the strength of the data you collect and whether using it could have unintended consequences. Making high-stakes decisions based on incomplete information could damage what the system is trying to build.

   For instance, external program observations provide systems and providers with information about the quality of certain program practices as observed on a given day. When used to prompt reflection and support, the data from such observations can strengthen practice and improve quality. However, making next year's funding dependent on meeting a program quality benchmark is likely not appropriate. To use the data in this way, you would need to be certain that the level of quality on the day of the observation is representative of the quality of the program all the time, that a different observer would have given the program the same rating, and that more highly rated programs in the system are truly better. Even if all of this were the case, using data to make determinations about funding could have the unintended consequence of making programs less willing to participate in data collection activities or the system in general.

   Before making decisions about how to use data, ask yourself: Whose perspective does the data reflect? Is the data representative of the population the system serves?  How reliable is the measurement? Refer to Appendix C for sample data plans: the Providence After School Alliance Sample Data Collection Schedule and Sprockets Data Matrix. Additionally, the Sample Outcome Tracking Charts throughout the guidebook provide a model for how data can be used.

6. **Revisit and revise over time.** The process of establishing goals, determining capacity, and creating infrastructure may take a long time. Systems should be prepared to dedicate time to the process up front and be ready to revise goals and priorities based on changes in, or a changing understanding of, system capacity, resources, and local community context.

# Measuring System-Level Outcomes

Participants of the Providence After School Alliance Hub program have fun practicing for a musical performance.
Photo credit: CAJ Photography, Providence After School Alliance

The system—as embodied by the lead organization—is the backbone that supports program quality, continuous improvement, and ultimately positive youth experience and outcomes. While all afterschool lead organizations play the coordinating function within their community, the distinct structure and context of each organization drives the system's goals and activities, and the pace at which it develops.

## This section provides options for measuring the five system-level outcomes presented in the framework:

**DESIRED OUTCOME #1:**

The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool

**DESIRED OUTCOME #2:**

Youth have expanded and equitable access to —and increased participation in — high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs

**DESIRED OUTCOME #3:**

Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement

**DESIRED OUTCOME #4:**

The system effectively advocates for policies and funding to support afterschool programs

**DESIRED OUTCOME #5:**

Families and youth are satisfied with, connected to, and have voice in the afterschool system

In working through this section, remember that this is not a rule book. It is a guide that provides ideas and advice to inform local decision-making. Not all indicators need to be measured, and not all potentially available data needs to be collected. There may be outcomes that are important to your system that are not represented on this list; feel free to add them. It is also important to understand that a system can engage in activities that support these outcomes without measuring them.

As we walk through each system-level outcome, we highlight its importance and then describe how systems might use data related to that outcome. We then delve into the potential indicators and data to track, making note of those indicators that require advanced data systems or analytic techniques to measure. We conclude the description of each outcome with a hypothetical sample of the data that an intermediary tracking that outcome might end up with and how it might inform the intermediary's priorities and actions. When available, we provide real world examples to show how the communities in the evaluation collected, analyzed, or used the corresponding data.

**DESIRED OUTCOME #1**

# The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool

## RACIAL EQUITY
QUESTIONS

- **Who has the system involved in establishing the vision?**

- **Are those involved representative of the community, including youth?**

- **How has the system involved youth in the process?**

- **Are system leaders systematically collecting and analyzing demographic information about board and staff members?**

- **Is the system encouraging cross-sector collaboration between afterschool, schools, workforce, health, and other sectors to meet the developmental needs of underserved youth in a holistic way?**

One of the key outcomes of building an afterschool system is bringing together a disparate and previously uncoordinated array of actors to share a joint vision of afterschool and its value.[1] An example of a shared vision from the Providence After School Alliance is: "Our vision is that all youth experience a range of quality after-school, summer, and other expanded learning opportunities that promote their intellectual, creative, and healthy development." Establishing a common vision takes time. Significant effort may go into getting the community's input and involvement. This will likely entail in-person meetings with and/or surveys of key stakeholders (e.g., funders, program providers, city officials, school personnel, families, and youth) to ensure the vision meets local needs. The development of a common vision is often a foundational activity for afterschool systems that helps guide organizational practices and future endeavors. At the same time, system leaders may want to periodically reassess the vision as new stakeholders and leaders emerge in the community.

The racial equity questions for this outcome encourage you to reflect on which stakeholders the system leader is engaging and how they are included in building a common vision for afterschool in the community.

## Use of data

System leaders can use data related to this outcome during annual planning to determine whether and how to focus engagement strategies on specific groups of stakeholders or whether to reengage stakeholders in order to refresh certain aspects of the vision. Systems that have developed common goals can periodically report on their progress toward those goals to help galvanize support and funding. An example of how one system leader tracked this outcome and a second example of how a system leader put data about this outcome into action can be found at the end of this section.

1 Bodilly et al., Hours of Opportunity; Yohalem et al., Building Citywide Systems.

Guidebook for the Every Hour Counts Framework     SYSTEM LEVEL: VISION AND GOALS

## Selecting indicators and data to track

Afterschool system leaders can choose among several indicators and associated data that measure the extent to which the community shares a common vision of afterschool. Systems should be able to track most of these regardless of how far along they are in their ability to work with data. We highlight methods for conducting a self-assessment, when possible, as a way to assess progress that does not rely on more formal data collection methods such as interviews and surveys.

**INDICATOR 1** System sets and publicizes shared vision and goals

Consider the example of a shared vision we offered at the start of this section: "All youth from low-income communities will have access to and participate in high-quality afterschool opportunities." Goals associated with this vision could include "In 2020, our community will increase the number of youth from low-income families participating in afterschool programs. We will serve 10,000 youth in afterschool, 5,000 in summer programs, and 2,500 in the summer jobs program." Publishing these goals, along with an explanation of the process by which the system arrived at them, on websites and in external documents can help acculturate new stakeholders and funders to what the community is trying to accomplish. We will address many of the goals a community might choose to set, including having programs serve a certain number of youth or meet a certain quality threshold, as described later in this guidebook on page 60: **Program Indicator 1. Programs meet established program quality standards**.

*What type of organization may be interested?* All types of systems in communities with an established vision and goals may be interested in formally or informally tracking aspects of this indicator.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* New afterschool systems that have only recently developed a common vision and goals may be interested in reporting the adoption of those goals, while more experienced systems with more established goals may want to track and report annual progress toward achieving them.

- **Adoption of community vision and goals** and **publication of community vision and goals:** These activities do not require a heavy lift in terms of measurement and analysis. The work is in the creation and dissemination of the vision and goals.

- **Reporting of progress toward community goals.** To do this, systems must have established goals in place and then measure, analyze, and report progress on a periodic basis. For example, Boston After School & Beyond reports the number of youth served in summer programming on an annual basis and tracks growth in the number served over time.

## Data *in Action*

### USING DATA TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENT:
#### ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Sprockets, Saint Paul, recognized that while the community had an understanding of what constituted quality programming, it lacked a shared vision for what youth outcomes it wanted programs to promote. Sprockets opted to pause the implementation of the framework and wisely decided to first develop such a vision and garner buy-in for it from community members. Sprockets engaged a neutral party, a local consultant, to host multiple focus groups with community members, including youth, to discuss what programs were currently focused on and their aspirations for what they should focus on. Results from these focus groups were used to inform the system's strategic planning and help determine what to measure.

System leaders also convened a select group of community members with expertise in data collection to review the system's current data inventory. The workgroup provided suggestions about what data to continue collecting and whether the intermediary's data system should be reconfigured to better link certain data sources or track information in different ways. Recommendations from these convenings, as well as the focus groups, allowed the system to meaningfully adjust its practices and plans so they were responsive to community needs.

In the end, Sprockets learned it was critical to pause for a few months and invest time and resources to develop a community-driven vision in order to lead a system-wide continuous improvement effort.

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**INDICATOR 2**  ## System adopts and uses a shared definition of program quality

A starting point for many afterschool systems is setting and publicly sharing quality standards for afterschool programs. These quality standards may follow a locally developed or widely available framework describing key program components that need to be in place for youth to have a high-quality experience. Publicizing this information on a website or in an annual report can help programs clearly understand what quality means and can help parents and youth identify high-quality programs.

***What type of organization may be interested?***
While all afterschool systems are interested in adopting quality standards, only new afterschool systems that are working on the creation of quality standards or adding providers to the system may be interested in measuring or tracking this indicator. Alternatively, systems with established quality standards may be interested in tracking how and whether programs new to the system are adopting standards.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?***
Afterschool systems can track the following indicators to gauge progress in adoption and use of quality standards.

- **Adoption of program quality standards.** The measurement of this is quite simple; the work is in the generation of the standards.

> **📶 Measurement Ideas**
>
> **Survey or Interview Questions About Programs' Use of Quality Standards**
>
> - **To what extent are you aware of the system's program quality standards?**
> - **Do you believe the standards represent quality? How could they be improved?**
> - **To what extent do you use the standards to develop your programming?**
> - **In what ways do you use the program standards to assess, either formally or informally, your program(s)?**

- **Number or percentage of providers or programs using the program quality standards.** Once standards are in place, system leaders may be interested in measuring and tracking the number of providers/programs using the standards. While systems can use a survey of providers to gather this data, it may not be worth the cost. For many afterschool systems, a good estimate of the number of providers using the quality standards is the number of provider organizations that participate in the network. Systems that do use a survey can also report the percentage of providers or programs that use the quality standards.

For system leaders who wish to more deeply understand the ways providers use quality standards, we provide potential interview questions in the pull-out box above.

**INDICATOR 3** **System adopts and uses shared measurement tools**

A key support that systems provide to programs is a set of common tools and infrastructure to help them strengthen their practice and track progress toward community-wide goals. The potential data to collect relate to two common forms of support:

- A management information system (MIS) that allows providers to enter data on youth and their attendance. The management information system can also capture key information about access to programs, such as program enrollment and participation rates across the community.

- A program quality assessment tool that captures programs' fidelity to quality standards. Adopting a single tool for the entire system makes it possible to collect a common set of data, which can then be used to track and report progress toward quality-related goals and help programs improve. Systems in the early phases of their development can encourage programs to use the tool for self-assessment. Systems further along can use it to conduct their own assessments and share the results with providers.

**What type of organization may be interested?**
All system leaders that directly support providers with a common MIS and/or quality program assessment tools will be interested in this indicator.

> ### Resource Tips
>
> **Program Quality Assessment Tools**
>
> **Systems looking for program quality assessment information should consult Measuring Youth Program Quality; A Guide to Assessment Tools: http://www.cypq.org/content/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition**
>
> **The guide provides detailed information on commonly used assessment tools, including their content, data collection structure, and technical properties.**
>
> **State afterschool networks also have information on the state's program quality assessments or state self-assessment tools. Find your state network here: http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/.**

**What data could be collected and analyzed?** System leaders can track:

- **Adoption of an MIS.** For new systems, the selection of an MIS that tracks attendance is a big accomplishment. This measure does not require specific data collection and analysis but is worth reporting.

- **MIS training.** Staff have to be trained before they can properly use an MIS,[2] and system leaders should know the percentage of providers or programs that have MIS-trained staff. Whether to measure this at the provider level or the individual program level depends on which staff should be entering the data. Either way, here is a formula for determining the percentage with trained staff:

> Percentage of providers/programs (that adopted the system) with MIS-trained staff =
> # of providers/programs with MIS-trained staff/# of providers/programs that adopted the MIS

Systems interested in this measure should systematically track the names of individuals who receive training, the organization they belong to, the date of training, and the material covered in the training session.

- **MIS use.** Once the system adopts an MIS, it can track *the number and percentage of providers or program in the system that use the MIS*.

---

2 McCombs et al., *Hours of Opportunity*.

You may also want to track *the number and percentage of youth served in programs that use the MIS*. System leaders can use these pieces of data to promote use of the MIS, understand the type of providers that are most likely to use (or not use) the MIS, and assess the value of their investment in an MIS. For instance, system leaders may question the value of the MIS if only 20 percent of providers used it and those providers only served 5 percent of the youth in the afterschool system. Tracking use over time can also give system leaders a sense of whether the system is valued by providers or not. For instance, if system leaders see that the number of providers using the system consistently declined each year for three years, they may want to determine why they are abandoning it and modify it accordingly.

**▉▍ Measurement Ideas**

**Survey Questions About Program Use of Management Information System**

- **What information do you record in the system?**

- **To what extent do you find the system's ready-made reports easy to use, if applicable?**

- **What recommendations do you have for improving the usability of [management information system name]?**

- **Are there additional data fields that should be added to the system?**

System leaders may also be interested in learning how individual programs engage with the MIS. They can do this using a survey or by interviewing program staff.

- **Program quality assessment tool use.** Understanding how many providers and programs are using your program assessment tool is critical to ensuring that it serves its purpose.

  Systems with a program quality assessment tool can track its use by:

  - The number and percentage of *providers* with a program that underwent a quality assessment, either annually or by session

  - The number and percentage of *programs* that underwent a quality assessment, either annually or by session

  - The number and percentage of *youth* served by programs that underwent a quality assessment, either annually or by session

Systems in which the intermediary does not conduct assessments but rather relies on providers and programs to self-assess may need to survey providers or program leaders to understand the extent to which they are using the assessment tool.

- **Participation in data sharing.** Systems can track *the number and percentage of providers or program in the system that enter and share their attendance data and/or program quality data on an annual basis*. Providers can share attendance data by (1) using a common MIS and/or (2) uploading attendance files that are then aggregated by the intermediary. Systems can track sharing of program quality data in terms of files uploaded by providers (if providers self-assess) or the number of programs that participate in an external assessment.

**INDICATOR 4**  ## System engages key community stakeholders

Community stakeholders including other community organizations, local government agencies, foundations, school districts, businesses, families, and youth are critical to the success of an afterschool system.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** All system leaders may be interested in tracking stakeholder engagement through either formal measurement or self-assessment.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Measurement and analysis options range from relatively easy to challenging. Before determing what data to collect, system leaders should reflect on who the key stakeholders in the system are and the roles each needs to play in order for the system to be successful in meeting its goals. Potential data to collect for this indicator include:

> ⚙ **Analysis Ideas**
>
> **To understand if there are gaps in the types of programs the system offers, analyze participation by:**
>
> - **Location in the city**
> - **Program type**
> - **Population served (age, demographics)**

- **Board composition.** System leaders can take stock of their board membership, particularly whether key city leaders and funders participate, and whether community, youth, and parent voice are adequately represented. We recommend a self-assessment to determine whether board representation is adequate to achieve the system's goals.

- **Provider engagement.** The *number and percentage of providers in the community that participate in the network* are both of interest. Reviewing membership rosters to determine the number of providers in the system should be simple. Determining the percentage of all providers in the community that participate in the system can be quite difficult; however, because you will need to know the number of providers in the community or come up with a good estimate:

> **Percentage of network participants =**
> **number of network providers/number of providers in the community**

Equally important is knowing which programs are not in the network. This information can help system leaders understand whether the network is meeting community needs and program participation goals. If you don't know the exact number of providers and providers in your community, you can still assess whether there are major ones that are not participating in the network. Make these your recruiting targets for next year!

- **Active network participation.** To understand the number and percentage of participants in the network who are active, you first need to define "active." For instance, an active provider could be defined as one that participates in the system's attendance tracking MIS or attends professional development workshops. The process of thinking through what "active" means for the system is helpful in and of itself.

  Once you identify the number of active network participants, you can analyze it as:

  - A percentage of all members of the network:

    Percentage of active participants = number of active providers/number of network member providers

  - A percentage of all providers in the community:

    Percentage of active participants in community = number of active providers/number of afterschool providers in the community

- **Key stakeholder support.** Every community has key stakeholders who are critical to the success and sustainability of the system. System leaders will want to periodically assess whether key stakeholders are involved and playing needed roles. While this can be accomplished with formal surveys and interviews, it

may not be worth the cost. Self-assessment is a lower-cost, lower-effort option that can still have big benefits. Members of the intermediary can report their perception of the level of support from stakeholders.

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**👤 Self-Assessment**

**Who Are Your Key Stakeholders?**

**Every community has key stakeholders who are critical to the success and sustainability of the system. Who are yours?**

**Common stakeholders include:**

- **City leaders**
- **District leaders**
- **School principals**
- **Families**
- **Youth**
- **Program providers**
- **Local foundations**
- **Other funders**

**What do they need to do for the system to be successful? How engaged are they? How do they demonstrate engagement?**

- **Board membership**
- **Ideas**
- **Voice**
- **Funding**
- **Public support**
- **Facilities**
- **Data**

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #1 TRACKING:**
*The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System adopts and uses shared measurement tools** | | | |
| **MIS use/ attendance sharing** | 65% of programs in the network are using the MIS; another 10% are uploading attendance data to use. | MIS and attendance data | Pull names of providers not sharing attendance data; interview program directors to understand barriers to data sharing or use. |
| **Quality assessment use** | In 2019, 75% of providers in the system are participating in our external quality assessments (up from 50% in 2018); 20% of providers report conducting annual self-assessments. | Our quality assessment score tracker and provider survey | Discuss with staff – are we satisfied? How confident are we about the quality of the self-assessments? How much focus should we place on converting the other providers versus other activities? |
| **System engages key community stakeholders** | | | |
| **Network participation** | 102 programs are in the network; percentage of participating programs is unknown; few programs operating in the south of the city are members of the network. | Network rosters, knowledge of major providers in the city, examining geographic location of providers in the network | Identify programs operating in the south of the city and recruit to the network. |
| **Active network participation** | 67% of programs in the network are active participants. | Active defined as participating in at least 2 network events | |
| **Board composition** | No youth are on the board. | Self-assessment | Develop a process for recruiting and selecting a youth member to the board. Add at least 2 youth members to the board by April. |
| **Key stakeholder support** | Principals are not systematically engaged with afterschool; a couple are very supportive and engaged (e.g., Principal Thomas), but most are unaware of program goals, creating barriers to access. | Self-assessment, collection of issues raised by staff | Create engagement strategy for principals in consultation with Superintendent Jones and Principal Thomas. |

## SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #1 TRACKING:
### *The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System adopts and uses shared measurement tools** | | | |
| **MIS use/ attendance sharing** | | | |
| **Quality assessment use** | | | |
| **System engages key community stakeholders** | | | |
| **Network participation** | | | |
| **Active network participation** | | | |
| **Board composition** | | | |
| **Key stakeholder support** | | | |

## *Youth have expanded and equitable access to— and increased participation in—high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs*

Youth participation in structured learning opportunities outside of the school day is not equitable. Youth from low-income families have lower rates of participation than youth from higher-income families across all types of activities, including sports, lessons, and clubs.[3] One of the key goals of communities' afterschool systems is to bridge that participation gap by providing access to quality afterschool programming for underserved youth. Like establishing a common vision, determining access to and participation in community afterschool programs is an activity that takes time and data and needs to be revisited periodically. Measuring this outcome requires information about the availability of programming across the community and the ability to track attendance in those programs. Determining whether access and participation is equitable also requires information about the youth participating in programs as well as youth across the entire community.

The racial equity questions ask system leaders to consider equity in terms of youth demographics and needs as well as whether and how the system is incorporating community voices in its own planning and helping providers develop programs that meet youth needs.

### RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- **Are access and participation equitable across regions, demographics, and youth needs?**

- **Are system staff members provided professional development on how to integrate equity in policies, practices, and governance?**

- **How are the people most affected by the system involved in the design and implementation of policies?**

## Use of data

By tracking access and participation across the system, system leaders can understand how best to target initiatives and allocate funding. The data may generate a set of questions that require further investigation before action can be taken. For instance, system leaders may need to seek additional information from programs leaders, principals, parents, or youth to understand the reasons why overall participation is lower than desired or why certain groups of youth are not participating at equal rates. Is it due to lack of programming? Cost? Lack of transportation? Undesirable programming? Perceptions of quality and safety? Gaining a full understanding of barriers helps system leaders find effective solutions.

US Census Bureau, "Nearly 6 Out of 10"; Yoo et al., *Putting Data to Work*;; Pew Research Center, <shortened title.

## Selecting indicators and measures

Several indicators and measures can help afterschool systems determine the degree of access to, and participation in, high-quality programs. Data for these indicators will likely come from multiple sources, including internal and external program listings, an MIS that tracks youth enrollment and attendance, and knowledge of barriers to access that may exist in the community. Some of the options below require advanced analytic expertise; where possible, we also provide options that may be less precise but will be attainable and useful to communities without this capacity.

**INDICATOR 1** System provides equitable access to high-quality programming

***What type of organization may be interested?*** All afterschool systems will be interested in understanding what programs are operating in the community and how they are distributed across the community.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Fully measuring equitable access is a difficult task. It requires information on (1) program availability, i.e., the programs operating in the community, including their location and capacity, and (2) youth, including their location and demographics. It also requires analytic capabilities, such as the ability to merge data sets, conduct representative surveys, weight data, and use geographic information system software.

Data on programs operating in the community, including the location, population served, number of slots available, content, and cost, can be gathered from (1) a community scan and provider survey, which may require an external research partner (depending on local context, this could involve access to universities) or (2) the system's program roster or program finder (which limits the scan to providers participating in the system). Data about youth can be obtained from the local school district or the public census. We offer basic and more complex options below.

- **Available programs and slots.**

  A first step to understanding access is to measure the number of available programs and their associated slots. Each program has a maximum enrollment number or the number of participant slots that are available to be filled. System leaders unable to conduct a comprehensive community scan can use MIS data to track the number of slots available in the systems' programs each year.

> ⚙ **Analysis Ideas**
>
> **Determining Equitable Access**
> - To what extent are programs distributed across the community's geographical areas (e.g., neighborhoods)?
>   - Are various program types available in all areas?
> - Are programs available to youth from various backgrounds, ages, and income levels?
> - Do the available programs meet youth needs in the community (e.g., English language learners, specific cultural groups)?

For those system leaders able to obtain more detailed data, analysts can assess how equitable access to programs is by dividing the number of available slots by the *number of youth in each demographic category who are able to access those slots*. For instance, analysts can look at whether youth from low-income communities have less access to programs than higher-income families. Neighborhood or address is typically used as a proxy for determining whether youth can easily access a program. They can use geographic information system software to map the availability of programming and the location of youth to visually display the extent to which the distribution of programming is consistent with the distribution of youth and certain groups of youth. Analysts can also determine if program cost should be a consideration as well.

This type of measurement may not be possible for many systems—it is time intensive, may require outside expertise, and can be expensive. System leaders interested in tracking this indicator without these resources may want to conduct less comprehensive scans to identify potential gaps by gathering information about program wait lists (i.e., which programs are regularly over-capacity and cannot serve everyone who wants to attend), examining the distribution of programs in the system by neighborhood, talking to district personnel and school principals about whether certain schools or groups of students have unmet needs, and by comparing the needs of parents and youth to the content of available programming. Because these methods may provide incomplete information, system leaders will want to seek additional information from other sources to confirm any perceived gaps in access before making decisions.

**INDICATOR 2** System ensures equitable participation

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems that track attendance and youth demographics will be interested in understanding whether youth participation in programs is equitable (i.e., whether the demographics of youth who participate in programs mirrors the demographics of youth in the community as a whole).

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** To understand whether participation is equitable, system leaders will need data on (1) the number of youth served in programs, (2) the characteristics of those youth, and (3) the number and characteristics of youth in the community. In systems with an MIS, program providers often enter some participant characteristics into the MIS. Characteristics of the youth population in the community as whole may be available from the district or the census. You will want to focus your analysis on:

- **Youths served.** Systems can track the *number and percentage of youth participating in programs and in high-quality programs*, overall and by subpopulations (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, family income).

One way of analyzing and displaying participation of subpopulations in programs is to create representation indices that measure the percentage of youth from different subpopulations served in programs relative to their representation in the overall population *(representation index = percentage in program/percentage in population)*. Representation is completely equitable if the index equals 1. A representation index value below 1 indicates some level of underrepresentation; an index value above 1 indicates some level of overrepresentation. For instance, if a system leader finds that 12 percent of elementary school youth in afterschool programs are Latinx while 60 percent of elementary school youth overall are Latinx (representation index = .2), this signals that Latinx youth are underrepresented among program participants. The system leader may want to understand why participation rates are low and find ways to increase participation among this group of youth. Interpreting the index relative to system goals is important, as under- or overrepresentation is not necessarily a negative. For instance, a system may desire to serve youth from low-income families. Finding that youth from low-income families are overrepresented in the system's programs may be considered a win for the community.

We provide an example of how one community used outside data to highlight participation gaps in their community in the case example on : **Telling a Story with Data: Sprockets and Youth Afterschool Participation**.

**INDICATOR 3** ## System expands access and increases participation

***What type of organization may be interested?*** System leaders that have identified groups of underserved youth may want to track and report on efforts to expand access and increase participation. Note that some of these measures require data that is typically compiled in an MIS.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** A good first step is to understand whether there is unmet demand or excess availability of programming. To this end, leaders can track program capacity indicators including:

- **Unused slots.** The number of available but unused slots can be examined at the program (*number of programs that have unused slots*) and community levels *(number of unused slots across all programs)*.

- **Wait lists.** Tracking the number of programs that have a wait list or the number of youth on a program's wait list.

To make this data more actionable, leaders can examine these indicators by program type (do certain types of programs have unmet demand or excess capacity?), by neighborhood (do certain areas of the community have unmet demand or excess capacity?), and by youth demographics or need (are certain youth more likely to be on wait lists than others?).

If the goal is to increase access and participation, potential data to track include:

- **New slots created.** System leaders can calculate the difference in the number of slots from year to year (e.g., number of slots in 2020 – number of slots in 2019) to track the *number of new program slots that are created each year*. Note that this analysis could also reveal a decline in available programming.

- **Money raised/identified to support program slots.** One way systems help expand access and increase participation is by raising money or identifying funding sources that support program slots for underserved youth. Systems may wish to track dollars from grants, contracts, donations, or policy changes that can be used to expand access and increase participation. They can track this information with an internal data system or documentation program. Analysis can consist of basic tabulations of dollars raised through donations, grants, or contracts. More complex analyses could examine how dollars were raised, the success rate of various grant/contract applications, and advocacy efforts to influence policy changes that affect afterschool funding.

- **Increases or decreases in the rate of participation of underserved youth.** System leaders that define and identify groups of youth as "underserved" can track this data over time. With data on the number of available slots, systems can determine if an increase in access to programs (i.e., number of new slots) is benefiting traditionally underserved youth.

> ## 💡 Think About It
>
> **Expanding Participation**
> - How does your system define underserved youth? How do programs define underserved youth?
> - How have you worked to increase underserved youth's access to programs?
> - Are underserved youth participating at higher rates than before? If so, to what extent?
> - What obstacles did your programs face when trying to expand underserved youth's access to or participation in programs?
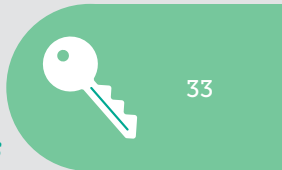
**Data *in* Action**

**TELLING A STORY WITH DATA:** SPROCKETS AND YOUTH AFTERSCHOOL PARTICIPATION

In order to tell a complete and compelling story about youth participation in afterschool, Sprockets looked beyond its own management information system. Staff used a Minnesota-specific database in tandem with program data collected by the system to understand whether participation in programs was equitably distributed across racial and ethnic groups and how perceptions about the quality of programs varied by different subgroups (e.g., low-income, youth of color, low-income youth of color). The staff found that youth of color participated at a lower rate than white youth and that perceptions of quality also varied by race and income status. Youth of color were less likely than white youth to indicate they felt safe in programs or developed a trusting relationship with an adult. Sprockets staff took these results seriously and wrote a brief on the findings (see Appendix C), which described what Sprockets is doing to increase and promote more equitable youth participation and to help providers improve the quality of programs for all youth. Sprockets shared its brief with city leaders, funders, program providers, and the broader community.

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #2 TRACKING:**
*Youth have expanded an equitable access to — and increased participation in — high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System provides equitable access to high-quality programming** | | | |
| **Available slots** | In the Ridgemont neighborhood, 300 youth (80% eligible for free and reduced-price lunch) will have no operating afterschool programs next year. | Superintendent Brown told us that the two elementary schools in that neighborhood no longer have federal 21st Century Community Learning Center money and will not have programs next year. Confirmed with principals and attended PTA meeting where issue was discussed. District has $2 M deficit and cannot fund. | Discuss with board: Can we raise funds to support these programs? Could the program at Highland (which is undersubscribed) move to Ridgemont? |
| **System ensures equitable participation in high-quality programming** | | | |
| **Youth served** | Latinx youth at the elementary and middle school levels are not participating at expected rates (representation index = .2). Access is not the issue. Programs are located in their neighborhoods and schools, but participation is still lagging. | MIS data. Mapping of programs to neighborhoods. | Conduct interviews and focus groups with providers, principals, parents, and teachers to understand root cause. Are programs employing bilingual staff? Does programming meet the needs of youth and families? What recruitment strategies are used? |

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #2 TRACKING:**
*Youth have expanded an equitable access to — and increased participation in — high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs*

34
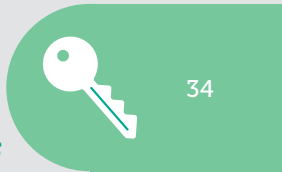
| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System provides equitable access to high-quality programming** | | | |
| **Available slots** | | | |
| **System ensures equitable participation in high-quality programming** | | | |
| **Youth served** | | | |

# *Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement*

## RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- **Are the quality standards culturally responsive and appropriate?**

- **Who delivers professional development to providers?**

- **Who is involved in setting improvement priorities for the system?**

Arguably, one of the most important features of afterschool systems is to support program providers' quality improvement efforts. This work is tied to the vision, goals, and program quality standards the system has established with the involvement of the community. The process of continuous improvement varies from system to system and depends on the structure of the system and available data and resources. Below, we describe data and measurement options for a set of common continuous improvement strategies adopted by systems that fall into three broad categories: professional development, use of data, and sharing of best practices. A system may provide all these components, partner with other organizations, or refer programs to outside sources.

The racial equity questions for this outcome prompt system leaders to consider the appropriateness of standards and assessment for different cultures, who delivers professional development to providers, and who weighs in on improvement priorities within the system.

## Use of data

System leaders can use data about this outcome to understand the effectiveness of their efforts to support programs' continuous improvement and to determine where additional supports may be needed. They can also use the data to advocate for funding for the system by demonstrating that programs are working to improve and, as a result, youth are having better experiences.

## Selecting indicators and measures

There are many ways to assess an afterschool system's provision of quality improvement standards and supports and providers' and programs' engagement with them. Here we outline potential indicators and measures related to continuous quality improvement efforts, including participation in quality observations and assessments, sharing and use of data, and

provision of professional development opportunities. For each of these indicators we also suggest specific measurement or assessments options and provide examples of how system leaders in the evaluation assessed or reported on program quality.

**INDICATOR 1** **System provides high-quality professional development, including workshops, coaching, and facilitated peer learning**

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Professional development is a key component of continuous quality improvement. Afterschool systems of all levels of maturity likely provide some type of training opportunity to program staff, including program leaders and front-line staff, and may be interested in tracking this indicator.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Newer systems may choose to focus on developing high-quality professional development offerings and measuring satisfaction with those offerings. Systems with more staff capacity can track staff participation in professional development over time and examine the relationship between staff participation in professional development and program quality. We provide several options for measuring professional development offerings, participation, and satisfaction:

- **Number of professional development opportunities provided, by content and type.** Systems should begin by having a clear understanding of all professional development opportunities offered throughout a calendar (or school) year. It may be helpful to categorize the offerings by type (e.g., workshop, webinar, peer-to-peer learning) and content (e.g., using data, social emotional learning practices). Doing this can help system leaders determine how well professional development offerings match up with the system's quality standards and measures. In addition to offering professional development directly, systems can connect program staff to professional development opportunities in the community. System leaders may wish to track the availability of such opportunities. For example, do the local parks and recreation department, United Way, or YMCA have offerings that program staff can attend? Knowing what is already out there can help system leaders decide what content to prioritize in their own offerings.

- **Professional development participation rates.** Systems with sufficient capacity and interest may wish to begin systematically tracking program staff's participation in professional development opportunities. To understand program participation, system staff can track individual staff attendance at offered sessions and the programs they represent. Tracking individual attendance allows systems to determine *the average number of professional development offerings an individual attends*, which can be analyzed by staff role and other characteristics if that information is available. System staff can also determine which staff are attending which PD opportunities; this can help them plan the following year's offerings, promote and recruit for events, and better tailor opportunities

to staff likely to attend. Another possible data point is the *number and percentage of providers or programs participating in a specific professional development activity*. Systems can use the information to encourage programs that may not be participating in offerings to do so.

- **Satisfaction with professional development opportunities and experiences.** One way for afterschool systems to know if they are meeting staff's professional development needs is to ask providers. System leaders can gauge satisfaction with a specific professional development offering by fielding a short satisfaction survey after the session. The survey could ask participants to rate the quality of the content provided along with the format and timing of the session and share their perceptions about how useful they found the offering. Measuring provider satisfaction with professional development opportunities requires surveying nonparticipants as well as participants to understand why some may not be participating, e.g., level of satisfaction.

## Data *in Action*

### TRACKING AND SELECTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

During the evaluation, Providence After School Alliance (PASA) set a goal to improve tracking of professional development. To do this, staff created a professional development calendar that included several pieces of information. We recommend following this example. Your calendar should include information on:

- The system's professional development offerings, including workshops led by system leader staff
- Professional development opportunities and trainings offered other community organizations
- Type and content of trainings (color-coded)

In addition, PASA used program observation and youth outcome data to shape the content of its professional development offerings. When they observed that program staff were struggling to apply specific practices or achieve specific outcomes, PASA adjusted its professional development content to explicitly focus on those areas. The following year, they measured the staff's progress on those practices and outcomes to determine whether the professional development was effective.

Systems with resources and robust data on both participation in professional development and program quality may wish to go a step further and begin to look for evidence of effectiveness by linking participation in professional development with program quality scores. They can analyze whether programs whose staff attended a certain training had stronger scores on the quality assessment linked to that training. We recommend this practice only for systems that have a strong understanding of, and practices for, data collection and analysis and a strong theory of action regarding how the training will affect particular aspects of quality.

## Data *in Action*

### TRACKING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION USING A MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

As part of the evaluation, Boston Afterschool & Beyond (Boston Beyond) had a goal of systematically tracking participation in professional development by programs in their network. Boston Beyond offers multiple professional development opportunities to program staff and wanted to understand which staff were served, which offerings were highly attended, and whether certain types of programs had better attendance than others. Boston Beyond also wanted to track attendance over time and ultimately link professional development participation to program quality assessment ratings. To meet these goals, it needed an accessible, easy-to-use system for tracking attendance. Boston Beyond would consider it a bonus if it could use the system for other purposes. Boston Beyond leadership conducted a search for such a system and decided that Salesforce was the best for their needs. Boston Beyond staff worked with a consultant to customize the system, developing fields and data collection tools to track professional development offerings and program participation in those offerings. As a result, Boston Beyond staff now tracks professional development participation both by the event (average attendance rate, who attended) and by program staff (each staff person's average event attendance rate and which events they attended).

**INDICATOR 2** System delivers data to program providers

***What type of organization may be interested?*** All systems that support the collection of program and youth data will be interested in understanding the extent to which providers use the data to drive improvement. Although all afterschool systems likely wish to share data with providers in their network, doing so is a huge undertaking that requires significant resources (e.g., time, expertise in data analysis). Data reports can include a variety of information, such as characteristics of youth or staff, general descriptive data about programs, and youth or program outcomes. However, data reports should be tailored to meet the needs of providers and aligned with system practices and supports. Thus, we anticipate that systems with greater capacity and interest will be most interested in this indicator.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?***
System leaders may be interested in tracking data such as:

- **Provider use of system-provided data reports.** A first step is to measure *the number and percentage of providers receiving system-provided data reports*.

  Understanding whether providers are using the reports they receive is more challenging. System leaders can gauge this by administering a survey of providers asking whether and how they use a report to inform practice or share information with parents or community partners. System leaders providing training in how to use report data can track and report the number and percentage of providers that participate in that training. If the system hosts data reports online, system leaders can also track provider logins or page visits.

  To understand why providers do or do not use data reports, we suggest conducting interviews or focus groups. The RAND Corporation's guide [Data Collection Methods](#) offers a user-friendly introduction to interviews and focus groups.

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📁 **Sharing Data with Providers**

**Potential Content for Reports**

- **General program information:**
  - **Program focus**
  - **Program session dates**
  - **Location**
  - **Staff names**
  - **Ages/grades served**
- **Program participation descriptive statistics:**
  - **Number of youths served, by demographics**
- **Program quality assessment scores, by indicator**
- **Youth attendance**
  - **Average daily attendance rate**
  - **Percentage of "high" and "low" attenders**
- **Other youth outcomes (if program focus)**
- **Benchmarks for data points, such as system-wide averages or the percentage of providers/programs meeting threshold standards**

---

Holding in-person meetings with providers allows them to share in-depth feedback that can help improve reporting with the goal of making data reports more accessible, applicable, and useful to programs.

- **Use of program quality assessment data.** Systems can track the *number and percentage of providers using program quality assessment data*. Systems that do not collect and share that data with providers may need to survey providers to understand the extent to which quality assessment data are used across the afterschool system to help guide improvements to the design and implementation of programs.

- **Use of MIS data reports.** System leaders may want to track the *number and percentage of providers that use MIS data reports*. System leaders may be able to track provider downloads of reports generated by the MIS to understand the type of information providers are using and the frequency with which they use it. For instance, system leaders may find that 60 percent of providers run a youth attendance report each week. Gathering additional data about how providers and programs are using the report can help system leaders spread best practices for data use. If they are unable to collect this data, system leaders can survey or interview providers and/or programs.

> **.ıll Measurement Ideas**
>
> **Asking Providers About MIS Data Use**
> - **What information do you record in the system? How often?**
> - **Who has access to the MIS? Who does not have access (meaning you have to pull the data for them)?**
> - **What data from the MIS do you use? How do you use it?**
> - **How easy or difficult is it to create ready-made reports using the MIS? To what extent are they helpful in informing your decisions, if applicable?**
> - **What recommendations do you have to improve the utility of [management information system name]?**

**INDICATOR 3** **System shares best practices with the provider community**

All afterschool systems can support programs by sharing best practices, such as methods for recruiting youth, engaging families, and onboarding staff.

*What type of organization may be interested?* All afterschool systems can support activities related to this indicator, but only systems with specific goals may want to measure the use of best practices.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* Systems seeking to understand the use of best practice information could track:

- **Creation and distribution of best practices.** By tracking the number of downloads and distributions of materials outlining and describing best practices, system leaders can gauge their reach. Tracking downloads can be as simple as using a website that records page traffic and number of downloads.
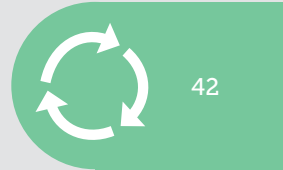
Tracking distribution of materials offline requires a careful count of materials and knowledge of who is receiving them and when. For example, are the materials delivered to participants that attend a workshop or annual meeting? Are they provided to each program in a welcome packet? Also, system leaders need to decide how much information they'd like to track, e.g., who is receiving the materials, and what support or training did they receive to help them use the materials or apply best practices?

- **Provider use of best practices.** System leaders who wish to understand how providers are using the best practices could survey all providers *(percentage of providers using best practice X)* or only those that participated in professional development *(percentage of providers trained to use best practice X)*. Alternatively, system leaders could conduct interviews with providers and ask detailed questions about their use of best practices and which best practices—and training and information about those practices—they find most effective.

## SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #3 TRACKING:
### *Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System provides high-quality professional development, including workshops, coaching, and facilitated peer learning** | | | |
| **Professional development opportunities provided** | Offered one session per quarter for front-line staff. Waiting list for family engagement training. | PD tracking system, satisfaction surveys, informal conversation with providers | Offer 2 sessions on family engagement due to demand. Can Jessica develop an intermediate training on this topic? |
| **Professional development participation** | 10 providers never send staff. | | Need more information – ask Dave to call program leads at 10 programs not sending staff to determine why. |
| **Professional development satisfaction** | Training that includes modeling and practice is most highly rated. Providers want more ongoing training and engagement. | | Pilot an ongoing learning group with program leaders (perhaps focused on data use?). Ask Allie from Cypress if she would be willing to help conceptualize the pilot. |
| **System delivers data to program providers** | | | |
| **Provider use of system-provided data reports** | 100% of partners logged into the online data report after the report update announcement was emailed, but only 40% have logged on several times since then. | Online report log-in data | We may need to provide more support to staff on how to navigate the report and understand the data. Could also conduct focus group to understand the obstacles to data use and interpretation. |

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #3 TRACKING:**
*Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement*

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| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System provides high-quality professional development, including workshops, coaching, and facilitated peer learning** | | | |
| **Professional development opportunities provided** | | | |
| **Professional development participation** | | | |
| **Professional development satisfaction** | | | |
| **System delivers data to program providers** | | | |
| **Provider use of system-provided data reports** | | | |

# The system effectively advocates for policies and funding to support afterschool programs

Apart from providing direct access to afterschool programs, afterschool systems can also advocate for local, state, and national policies and funding to support community programs. Forming relationships with community leaders and decision-makers is likely one of the most important aspects of the system leader's role. They may participate in local boards or community initiatives, meet with policymakers, apply for grants to support afterschool programming, and join other afterschool system leaders in organizations such as Every Hour Counts or the Afterschool Alliance to collectively advocate for afterschool-friendly policies and additional funding at the state or national level.

The racial equity questions for this outcome focus on building equitable access for all youth in the community into the system's funding and communication strategies.

## RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- **How is equitable access for all youth in your community built into the system's communication and funding strategies?**

- **Which youth have access to new programs and initiatives?**

## Use of data

System leaders can use data and information about this outcome to help focus advocacy and funding efforts and to demonstrate the value of the system to providers and funders in the community.

## Selecting indicators and measures

Potential indicators and associated measures focus on the processes and activities linked to the creation of supportive policies as well as the funding outcomes associated with those policies. As we discuss measurement options, we also look at how systems can self-assess progress, as system leaders may want to track this work without spending resources on precise measurements.

**INDICATOR 1** System promotes and communicates the value of afterschool

One critical function of afterschool systems is to communicate the value of afterschool programs and systems to a variety of stakeholders. Refer to "Self-Assessment: Who Are Your Key Stakeholders?" (page 24) to consider your audiences. Specifically, the system may communicate this in terms of access, participation, quality, youth outcomes, and the value of a coordinating body. Different metrics and messages will be appropriate depending on the audience.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** All types of systems are likely engaged in activities related to this indicator and may be interested in quantitatively or qualitatively assessing and speaking about their activities.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Afterschool system staff can track the following data:

- The *number of communication activities*—including reports, briefings, special events or convenings, and testimony to public bodies—and the content of these activities.

For example, an Excel spreadsheet could track the type of communication, the intended audience, and the intermediary staff's perceptions of its influence. Reviewing that information on an annual basis can provide a clear picture of the type of information the system is creating and/or distributing and whether it is reaching the intended stakeholders.

- **Effectiveness of communication** in influencing stakeholders. Gauging this can be challenging. There are times, however, when system leaders can track *stakeholders influenced and corresponding changes in policy by number and type*. For example, local government may increase afterschool funding for a summer jobs program based, in part, on information received from the intermediary. At the end of the year, system leaders can share accomplishments with the community and use the information to plan for the upcoming year. Given limited resources, we do not recommend surveying stakeholders to measure the effectiveness of individual communications and their influence; however, intermediary staff can gather qualitative assessments from stakeholders and staff, record them in a communication tracking spreadsheet, and use them to help inform future efforts.

## Data *in Action*

# COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF AFTERSCHOOL:
## SHARING SYSTEM PROGRESS, MESSAGES, AND ANNUAL UPDATES

Afterschool intermediaries often share updates and messages to communicate the value of afterschool and the accomplishments of providers and intermediaries and to raise the profile of the local afterschool sector with key stakeholders. We have included links to samples of annual reports and email updates in Appendix C. Here are two brief examples from the communities in the evaluation:

**Sprockets:** Over the course of the evaluation, Sprockets developed a series of reports based on system priorities, including access, participation, and quality. Each report is short, focused on one topic, and geared toward a different audience (e.g., the report on access to programs is primarily for local policymakers). The short reports represented a way to communicate with key stakeholders throughout the year about system goals and important issues beyond an annual report.

**Boston Afterschool & Beyond (Boston Beyond) and Providence After School Alliance (PASA):** To provide the community, funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders periodic updates, Boston Beyond and PASA send out emails with information on key events, policies, or reports that feature the intermediaries. The emails are short and provide links to the documents referenced. Rather than serving as a comprehensive overview, they share snippets of information and highlight key local accomplishments.

**INDICATOR 2** System shares information about policy and funding opportunities with providers

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems often serve as a conduit of information for providers, passing along information on key policies—those set by the system and those set by various levels of government—and funding opportunities that may affect them. System leaders who consider this a key part of their work may want to track their efforts.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* System leaders interested in this indicator may want to start by developing a list of information considered critical to providers, such as federal, state, or local policies affecting programs and associated funding opportunities.

They can track the *number of new funding opportunities identified and shared*. System leaders may want to develop a strategy for tracking this information and communicating it with the provider community. They can then conduct a self-assessment and gather provider feedback to gauge the availability and accessibility of information about policies and funding sources. Can providers easily find the information they need on a regular basis? Does the intermediary share new information with providers quickly and effectively? Is the intermediary identifying new sources of funding and sharing those with the provider community? In addition, system leaders may also want to identify missed opportunities to share information.

### INDICATOR 3  System secures sustainable and diverse system-level funding

A key challenge for systems is developing sustainable and sufficient funding for both programs and the system itself. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. Understanding the funding profile of the system, however, can help system leaders keep track of their available resources, prioritize activities in a way that matches up with available resources, and potentially identify new funding opportunities.

*What type of organization may be interested?* All systems will want to think about how to ensure diverse and sustainable funding for system activities and programs.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* Measures for this indicator could capture information about funding for intermediary functions and programs in the system. Specifically, system leaders can track:

- Number of funders
- Funder type (e.g., government, foundation, private donor)
- Amount of funding
- Length of funding commitments
- Restrictions on use of funding

All system leaders should be collecting and analyzing this information at least for funding of the system itself, if not for programs. We suggest that system leaders review the information periodically to identify gaps and determine if current funding is sustainable and spread across different types of funders.

Additionally, systems with greater staff capacity may wish to track programs' success rate in applying for grants or contracts. Tracking this information can help ensure that relevant programs receive information on key funding opportunities and potentially help from the intermediary with grants or contract proposals.

**INDICATOR 4** **System supports new programs and initiatives**

As afterschool systems grow and identify gaps between available programming and community needs, system leaders may help develop and incubate new programs and initiatives, perhaps testing their efficacy to determine whether the practices they use should be scaled to the entire network.
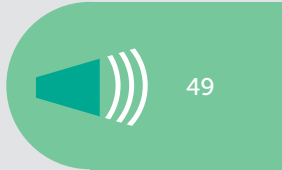
**What type of organization may be interested?** Because developing and supporting new programs and initiatives takes time and significant resources, we believe that systems with greater staff capacity are most likely to be interested in this indicator. It focuses on what type of programs or initiatives the system helps develop and the funding and support it provides.

**What data could be collected and analyzed?** To understand what the afterschool system has funded and supported, leaders should track:

- **The number and type (e.g., STEM, art, summer) of programs or initiatives developed.** This information can be provided to potential funders, used to develop system priorities and strategic plans, and shared with the broader community.

- **Cost of new initiatives.** System leaders should track the cost of new initiatives, along with the type and amount of funding they receive. This information can be used to determine if funding is sustainable, diverse, and sufficient to continue supporting or potentially developing new programs or initiatives.

- **Spread of knowledge from initiatives.** Sharing positive outcomes of, and lessons learned from, new initiatives can benefit the entire afterschool community. Afterschool systems may wish to work with an outside evaluator to determine the effectiveness of certain program or initiatives. Alternatively, system leaders may choose to gather their own data from program and system staff and participating youth on what worked well, what could be improved, and what lessons can be applied to other programs or initiatives. Regardless of how they gather data, system leaders can share a report or brief with the wider afterschool community to help inform others' practice and policies.

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #4 TRACKING:**
*The system effectively advocates for policies and funding that support afterschool programs*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System promotes and communicates the value of afterschool** | | | |
| **Effectiveness of external communication** | The city access and participation report was a large investment but appears to have paid off. It was shared with city leaders, local funders, and families. Local paper also picked it up. City council discussed findings and asked us to present. City council passed budget with additional $75K for afterschool programs on the West Side, where we found access and participation gaps. | Communication tracking data, city budget data | $75K is not sufficient to close the participation gap. The community foundation has not engaged on this yet. Send report to Executive Director and arrange follow-up conversation. |
| **System shares information about policy and funding opportunities with providers** | | | |
| **New funding opportunities shared** | Two new funding opportunities shared on the "Finding Funding" part of the intermediary website. However, the site only received 5 hits this fall, compared to 250 hits upon launch in fall 2015. | Analysis of web data | Send out email blast and tweets when new funding sources are added. |
| **System creates sustainable and diverse system-level funding** | | | |
| **Level of funding and length of commitments** | Large grant from national funder is ending next year. In addition to paying for creation of the MIS, it is funding the associated maintenance fees and provider training. | Financial data | Need to find an alternative funding source or determine what activities we will need to cut to keep it. |

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #4 TRACKING:**
*The system effectively advocates for policies and funding that support afterschool programs*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System promotes and communicates the value of afterschool** | | | |
| **Effectiveness of external communication** | | | |
| **System shares information about policy and funding opportunities with providers** | | | |
| **New funding opportunities shared** | | | |
| **System creates sustainable and diverse system-level funding** | | | |
| **Level of funding and length of commitments** | | | |

**DESIRED OUTCOME #5**

# *Families and youth are satisfied with, connected to, and have voice in the afterschool system*

## RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- **How does the system know what families and youth want in terms of program options?**

- **Are levels of satisfaction equally distributed in the community?**

- **Are the youth in leadership positions representative of the community?**

Afterschool systems can serve as a trusted voice on afterschool activities in a community, providing information on what is available and what the benefits of participation are. Systems may elect to connect families to afterschool programs by creating or hosting a program finder tool, publishing a brochure of community offerings, or fielding emails or calls from interested parents or youth. Systems may wish to communicate the value of participating in organized activities through a variety of channels, such as a website or annual event. Soliciting input from youth and families can help ensure that the system is addressing their needs and interests.

The racial equity questions for this outcome focus on the whether the system is adequately considering all families' needs and whether satisfaction with the system is equally distributed in the community.

## Use of data

System leaders can use data about this indicator to continuously improve their outreach activities, advise or allocate funding to programs, advocate for additional funding, and identify ways to increase the influence of youth in the afterschool community.

## Selecting indicators and measures

Fully measuring some of these indicators requires advanced data collection (e.g., fielding system-wide family or youth surveys) or working with a school district or research partner. As a result, we also include process-oriented indicators (i.e., actions the system can take to get to the desired outcome) and describe lower-effort ways to gather information from smaller groups that can help inform decisions.

**INDICATOR 1** System provides information about program options to families and youth

***What type of organization may be interested?*** All afterschool systems that share information about program opportunities with families and youth may be interested in tracking some data related to this indicator.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?***

- **Family and youth reports.** Capturing the percentage of parents and youth who know about afterschool opportunities would require a survey. Because it can be difficult to obtain high response rates from families and youth, surveying them is expensive and requires advanced statistical knowledge to ensure that the respondents are representative of the population. We recommend that system leaders interested in making this investment have a clear idea of how they would use the data and seek a research partner or try to add survey questions to an existing survey administered by the city or district.

For systems unable to make this investment, we recommend that system leaders track the dissemination and use of resources for communicating with families about program opportunities. For instance, system leaders can track:

- **Distribution of program catalogs.** System leaders can track the number of catalogs that are printed, to whom catalogs are shipped (e.g., individual families, community organizations like the United Way), and events where catalogs are distributed. System leaders can analyze the data collected to determine how many people they reached, who they reached, and whether they failed to reach certain populations of families and youth. This type of analysis can help systems better target catalogs to intended users for the next distribution.

- **Online program finder use.** All afterschool systems that develop or host a program finder on their website can track its use or the number of hits it received. Intermediary leaders might be interested in the number of times the program finder was used in a given timeframe like the last month, six months, or year. If the website collects detailed data, leaders may also be able to track the number of unique visits and frequency of visits.

> ⚙ **Analysis Tip**
>
> **Understanding Program Catalog Reach**
>
> Track how catalogs are distributed (e.g., dropped off at community organizations, provided during annual meetings/ community events, mailed to families), and annually reflect on whether:
>
> - All neighborhoods received catalogs
> - Catalogs were distributed at diverse events (e.g., sporting events, program fairs, cultural events)
> - Families from different income, races, and ethnicities received catalogs

Intermediary leaders could also ask providers to report on how parents learned about their programs or conduct parent or youth focus groups to supplement their information.

## INDICATOR 2 System ensures program options meet the needs of families and youth

*What type of organization may be interested?* This is a goal of all systems but may be of particular interest to afterschool systems that are considering expansion of existing or addition of new initiatives or seeing decreases in program attendance and/or retention.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* One challenge system leaders face in measuring this indicator is that those who are least satisfied with their options may be the families who are not currently participating.

System leaders interested in this indicator can track many aspects of satisfaction with the afterschool programs available in the community, including:

- **Satisfaction with access, quality, cost, content, and safety.** As noted above, obtaining a representative survey sample from parents and youth is expensive and complicated. System leaders without resources for a proper survey could conduct interviews and focus groups with parents and youth, including those serving on parent and youth councils, with representation from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, age groups, genders, and geographic locations.

## INDICATOR 3 System ensures youth voice and leadership in the community

*What type of organization may be interested?* Because afterschool programs all serve youth in their community, we believe that all afterschool systems are likely interested in determining how youth voice is represented in system decision-making. Specifically, systems may wish to look at the various committees it convenes or participates in to determine whether youth are included as members and whether they are tasked with leadership roles.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* System leaders can track:

- **Youth participation in decision-making bodies.** Data can be collected on the number and percentage of boards and leadership committees with youth members and leaders and the percentage of board and committee seats that are assigned to youth.
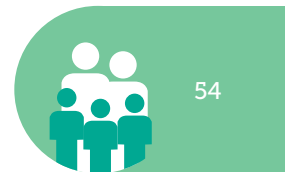
- **Youth influence on decision-making.**
  By going beyond absolute numbers and percentages, intermediary leaders can consider the degree of youth involvement: Are they tasked with key responsibilities on the board? Do they have the same voting power as other members? Do participating youth regularly attend meetings and feel free to share their ideas? What responsibilities and leadership opportunities do they have? How does the system help them be active and contributing members?

System leaders may also want to understand whether youth perceive that they have influence on boards and committees. System leaders that field a youth survey can include questions that ask youth about their influence on program activities and structure and system priorities. In addition, system leaders can regularly check in with youth leaders to receive feedback on how they perceive their degree of influence and what factors enable and hinder their participation.

**? Questions to Ask Youth**
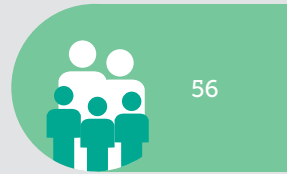
**Involvement in Decision-Making**
- **What is your role on the [workgroup/board]?**
- **Can you describe the leadership opportunities you have been given as part of the workgroup/board position?**
- **To what extent do you believe you have decision-making power?**
- **Do you believe the workgroup/board has adequate youth representation?**
- **How could youth be better represented?**
- **How could youth have more decision-making power in important system decisions?**

## SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #5 TRACKING:
### *Families and youth are satisfied with, connected to, and have voice in the afterschool system*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System provides information about program options to families and youth** | | | |
| **Program locater use** | Use of program finder dropped from 5,200 users (2018) to 4,000 users (2019). | Website statistics | Need to determine root cause. Last year there was a public campaign to promote the launch. Maybe people don't know. Check search optimization. See how community partners can help spread the word. |
| **System ensures program options meet the needs of families and youth** | | | |
| **Youth satisfaction with access and content** | There may be more demand for afterschool programming focused on computer gaming (how to develop). Youth council representatives highlighted this as an activity that is offered in the broader community but is expensive and inaccessible to many youth. Computer gaming is not available in our programs supported by and operating in the schools. | Youth council representative feedback | Need to determine broader demand. |
| **System ensures youth voice and leadership in the community** | | | |
| **Degree of youth influence on decision-making** | A representative of the youth board attends intermediary board meetings and has voting power; however, he is quiet. Would like to hear from him more. | Self-assessment | Talk to the youth council and youth representative about ideas to better incorporate and include youth voices. Maybe two members? Maybe dedicated speaking time? Talk with adult members of the board about how they can better encourage and support active participation from youth member(s). <br><br> Ask other communities for ideas. |

**SYSTEM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #5 TRACKING:**
*Families and youth are satisfied with, connected to,
and have voice in the afterschool system*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **System provides information about program options to families and youth** | | | |
| **Program locater use** | | | |
| **System ensures program options meet the needs of families and youth** | | | |
| **Youth satisfaction with access and content** | | | |
| **System ensures youth voice and leadership in the community** | | | |
| **Degree of youth influence on decision-making** | | | |

# Measuring Program-Level Outcomes



The Sprockets Community Engagement Team develops a group presentation using data from a citywide survey project on after-school access (St. Paul). Photo credit: Sprockets.

Prior research has demonstrated that afterschool programs that are high-quality and intentional (i.e., content and activities are linked to desired outcomes) can promote positive youth outcomes.[4] Measuring program-level outcomes provides system leaders information about the types of support programs may need from the system, the effectiveness of this support, and the ability of programs to promote positive youth outcomes.

4 Durlak et al., "Meta-Analysis of After-School"; McCombs et al., "*Value of Out-of-School*."

The previous chapter on system-level outcomes describes actions that systems can take to support programs, including establishing common standards and associated measurement tools for program quality, providing professional development, sharing best practices, and supporting program efforts to engage in continuous improvement. Measuring program-level outcomes provides system leaders information about the types of support programs may need from the system, the effectiveness of this support, and the ability of programs to promote positive youth outcomes.

## This section provides options for measuring the three program-level outcomes presented in the framework:

**DESIRED OUTCOME #1:**
Programs provide high-quality, equitable experiences to youth

**DESIRED OUTCOME #2:**
Programs are intentionally designed and meet youth needs

**DESIRED OUTCOME #3:**
Programs use management practices that enhance quality

Remember, you do not need to measure all outcomes and indicators, nor do you need to collect all potential data. Also, systems and programs can and should add outcomes or indicators they desire to track those that are not listed.

As in the previous section, we make note of indicators and data that require advanced data systems or analytic techniques to measure, and we provide guidance regarding what indicators may be good places to start for system leaders that are beginning their data journey.

As we walk through each program-level outcome, we discuss its importance and then describe

how the system could use data about that outcome. We then delve into the potential indicators and data to track. For each of these, the guide indicates what type of organization may be interested in the indicator and options for measuring and analyzing it. We conclude the description of each outcome with a hypothetical sample of the data that a system leader tracking that outcome might end up with and how it might inform the system leader's priorities and actions.

> **⚲ Resource Tips**
>
> **Systems looking for tools that can help them measure program quality and the management practices that support quality can consult the Forum for Youth Investment's *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, Second Edition* or *Child Trend's How Can I Assess the Quality of My Program?* (http://www.readyby21. org/resources/guide/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition) (https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/2008-10OSTProgramQuality.pdf).**
>
> **Both provide an overview of program quality assessment tools commonly used in the field.**

# *Programs provide high-quality, equitable experiences to youth*

## RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- **Who is participating in high-quality programs?**

- **Are there groups of youth who have inequitable participation?**

- **Are racially diverse young people helping the system determine what constitutes a high-quality afterschool experience?**

Programs and program quality are at the heart of afterschool systems. The system-level work detailed in the previous chapter (including developing quality standards, selecting quality assessment measures, adopting data systems to track program attendance, providing professional development, and supporting data-based continuous improvement) create a strong foundation that enables providers to give youth high-quality experiences in an equitable way.

Program quality affects how much youth enjoy their afterschool experience and how much they benefit from it. Rigorous studies have demonstrated that afterschool programs can benefit youth, but not all programs do. Studies consistently demonstrate a relationship between aspects of program quality and youth outcomes.

The racial equity questions for this outcome focus on understanding which youth are participating in high-quality programs, whether access to high-quality programs is equitable (i.e., are various groups participating in numbers proportionate to their presence in the community and commensurate with their needs?), and whether the process of developing quality measures is likely to yield indicators that are culturally relevant to, and appropriate for, all the groups of youth that programs in the system serve.

## Use of data

System leaders can use data for this outcome to support providers' quality improvement process, sharing the information with them and helping them use it. System leaders can also use this data to set system-level priorities for professional development, track the progress of system-level improvement efforts, and advocate for additional funding that supports high-quality programming.

## Selecting indicators and data to track

Afterschool systems can select among many indicators, including those described here, to determine whether programs in the

network are providing high-quality experiences. Some indicators can be assessed by conducting simple descriptive analyses of program quality observation data and/or survey data.

INDICATOR 1  ## Programs meet established program quality standards (often established by states)

**What type of organization may be interested?** Systems that have established program quality standards may want to track this indicator.

**What data could be collected and analyzed?** Each program quality assessment tool gathers data from observations. Observations involve assessments of specific components of high-quality programming such as:

- Safe environment

- Supportive relationships between adults and youth

- Positive emotional climate

- Hands-on, inquiry-based learning opportunities

- Culturally relevant content and activities

- Youth engagement

- Meeting special needs (e.g. English language learners, physical needs, learning needs)

System leaders will want to track those factors that are relevant to their quality standards and measured by their program quality assessments. They may need to add or remove items from the list above accordingly.

Each component of program quality is typically represented by multiple items measured by the program tool, which are then combined and averaged. As a result, the measurement score is typically expressed as a number. For instance, youth engagement in the program may be rated as a 3.4 (on of a 5-point scale). System leaders can report the average scale scores, the range of scores, and the median score for each component. These numbers can be difficult for stakeholders to interpret, however. As a result, we recommend that system leaders establish benchmarks for quality. For instance, a benchmark on a 5-point scale (never to always) might be set at a 4 (almost always). So, if a program scores a 4 or above, it meets the quality standard. System leaders that set such benchmarks can report *the number and percentage of*

> ⚙ **Analysis Ideas**
>
> **Across the system, analyze program quality components by:**
> - **Program type**
> - **Program size**
> - **Demographics of youth in the programs**

*afterschool programs meeting quality thresholds on program quality assessments* (by indicator), a data point that can be easier for stakeholders to understand.

We also recommend that when systems report scores to providers or programs, they provide the score of each subitem that went into the scale scores. This highlights specific strengths and weaknesses for each component of quality during the observed period.

**INDICATOR 2** Programs deliver experiences that youth believe are high quality

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems seeking a youth perspective on the quality of their program offerings will be interested in tracking this indicator.

**What data could be collected and analyzed?** Another way systems can gauge how well programs in the network are meeting program quality standards and quality benchmarks is by surveying youth in programs. Systems can design their own youth surveys or use publicly available tools like the Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes (SAYO) Youth Version, which can be used to assess the experience of youth in a program. As with program quality observation tools, systems should set clear benchmarks on the youth surveys so programs and the public are aware of standards.

Data points to gather include perceptions of the following:

- Activity is engaging
- Youth have opportunities to exercise choice
- Activity is challenging
- Relationships between adults and youth are positive
- Relationships among youth are positive

Newer systems may wish to understand how youth view the program experience overall so system leaders can analyze *the number and percentage of youth who give the program experience an overall high score*. When considering the total and percentage, it is important to take into consideration the number of youth who took the survey compared with the number who did not. Surveys are typically fielded at the end of a program session and given to youth in attendance. Youth taking the survey are more likely to have enjoyed the experience than those who are no longer participating (and did not take the survey).

System leaders will want to clearly report the denominator used to determine the percentage, which could be either the total number of youth taking the survey or total number of youth enrolled in programs. System leaders and providers may want to combine this survey data with some attendance data to get a more detailed picture of youth experience.
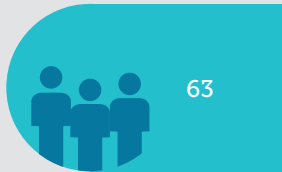
**PROGRAM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #1 TRACKING:**
*Programs provide high-quality, equitable experiences to youth*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Programs meet established program quality standards** | | | |
| **Safe environment**<br><br>**Youth-adult relationship quality**<br><br>**Youth-youth relationship quality**<br><br>**Youth engagement** | All programs meet quality standards for basic components, like having a physically safe environment.<br><br>A substantial minority do not meet quality thresholds for positive relationships — 31% of programs do not meet standards for positive youth-adult relationships, and 35% do not meet standards for positive youth-youth relationships (15% of programs do not meet either). | Program quality observation conducted by external evaluator | Look to see whether programs struggling with positive relationships have front-line staff who received our PD on positive behavior management strategies. May need to offer additional sessions and target these programs. Also, when sharing data, ask providers to think about how they are providing ongoing training in this area to staff, particularly as staff turns over. Look at our PD curriculum to ensure it is meeting the current needs of providers to reach these goals.<br><br>Ask programs that did very well in youth-adult relationships to share best practices. How did they prepare for this, what do their staff do, and what should these other programs consider? |
| **Programs deliver youth experiences they believe are high-quality** | | | |
| **Youth-reported engagement** | Youth engagement scores are high — 90% of survey respondents report being engaged. However, a third of the programs had inconsistent attendance or high dropout rates, signaling challenges with youth engagement in those programs.<br><br>Latinx youth were least likely to report feeling engaged in the program (60% compared with 100% of white youth). | Youth survey conducted at the end of the program<br><br>Attendance data from MIS | Provide follow-up session on program design for youth engagement that is offered to programs with inconsistent attendance and high dropout rates. Ask them to bring data on program content and staffing. Is the content culturally appropriate? Are staff able to communicate effectively with youth?<br><br>Engage Latinx youth to serve on advisory board and implement their recommendations. |

**PROGRAM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #1 TRACKING:**
*Programs provide high-quality, equitable experiences to youth*

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| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Programs meet established program quality standards** | | | |
| **Safe environment**<br><br>**Youth-adult relationship quality**<br><br>**Youth-youth relationship quality**<br><br>**Youth engagement** | | | |
| **Programs deliver youth experiences they believe are high-quality** | | | |
| **Youth-reported engagement** | | | |

# *Programs are intentionally designed and meet youth needs*

## RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- **Are programs conducting structural racial equity analysis of internal policies and practices that influence program design?**

- **Are programs examining board and staff leadership structures?**

- **Is the system allocating sufficient financial resources to support building the capacity of program leaders for equity work?**

- **Are program staff provided professional development that will enhance their understanding of racial equity?**

- **Is a diverse team leading the professional development?**

- **How are youth and families informing program design?**

High-quality programs do not happen by accident. They require careful design. Below we highlight some data about intentional design (i.e., content and activities are linked to desired outcomes) that systems can collect and analyze. We note, however, that while all the systems in the pilot study provided support for intentional design, none were measuring this indicator. Even without measuring this indicator, system leaders can use the framework to help providers achieve this outcome.

**INDICATOR 1** ## Program content matches youth needs and desired youth outcomes

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems that play a role in shaping program content may want to track this indicator.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** System leaders may want to measure the number and percentage of programs with a strong link between:

- **Program activities and youth needs.** System leaders have to understand the needs of the youth the program serves. For instance, youth with specialized physical or mental needs may need support in the program to ensure their engagement and participation. They can assess whether program activities meet those needs by asking program leaders relevant questions during observations or by observing whether there are youth in the program who are unable to participate in activities because the program does not provide needed supports.

- **Program activities and desired youth outcomes.** It is the content of program activities that leads to desired youth outcomes. Some systems develop common goals across all programs in the system. These systems can assess whether the content of program activities (using observation notes, the provider's description of the program, or the program's logic model) targets those common goals. This is a more sophisticated analysis that will require significant time from system staff and a clear idea of what types of activities lead to different outcomes. For example, if a system determines

that all programs will focus on building youths' perseverance, the system leader can review program content for activities that would build this skill, such as (1) establishing a goal; (2) planning a project that meets the goal; (3) working on the project over time, (4) discussing the status of the project, successes, and challenges; and (5) holding a culminating event or celebration for reaching the goal. Systems without common goals could measure the link between the activities and goals of each individual program by reviewing documents or asking program leaders and staff to describe desired outcomes and the activities that lead to them.

### INDICATOR 2 Planned program activities are effectively structured

*What type of organization may be interested?* Systems that have a goal of supporting intentional program design may be interested in tracking this indicator.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* System leaders will want to support programs—and may want to measure the number and percentage—that have:

- **Sequenced lessons.** A key factor related to program quality is whether activities are sequenced and build on one another, not just within the program day but across program days. To measure this, system leaders will have to include a question about it in the program quality tool or review program plans.

- **Activities requiring active participation.** A key driver of program quality and youth engagement is whether program activities require youth to actively participate rather than passively watch or listen to an instructor.

### INDICATOR 3 Program content reflects input from youth and community members

*What type of organization may be interested?* Systems that want to consider the way programs develop content as part of the quality assessment process may be interested in tracking this indicator.

*What data could be collected and analyzed?* Factors in the process of developing program content that system leaders will want to support and may want to measure include:

- **Youth input.** There are several ways to collect data for this measure. System leaders can analyze youth survey data to learn more about which programs meaningfully involve youth in boards or workgroups and whether this involvement differs by program type and youth served. Once there is a basic understanding of which programs are involving youth in leadership positions that help guide programmatic decisions, system leaders may want to gather more information on the specific ways youth are involved and which types of decisions they help make. This can be done by conducting in-

depth interviews or focus groups with youth in programs. Interviews and focus groups can address whether youth believe they have sufficient voice in decision-making and how else they would like to be involved in leadership roles. System leaders can use information from the interviews to develop guidance on how to involve youth in meaningful leadership roles and decision-making processes within programs.

- **Explicit connections between afterschool program design and the school day.** Systems with strong partnerships with schools may be particularly interested in understanding the extent to which afterschool program content is connected to the school day. A program may choose to do this by intentionally complementing and/or reinforcing school-day content. For instance, a school may not be able to offer as many art programs as desired, so the afterschool program in that school may intentionally offer arts programs. Another way for an afterschool program to connect with the school day is by reinforcing school-day goals. For instance, if a school is focused on adopting project-based learning, the afterschool program may incorporate project-based learning as well. System leaders could measure this connection by analyzing program design documents or interviewing program and school leaders.

> ✏️ **Qualitative Questions**
>
> **For Program Leaders and Staff:**
>
> **What skills does your program desire to produce among participants?**
>
> **How do the activities in the program help youth gain those skills?**

## PROGRAM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #2 TRACKING:
### *Programs are intentionally designed and meet youth needs*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program content matches youth needs and desired youth outcomes** | | | |
| **Match between program activities and desired youth outcomes** | Program leaders were more likely than program staff to be able to articulate skill goals (80% versus 40%) and link to activities (50% versus 25%). Staff at both levels had a better understanding of goals than how program activities linked up with them. | Interview questions asked program providers and observed staff during quality assessments, "What skills does your program desire to produce among participants? How do the activities in the program help youth gain those skills?" | Professional development priority: Provider organizations and program leaders need more support in developing program content that meets programmatic goals and methods of training staff to understand how program activities help youth achieve those goals. Emphasize explicit goal of focusing on skills during provider orientation session so that all program instructors understand the need to connect the skills to their content. |
| **Program content reflects input from youth and community members** | | | |
| **Explicit connection between afterschool program design and school day** | Of the 5 afterschool programs operating in our middle schools, 3 appear to be making clear connections between afterschool program design and the school day. Two are explicitly offering content not offered during the school day, and one is reinforcing content. No connection is being made at Adams or Quincy, and the principals and program leaders report not knowing one another. | Interviews with principals and program leaders | Help establish a planning session for both principals and program leaders. See if Superintendent Jones will help message principals. |

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program content matches youth needs and desired youth outcomes** | | | |
| **Match between program activities and desired youth outcomes** | | | |
| **Program content reflects input from youth and community members** | | | |
| **Explicit connection between afterschool program design and school day** | | | |
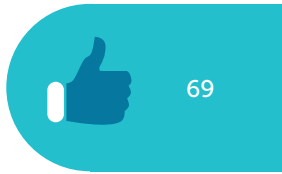
*Programs use management practices that enhance quality*

Consistently high-quality programs develop out of management practices that enable smooth and effective implementation. Below we focus on a few of these, including attendance tracking, professional development, family engagement, and continuous improvement. You may want to add to this list, however, depending on your own specific needs.

The racial equity questions for this outcome encourage reflection on who has access to programs using quality management practices, whether different groups have different degrees of access to programs, and whether there are changes on the horizon (e.g., in the availability of resources) that would affect programs' ability to maintain strong practices.

## Use of data

Systems tracking this outcome can use their data to set system-level professional development priorities and track progress toward system-level improvement. Whether or not system leaders collect data about this outcome or the associated indicators, they can support strong management practices by embedding them in quality standards, providing professional development, and sharing best practices.

## Selecting indicators and data to track

All providers are likely to be interested in understanding and tracking their own management practices. System leaders may also be interested in understanding the system-wide management practices that support program quality. For each potential indicator for this outcome, we describe potential sources of data. For instance, some program quality measurement tools collect data on management practices. Systems that fund programs can collect this data as part of program application and reporting processes. While all three of the systems in the evaluation had a goal of promoting strong management practices, they did not systematically track or use much data related to this goal. Systems that choose not to

## RACIAL EQUITY
QUESTIONS

- **Who is participating in programs that use quality management practices?**

- **Are there groups of youth who lack this access?**

- **Are programs mapping changes in our community (e.g., in financial resources available) that may influence quality?**

collect data on particular indicators can still help programs use strong management practices through professional development and by sharing best practices.

**INDICATOR 1** Program staff track individual student attendance daily

***What type of organization may be interested?*** For the MIS to generate useful data that can inform decisions about programming, program staff need to regularly and accurately enter data into the system. As such, afterschool systems that seek to use their MIS to inform such decision-making will be particularly interested in tracking whether program staff enter student attendance into the MIS on a daily basis.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** It may not be possible to determine the extent to which all programs in the system accurately record attendance on any given day. System leaders can look at the number and percentage of programs entering individual student attendance data into the MIS on a daily basis, but failure to do so may or may not indicate an issue with attendance tracking. For instance, a provider's procedure may be to take attendance on paper and have administrative staff enter the attendance data on a weekly basis. Nonetheless, system leaders that check how frequently providers enter attendance data can have an informed discussion with them to understand their process and whether or not there is an issue. It's best to do these checks on a weekly or monthly basis so intermediary staff can follow up with programs promptly and provide additional support or training if needed.

(Some MIS mark youth as present as a default, so program staff only have to enter data for youth who are not present. A pattern of 100 percent attendance for all days in a session could indicate that the default setting is on and program staff is not using the MIS.)

## Data *in Action*

**CONNECTION:** ATTENDANCE TRACKING AT THE SYSTEM AND PROGRAM LEVELS

One common activity at the system level is to adopt a management information system (MIS) that helps the system and individual programs track student-level enrollment and attendance in afterschool programs. At the system level, systems can track the adoption and use of the MIS and perhaps participation in professional development and training on how to use it. At the program level, accurate attendance tracking is an indicator of strong program management practices. Attendance data flowing into the MIS also provides critical information about youth participation and feeds continuous improvement at both the program and system levels.

**INDICATOR 2** Program leaders ensure the professional development and qualifications of staff who work with youth

There is a direct connection between the know-how and abilities of front-line staff and how effective and engaging a program is. Prior research has linked competencies like effectively managing groups, supporting young people in the learning process, and providing positive adult relationships with youth to positive outcomes, such as youth engagement and learning.

*What type of organization may be interested?* All systems will be interested to some degree in understanding how providers and programs support the professional development of front-line staff. Systems that offer professional development, fund programs, or track the provision of professional development in their quality assessments may be particularly interested in this indicator.

**What data could be collected and analyzed?** To track this indicator, system leaders may be interested in examining:

- **Training requirements.** At a basic level, systems may want to track the number and percentage of providers that have training requirements for program staff and the specifics of those requirements, such as number of hours per year and the content of training required.

- **Program staff participation in training.** Systems may also be interested in understanding the *number and percentage of trained staff working in programs*, overall or by provider of training (system, program, or other); content of training; format of training (ongoing or single-session); and duration (number of hours). System leads can analyze the percentage of trained staff at:

  - The system level: XX percent of front-line staff working with youth are trained (# of trained front-line staff/# of front-line staff in all programs)

  - The program level: YY percent of programs have trained their front-line staff (# of programs with all front-line staff trained/# of programs in system)

  - The youth level: ZZ percent of youth participants were instructed by trained staff (# of youth served in programs with trained front-line staff/# of youth served)

System leaders can gather this information during program quality assessments or by surveying program staff.

### INDICATOR 3  Program staff create and carry out family engagement strategies

Prior research has identified family engagement as a component of program quality. To be effective, however, family engagement activities must be carefully planned. These activities include events for parents/guardians and communication efforts with families about youth attendance and participation in program activities.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems that play a role in shaping and supporting programs' family engagement strategies will be interested in this indicator. Systems that track family engagement as part of their quality assessments may already be collecting the relevant data. Systems that fund programs may ask for this information as part of the program application and monitoring process. For systems without these mechanisms, tracking this information is more challenging and would require administering a program or family survey, which may not be worth the cost. Those not choosing to track this indicator can still support effective family engagement through professional development and by sharing best practices.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** To track this indicator, system leaders could analyze:

- **Family engagement plans.** At a basic level, systems could track the *number and percentage of afterschool programs with a family engagement plan*. (Family engagement plans can include phone calls, newsletters, social media interactions, and events.) Systems that choose to collect engagement plans can assign raters to assess the plans' quality.

- **Families' perceptions of engagement.** Systems could also track families' reports about their engagement and satisfaction with their afterschool program. This information could be reported at the program level (*number and percentage of programs with a high level of engagement/satisfaction) or at the family level (number and percentage of families reporting a high level of engagement/satisfaction*).

Reporting this data requires the development of relevant survey questions, for instance, about parents' comfort contacting the program with questions or an issue, satisfaction with the format and frequency of communication from the program, understanding of youth's activities during the program, and (if applicable) participation in family activities offered by the program. It may make sense to aggregate answers to several questions to get an overall sense of a family's feelings of engagement.

> **.ıl Measurement Ideas**
>
> **Family Surveys**
>
> Surveying families can be difficult. Response rates from family surveys can be low, which affects the generalizability of the data they yield.
>
> Systems that want to survey families may want to consult with a research partner to help develop and carry out the survey.

**INDICATOR 4** Program leaders use data to improve practice

A key practice related to program quality is the use of data to improve program practice.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems engaged in continuous improvement efforts—and those that share data with providers to support their continuous improvement efforts—may be interested in tracking this indicator. Systems that fund programs may ask for this information as part of the program application and monitoring process.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** To track this indicator, system leaders could analyze:

- **Data use.** At a basic level, system leaders could gather information on whether providers use data (yes/no). To go deeper, they could collect data on the type of data providers use, the frequency with which they use it, and the type of decisions they make using each type of data. To fully gather this information, systems would need to survey providers.

Systems that support providers' continuous improvement efforts could track:

- **Receipt of system-provided data.** System leaders can track the *number and percentage of afterschool programs that receive data from the system* by reviewing their own records.

- **Participation in data-use training.** Systems that offer training in data use to providers/program leaders and track attendance can report the *number and percentage of programs* in the system that participate in that training.

- **Change in data over time.** Systems that set improvement goals based on prior data can look to see if providers have made progress toward those goals over the next few rounds of data collection.

## Data in Action

### USING DATA TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENT:
#### M3 DAY AND SUMMER DATA DEBRIEF & CELEBRATION

Sprockets, through its partnership with Ignite Afterschool (Minnesota's Statewide Afterschool Network), leads a comprehensive approach to assist afterschool program staff in how to interpret and use data for continuous improvement. Ignite found that the key to this process is the M3 Huddle, a six-hour workshop called Making Meaning with Multiple Data Sets (M3), that brings together program teams to intentionally make meaning of their data and devise action steps. The huddle's goal is to have programs use data to reflect, plan, and act. The workshop is meant to help programs use their own data in a hands-on, supportive environment and provides dedicated time for staff from the same program to work together to interpret data with workshop facilitators available to answer questions. As a testament to Ignite's statewide leadership, M3 Huddles supported by Ignite typically take place in seven regions across Minnesota in January, intentionally scheduled at the mid-point of the school year to support continuous program improvement. More information on M3 is available on the Ignite website (https://igniteafterschool.org/m3) and in Appendix C.

"Data can tell you who's coming to your program, what students are learning and much, much more. But how do you bring all those different data sets together to create the most impactful, data-driven continuous improvement plan for your program?"
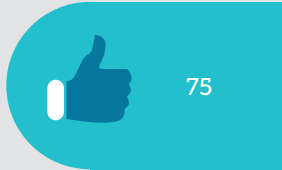—Ignite Afterschool

Each fall, Boston Beyond brings together its summer program providers for a data-sharing day: Summer Data Debrief and Celebration. The event serves several purposes: raising awareness in the community of the value of summer programming, sharing data, highlighting best practices, and providing early support for the use of data. The event is attended by representatives of all the summer providers, city officials, and funders. Boston Beyond presents data on the number of youth served in programs during that summer as well as in past summers to show growth toward their community-wide goal over time, with a focus on data collected on student attendance, program quality, and youth outcomes. It highlights overall averages, areas of growth, and areas in need of collective improvement. Each provider organization is presented with its summer data, including its own program outcomes in relation to the established benchmark and the city average. This allows providers to understand their relative strengths and weaknesses. The day also features in-depth looks at key topics and highlights best practices from organizations that have demonstrated strengths in common problem areas. The day is utilized to inspire, share data, and set the stage for further investigation and use of data for program planning.

**PROGRAM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #3 TRACKING:**
*Programs use management practices that enhance quality*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program staff track individual student attendance daily** | | | |
| **Daily attendance entry** | 75% of programs are tracking individual student attendance through MIS.<br><br>10 programs have 100% attendance across the month of October, suggesting that attendance is not being entered. | Monthly analysis of MIS attendance data from October | Target 10 programs struggling with attendance entry for MIS training. |
| **Program leaders ensure the professional development and qualifications of staff who work with youth** | | | |
| **Training requirements** | 75% of programs have training requirements for front-line staff.<br><br>ABC program has an onboarding manual that could serve as an exemplar.<br><br>20% of staff we work with turn over every year on average. | Program report during quality assessment visit<br><br>Discussion with program lead and review of manual<br><br>MIS on program and program staff participation in our network | Share onboarding requirements and practices of ABC program through the best practice site. |
| **Trained staff** | 65% of programs are sending front-line staff to our trainings.<br><br>15% of programs offer their own onboarding training. | Professional development training data | Follow up with major programs not using our professional development or providing their own to understand why – determine if modifications are needed. |

**PROGRAM LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #3 TRACKING:**
*Programs use management practices that enhance quality*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program staff track individual student attendance daily** | | | |
| **Daily attendance entry** | | | |
| **Program leaders ensure the professional development and qualifications of staff who work with youth** | | | |
| **Training requirements** | | | |
| **Trained staff** | | | |

# Measuring Youth-Level Outcomes



**Youth from the Haynes Early Education Center enjoy the beach after using their scientific discovery skills with New England Aquarium staff (Boston).** Photo credit: Casey Atkins, Boston After School & Beyond

The ultimate purpose of afterschool systems is to support positive youth outcomes. The framework identifies a set of intermediate outcomes that can be affected by quality programming and contribute to the ultimate desired outcome of youth developing into healthy, engaged, empowered, and productive adults.

## This section provides options for measuring the three youth-level outcomes presented in the framework:

**DESIRED OUTCOME #1:**
Youth have high rates of afterschool program participation

**DESIRED OUTCOME #2:**
Youth are exposed to new and enriching experiences and content

**DESIRED OUTCOME #3:**
Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs

Skills and beliefs are difficult to measure, and the process takes significant resources and data capacity to gather and use. Further, many skills and beliefs develop through multiple experiences over the course of many years, and afterschool programs run in very short increments of time, often six- to nine-week sessions. Research has demonstrated that afterschool programs can affect youth skills and beliefs closely related to program content when the programs are intentionally designed and high quality and when youth participate at a high rate.[5] We recommend that, before spending resources measuring youth skills and beliefs, systems draw on that existing research base and focus on supporting and measuring the conditions that have been empirically demonstrated to improve youth outcomes: intentional program design, high-quality program implementation, and youth attendance.

Collecting data about individual youth is a responsibility. Collecting this data requires clear consent and data protection procedures. Those receiving U.S. Department of Education funds need to comply with the Family Education and Rights Privacy Act (FERPA).[6]

As we walk through each outcome, we discuss its importance and then describe how the system could use data about that outcome. We then delve into the potential indicators and data to track. For each of these, the guide indicates what type of organization may be interested in the indicator and options for its measurement and analysis. We conclude the description of each outcome with a hypothetical sample of the data the system leader might end up with and how it may inform the system leader's priorities and actions. We also provide information, when available, about how systems in the evaluation used the data.

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5 See McCombs et al. *Value of Out-of-School* (2017) for a summary of the research base.

6 For a discussion of data security and FERPA, see C. Kingsley, *Building Management Information Systems*. For sample data sharing agreements and legal guidelines for data sharing, see M. McLaughlin and R. A. London, *From Data to Action*. The U.S. Department of Education has a webpage that lists resources for protecting student privacy under FERPA: https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources.

**DESIRED OUTCOME #1**

## *Youth have high rates of afterschool program participation*

In order to benefit from programs, youth need to attend. Studies of afterschool programs consistently demonstrate that greater benefits accrue to those with high rates of participation.[7] As such, attendance is arguably the most important youth outcome that an intermediary can track. It is also the first youth indicator that most systems measure.

For this outcome, the racial equity questions encourage reflection on which youth may be benefiting from programs and whether there are barriers preventing certain groups from participating that should be addressed.

## Use of data

Youth participation data has many uses. Systems operating their own programs can use it in real time to identify programs with poor enrollment (which may be facing barriers to recruitment), programs with poor attendance (which may have youth facing barriers to regular attendance or have challenges related to quality), or individual youth with poor attendance (who may need additional support or encouragement).

All system leaders can use participation after each session of programming to (1) identify programs that may need support, (2) identify programs or types of programs with particularly strong attendance that serve as exemplars or that could be expanded, and (3) identify groups of youth who may have lower rates of participation than others. System leaders can share youth participation data with stakeholders as part of annual goal reporting.

## Selecting indicators and data to track

Tracking rates of youth participation requires a method of collecting enrollment and daily attendance data at the individual youth level, such as individual youth's enrollment and daily attendance from programs. Often systems invest in a management information system that allows for the collection, storage, and

**RACIAL EQUITY**
QUESTIONS

- **Has the system analyzed who is coming and who is not coming to afterschool programs?**

- **Are there barriers certain groups of youth may face that prevent them from participating in programs?**

- **How can the system address these barriers?**

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7 Borman and Dowling, "Longitudinal Achievement"; Herrera et al., *Staying on Track*; McCombs et al., *Ready for Fall?*; Naftzger et al., "Summary of Three Studies"; Augustine and Thompson, *Learning from Summer*; Little et al., "After School Programs"; and Yohalem et al., *Building Citywide System*s.

analysis of program data, particularly student attendance. Indicators for this outcome range from those that are simple to collect to those that are far more challenging and require the ability to track individual youth over time. In this section, we look at both participation (attending at least one day) and level of participation (attendance).

## INDICATOR 1  Youth have consistent, high participation rates

***What type of organization may be interested?*** All systems may be interested in tracking this indicator. This is typically the first youth outcome systems will track.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** There are a number of data points that systems will want to track and monitor to provide a full view of program participation:

- **Youth enrollment.** Systems will want to track the number of youth who enroll and the percentage of enrolled youth by demographics.

- **Youth attending at least one day.** The number of youth who attend a program for at least one day is unlikely to be as high as the number who enroll. We suggest tracking both.

The difference between enrollment and youth attending at least one day can be used to determine the "no-show" rate for the program:

$$\text{(youth enrolled – youth attending at least one day)/youth enrolled} = \%\text{ no-show}$$

Knowing the no-show rate can help systems and programs (1) reduce the no-show rate by engaging families and youth and (2) plan for a stable no-show rate by enrolling based on the number of students expected to attend rather than the number of slots available.

- **Average daily attendance rates.** Average daily student attendance is different than the number of seats filled on a given day. The average attendance rate for each youth is calculated by dividing the number of days attended by the number of days offered. The average daily attendance rate for the entire program is calculated by adding together individual youth attendance rates and dividing by the total number of youth in the program. Typically, systems and programs only include youth who attend at least one program day in calculations of average daily attendance. Be aware: Calculating average daily attendance in this way can mask participation issues a program may face because it leaves out all the youth who enroll but do not attend. Therefore, it's important to also have an understanding of the no-show rate.

System leaders can analyze each of these data points at the system, program, or youth level.

- **The youth level:** What was Josie's attendance rate? (number of days Josie attended/number of days offered)

- **The program level:** What was the average attendance rate at the Cypress program? (Sum of all individual youth attendance rates in the program/number of youth in the program)

- **The system level:**

  - What was the average attendance rate of youth across the community? (Sum of attendance rates of all youth/number of youth)

  - What was the average attendance rate across all programs in the community? (Sum of program attendance rates/number of programs)

> ⚙ **Analysis Ideas**
>
> **Analyze participation and attendance data by:**
> - **Program type**
> - **Youth demographics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender, family income)**
> - **Youth school indicators (e.g., chronic absenteeism, academic performance)**

Analyzing and reporting participation data at the system level can be challenging and complex. Many communities want to report an **unduplicated** count of youth participating in at least one experience over the course of the year. This is a very challenging piece of data to obtain as it requires the assignment of a unique identifier to each youth, such as an ID number assigned by the school district or afterschool system, in order to track when an individual student enrolls in multiple programs. Communities that do this can report:

- Number of youth participating in at least one program

- Number of youth participating in more than one program

Without such an identifier, system leaders will be unable to determine whether the 24 John Smiths recorded in their data represent 24 individual youth each enrolled in one program or seven youth enrolled in multiple programs each.

**Attendance thresholds.** Cities can also measure the number and percentage of youth attending at relevant thresholds. For school-year programs, common thresholds include 30, 60, and 90 days of participation because prior research on 21st Century Community Learning Center programming has shown positive outcomes for youth with as low as 30 days of participation but stronger outcomes for youth attending 60 and 90 days.[8] For academic summer programs, a research-based threshold is 20 days of attendance to achieve measurable academic benefits.[9] If the system establishes attendance thresholds, it can analyze the number and percentage of youth meeting those thresholds at the individual, program, and system level.

8 Naftzger et al., *Texas 21st Century*; Naftzger et al., Summary of Three Studies."
9 Augustine and Thompson, *Making Summer Last.*

**Data in Action**

## USING DATA TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENT:
### ATTENDANCE DATA

Providence After School Alliance took a hands-on approach to using individual-level attendance data to inform practice. Every other week, PASA analyzed youth attendance data to identify high-, low-, and medium-level attenders. PASA knew it wanted youth to hit an attendance threshold of at least 30 days a session based on prior research about 21st Century Community Learning Centers. With this in mind, it sought to increase attendance for the low- or medium-level attenders. It provided program staff with names of low- and medium-level attenders so staff could encourage them to attend more frequently. They also offered incentives for attendance, such as t-shirts and water bottles. The number of youth meeting the 30-day threshold subsequently increased. The system leader attributes this increase to the steps it took: (1) regularly reviewing attendance data and (2) providing guidance to program staff accordingly.

---

**INDICATOR 2** ## Youth participate in programming over time

**What type of organization may be interested?** Systems that are able to assign youth a consistent ID number across the system would be interested in tracking this indicator. Tracking this indicator also requires more advanced analytic capabilities, including proficiency with statistical software.

**What data could be collected and analyzed?** With longitudinal youth data, systems can track:

- **Participation in consecutive sessions of programming and participation in consecutive and/or multiple years of programming.** System leaders can examine the number and percentage of youth attending for consecutive sessions or years.

⚙ **Analysis Ideas:**

- **Program type**
- **Youth demographics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender, family income)**
- **In-school youth indicators (e.g., chronic absenteeism, academic performance)**
- **Patterns of participation**
- **Grade/ages when participation patterns shift**

When analyzing the data, system leaders will want to make sure to restrict the analysis to youth who would have had the opportunity to attend consecutive sessions or years. For instance, if kindergarten is the earliest grade at which a child has the ability to participate in an afterschool program in the system, the pool of youth who could possibly attend consecutive years is restricted to those who are in grade 1 or above.

Systems interested in this indicator may need a research partner. With that partner, systems could investigate the extent to which participation in multiple years of programming is associated with positive youth outcomes

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth have consistent high participation rates** | | | |
| **Youth participation** | 15,000 youth participated in programming over the course of the year (duplicated count): 3,000 youth participated in sports, 2,000 youth participated in arts programming, 1,000 youth participated in science and technology, 4,000 youth participated in general recreation, 5,000 youth participated in summer jobs programs.<br><br>Latinx youth are not participating at rates equal to other racial/ethnic groups (10% of youth participating in programming are Hispanic compared with 55% in the community – still have long wait lists in Culver and Juarez Elementary and no programming at Fillmore High).<br><br>500 youth applied for a summer job but did not get one due to lack of funding.<br><br>Only 10% of participating youth not in summer jobs programs are in grades 7-12, down 10% since last year. | Analysis of MIS attendance, program, and demographic data<br><br>Analysis of summer jobs; data shared by city | Discuss how we can help increase number of summer job slots with mayor and other board members.<br><br>Increase number of slots in schools with high proportions of Latinx youth, particularly those without programs or with wait lists: (a) Filmore High for science and technology program with associated internship opportunity, building on summer jobs success, (b) discuss possibility of increased funding for slots in Culver and Juarez Elementary Schools.<br><br>Solicit ideas for program options at PTA meetings and community meetings to ensure new slots meet local needs.<br><br>Fundraise to increase number of slots in specialty programs and decrease number of slots in general recreation programs.<br><br>Determine reasons for high drop-out rate in 2 programs (call coordinators), make determinations for additional supports or changes in program content.<br><br>Examine whether programs with lower average daily attendance (less than 50%) have particular quality improvement needs (ask research partner for this analysis). |

(over)

(continued)

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth have consistent high participation rates** | | | |
| **Attendance rates** | On average, youth attended 70% of program days. Across programs, average daily attendance rate ranged from 30% to 95%. No-show rate was 19% (excluding summer jobs). <br><br> 5% of youth attended the first week and did not return, concentrated in 2 programs in which 25% percent of youth attended once and never returned. <br><br> Average daily attendance rates vary by type of program: 85% for sports, 85% for arts, 80% for science and technology, 50% for recreation, 95% for ADA summer jobs. <br><br> Attendance rates are higher in the summer than other sessions: Fall: 70%; Winter: 65%; Spring: 70%; Summer: 75% . <br><br> Latinx students have higher average daily attendance rates than other racial/ethnic groups: Hispanic: 80%; White: 70%; African American: 69%; Asian: 71% . | Analysis of MIS attendance, program and demographic data | (see previous page) |
| **Attendance thresholds** | 50% of programs met high average daily attendance threshold (70%). 5% of programs had low attendance (50% or below). 60% of youth in school year programs met high attendance threshold. | Analysis of MIS attendance, program and demographic data | |

**YOUTH LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #1 TRACKING:**
*Youth have high rates of afterschool program participation*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth have consistent high participation rates** | | | |
| **Youth participation** | | | |
| **Attendance rates** | | | |
| **Attendance thresholds** | | | |

# Youth are exposed to new and enriching experiences and content

A key benefit of afterschool programs is that they can provide experiences and content to youth that are new, support positive development, and build their social capital. For youth from low-income families, these are experiences that they may not have otherwise, which can help close the opportunity gap.[10]

For this outcome, the racial equity questions encourage reflection on whether diverse youth have a say in the types of experiences programs provide and whether programs offering novel and enriching experiences are equitable for youth from different backgrounds in terms of access and participation.

## RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS

- Is the system making an intentional effort to serve indigenous, immigrant, and racially and economically diverse youth and giving the youth the opportunity to weigh in on what type of programming would respond to their needs?

- Are programs providing youth content and new experiences that support positive development, and are these offerings distributed equitably among youth with different characteristics?

## Use of data

System leaders in the evaluation were not tracking this outcome, but each of them considered it a clear benefit of afterschool programs. Measuring this benefit would enable system leaders to (1) advocate for additional resources from funders by highlighting the value of programs and (2) better understand the degree to which different groups of youth in the community are able to access and participate in new and enriching experiences.

## Selecting indicators and data to track

We offer indicators below as options; however, each system will need to define and operationalize the concept of experiences and content that are "new and enriching" based on their goals and data. The indicators and suggested analyses described below draw on program- and youth-level data. Systems may not be able to tackle some of them without an MIS that tracks information about programs as well as youth.

**INDICATOR 1** Youth engage in novel experiences and/or specialized content

In order to expose youth to new content, programs can go above and beyond traditional afterschool programs to offer specialized content, such as theater arts, spoken word, coding, marine biology, youth entrepreneurship, sailing, and solar power. The creativity and options are limitless. Programs can also offer special experiences, such as a field trip or guest speakers, in addition to regular programming. For instance, a recreation-focused summer program may use every Friday for a field trip that takes youth to places inside or outside the community, such as a nature preserve, beach, or zoo. Also, certain types of programs focus on providing exposure to specific content or experiences that support positive development, such as STEM programs or summer jobs programs.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems that want to demonstrate the value of afterschool programs to the community would want to track this indicator.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** System leaders have several options to select from when measuring and analyzing this indicator. System leaders can analyze the number and percentage of participating youth who:

- **Participate in programs that offer a novel experience** (e.g., field trips, exposure to new activities)

- **Participate in programs that offer specialized content** (e.g., STEM, arts, apprenticeships)

- **Participate in programs that offer a novel experience or specialized content**

Note that, unless the intermediary has the ability to track individual youth across programs by assigning a unique youth ID, the numbers and percentages will represent *occasions of exposure to new experiences and/or specialized content* across all programs in the system, not the number and percentage of individual youth who are exposed to them.

> ⚙ **Analysis Ideas**
>
> **Analyze participation in programs that offer novel experiences and/or specialized content by:**
>
> - **Program type**
> - **Youth demographics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, gender, family income)**
> - **In-school youth indicators (e.g., chronic absenteeism, academic performance)**

**INDICATOR 2** Youth report learning new things in the program

Another option to understand the extent to which programs are providing youth new and enriching learning experiences and content is to survey youth.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems that want to demonstrate the value of afterschool programs to the community would want to track this indicator.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Systems can use a survey to track the percentage of youth who report learning something new in their afterschool program. It is unlikely that every youth will take the survey, so survey results will represent an estimate of the population of youth in programs, not the actual total population. System leaders may want to think about whether there are patterns in terms of which groups of youth are responding to the survey and which are not and what that means for the generalizability of the survey results.

## Mizzen by Mott

**Systems looking for an all-in-one tool that can strengthen your program can utilize Mizzen by Mott. Mizzen inspires, engages and sparks learning in young people. With activities from organizations such as Jazz at Lincoln Center and powerful management tools, this app can help you strengthen programs and identify activities that enhance youth exposure to new experiences and specialized content. Supported by the Mott Foundation, Mizzen is available at no cost to afterschool professionals.**

**YOUTH LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #2 TRACKING:**
*Youth are exposed to new and enriching experiences and content*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth engage in novel and/or specialized content** | 1,200 youth (30%) participated in a program that offered field trips.<br><br>600 youth (15%) participated in programs concentrated on providing specialized developmental content.<br><br>Students from low-income communities are underrepresented in specialty programs (70% of students participating in any program are from low-income communities, but only 40% of youth participating in specialty programs are from low-income communities)<br><br>Black youth are particularly underrepresented in specialty programs (80% of youth in any program are Black, but only 22% of youth in specialty programs are Black) | Analysis of MIS attendance data, descriptive program information from MIS | Engage board to fundraise for specialty programs.<br><br>Need to understand the cause for participation gaps in specialty programs: Where are the programs located?<br><br>Does the content of the specialty programs match youth and parent interests?<br><br>Discuss results with youth board so they can help inform next steps.<br><br>Ask youth board for personal stories of how the programs have helped them grow and develop their interests to support board fundraising |
| **Youth report learning new things in the program** | 2,320 youth responding to the survey (58%) reported learning something new in their afterschool program. Note: Only youth who were attending at the end of the program responded to the survey, so surveyed youth represent those who persisted in their programs. | Youth survey | Seems like this is likely related to differences in specialty program participation. Conduct additional analyses to determine whether this is true or if there is another cause. |

**YOUTH LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #2 TRACKING:**
*Youth are exposed to new and enriching experiences and content*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth engage in novel and/or specialized content** | | | |
| **Youth report learning new things in the program** | | | |

# Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs

**RACIAL EQUITY QUESTIONS**

- **Are diverse youth involved in determining appropriate skill and belief indicators?**

- **Are youth empowered to participate in meaningful ways in policy, governance, and research discussions?**

- **Is outcome measurement affecting the experiences youth have in programs? In what ways, and are they desirable and equitable?**

As noted earlier, youth's skills and beliefs are difficult to measure well, requiring advanced capacity to gather and use data, and often place an additional data collection burden on youth and/or instructors. Further, it is challenging for systems to accurately attribute changes in measured skills and beliefs to the program because most lack data about a comparison group of youth who did not participate in the program. Systems without resources and the capacity to measure and analyze youth skills and beliefs can draw on existing rigorous research that demonstrates that afterschool programs can affect those skills and beliefs that are closely related to program content when the programs are intentionally designed and high-quality, and youth participate at high rates.[11]

For this outcome, the racial equity questions encourage reflection on indicator selection, bias that may exist within the measures, and how measurement of outcomes may be affect the experiences of youth in programs.

## Use of data

Systems often use this data to report back to funders in order to maintain and increase funding for programs. Measuring and reporting youth outcomes can easily become a compliance-oriented activity rather than one that helps the system improve the experience and outcomes of youth. We encourage system leaders that measure youth outcomes to consider how to use them to select programs and support their improvement.

## Selecting indicators and data to track

To maximize the value of measuring youth skills and beliefs, we recommend that system leaders take the following steps:

1. Identify the common skills and beliefs that programs across the system want to measure. This requires gaining consensus in the community for a set of common outcomes.

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11 See McCombs et al., *Value of Out-of-School* for a summary of the research base.

2. Ensure that measured skills and beliefs are conceptually linked to program content. What is the theory of action that links programming to outcomes?

3. Determine how the skills and beliefs will be measured.

4. Plan for data collection, analysis, reporting, and use.

The framework lists the following potential skills and beliefs:

- Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships

- Happiness

- Curiosity

- Optimism

- Engagement in learning in and out of school

- Self-regulation

- Perseverance

- Communication

- Growth mindset (i.e., the belief that one's abilities can be developed with effort)

- Academic learning

- Leadership

These are examples and options; each intermediary will need to make its own list based on community goals and the content of programming in the community. Some are typically measured using a youth or instructor survey, while others, such as academic learning, may require data from the school district.

> ### 🔧 Resource Tips
>
> **Systems seeking ways to measure youth skills and beliefs can find information on potential measurement tools in the following:**
>
> A report on afterschool outcome measures by the Forum for Youth Investment: *From Soft Skills to Hard Data: Measuring Youth Program Outcomes;* **https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/DAP-Ready-by-21-Review.pdf**
>
> CASEL's Assessment Guide: **https://measuringsel.casel.org/access-assessment-guide/**
>
> RAND's Assessment Finder, which covers measures of social, emotional, and academic competencies: **https://www.rand.org/education-and-labor/projects/assessments.html**

## Data in Action

### **DATA-SHARING:** DISTRICT DATA AGREEMENTS

Some afterschool systems have entered into data-sharing agreements with their school districts, which allow them to receive data from the district about youth in their programs and/or share data about youth participation in afterschool programs with the district. There are three ways these agreements can be set up:

- The intermediary provides the district with data, and district staff conduct analyses and share results with the intermediary. This is the best option for systems with limited internal data capacity.
- The district shares a set of youth-level data (e.g., attendance, grades) with the intermediary. This is a reasonable option for systems that have staff with high-level analytic capabilities, including the ability to merge data and conduct statistical analysis.
- The district and intermediary create a data bridge that allows the intermediary and district management information systems to directly draw on and query one another's data. This option requires advanced data security protection and use agreements and resources dedicated to the development and maintenance of the data bridge.

See Appendix C for a sample data sharing agreement.

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**INDICATOR 1** Youth engage in program activities that build positive skills and beliefs

Program activities and experiences help youth build and grow desired skills and beliefs.

***What type of organization may be interested?*** Systems that have identified and supported the adoption of a set of activities that help build common positive skills and beliefs may be interested in understanding youth engagement in those activities.

***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Systems can track the number and percentage of programs engaging in certain activities conceptually linked to desired skills and beliefs in the course of program observations or by surveying youth.

Program observations may be best for activities that should be conducted daily (and thus could be reasonably observed on any day that the program observation occurred).

System leaders can add questions to existing youth surveys that ask whether they have participated in activities that would help them build skills and beliefs in general or a particular skill, belief, or disposition (e.g., In your program, did instructors teach you [X]?) They can also add questions about youth perceptions of the effectiveness or quality of those activities, if interested.

**INDICATOR 2** Youth demonstrate positive skills and beliefs

### What type of organization may be interested?

This indicator will be of interest to systems that have established community-wide goals for the development of youth's skills and beliefs and wish to publicly recognize the positive development of youth participating in afterschool programs.

### What data could be collected and analyzed?

Common methods of gathering data about the demonstration of particular skills and beliefs are:

1. Instructor surveys (instructor's perception of a youth's demonstration of skills and beliefs)

2. Review of work (e.g., portfolios) or accomplishment of activities

Using data from these sources, systems can report on *the number and percentage of youth who demonstrate desired skills, beliefs, or dispositions*.

**INDICATOR 3** Youth develop positive skills and beliefs

### What type of organization may be interested?

Systems that have established community-wide goals for the development of youth's skills and beliefs will be interested in this indicator.

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**▦ Data Presentation Tip**

Many youth and instructor surveys ask respondents to report on a scale (e.g., 1–5, representing never to always). Raters then combine multiple survey items to assign an overall score to the development of a particular skill, belief, or disposition. For instance, the SAYO-T uses five questions to assess youth engagement in learning (stays focused on task at hand, is alert and focused during group time, is interested in participating in new experiences, contributes constructively to group discussion) and asks that instructors rate the frequency with which the individual student demonstrates the behavior from never (1) to always (5).

Analyses of this data generate scale scores, which can be difficult for systems and providers to use. If the average score for youth engagement in learning increased from 2.5 to 2.8, is that good or disappointing? Is it meaningful at all?

Creating and reporting data based on benchmarks can help providers make sense of the data. For instance, if an intermediary establishes a benchmark for engagement in learning of least a 4 (with 4 meaning "usually demonstrating those behaviors"), it can then share data that is easier to understand, such as:

• Upon entry into the program, 30 percent of youth usually demonstrated engagement in learning.

• At the end of the program, 60 percent of youth in the program usually demonstrated engagement in learning.

• Relative to other programs in our community, your program demonstrated above-average growth in engagement in learning.

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***What data could be collected and analyzed?*** Common methods of gathering data about the development of particular skills and beliefs:

1. Youth surveys (perceptions of own skills and beliefs)

2. Instructor surveys (instructor's perception of a youth's skills and beliefs)

3. Administrative data (e.g., school attendance, grades, test scores, suspensions)

Some surveys measure perceptions at the end of the program only (retrospective questions). These surveys ask youth or instructors to report whether skills and beliefs have developed over the course of the program or due to the program.

Other surveys ask youth and instructors to rate skills or beliefs at multiple points in time, typically the beginning (pre-) and end of the program (post-). It is then possible to calculate the change between pre- and post- measurements.

Each of these methods has flaws that threaten the validity of results. For instance, in a pre-/post- survey design, there may be natural growth in a particular skill that occurs between pre- and post- testing that is not due to the program. Without a comparison group of similar youth who are not attending the program, it is impossible to tell if a change is due to the program or other factors. Therefore, collecting this data only to "prove" the effectiveness of the program may not be a good use of resources. The data can yield helpful insights, however, when used for improvement and reflection.

*Data in Action*

## A GRASSROOTS APPROACH TO YOUTH OUTCOMES:
### FROM SELECTION TO ASSESSMENT

PASA adopted a community-based process to identify a core set of social and emotional competencies, its Graduate Profile, which is aligned with the Every Hour Counts measurement framework. PASA worked with the RAND Corporation to examine the many potential youth outcomes they could potentially measure linked to their program quality assessment system. They identified 12 outcomes that were supported by the practices that its program providers were already using. But rather than go top-down, deciding outcomes for its provider network, PASA looked to its program partners to identify the social and emotional outcomes they most commonly focus on in their practice. Together, PASA and its network narrowed the list down to five outcomes and worked as a community to finalize a set of agreed-upon definitions for each competency. This process in turn helped PASA garner citywide buy-in for the outcomes identified in the measurement framework.

With the social and emotional outcomes defined and tied to program practices, PASA then worked with RAND to review open-source SEL tools that measured those specific skills. It was especially important to PASA to make sure that the way a tool defined and measured a skill matched how PASA and its community had defined the skill. For example, does a measure of communication take into account non-verbal and written communication in addition to oral communication? A thorough review of available tools revealed that there simply was no perfect fit, but that the existing Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes-Teacher was still the best match for PASA's youth outcomes assessment needs.

PASA's community consensus-building approach to implementing the Measurement Framework provides two important lessons for intermediaries interested in using the Framework in their programs.

**First,** take time to explore the framework and identify the outcomes that are right for your community, making sure to engage the community at as many levels as possible to co-develop the strategy for achieving those outcomes. The outcomes ought to follow practice, not the other way around.

**Second,** find a measurement tool that is right for you and your outcomes, and that will not represent a significant cost burden. By ensuring that the outcomes you want to achieve are already supported by current program practices through discussions with providers, you will both ensure that your community of program providers feels invested in and respected by the process of implementing the framework.

**YOUTH LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #3 TRACKING:**
*Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth engage in program activities that build positive skills and beliefs** | | | |
| **Growth mindset**<br><br>Each program worked toward developing growth mindset by enacting the growth mindset curriculum, which included (1) discussing growth mindset at the beginning of the program, (2) explicitly working to build a skill over the course of the program, and (3) incorporating reflection at the end of each week where youth would discuss their progress. | 92% of youth respondents selected the correct definition of growth mindset.<br><br>52% of youth respondents reported that their program created time and space to reflect on growth over the course of the program but only 30% said that it was done on a weekly basis.<br><br>55% of youth reported building a skill over the course of the program.<br><br>44% of programs had more than 75% of youth report that they developed a skill over the course of the program. | Questions added to our youth survey | Goal – improve strength of implementation across the system for next year.<br><br>Consistency of practice across the entire session appears to be an issue for some programs. Talk to program directors where this appears to be an issue. Are there barriers to consistently implementing? Do they need better support on how to select a skill to work on related to their program content? More support on facilitating reflective conversations? |
| **Growth mindset** | 70% of youth agreed with the statement "With time and hard work I can master new skills."<br><br>Relative to other programs, programs that had weekly reflection and 75% or more of youth report developing a skill had higher percentages of youth agreeing (85% versus 60%) and strongly agreeing (45% versus 12%) to the statement: with time and hard work I can master new skills. | Student survey. We only have a post-survey, so we do not know if responses changed after the program. | |

**YOUTH LEVEL DESIRED OUTCOME #3 TRACKING:**
*Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs*

| WHAT ARE WE TRACKING? | WHAT DID WE LEARN? | HOW DO WE KNOW? | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIORITIES AND ACTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Youth engage in program activities that build positive skills and beliefs** | | | |
| **Growth mindset**<br><br>Each program worked toward developing growth mindset by enacting the growth mindset curriculum, which included (1) discussing growth mindset at the beginning of the program, (2) explicitly working to build a skill over the course of the program, and (3) incorporating reflection at the end of each week where youth would discuss their progress. | | | |
| **Growth mindset** | | | |

| Outcome Within Framework | Measured (yes/no) | Data system storage | Frequency of data collection | For sample or entire population? | Tool used to measure (e.g., SAYO, YPQA, DESSA)? | Frequency of data analysis | Type of analyses run | Data shared with… | Use of data |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SYSTEM LEVEL** | | | | | | | | | |
| The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool | | | | | | | | | |
| Youth have expanded and equitable access to — and increased participation in — high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs | | | | | | | | | |
| Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement | | | | | | | | | |
| The system effectively advocates for policies and funding to support afterschool programs | | | | | | | | | |
| Families and youth are satisfied with, connected to, and have a voice in the afterschool system | | | | | | | | | |
| **PROGRAM LEVEL** | | | | | | | | | |
| Programs provide high-quality, equitable experiences to youth | | | | | | | | | |
| Programs are intentionally designed and meet youth needs | | | | | | | | | |
| Programs use management practices that enhance quality | | | | | | | | | |
| **YOUTH LEVEL** | | | | | | | | | |
| Youth have high rates of afterschool program participation | | | | | | | | | |
| Youth are exposed to new and enriching experiences and content | | | | | | | | | |
| Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs | | | | | | | | | |

# About the Developmental Evaluation

Led by Principal Investigators **Jennifer McCombs** and **Anamarie Whitaker**, RAND's developmental evaluation looked at how three intermediaries in the pilot program used the measurement framework developed by Every Hour Counts in 2014. The goal of the evaluation was to understand what data the intermediaries were collecting at the system, program, and youth levels; how outcomes at these three levels interact with each other; how intermediaries used the data to inform priorities and practices; and differences among the three intermediaries in how they used the framework.

## The three participating intermediaries were:

- **Boston After School & Beyond (Boston Beyond).** At the time of its application for the pilot, Boston Beyond had a network of 79 out-of-school-time service providers in Boston that collectively reached more than 3,000 elementary and secondary school youth during the 2014–15 school year and more than 5,000 youth during the 2015 summer session. It provided funding to a small number of the afterschool organizations in its network and is itself supported by private funders, foundations, and the city.

  In addition to promoting quality standards and providing professional development, Boston Beyond used a system to track youth participation in its programs, collected program quality and youth outcomes data, employed a data and management professional to oversee data collection and analysis and collaboration with local research partners, and produced a report for each of its summer partners to identify areas for improvement.

  Boston Beyond's goal for the pilot was to closely examine the measures it used to track program quality and youth outcomes to determine whether they aligned with their overarching goals for programs and youth.

- **Providence Afterschool Alliance (PASA).** PASA is both an intermediary and a manager of direct services. It is supported by private funders, foundations, and state 21st Century Community Learning Center funding. At the time of its application for the pilot, it operated two programs: the middle school AfterZone program and the high school Hub program. PASA hired and managed all AfterZone and Hub coordinators responsible for the daily operation of the sites, selected local community-based organizations to provide content at the AfterZones, and trained all new AfterZone instructors. In 2014–2015, PASA worked with 70 program providers that served more than 1,600 youth during the school year and with 21 program providers that served approximately 500 middle school youth during the 2015 summer session.

  PASA promoted program quality standards, offers training to interested service providers, tracked student participation in programs, measured students' social and emotional learning outcomes, and monitored program quality using surveys and observations. It did not prepare a formal report on the programs but used the measurement and observation results to guide program design and professional development. PASA did not have internal data analysis staff and instead worked with external research partners to provide data analysis.

  PASA's goal for the pilot was to examine the alignment of its current measurement work with its overarching goals and create a system

for promoting program quality and improving youth outcomes that could be sustained with available funding.

- **Sprockets.** Sprockets was founded in 2011 in Saint Paul, Minnesota. It is funded through various channels, including the city, private foundations, and a larger intermediary organization in Minneapolis/Saint Paul. At the time of its application for the pilot, Sprockets worked with 47 out-of-school-time program providers to serve more than 18,000 students during the 2014–15 school year and the 2015 summer session.

It promoted quality standards for programs and provided an attendance tracking system to providers in its network. Sprockets customized support to its program providers by allowing them to choose what student-level outcomes to measure and decide on their level of participation in program quality assessments. This customization limited Sprockets' ability to make comparisons between programs, but Sprockets staff thought it increased participation in the network. Sprockets provided professional development to help providers use data to reflect on their practices, identify weaknesses, and develop plans for improvement. Sprockets contracts with an outside research organization to provide support for its data analysis.

Sprockets goals for the pilot were to examine the youth social-emotional skills it measured and the assessments it used to determine their alignment with program partners' needs, and to articulate the value of their work by effectively communicating youth and program level outcomes to various stakeholders.

The purpose of a developmental evaluation is to support the innovation process by forging partnerships between researchers and practitioners. During the developmental evaluation of the measurement framework, RAND researchers acted as a thought partner to leaders and staff of the three participating intermediaries, as well as leadership of Every Hour Counts, providing ongoing research-based advice. This close working relationship allowed RAND to better understand each intermediary's goals, constraints, questions, and successes as they went about using data to inform their practice.

In the fall of 2015 RAND researchers visited each intermediary to better understand its organizational structure and capacity, data-related goals, current data collection and analysis strategies, partnerships with research organizations, how it used data to inform decision-making, and how it shared data with key partners. Prior to the site visit, intermediary leaders and local data and evaluation specialists completed a data use assessment to determine whether the intermediary collected data for each outcome identified in the framework, and if so, how (i.e., what measurement tool it used); whether and how the intermediary used the data collected for each outcome, and to what extent each outcome was a priority for the intermediary. The visits and assessment results provided a baseline for the evaluation and informed RAND's conversations with intermediaries.

Intermediaries completed the data use assessment two other times over the course of the study, and RAND researchers used the data along with conversations with intermediary staff to determine each intermediary's specific data collection needs;

what data was available; and what barriers to collecting, inputting, and analyzing data each faced. This process contributed to ongoing, biweekly in-depth conversations from 2016 through 2018 between RAND researchers and intermediary staff on how to better select and measure framework outcomes. In addition, RAND researchers held calls in 2017 and 2019 with state afterschool network leaders in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Rhode Island to better understand how state networks and local afterschool systems could use the measurement framework.

In 2017 and 2018, RAND collected program and youth data from each of the three participating intermediaries and established a correlation between program quality and youth outcomes. RAND provided these results to intermediary leaders and engaged them in in-depth discussions on how to strengthen their data collection activities and procedures and how to use correlational data in their decision-making. The correlational analysis informed the development of the RAND report *Putting Data to Work for Young People: A Ten-Step Guide for Expanded Learning Intermediaries*. Overall findings of the developmental evaluation informed the update to the measurement framework and this accompanying guidebook, authored by Jennifer McCombs and Anamarie Whitaker.

# Afterschool Data Toolkit

To access the Google Folder with all the available resources for the Afterschool Data Toolkit, click below:

**✈ ALL RESOURCES**

Or, click on the links below to access individual framework section resources:

**✈ STARTING THE WORK: ESTABLISHING SYSTEM GOALS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Providence After School Alliance Sample Data Collection Schedule
- Sprockets Data Matrix

**✈ SYSTEM LEVEL RESOURCES**

- **OUTCOME #1:** The community shares a common vision and goals for afterschool
  - Sprockets Propel SEL Community Engagement Summary
  - Sprockets Propel SEL Recommendations
  - Sample Logic Model
- **OUTCOME #2:** Youth have expanded and equitable access to — and increased participation in — high-quality afterschool programs that meet their needs
  - Sprockets Equitable Access Brief
  - Sprockets Participation Brief
- **OUTCOME #3:** Afterschool programming community engages in continuous quality improvement
  - Boston Beyond Data Readiness Diagnostic
  - Boston Beyond Salesforce Event Tracking 1 Summary
  - Boston Beyond Salesforce Event Tracking 2
  - PASA Professional Development Descriptions
  - PASA Professional Development Offerings 2018–2019
  - Sprockets Data Systems Analysis Final Report July 2018
- **OUTCOME 4:** The system effectively advocates for policies and funding to support afterschool programs
  - Boston Beyond E-Newsletter
  - PASA E-Newsletter
  - Sprockets Benefits to Youth Brief
  - Sprockets Strong Programs Brief

## ✈ PROGRAM LEVEL RESOURCES

- **OUTCOME 3:** Programs use management practices that enhance quality
  - Boston Beyond PRISM 1 Cover
  - Boston Beyond PRISM 2 Engagement in Activities & Learning
  - Boston Beyond PRISM 3 Engagement in Activities & Learning Drillthrough
  - Boston Beyond PRISM 4 Engagement in Activities & Learning Drillthrough Level 2
  - Boston Beyond PRISM 5 Engagement in Activities & Learning Drillthrough Level 3
  - Boston Beyond PRISM 6 Demographics & Attendance
  - Sprockets Making Meaning with Multiple Data Sets Overview
  - Boston Beyond Summer Data Debrief resources

## ✈ YOUTH LEVEL RESOURCES

- **OUTCOME 1:** Youth have high rates of afterschool program participation
  - PASA Sample Middle School AfterZone Attendance
- **OUTCOME 3:** Youth develop and demonstrate positive skills and beliefs
  - Boston Beyond ACT Framework
  - Boston Beyond SAYO-Y
  - District Data Agreement

## ✈ WORKSHEETS

- Sample Outcome Tracking Worksheet
- Data Use Assessment Tool

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# every hour counts

Students today need more ways to learn so they are prepared for college and career. But the young people who most need additional learning opportunities are least likely to have them due to structural inequities. Every Hour Counts is a coalition of local organizations that increases access to quality learning opportunities, particularly for underserved students. Our approach — called an expanded-learning system — coordinates the work of service providers, public agencies, funders, and schools, so dollars stretch farther and more young people are served.

The Every Hour Counts coalition represents longstanding partnerships with more than 3,500 schools, districts, and community-based organizations that provide quality after-school and summer programming. Every Hour Counts partners support initiatives that reach 500,000 youth each year.

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