



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth benefit from involvement in the arts.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, youth from families with low incomes are about half as likely to have access to arts instruction as youth from families with more resources, due to cuts in arts education which disproportionately affect schools in under-resourced communities that have been economically and socially marginalized.<sup>2</sup> Arts programming outside of schools is also inequitably distributed, and when the arts are offered in low-cost settings such as multipurpose<sup>3</sup> afterschool programs, the programming tends to focus on arts and crafts rather than the creation of original artwork that develops formative artistic skills.<sup>4</sup>

**The Youth Arts Initiative (YAI) aimed to address the gap in access to high-quality arts by developing a sustainable and scalable model of arts programming in multipurpose OST organizations.** YAI was developed by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA)—an out-of-school time (OST) provider that offers community-based low-cost multipurpose OST programs in under-resourced communities that have been economically and socially marginalized. YAI is based on Ten Principles for High-Quality OST Arts Programs (see Figure ES.1 below).

**From 2019 through 2021, five Boys & Girls Club organizations, with startup resources from The Wallace Foundation, set out to test whether they could develop YAI within the resource constraints of multipurpose OST programs. This report shares early lessons learned by these five OST organizations which were documented by a two-and-a-half-year study.** It provides a preliminary roadmap for multipurpose OST organizations seeking to increase the quality of their arts programming and close gaps in access to high-quality arts programming. The findings shared in this report can also be used by organizational leaders to make the case to funders and policymakers that initial investments in a high-quality arts program infrastructure are needed and that those investments will expand access and equity in arts programming for youth.

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1 Elpus, K. (2013). *Arts education and positive youth development: Cognitive, behavioral and social outcomes for adolescents who study the arts*. National Endowment for the Arts.

2 Kraehe, A. M., Acuff, J. B., Travis, S. (2016). Equity, the arts, and urban education: A review. *Urban Review*, 48, 220-244. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-016-0352-2>; Parsad, B. & Spiegelman, M. (2012). *Arts education in public elementary and secondary schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-2010 (NCES 2012-2014)*. National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubns2012/2012014rev.pdf>

3 McCombs, J.S., Whitaker, A.A., & Yoo, P.Y. (2017). *The value of out-of-school time programs*. RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE267.html>

4 Montgomery, D., Rogovin, P., & Persaud, N. (2013). *Something to say: Success principles for afterschool arts programs from urban youth and other experts*. The Wallace Foundation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/documents/something-tosay-success-principles-for-afterschool-arts-programs.pdf>

Figure ES.1. Ten principles for high-quality OST arts programming for youth



\* Dark purple denotes the principles that serve as the program infrastructure examined in this report.

Clubs focused investments in the three fundamental elements of arts program infrastructure—professional teaching artists, high-quality equipment and materials, and the creation of art studio space. The research documented lessons learned across cities with each of these infrastructure elements:

- **Lesson 1:** Teaching artists with youth development skills were perceived to be the non-negotiable ingredient for high-quality arts programs.
- **Lesson 2:** Current and high-quality equipment and materials are important for engaging youth in high-quality visual and digital arts programs and some performing arts programs. Dance programs, however, engaged youth regardless of available space, materials, or equipment.
- **Lesson 3:** Quality arts space is often not scalable for multipurpose OST organizations due to resource and other constraints, but high-quality arts programs can be implemented in less-than-ideal spaces with some limitations.

Clubs also developed promising approaches for implementing these infrastructure elements that allowed for stretching limited resources to reach more young people while still elevating arts program quality. These approaches are shared in the table on the following page.

While these approaches are promising, the research documented tradeoffs that program implementers should consider. Importantly, teaching artists that work part-time and are placed in more than one location need support from site-based and centralized organizational leaders to implement all aspects of high-quality arts programming. These considerations are detailed throughout the report.

## ABOUT THE STUDY

The report is based on research conducted in five Boys & Girls Clubs organizations and draws on multiple sources of data collected over two and a half years, including over 300 interviews and 42 program observations collected prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the research documented pandemic adaptations and captured final reflections from teaching artists and program leaders in June of 2021 when most YAI programming had resumed in-person, the claims in this report are described as early lessons because the research was not able to observe the full arc of program development under typical conditions. More research is needed to determine if the choices the five organizations made to create high-quality arts programs that benefit youth are sustainable over the long term. Additionally, future research could document how such choices impact young people.

Table ES.1. Lessons and promising approaches for creating an infrastructure for high-quality arts programming within the resource constraints of multipurpose OST organizations

<p>Promising approaches to <b>hiring and retaining teaching artists</b> in a multipurpose, resource-constrained OST setting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compensate teaching artists as content specialists to support hiring and retention.</li> <li>• Employ early career teaching artists as well as professional practicing teaching artists.</li> <li>• Hire part-time teaching artists for narrowly focused programming roles.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support part-time teaching artists with planning culminating events, engaging community partners, recruiting youth participants, and facilitating program and artist visibility at each site.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Assign teaching artists to no more than two locations and retain them in one site for at least one year.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign youth development staff to support teaching artists and youth when the teaching artist is not at the program site every day.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Contract with a community arts organization to staff some positions.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that teaching artists from these organizations can tailor programming to beginners and a drop-in environment.</li> <li>• Club staff should support artists from other organizations in recruitment and relationship-building with staff and youth at each site.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Promising approaches to offering <b>high-quality equipment and materials</b> in a multipurpose, resource-constrained OST setting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentionally cultivate donations of new equipment and materials by engaging industry partners in art form relevant fields.</li> <li>• Purchase one full set of materials or equipment for the art form and rotate materials from site to site.</li> <li>• Purchase a limited amount of high-quality equipment and materials and ask youth to share <u>but</u> ensure teaching artists have strategies to effectively manage the group to maintain youth engagement.</li> </ul>
<p>Promising approaches to offering <b>quality spaces for art programming</b> in a multipurpose, resource-constrained OST setting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in one or two high-quality art studios and create opportunities for youth across sites to access these spaces.</li> <li>• Make use of neighborhood community arts partners' or schools' art spaces.</li> <li>• If creating a high-quality art studio space is not an option, make minor renovations and modifications to make existing spaces more welcoming and artistically inspiring. Ensure spaces meet safety guidelines for the art form.</li> </ul>