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The Future of Youth Development: Building Systems and Strengthening Programs (2025)

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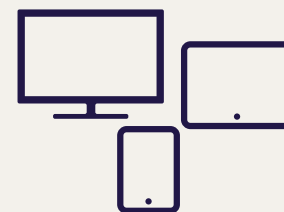
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The Future of Youth Development

Building Systems and Strengthening Programs

Deborah Moroney and Priyanka Nalamada,
Editors

Committee on Promoting Learning and
Development in K-12 Out of School Time
Settings for Low Income and
Marginalized Children and Youth

Board on Children, Youth, and Families

Division of Behavioral and Social
Sciences and Education

Consensus Study Report

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This Consensus Study Report was reviewed in draft form by individuals chosen for their diverse perspectives and technical expertise. The purpose of this independent review is to provide candid and critical comments that will assist the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in making each published report as sound as possible and to ensure that it meets the institutional standards for quality, objectivity, evidence, and responsiveness to the study charge. The review comments and draft manuscript remain confidential to protect the integrity of the deliberative process.

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Although the reviewers listed above provided many constructive comments and suggestions, they were not asked to endorse the conclusions or recommendations of this report, nor did they see the final draft before its release. The review of this report was overseen by **KENNETH A. DODGE**, Public Policy and Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University and **JEANNE BROOKS-GUNN**, Child Development, Teachers College, Columbia University. They were responsible for making certain that an independent examination of this report was carried out in accordance with the standards of the National Academies and that all review comments were carefully considered. Responsibility for the final content rests entirely with the authoring committee and the National Academies.

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Preface

It has been over 20 years since the publication of *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (a.k.a. the Blue Book). Since then, other seminal studies have explored, described, and elevated the youth development field and out-of-school-time (OST) programs. My professional career trajectory has in part followed this history, starting out as a participant in a community drop-in center in the 1980s to my role as a researcher in the youth development field to now having the honor of chairing this esteemed committee. It has been over 20 years since I attended my first national field conference and recognized that my job in a local community-based program in Chicago was a part of a much larger national movement. I celebrate and acknowledge how much has changed in those 20-plus years.

The youth development field has seen the evolution of intermediaries and other cross-sector partnerships in support of strong programs and program access, and the rise of the quality movement and related measures, standards, and practices. As a result, we have seen the rise of a stronger, more unified workforce and aligned supports, despite the ever-complicated funding landscape. In this study, the committee endeavored to explore, describe, and elevate the landscape, evidence, and narratives that depict today's OST experience.

Program participation has increased, but not for all children and youth. There remains a strong unmet demand for programs from families with marginalized backgrounds, for those in rural settings, and lower participation overall among teens. Much of the early research on youth development, including the Blue Book, was focused on programs for teens. Yet, today teens make up, as far as we know, the smallest portion of program participants. Did progress in the field (the idea that structure and regular participation are a priority) make programs less appropriate and appealing for teens today? Access to programs for teens is one of the unfulfilled promises of the youth development field at a time when it can be most beneficial. Recently, the surgeon general informed us that youth mental health is in a state of crisis. More young people today are disconnected from school or work, and we know that this only scratches the surface of what teens are going through as they weather today's sociopolitical climate with heightened access to a plethora of information and conflict. The committee describes the landscape of program participation and demand; we need to know more about the children and youth who are not showing up for programs so we can do more to promote access to high-quality opportunities for all.

We have weathered high-stakes evaluation with often misaligned outcomes during an era of accountability and then celebrated the recognition of the role of the field in supporting participants in their learning and development . . . while still scurrying to measure how well programs were supporting the slipperiest of outcomes. We know more about what works in some programs for some participants, but because of the diversity of field-driven offerings, we do not quite have our arms around a shared logic model for programs, nonetheless a shared nomenclature. And that may be the crux of youth development: in our celebration of the grassroots, culturally responsive, and locally derived programs, we are hesitant to come to

agreement on who we are and what we do to a point where we can then concretely understand how we are doing on behalf of the children, youth, families, and communities we serve.

On the other hand, families with means to pay for services and programs (care, arts, sports, and clubs) simply agree that it is a good idea for children and youth to be cared for, form positive relationships, learn something new, have fun, prepare for their future, and spark their interests. Is it necessary for us to dissect subsidized programs differently, and to what end, and at whose expense? It is certainly reasonable to assess how well public dollars are spent, but to do that we can look toward implementation quality and the diversity and richness of program offerings and let programs off the hook for moving the needle on everything. I commend the committee for grappling with the basis of evidence, and it is clear that while we need agreed-upon evidence on the relationship between systems-level supports and program implementation, and between program experiences and youth outcomes to understand what works for whom, we need to take the onus off individual programs to repeatedly prove their worth. If the committee's microcosm of an experience in exploring the plethora of varied evidence is an indicator of the wide-ranging discourse needed to come to consensus on the basis of evidence in OST, then we have important work to do on a shared research agenda.

Intermediaries and other cross-sector partnerships built to foster cross-sector alignment were not new 20-plus years ago but were recognized and invested in as potential backbone entities for the youth development field in the absence of other public, more formal mechanisms. They remain the invisible and sometimes unsung hero in the field holding the reigns of quality, professional development, funding, and measurement for cadres of programs in a locale. Yet these intermediaries are subject to tenuous funding stability, and often their success hinges on leadership connections and political prowess—it is scary for a backbone to be strong on flimsy funding. The committee describes the many roles intermediaries play in the field, and we need to ensure we can move to stable support for intermediaries to sustain their integral role.

Trends in professional learning, possibilities for a shared labor category, definitions of core competencies, and general recognition of the importance of the youth development workforce have come a long way in the last 20 years, while some challenges remain the same, particularly for early career entrants and part-time workers. Youth development professionals report they enter and stay in the field because of their passion and sense of mission, yet passion and mission it is not enough to recruit and sustain a workforce to meet the unmet demands for programs. Today, youth work practitioner pay and benefits is more on par with other service professionals than it may have been in the past, especially for those in leadership; yet service professionals (e.g., childcare workers) as a whole do not make a livable wage. The committee describes the current landscape of youth development professional pathways based on current data, which should be updated regularly so we can continue to inform policy on this essential workforce.

Support for programs and funding have grown but not on par with demand or inflation. For a field so fundamental to child and youth experience and supportive of families, its existence remains precarious and, to be a little dramatic, at the whim of one foundation board meeting or election. Despite some hallmark federal funding and decades-long investments by a small group of foundations, funding remains precarious for something that is in the fabric of youth experience. The youth development field can and should be coordinated centrally and woven into the nation's safety net, yet it remains supported in a disjointed manner with unheralded champions to manage coordination at all levels. The committee describes this complex policy

and funding landscape at every level with recommendations to streamline processes to alleviate the onus on individual programs or systems.

It was an honor and a privilege to work shoulder to shoulder with committee members; our stellar National Academies team, including the unflappable Priyanka Nalamada; and our contributors to present the landscape of evidence in OST. In many ways, we have made great strides from defining the field to defining what works in the field to support children, youth, and their families on their pathway to thriving. But there is more to do. Based on our experience with the many individuals on the committee, our contributors, and those experts who we heard from at public sessions, I am confident we have the right champions, researchers, and policymakers for the job.

On behalf of the National Academies and its Board on Children, Youth, and Families, we thank the Wallace Foundation for sponsoring this study and share great hopes that this report will inform momentum in the field as did the Blue Book over 20 years ago.

Deborah A. Moroney, *Chair*
Committee on Promoting Learning and Development in K-12 Out of School Time Settings for
Low Income and Marginalized Children and Youth

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AA3	America After 3PM
AANHPI	Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander
AAP	American Academy of Pediatrics
AASA	The School Superintendents Association
ACT	“Active by Choice Today”
Add Health	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health
AIR	American Institutes for Research
AISL	Advancing Informal STEM Learning
21 APR	21 Annual Performance Reporting
APT	Assessment of Afterschool Program Practices Tool
ARP	American Rescue Plan
ASES	After School Education and Safety Program
ASM	After School Matters
BMI	body mass index
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CBO	community-based organization
CCDBG	Child Care and Development Block Grant
CCDF	Child Care and Development Fund
21st CCLC	21st Century Community Learning Centers
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CDC	The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CLEAR	Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research
COMPASS	Community of Many Providing After School Success
CPYD	critical positive youth development
CRDC	Civil Rights Data Collection
CRL	culturally relevant learning
CRRSA	Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CYD	critical youth development
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
EBPs	Evidence-Based Program
ECLS	Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies Program
ED	U.S. Department of Education
ELO	expanded learning opportunities
ELO-P	expanded learning opportunities program
EPI	Evidence of Program Improvement
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESI	El Sistema-Inspired

ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
ESSER	Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund
FBO	faith-based organization
FERPA	Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act
FRPL	Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
FSCS	Full-Service Community Schools
FTE	full-time equivalent
GED	General Educational Development
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOTM	Girls on the Move
HBCU	Historically Black College/University
HELP	Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
IEPs	Individualized Education Programs
IES	Institute of Education Sciences
IOM	Institute of Medicine
IROP	Imani Rites of Passage
ITEST	Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers
IWGYP	Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs
JJDP	Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act
LEA	local education agency
LEAP	Lottery for Education: Afterschool Program
LEAPS	Learning and Enrichment After-school Program Supports
MiLEAP	Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential
MIS	Management Information System
MSA	Master Settlement Agreement
MVPA	Moderate-to-Vigorous Physical Activity
NAA	National AfterSchool Association
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NELS	National Educational Longitudinal Study
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
NIFA	National Institute of Food and Agriculture
NLC	National League of Cities
NLTS	National Longitudinal Transition Study
NPRM	Notice of Proposed Rulemaking
NPSS	National Partnership for Student Success
NRC	National Research Council
NSF	National Science Foundation

OCFS	Office of Children and Family Services
OJJDP	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
OSPI	Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
OST	out-of-school time
O2L	Out 2 Learn Program
PARC	programs, activities, relationships, and culture
PASA	Providence Afterschool Alliance
PASL	Peer-Assisted Social Learning
PAWS	Peer-Education About Weight Steadiness
PAX GBG	PAX Good Behavior Game
PD	professional development
PLCs	professional learning communities
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PVEST	phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory
PYD	positive youth development
QuEST	quality, engagement, skill, and transfer
QIN	Quinault Indian Nation
QIS	quality improvement systems
RCT	randomized controlled trial
REL	Regional Educational Laboratory Program
RFP	request for proposals
R3 Program	Restore, Reinvest, and Renew Program
SAC	School Age Centers
SAN	state afterschool network
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SEA	state education agency
SECCYD	Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development
SEL	social and emotional learning
SIBS	Siblings are Special Program
SJYD	social justice youth development
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
STEAM	science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics
STEM	science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
STEPS	Strategies-To-Enhance-Practice
SYEP	Summer Youth Employment Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TAP	Transportation Access Program
UCS	Unified Champion Schools Program
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA-NIFA U.S. Department of Agriculture-National Institute of Food and Agriculture

VISTA Volunteers in Service to America

WDB Workforce Development Board

WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Y-AP youth-adult partnerships

YE4C Youth Engaged 4 Change

YLP Youth Leaders Project

Youth PQA Youth Program Quality Assessment

YPAR youth participatory action research

YRBS Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

Summary¹

Out-of-school time (OST) programs are a part of the broader field of youth development.² Situated at the intersection of child and youth development, education, workforce, human services, and community development, the youth development field serves as a bridge between school, community, and home, whether before or after school, on weekends, in the summer, or during school breaks. As a field, it encompasses the broad range of programs and settings where young people spend their time outside of school and the actors and systems that support them. The terms *OST* and *youth development* programs are sometimes used interchangeably; however, *OST* speaks to the time programs can happen and *youth development* speaks to the approach.

In 2002, the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine released a foundational report for the field of youth development: *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Commonly referred to today as the “Blue Book,” that report reviewed the evidence available at the time on positive youth development, identifying the personal and social assets young people need to succeed, the settings that foster these assets, and youth programs that could serve as models for communities. This report serves to update the 2002 Blue Book: to recognize the growth, robustness, and complexity of the youth development field and consider ways in which OST programs can better serve the needs of all children and youth.

¹ This chapter does not include references. Citations to support the text and conclusions herein are provided in following chapters of the report.

² *Youth development*, sometimes known as *positive youth development*, is “an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths” (See Chapter 1).

SUMMARY-1

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At the request of the Wallace Foundation, the National Academies established an ad hoc committee of experts—with backgrounds in public policy, child and adolescent development, developmental psychology, sociology, population health, juvenile justice, economics, research and evaluation, and program design and delivery—to conduct a consensus study on the learning and development of young people from low-income households in OST settings across grades K–12. The committee was asked to review the evidence across four key areas for this population: (1) characterizing the array of OST activities; (2) evaluating the strength and limitations of the evidence on the effectiveness of OST activities in promoting learning, development, and well-being; (3) outlining improvements to existing policies and regulations to increase program access and quality; and (4) laying out a research agenda that would strengthen the OST evidence base. In reviewing the available evidence, the committee was directed to consider the intersections between economic stress and other factors that have operated historically to marginalize young people.³

In addressing its task, the committee found that the field of youth development has seen a number of changes in the past 2 decades: (1) OST programs and activities have become increasingly varied in their settings and programming, and in the children and youth served; (2) a greater consideration of the unique needs and identities of children and youth has changed how the field understands high-quality programming; and (3) public and private funding and support for programs has increased, as has demand for these programs. These changes emphasize that while the contexts—including the state of children and youth across the nation—have changed since the Blue Book was written, the value and interest in OST programs as positive developmental settings remain strong.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN OST SETTINGS

Developmental and ecological theories are commonly used to guide researchers and practitioners in the youth development field in their consideration of learning and human development—including how time spent in OST settings can shape young people’s growth, the factors within these settings that might be influential, and how these settings interact with other parts of their lives. These theories have then been applied to establish OST program tools and trainings that are used to support program quality. The theory of positive youth development is most associated with OST programs, offering approaches that recognize and emphasize young people’s strengths, their circumstances and relationships, and their individual agency. In recent decades, scholars have increasingly considered the role of social position, culture, and access to resources to understand the unique experiences of children and youth from a range of backgrounds. These conceptualizations examine the ways in which social and community forces influence opportunities and outcomes.

These theories have also led to greater understanding that OST programs are part of a larger ecosystem of multiple, overlapping systems that shape the creation of OST programs, access to these programs, and ultimately the experiences they provide for children and youth. Applying a systems view to OST programs allows consideration of all the factors that shape

³ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit and colleagues synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering’ where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage.” The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts. See “Key Terms Used in the Report” in Chapter 1.

outcomes for children and youth, rather than focusing on why particular children and youth do not succeed. It provides an alternative to individually focused frameworks, which can involve deficit views in which children, youth, and families are held accountable for individual outcomes, despite society-level systems such as culture, law, and government that affect that those outcomes.

Within this ecosystem are subsystems and sectors, such as families, education, and transportation, that serve as entry points for implementors, funders, researchers, and others to improve programs. Key actors supporting the OST ecosystem include intermediaries; these are coordinating entities, commonly local OST nonprofit organizations and state OST networks, that facilitate the OST ecosystem and manage networks of program providers. Intermediaries—such as state afterschool networks, local OST intermediaries, and children’s cabinets—serve a critical function in coordinating, funding, and collecting data on OST systems, and in providing technical assistance to local OST programs, activities, and related services (Conclusion 3-1).

OST PROGRAMS AND PARTICIPATION

OST programs vary across multiple dimensions. Some dimensions represent deliberate choices made, such as a program’s focus, curriculum, and level of structure; others result from external factors such as location, level of resources, and governance. There is no standard organizing categorization of programs that is routinely used in the field, but rather these dimensions paint a picture of the broad landscape of OST programs serving children and youth in the United States. This variance is beneficial because it allows programs to meet participants’ and communities’ unique needs.

Despite high levels of satisfaction with OST programs among parents and a decade of steadily increasing participation in the early 2000s, the limited available data indicate that the number of children and youth participating in OST programs declined between 2014 and 2020 to 14% (7.8 million) of the overall school-age population, with the largest decreases among Black, Hispanic, and Asian youth.⁴ Moreover, of the 7.8 million youth participating in OST programs in 2020, 2.7 million were from low-income households. While OST participation has declined, unmet demand has continued to rise, increasing to 24.6 million children in 2020. According to survey data, 11 million children from low-income households would participate in programs if they were available to them, suggesting that barriers to participation in OST are not evenly distributed (Conclusion 4-3). Families with low incomes most often cite program costs, safe and reliable transportation, program awareness, and program availability as barriers. State and local intermediaries, municipalities, and programs have implemented promising strategies for reducing barriers and supporting participation, such as providing stipends to older youth to attend programs.

Available data provide some indication of the profile of OST participation, but these data are limited. Systematic information on OST programming at a national level—including the type of programming, location, and populations served—is needed to offer a clearer understanding of the availability and accessibility of programs (Conclusion 4-1). Moreover, population-level or nationally representative data that report on participation at intersecting demographics are critical to document and explore reasons for participation trends (Conclusion 4-3). Data on intersections of marginalization are lacking, and no population-level data on OST participation exist for some

⁴ Data are from the America After 3pm survey, the only national survey of afterschool activities. See Chapter 4.

groups of children and youth, such as those with chronic health conditions, disabilities, and special needs, and those experiencing homelessness, involved with the juvenile justice system, or from immigrant families (Conclusion 4-2). The gaps in available data around OST programs and participation present an opportunity for greater investment in data collection and assessment, which can inform program design and help target resources to those groups most in need.

OST WORKFORCE

The quality and competency of the workforce supporting OST programs are important elements of program quality, contributing to young people's level of engagement in programs and the impact of programs on their outcomes. Youth development practitioners—the adult leaders who guide children and youth through social, educational, and personal development within informal educational spaces—are central to this workforce. OST programs benefit when these staff are creative, well trained, skilled at building relationships, and capable of making long-term commitments to programs. There is great variation in the roles of this profession, in the responsibilities they take on, and the educational and experiential paths they take to join the field. This heterogeneity has helped the field remain flexible, innovative, and inclusive.

While research shows they are committed to their work and the youth they serve, youth development practitioners face a number of challenges that can influence retention, such as lack of recognition and respect, low wages, job stress, and limited training and professional development. Staff turnover is an often-cited problem in this field, as it impacts program access and quality—lower staffing levels mean less capacity, fewer program spots for children and youth, and more time spent on hiring instead of on developing programs. Addressing the challenges contributing to staff attrition in OST programs requires organizational commitment and capacity. Especially for programs serving primarily children and youth from low-income households that rely on public funding, commitment and capacity often depend on system-level support structures and funding (Conclusion 5-1).

Moreover, the quality and competency of the workforce supporting OST programs are important elements of program quality, contributing to young people's level of engagement in programs and the impact of programs on their outcomes. More professional development opportunities through education and training (e.g., through postsecondary degrees, certificates, and organization-led trainings) for individuals interested in or currently serving in youth development can help build the OST workforce pipeline and strengthen career trajectories, which ultimately will strengthen program quality (Conclusion 5-2).

Estimates from the early 2000s suggest that there were between 2 million and 4 million frontline youth services workers in the United States, but there are neither population-level data nor formal federal occupational classifications for these workers. Without a federally recognized occupational code and formalized apprenticeship designations, there are no wage protections, which has prompted both public and private funders of OST programs to often (unintentionally) underestimate the needs of staff, from allowable use of dollars for staff compensation, to indirect rate restrictions on talent development and retention. Ultimately, more work—including system-level supports and resources, professional development opportunities, and population-level data collection—is needed not only to recognize these professionals but to support their growth and strengthen career trajectories (Conclusion 5-3).

OST PROGRAM QUALITY AND EXPERIENCES

The last 2 decades have seen the rise of the program quality movement in OST systems and the emergence of quality improvement initiatives, which youth development practitioners use to systematically examine and improve aspects of their programs. Program quality has been defined in many ways, but generally includes aspects of the physical space, psychological safety, structure, adult–youth interaction, and learning opportunities. Variation in program quality helps to account for differences in effectiveness; the youth development field has focused increasingly on improving the quality of both program design and implementation to best meet the needs of participants. Developing program curricula that are culturally responsive and co-created with youth are common program practices that the committee identified from the qualitative literature, which are critical additions to the features of developmental settings that have emerged since the Blue Book.

Although studies connect OST outcomes and quality, additional research is needed to explore associations between specific indicators of quality and outcomes, and to provide additional guidance for focusing on or prioritizing elements of quality to improve outcomes for all children and youth (Conclusion 6-2). Furthermore, most current quality approaches take a universal approach that is not explicit about barriers that drive access and opportunity gaps. Research that examines how critical approaches to positive youth development can be more intentionally integrated into programs is needed, as are thoughtful critiques of the dominant quality approaches.

EFFECTIVENESS AND OUTCOMES OF OST PROGRAMS

OST settings provide a place for the social and emotional development of children and youth, provided they are well designed and offer high-quality experiences that intentionally support these areas of development. OST settings can provide a place that is responsive to youth, where all participants can feel a sense of belonging and affirm their sense of self. Children and youth report that these programs and activities help them develop responsibility, positive work ethics, social skills, and interest in civic activities (Conclusion 7-1). However, OST programs are not easily poised to affect intransient, hard-to-change outcomes, such as test scores and grades, which require continuous and effective teaching and are heavily influenced by schools. Notwithstanding, some OST programs and experiences have been shown to foster interest and engagement in specific academic domains and social and emotional skills that help youth succeed at school, which over the long term may lead to better educational outcomes, such as attendance and graduation (Conclusion 7-2).

Box S-1 presents the committee’s overall takeaways from the literature assessing outcomes of OST programs. Not all OST programs are expected to demonstrate positive effects on all outcomes. OST programs are most likely to affect outcomes that they intentionally support through the content and provision of developmental opportunities (Conclusion 7-3).

To better understand which outcomes an activity affects, research and evaluation of OST programs need to move beyond studies that seek to reach general conclusions about whether OST programs are effective by comparing those who do and do not attend these programs to understanding which quality features and experiences in which activities are associated with youth development and for whom—taking into account both activity- and youth-level factors.

Future research can capitalize on the strengths of multiple methods to provide a deeper understanding of what specific types of programs, experiences, approaches, and characteristics of OST program quality are linked to positive outcomes across learning, development, and well-being, and for which specific children and youth, families, and communities (Conclusion 7-4).

BOX S-1

Outcomes: Overall Takeaways

Social and Emotional Learning Outcomes

- **Persistence:** Experimental findings suggest that OST programs that choose activities aimed at improving skills and motivation have the potential to improve persistence. However, the number of studies on these relations is quite small. More work is needed to understand under what circumstances (e.g., for which types of activities, what activity experiences) and for whom participation in these activities might help build persistence.
- **Sense of Responsibility:** Qualitative research suggests that adolescents and parents think that one of the benefits of participating in organized OST activities is developing a stronger sense of responsibility. More quantitative studies need to examine the generalizability of these development processes, as the effects are larger for certain adolescents, and some activities seem more effective than others.
- **Work Habits:** Correlational studies suggest that organized OST activities are associated with a young person's work habits and that these skills can help them excel academically. However, the results suggest that these associations may vary by activity type, quality, and developmental period. More work is needed to understand what developmental experiences within OST activities help strengthen young people's work habits.
- **Self-Control and Emotion-Regulation Skills:** Research using experimental designs and programs that serve adolescents who are struggling present mixed findings in terms of the extent to which participating in programs is associated with changes in their self-control. Qualitative studies in childhood and adolescence provide some guidance on staff practices that may be associated with adolescents' emotion-regulation skills, including creating positive norms and having positive relationships with participants. These results might provide insight into why the findings on participation or time spent in activities are mixed.
- **Prosocial Behavior:** The pattern of associations between a young person's organized OST activities and their prosocial behavior is mixed when researchers measure activities simply in terms of whether youth participated in activities or how much time they spent in activities. The

research suggests that OST activities have the potential to promote prosocial behavior among diverse young people, but that potential depends on activity quality and content, and participants' experiences in the setting. Though prosocial behavior might happen more often in specific types of OST activities, it might be more fruitful to consider which experiences within activities (e.g., behavioral expectations/norms, relationships), and the extent to which activities highlight prosocial behavior as part of OST programming, might be associated with a young person's prosocial behavior.

Youth Identity and Culture

- The research on youth identity and culture draws upon a variety of research approaches, including correlational work, quasi-experiments, rigorous randomized designs, and mixed quantitative and qualitative designs that describe both effects and processes of how programs might prove helpful. Research demonstrates that programs in which children and youth feel safe and supported and that intentionally include culturally informed programming attuned to the contexts of their lives can result in more positive perceptions of their social identities, values of respect, and cooperation. These results are related to increased caring, connection, and competence; improved academic achievement; and reduced risk for violence and substance use.

Civic Engagement

- **Volunteering and Community Service:** Several correlational studies suggest that participating in activities, particularly activities focused on volunteering or community service, during adolescence is associated with volunteering later in adolescence and early adulthood.
- **Political Engagement:** Although adolescents' OST activity participation is not consistently associated with their voting behavior, more recent work suggests that OST activities can inspire participants to learn about political issues and can support confidence to influence those issues. Some studies suggest that the extent to which activities promote participants' sociopolitical development depends on the extent to which these issues are a core component of the OST program and mission of the activity. Understanding how the activity is structured (e.g., centering youth voice, sharing decision-making) may help illuminate why some activities may be better positioned to promote individuals' sociopolitical development.

Outcomes for Academic Success

- With some exceptions, randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental studies note that the OST activities they explored did not have positive effects on test scores or school grades—the academic outcomes most connected to classroom experiences. The studies showed that OST activities tend to have more positive effects on other important academic outcomes, such as attendance, high school graduation, and college attendance. OST programs that showed positive effects in these studies were typically intensive, including many hours of participation and targeted programming.

Violence Prevention, Substance Use Prevention, and Mitigation of Other Risk Behaviors

- Experimental studies across multiple city programs found that these programs consistently reduced involvement in the criminal justice system and led to improvements in a range of positive youth development outcomes. Overall, the relationship between OST program participation and prevention of violence, substance abuse, and/or other risk behaviors is mixed, as varied as the programs themselves, and is affected by the mitigating variables in the studies (e.g., depth and breadth of participation, skill development, peer influence).

Outcomes for Physical and Mental Health

- **Physical Health:** OST programs that include a physical health component have demonstrated somewhat mixed results, but some studies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving physical outcomes of interest for children and youth. Limitations to the current studies include the heterogeneity of the programming and target audiences, as well as limited detail provided about the research design and types of intervention activities. School-level randomization and multiple assessments are necessary to better understand the effectiveness of OST interventions for improving physical health. Future studies need to provide more comprehensive assessments of physical activity and the utility of a physical activity program to promote activity both within and outside of the program.

- **Mental Health:** There is relatively little concrete evidence about how OST programs relate to the mental health of children and youth, especially pertaining to internalizing behaviors such as depression and anxiety. Yet, there is some indirect indication that OST programs might impact outcomes that relate to mental health. For example, some studies included social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes, and the programs under study demonstrated favorable effects in the domains of problem behaviors, positive youth development, relationships, and beliefs, all of which could be correlated with mental health outcomes.

Outcomes for Family and Peer Relationships

- To date, no studies separate out the effects of differential selection into participation and the treatment effects of participating in OST activities on family and peer relationships; this is an area where high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental evidence is greatly needed.

Long-Term Outcomes

- Several studies use nationally representative, longitudinal datasets, such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, and the National Education Longitudinal Study to examine observable associations between program participation and longer-term outcomes. More randomized trials are needed, particularly for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds, to determine long-term outcomes for young people who participate in out-of-school-time programs.

CURRENT OST FUNDING AND POLICIES

In the United States, the landscape of funding for OST programs is fragmented; programs are paid for through a number of financing mechanisms, including program fees paid by families, public funding (federal, state, and local), and private funding (philanthropic and other investments). For children and youth from low-income households, public and philanthropic assistance are vital to their participation in these programs.

While public investment in children and youth from low-income households has grown over the past 2 decades, these investments are often designed for a specific purpose (e.g., health, education, housing, food security, workforce development) and administered through a designated agency. This has created both a fragmented and incremental portfolio of funding for children, youth, and families. With federal dollars often distributed using a formula across all U.S. states, territories, and tribal communities, the dollars rarely stretch to meet the needs of children and youth, and many eligible families remain unserved (Conclusion 8-1).

To fill gaps in their budgets, OST programs are left to search for other sources of support, resulting in increased burden on OST providers in researching, competing for, and complying with onerous accountability measures across their funding portfolio; at times, funders demand contrary requirements. Complex grant application processes make it challenging for OST programs to develop a sustained funding portfolio, with particular hardship on smaller, rural, under-resourced programs. These dynamics widen the funding gap between small grassroots organizations, which often serve children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds, and well-established organizations with greater capacity to apply and adhere to grant requirements. Concerned about the sustainability of their funding, OST providers often operate from a scarcity mindset, shaping their programs in response to available funding

opportunities rather than in response to strategic implementation of their organization's mission (Conclusion 8-2).

Intermediaries play a critical role in providing timely supports so programs can continuously improve, implement innovative practices, utilize data-informed systems, and better compete for funding. However, public and private funding streams can restrict use of funds for such activities; at times, this leaves intermediaries underfunded, overstretched, and may result in OST program lacking access to supports. While some states and local governments have improved coordination and increased alignment across funding streams by blending or braiding funds to increase sustainability, the capacity and opportunity for such practices to take place at the program or organizational level are limited. Greater access to consistent technical assistance and professional development resources can support programs in their capacity and skills to fundraise, implement, comply with, and sustain funding at the program level (Conclusion 8-3).

ENSURING HIGH-QUALITY OST OPPORTUNITIES

While additional research is needed to fully appraise when OST activities matter, how they matter, for whom, and under what conditions, decades of research and practice point to OST programs playing a critical role in youth development as a bridge between school, home, and community and as a place for personal growth, relationship-building, learning, skill-building, and career exploration. For children and youth from affluent families, these experiences are often part of their normal life course, and children and youth from low-income households are eager for these opportunities—as mentioned above, data show 11 million children and youth from low-income households would enroll in a program if one were available.

In its review of the evidence, the committee found that effectiveness of programs is linked to youth participation and engagement and the quality of programming. Providing high-quality OST experiences for children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds requires strong OST systems and organizational capacity, a stable and well-trained workforce, and high-quality programming that is responsive to the needs of the populations being served. Current funding levels and support structures are insufficient for meeting these requirements and for meeting the demand for OST programs.

The committee's conclusions led it to develop a blueprint for efforts to better ensure high-quality OST opportunities, recognizing the role OST programs play in supporting parental and caregiver work, the gap in access between affluent and low-income families, and the overall positive association of high-quality programs on youth development. The committee's recommendations are organized across six goals: (1) support the funding stability of OST programs; (2) increase support for intermediary organizations to strengthen the organizational capacity of OST programs; (3) advance program quality efforts to foster enriching, safe, and supportive OST settings; (4) build stable, supportive environments and career pathways for youth development practitioners; (5) improve understanding of the landscape of OST programs and participation, OST staff development, program quality efforts, and OST systems; and (6) improve understanding of OST program effectiveness and outcomes. Goals 6 and 7 reflect the committee's consensus that funding research is critically important to advancing the youth development field. The federal government can support research in various ways, including by (1) continuing to fund the Interagency Working Group on Youth programs to set priorities on youth research and offer shared metrics and/or roadmaps (2) continuing to fund agencies and associated clearinghouses, (2) authorizing use of funds for evidence-generating activities, and (3)

set-aside allocations that require federal grantees to budget for internal and/or external evaluations. A complete list of the full recommendations and specific considerations for implementation are included in Chapter 9.

GOAL 1: Support the funding stability of OST programs.

- Provide general program support for staff compensation, indirect costs (i.e., administrative or operating costs), and robust evaluation over the long term (Recommendation 1-1).
- Increase coordination across funding streams and implement greater cross-sector and interagency partnership to alleviate the administrative burden on OST programs in researching and competing for grants and complying with grant requirements (Recommendation 1-2).
- Define funding priorities that align with priorities in the youth development field and are responsive to the needs and interests of participants, families, communities, and youth development practitioners; engage these groups in designing funding opportunities and application requirements (Recommendation 1-3).
- Reduce access burdens for children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds by helping providers address common barriers to participation in OST programs (Recommendations 1-4).

GOAL 2: Increase support for intermediary organizations to strengthen the organizational capacity of OST programs.

- Support entities that coordinate and support OST programs, including city- and state-level intermediaries to improve infrastructure for program availability, accessibility, and quality (Recommendation 2-1).
- Prioritize or incentivize partnerships with local intermediaries that can provide OST system-level supports, such as grant allocation and monitoring and integration of quality improvement systems (Recommendation 2-2).
- Where no coordinating body currently exists, form or support coordinating bodies, such as intermediaries or children's cabinets or their equivalent, which would work across entities serving children and youth (Recommendation 2-3).
- Continually identify gaps in access to OST programs and related barriers at the neighborhood level (e.g., through needs-based assessments and mapping tools) to increase program participation (Recommendation 2-4).

GOAL 3: Advance program quality efforts to foster enriching, safe, and supportive OST settings.

- Support the development and implementation of quality improvement initiatives and provide ongoing technical assistance to advance program quality efforts (Recommendation 3-1).
- Set a schedule and process for reviewing and updating program quality initiatives, associated assessment tool(s), and aligned supports for OST programs, reflective of evidence-based practices and research, as well as evolving community strengths and needs (Recommendation 3-2).

- Support cross-sector collaboration with school districts, local universities, and municipal agencies to share and analyze data to support continuous improvement of program quality (Recommendation 3-3).

GOAL 4: Build stable, supportive environments and career pathways for youth development practitioners.

- Create opportunities to prepare and increase professional pathways for the OST workforce (Recommendation 4-1).
- Provide more opportunities for students to pursue their interests in the youth development field, including exposure to practical experiences and relevant coursework (Recommendation 4-2).
- Establish a standard occupational classification for youth development practitioners (Recommendation 4-3).

GOAL 5: Improve understanding of the landscape of OST programs and participation, OST staff development, program quality efforts, and OST systems.

- Continually monitor supply of and demand for OST programs, monitor experiences of the youth development workforce, and identify which young people are and are not being served in OST programs (Recommendation 5-1).
- Collect data on participation in OST programs, including data that allow for examination of intersecting demographics (Recommendation 5-2).

GOAL 6: Improve understanding of OST program effectiveness and outcomes.

- Assess the efficacy of specific program designs and features. Examine a wide range of short- and long-term outcomes and other rigorous quantitative and rigorous qualitative research that includes measures of participation, program duration, program quality, and implementation (Recommendation 6-1).

1

Introduction

Youth development, sometimes known as *positive youth development*, is “an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths”¹ (Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, n.d., para 1). This approach, which evolved from the field of prevention, recognizes individuals as agents in their development. As a field, it encompasses the diverse programs and settings where young people spend their time outside of school and the actors (i.e., implementors, funders, researchers) and systems that support them. Out-of-school-time (OST) programs are a part of the broader field of youth development. The terms *OST* and *youth development* programs are sometimes used interchangeably; however, *OST* speaks to the time programs can happen and *youth development* speaks to the approach.

In 2002, the National Research Council (NRC & Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2002) released its report *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. This report was foundational for the field of youth development and continues to be an important resource for individuals working with, studying, or advocating on behalf of youth. Commonly referred to today as the “Blue Book” by those in the field, that report reviewed the evidence available at the time on positive youth development, identifying the personal and social assets young people need to succeed, the settings that foster these assets, and ultimately the value of community programs as an opportunity for youth to experience positive developmental settings.

Since the publication of the Blue Book, much of the policy and funding advances related to youth development have come in the form of OST opportunities. OST programs provide promise for learning and development during the critical time when children and youth are not in school. Rich OST experiences give children and youth opportunities for play, discovery, joy, and carefreeness. Participants can try new activities, talk with new people, discover their passions, and develop the supportive relationships they need to thrive. High-quality OST programs offer opportunities to develop skills and capabilities during childhood and adolescence that can help them prepare for adulthood and will remain valuable throughout their lives. These skills—such as cultivating strong personal relationships, acting with autonomy, and deriving pleasure from art or sports—can increase their societal contributions and enable them to live fuller lives. Moreover, OST opportunities offer structured safe spaces for children and youth after the school day that allow parents and caregivers to work. Research shows parents overwhelmingly view OST programs as helping working families keep their jobs or work more hours (Afterschool

¹ The (positive) youth development approach is commonly applied in multiple settings, including in the home; in residential facilities; in libraries, parks, and camps; and often in out-of-school-time programs.

Alliance, 2022), a view that may be more prominent among low-income families, where parents are more likely to be in service occupations with less flexible schedules (Harknett et al., 2020; Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2007). There is also a general consensus that OST opportunities for adolescents are preferable to other less productive or unsafe and unstructured activities teens have access to and that OST remains a critical, ongoing connector to school participation.

Today's youth development field in the United States is increasingly varied in its settings and programming, and in the children and youth served, which is both a strength and a factor that can make it difficult to describe and study. OST programs may be based in schools or offered through community-based organizations, and in many other settings. Programs can include a range of activities or have a specific focus, such as arts, sports, activism, or academics. Some programs are designed to serve specific populations, such as LGBTQ+, refugee children and youth, or Latine children and youth; others are funded to serve children and youth from households with low incomes. The variation in program foci and design is relevant to understanding the landscape of activities and funding issues and identifying relevant outcomes.

In the decades since the Blue Book, interest and funding for programming to support children and youth in organized activities outside of school has continued to grow. Developments in the field that followed and may have been inspired by the publication of the Blue Book include codified program practices, systemic support of program quality, recognition of the youth development workforce as a valued asset, and the trajectory of youth outcomes from purely academic to social and emotional competencies. Along the way, the youth development field has maintained roots in strengths-based and community-driven approaches that mitigate persistent gaps in opportunities and outcomes. Nonetheless, much work remains to ensure access to high-quality programs for all children and youth who may benefit. The committee aims to unpack these issues and more, based in the robust evidence now available. It will share conclusions and propose recommendations to fuel directionality in the youth development field in the same spirit of the committee that authored the Blue Book over 20 years ago.

THE STUDY CHARGE AND THE COMMITTEE'S APPROACH

With the support of the Wallace Foundation, the Board on Children, Youth, and Families convened an ad hoc committee to review the evidence on OST activities across geographic settings for children and youth from low-income households.

Specifically, the committee was asked to review the evidence across four key areas: (1) characterizing the array of OST activities; (2) evaluating the strength and limitations of the evidence on the effectiveness of OST activities in promoting learning, development, and well-being; (3) outlining improvements to existing policies and regulations to increase program access and quality; and (4) laying out a research agenda that would strengthen the OST evidence base. In addressing these priorities, the committee was directed to the intersections between economic stress and other factors—such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, disability, immigrant status, and involvement with justice or child welfare systems—that have operated historically to marginalize young people.

The full statement of task for the committee appears in Box 1-1. The committee also had an opportunity to hear directly from the sponsor at its first public meeting and ask clarifying questions around the statement of task. In this conversation, the sponsor emphasized a few key points—identifying robust qualitative and quantitative studies to review entails thinking about quality standards for inclusion and making clear the strengths and limitations of the research.

The sponsor emphasized the need to go beyond discussions of program access to discussions of program quality and to understand where investments and policy changes at all levels—federal, state, and local—can help ensure higher-quality programming for children and youth.

BOX 1-1 **Statement of Task**

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine will convene an ad hoc committee of experts to conduct a consensus study on learning and development of low-income youth in out-of-school time (OST) settings across the K-12 age span. Specifically, the study will focus on students from low-income households, across urban, suburban, and rural settings. Analyses of findings will attend to issues of intersectionality of economic stress with other factors that have operated historically to marginalize young people, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, age, disability, and involvement with justice or child welfare systems, among others. The committee will establish and describe quality standards of inclusion to ensure that only the most robust qualitative and quantitative studies are included in the review and will address and make recommendations for the following questions:

1. How can OST programs specifically designed to serve K-12 youth from low-income households be characterized (e.g., program goals, audiences, governance structures/staffing, size, dosage, programmatic approaches, and theories of change)? How and why do these characteristics vary among OST programs? Are there any patterns among these organizational dimensions related to community served, focus/purpose, geographic region, or other factors?
2. What is the evidence on the effectiveness and outcomes of OST programs for promoting learning, development (social, emotional, intellectual, and physical), and wellbeing for children and youth from low-income households? How are these constructs defined and measured by programs and in the research literature? Do findings vary by sub-groups of low-income youth experiencing additional forms of structural inequality?
 - A. What approaches are linked to positive effects, across a range of quantifiable outcomes? How do results vary by demographic factors (e.g., age, ethnicity/race, gender, gender identity, disability) and program approach (including governance structures and dosage) as well as intersectionality with additional forms of structural inequality?
 - b. What other types of outcomes have been documented in the research (e.g., social, emotional, academic, workforce) and how do these differ by demographic factors (e.g., age, ethnicity/race, gender, gender identity, disability) and program approach (including governance structures and dosage), as well as intersectionality with additional forms of structural inequality?
3. How can existing policies and regulations for OST programs be improved to ensure high-quality opportunities for children and youth from low-income households? How might these vary when low-income youth experience additional forms of structural inequality?
4. What are the existing gaps in the literature that can be addressed to produce more robust findings about how OST can support learning and development for children and youth from low-income households? How might these vary when low income youth experience additional forms of structural inequality?

Defining the Study Scope

In order to carry out its charge, the committee had to first define its scope of interest. To narrow the scope, the committee relied on the established definition of *organized-activities*,

which are characterized by structure and adult supervision, have scheduled meeting times, and emphasize skill-building. They typically denote *for whom* (school-age, child, adolescent, youth), *what* (activities, programs, organizations), *where* (school-based, community-based), and *when* (after school, extracurricular, summer, nonschool, out-of-school) youth development programs will occur (Mahoney et al., 2005).

The committee further narrowed its review to focus on the following:

- Organized activities in *OST settings*, defined as structured school- and community-based programs offered outside of school hours that occur with regular frequency. This could include programs that are distinct from the school curriculum and are offered before or after school, on weekends, or during the summer. This report looks primarily at programs after school during the afternoon and early evening and on weekends.²
- Programs serving children and youth in grades K–12 (between the ages of 5 and 18) from households with low incomes, where possible. The committee recognizes that young people who are contending with economic insecurity may also face other intersecting challenges or characteristics.
- Programs serving children and youth from low-income households, across urban, suburban, and rural settings with attention to issues of intersectionality of economic stress with other factors as defined in its statement of task... In some cases, the literature the committee reviewed did not present details or disaggregate by the aforementioned factors. In those cases, the committee described the population focus, or lack thereof, in its description of the evidence.

The Committee's Approach

A variety of activities and sources informed the committee's work. Foremost, the study benefited from the varied perspectives of its 15-member committee, which collectively holds expertise in public policy, child and adolescent development, developmental psychology, sociology, population health, juvenile justice, economics, and evaluation, program design and delivery, and the populations that are the focus of this study. Many members also had previous experience providing direct services to children and youth through OST programs. (See Appendix D for biographical sketches of the committee.)

The committee met in formal closed sessions five times over the course of its study and conducted additional deliberations in several ad hoc virtual meetings.

Sources of Evidence

The committee gathered and synthesized the available evidence pertaining to the questions raised in its statement of task. They reviewed scientific literature, gray literature (i.e., literature produced by organizations outside of the traditional or academic publishing sphere),

² While summer programming provides important developmental opportunities for children and youth, the committee did not focus specifically on this body of work, as a recent National Academies report, *Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth* (NASEM, 2019c), examines the impact of summertime experiences on the developmental trajectories of school-age children and youth. It discusses impacts across four areas of well-being, including academic learning, social and emotional development, physical and mental health, and health-promoting and safety behaviors. It also reviews the state of the science and available literature regarding the impact of summertime experiences.

papers and reports produced by youth-focused organizations, and previous reports from the National Academies (see Box 1-2). To augment its activities, the committee commissioned two systematic literature reviews. Mathematica conducted a review of peer-reviewed studies based on quantitative data. To complement this work, Youth-Nex, a research center at the University of Virginia, reviewed studies based on mixed-methods and qualitative data.³

The committee held three public information-gathering sessions (NASEM, 2024a). In the first session, representatives of national, state-, and city-level organizations shared their perspectives on investments and partnerships that would support OST program access, quality, and assessment, as well as professional pathways for the OST workforce. In the second and third public sessions, young people and staff from program settings across the country shared their personal experiences participating in and supporting community programs. Program participants discussed the opportunities they see in these programs, what matters most to them about these programs, and how they define a successful program, among other areas. Program staff shared ways in which their organizations are reaching and serving young people, and they illuminated OST workforce challenges through their personal experiences.

The committee also requested memos and commissioned papers from experts in academia and organizations that serve children and youth. The topics included a review of the work of the Grantmakers for Education Out-of-School Time Impact Group, city-level supports and governance structures of OST activities, findings from an ongoing study estimating OST program costs (American Institutes for Research [AIR], 2024), and the experiences of youth workers in the United States (AIR, 2025). The committee also commissioned the Afterschool Alliance to provide additional data on OST participation and demand among low-income families on a national level.

BOX 1-2 **Relevant National Academies Reports**

This report is a contribution to a series of reports by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine that focus on opportunities and gaps in positive developmental experiences, elevating the strengths of children, youth, and their families. Together, these reports offer a comprehensive exploration and set of recommendations for the potential and promise of coordinated programs, systems, and investments to support better outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities.

- *Reducing Intergenerational Poverty* (NASEM, 2024)
- *Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children* (NASEM, 2023)
- *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty* (NASEM, 2019a)
- *Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth* (NASEM, 2019c)
- *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (NASEM, 2019)
- *Identifying and Supporting Productive STEM Programs in Out-of-School Settings* (NASEM, 2015)
- *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth: A National Agenda* (NASEM, 2019b)
- *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (NASEM, 2019d)
- *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (NRC and IOM, 2002)

³ These reviews are available in the committee's public access file; access can be requested via <https://www8.nationalacademies.org/pa/managerequest.aspx?key=DBASSE-BCYF-22-03>

– *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (IOM and NRC, 2002)

Standards of Evidence on Program Effectiveness and Outcomes

The youth development field is rich and diverse. The field is upheld by a set of principles including strengths-based and context-driven approaches that inherently promote multiplicity in program offerings. The field is organized by OST systems that vary in their governance and goals and work in a multitude of settings: schools, communities, parks, places of worship, and more. The workforce comes with preparation, credentials, and experience in multiple fields and is ideally rooted in the local community. Programs are complex; they have many moving parts and are emergent—in other words, outcomes may manifest differently for different youth (even for youth who attend the same activity). Activities constantly evolve, and two programs based on the same principles may shift in different ways in reflection of the assets, context, and talents of the implementers and participants. For example, two local affiliates of the same national organization (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, Girls Inc.) can vary in program quality, norms, youth–staff interactions, and specific activities, even when they are founded on the same principles, programming, and staff training (Seitz et al., 2021; Simpkins, 2015). This variety is more expansive when considering the various programs and activities offered, such as the range of academic clubs across multiple high schools. Scholars have argued that regarding all possible activities in the youth development field as a singular intervention is not tenable, as activities vary in structure, quality, and youth experiences (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). Still, this array of activities and approaches is a strength, creating greater opportunity for youth and families.

When studying such complex systems, it is vital to draw on multiple sources of evidence based on rigorous quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help inform research, practice, and policy decisions. As described above, the members of the study committee have a range of disciplines, perspectives, and methodological approaches to developing and interpreting robust evidence. It therefore relied on a range of approaches to capture the evidence on the effectiveness and outcomes of OST programs, as detailed in Chapter 7.

Every method has strengths and challenges, and varied sources of evidence provide complementary information on OST programs. Rich qualitative narratives, for example, provide insight into the complex, multidetermined processes that are challenging to discern in many generalizable quantitative methods. Consolidating evidence across multiple methodologies helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of how activity participation matters, for whom, and under what conditions.

Throughout this report, the committee summarized the evidence from robust quantitative and qualitative evidence. In some cases, we drew on available causal evidence to understand the direct relationship between program participation and youth outcomes and on other evidence to illuminate relationships, future research directions, and considerations for policy and practice. Additionally, the committee highlights throughout the report relevant studies and examples, wherever available, across demographic and geographic considerations, such as research, practice, and/or policy on rural and Indigenous communities, youth involved in other systems of care (e.g., justice, child welfare), and youth with disabilities. Because of the limited availability of such evidence, the committee’s recommendations invite further investments in research that deepen understanding of context and variation in outcomes across subgroups and at demographic intersections.

Language and Terminology

Language in the field is as varied as the settings in which they are offered. Language matters because it is the way that children, youth, families, staff, partners, and community members identify with what they engage in. Today, prominent terms describing youth programs include *youth development*, *afterschool*, and *out-of-school-time* programs. The latter two reflect the program or activity in its relationship to school, as opposed to its own value or purpose. The committee observes that people who benefit from youth development programs do not use these terms widely, nor do they identify with names used by common funding streams, creating a disjuncture between the system-level architecture of the field (what system leaders use to refer to programs), the workforce (those who run and work in the field), and those for whom it is intended (children, youth, and families). As much as use of a common set of terms may further unite the fields that support youth development, the committee recognizes the value of locally driven and relevant program language, as well as the complexities created by the push and pull of funding mechanisms in naming programs.

Throughout the report, the committee used people-first language, using the terms and definitions laid out in Box 1-3 where applicable. At the start of each chapter, the committee also captures chapter-specific key terms and entities to improve understanding of the report for all audiences.

BOX 1-3 Key Terms Used in the Report

- **Agency:** A public office (e.g., a state or local education agency, governor's or mayor's office) that may serve as the funder for organizations and programs and/or a backbone support for a system; in some cases, the term refers to a program implementer.
- **Children:** Individuals ages 5–12.
- **Direct service:** Staff who work directly with participants in out-of-school-time (OST) programs.
- **Extracurricular (activities/clubs/sports):** school-sponsored activities, common in middle and high school levels.
- **Intersectionality:** As defined by Crenshaw (1989), a framework that recognizes the intractable overlap of social positions (e.g., race, gender) that cannot be otherwise understood separately, and furthermore that intersecting systems of power inform people's social positioning and experiences. Crenshaw (1989) and her colleagues' conceptualizations of intersectionality highlight the role of race, ethnicity, gender, orientation and identities as objects of overlapping areas of marginalization, discrimination, and structural inequality.
- **Intermediary:** an organization or agency that oversees the OST system policies and strategies, and coordinates resources, money, and expertise; can serve at the county, city, state, or regional levels.
- **Low-income:** The committee recognizes that the U.S. Census Bureau sets specific thresholds to define poverty for households. However, the eligibility requirements for children and youth to participate in OST activities and programs that primarily serve youth from low-income households are often defined as households that qualify for free and reduced-price school meals, which is reflected in the data and research around OST activities and programs. Therefore, the committee follows the general practice of using the term low-income to encompass individuals, households, and families with incomes who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals.

- *Marginalized*: In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of marginalization as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering,’ where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage (p.1).” The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024).
- *OST systems and settings*: the field-level infrastructure and locales (i.e., places) that support program implementation.
- *OST programs and activities*: structured school- and community-based programs and activities offered outside of school hours, that are not part of the school curriculum, and that occur with regular frequency. These include programs and activities offered before school, after school, on weekends, or during the summer. The terms programs and activities are sometimes used interchangeably in this report.
- *Youth or adolescent(s)*: individuals ages 13–18.
- *Youth development or positive youth development*: the underlying philosophy of programs (i.e., strengths based, context driven); the term can describe actors (i.e., implementers, funders, researchers), settings, and program types. The youth development field includes the approach, actors (i.e., implementors, funders, researchers), settings, and program types.
- *Youth development practitioner*: one who works directly with children and youth in a part- or full-time capacity in an OST program.

Throughout the report, when discussing subpopulations disaggregated by race, the committee generally used the terms White, Black, Latine, Asian, and Native American. However, the term Hispanic is used, primarily in Chapter 4, when reporting results of national surveys that employed this term.

NOTE: Other terms that refer to programs are commonly used in the field but are not used widely in this report: organized activities, informal learning, and expanded learning.

BACKGROUND ON THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND OST PROGRAMS

Throughout the study process the committee discussed the history of youth development and OST programming as critical to understanding the state and direction of programs today, including policy and funding issues, program practices, program access and availability, and research. This history is particularly important in understanding contemporary developments that have contributed to moving the field of youth development forward and the focus and accessibility of programs that serve children and youth, especially those subpopulations that are the focus of this study. The following sections briefly review these origins and recent advancements.

It is helpful to first note that historical and contemporary developments around OST programs have been shaped by four underlying drivers:

1. **Safety and Supervision**: OST settings were first positioned as safe spaces between home and school, whereby children and youth could be supervised by trusted adults in structured spaces as their families worked (Halpern, 2003; Noam & Rosenbaum Tillinger, 2004). The role of OST as a support structure to working families grew in prominence with the labor market shifts of the 1970s and onward (Halpern, 2003; Malone, 2013). This positioning was also used to emphasize the need to prevent risky behaviors and juvenile crime (Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, 1998; The FrameWorks

Institute, 2001). Although some scholars have highlighted that an emphasis on crime and safety stands to label both certain communities and young people as unsafe, the risk prevention—especially for older youth—remains a consideration in public support of OST programs, especially with focus on older youth (Malone, 2013; The FrameWorks Institute, 2001; see also Pittman & Cahill, 1992).

2. **Academic Learning:** The second driver that has shaped policy discourse is the role program participation plays in supporting academic learning. Debates on whether such programs need to extend the school day to boost academic achievement have led to tighter coupling of some OST programming with academic outcomes under certain public funding streams (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers [21st CCLCs]), and have created an opportunity for the growth of programs offering targeted interventions, homework assistance, or tutoring (Halpern, 2003; see examples in Borman & D’Agostino, 1996; Lauer et al., 2006). The central debate surrounding this driver is whether this positioning narrows the purposes of the field or bolsters connections to learning spaces in advancing student success (Malone, 2013).
3. **Preparing the Future Workforce:** The third driver focuses on workforce and skills development, particularly pertaining to adolescents youth (Malone, 2013). Through both federal levers and public–private partnerships, there is increased attention to the role of youth–adult relationships through mentoring, career counseling, and exploratory opportunities for career readiness (e.g., internships, preapprenticeships, job shadowing, service learning) (see overview of each pathway in Clagett, 2015; Midwest Regional Educational Laboratory Program, 2018; Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2015; Ross et al., 2020). Federal investments such as the Job Corps, YouthBuild, and programs for youth through the departments of Labor and Justice have forged new funding opportunities for the field to support workforce development (see Chapter 8 for overview of each investment area).
4. **Whole-Child Development:** The youth development field’s embrace of whole-child development⁴ is clear (Cantor & Osher, 2021; Cantor et al., 2019, 2021; NRC & IOM, 2002; Osher et al., 2020; Search Institute, 2007). Especially after the No Child Left Behind era, when practitioners experienced fatigue for being held accountable to academic tests, the youth development practitioners began to embrace a more holistic approach to whole-child development. See, for example, the framework of Nagaoka et al. (2015) and codifying practices to explicitly support learning *and* development. Other popular models that elevate whole-child learning and development are the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Whole School, Whole Community, and Whole Child framework (CDC, 2024) and the Science of Learning and Development, which elevate the strengths and assets of individuals as agents in their own learning and development, while prioritizing alignment across settings and systems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In addition to explicit skills development, whole-child models recognize the interconnected nature of multiple actors in a young person’s life, contributing to the rise of theories and value for systemic approaches, as discussed in Chapter 2. Public funding supports whole-child efforts, such as community schools and Promise Neighborhoods (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

⁴ Tenets of whole-child development such as problem-solving and relationships often resonate with families. At times, the term *whole-child development* has been conflated with mental health and social and emotional learning.

Early Years

The history of the youth development field in the United States goes back well over a hundred years. Most historians describe the emergence of OST programs and activities in the late 1800s as resulting from several large historical patterns—the rise of compulsory schooling, combined with decreased child labor, increased urbanization, increased parental (including maternal) employment, and a rise in single-parent households. This led to a gap between the end of the school day (usually around 2:30 or 3:00 p.m.) and the time when parents got home from work. This was particularly pronounced in urban areas, which grew steadily during the 1800s and 1900s (Halpern, 2003; Mahoney et al., 2009).

The earliest organizations providing afterschool programming emerged in the mid-1800s: the YMCA, or the Y, was founded in 1844 (Mjagkij & Spratt, 1997), and the first Boys Club, which eventually became Boys & Girls Clubs of America,² was founded in 1860. Settlement houses³ were also precursors to today's youth development field, with some settlement organizations offering activities and access to facilities, such as gymnasiums and playgrounds, for Black individuals and European immigrants, particularly in urban areas (Theriault, 2018). Many other large youth organizations and national investments were formed in the early 1900s, including 4-H (1902), Scouts (1910), and Camp Fire Girls (1910), with the goal of providing spaces that fostered positive youth development. These organizations formed their approaches around supporting adolescents through a period of “storm and stress,”⁴ which was the predominant theory shaping developmental research at the time (LeMenestrel & Lauxman, 2011).

However, access to programs and program goals differed across groups. These large youth organizations were founded during the Jim Crow era, with *Plessy v. Ferguson* enabling states to legalize segregation in 1896 (Hoffer, 2012). As documented by Theriault (2018), Black young people were often barred from newly created parks, recreation centers, and youth centers through exclusionary “membership systems,” or they were dissuaded from attending these settings through negative microinteractions, discrimination, and violence. Elsewhere, Johnston-Goodstar (2020) and Halpern (2003) describe how Native American youth were largely excluded from these mainstream organizations; when they were allowed to participate, they were met with different goals. These authors report that strength and character through sport were features of programming for White children, but for Native American children and immigrant children programming was associated with desires to protect, control, civilize and “Americanize,” them alongside the progressive education ideas of enrichment and organized play (Johnston-Goodstar, 2020; Halpern, 2003, p. 24).

Theriault (2018) also documents how discrimination and segregation often fueled the creation of Black community-created spaces. In reference to church-based settings for youth, Theriault (2018) notes, “The developmental significance of having spaces free of White supremacy during the era of Jim Crow is impossible to quantify” (p. 9). Several African

² <https://bgca.org>

³ In the United States, settlement houses functioned as community centers—offering a wide range of cultural and social services, including education, health care, childcare, and employment resources. They were typically located in impoverished urban areas and served the residents of these neighborhoods (Hansan, 2011; Library of Congress, n.d.).

⁴ Adolescence has been considered a period of heightened stress because of changes experienced during this time, including physical maturation, drive for independence, increased salience of social and peer interactions, and brain development. This has historically led some researchers to characterize adolescence as a time of “storm and stress” (Casey et al., 2010).

American YMCAs were founded in the late 1800s; many struggled financially and did not survive more than a few years. Nonetheless, iconic and long-lasting organizations exist today (e.g., in Chicago, Illinois, and Washington, DC) in times of shifting community demographics (Mjagkij, 2003). For example, Anthony Bowen, a prominent religious leader and educator, a council member of the District's Seventh Ward, and the first Black clerk at the U.S. Patent Office, was the founder and president of the world's first Black YMCA (YMCA, n.d.). Hope et al. (2023) argue that this legacy is central to understanding the ingenuity and persistence in developing spaces for positive development in the sociohistorical context of racism and oppression facing children and youth from marginalized backgrounds (Hope et al., 2023).

20th-Century OST: From Safety to Learning

The first half of the century saw changes that catalyzed further formalization of OST programs to support families facing distress from world wars and the Great Depression. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 reduced the number of child laborers; this, coupled with an increasing number of women working during World War II, meant there were fewer adults to watch over children and youth after the school day. The first U.S. government childcare facilities were established during this time (Green, 2024).

Enrichment, learning, and childcare exemplified the role of OST during the 20th century. Schools were eliminating or decreasing arts, music, health, and recreation programming, so OST programs focused on these activities (Halpern, 2003).

With the 1960s War on Poverty, there was an emerging emphasis on supporting learning and opportunities for children from low-income households (Halpern, 2003). As labor market patterns begin to shift during the 1970s, the childcare function, in addition to enrichment and learning, reemerged as an important element to OST programs. Title XX and Dependent Care Block Grants are examples of the 53 federal childcare initiatives of the 1980s that supported working families and access to OST programs (Besharov & Tramontozzi, 1988; Halpern, 2003; Stephen & Schillmoeller, 1987). Organizations such as the School-Age Child Care Project (today's National Institute on Out-of-School Time) and School Age Child Care Alliance (today's National AfterSchool Association) emerged (Malone, 2013; Neugebauer, 1996).

With the publication of the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and the subsequent standards-based accountability movement within the education sector, there was an increased emphasis on the link between OST and academics (Malone, 2013). A focus on academics often hampered the development of other artistic and creative expressions in OST (Baldrige et al., 2024).

According to Kwon (2013), during this period, moral panic around adolescents, as well as paternalism, shaped the purposes and practices around OST programming, especially for Black and Latine populations. Young people were the focus of social anxieties over urbanization, increasing social inequality, crime, and changing sexual norms (Kwon, 2013). Community-based youth organizations grew quickly in urban centers in the wake of legislation that arose from the War on Drugs. In the 1980s and 1990s youth programs were positioned as spaces that offered an alternative to the crime of the urban settings and allowed for the containment and control of Black and Latine youth—preventing crime among males and policing the sexualities of young girls (Baldrige et al., 2024; Kwon, 2013). OST programs have been viewed as critical in preventing juvenile crime, substance use, and risky sexual behavior.

Contemporary Developments

In the late 1990s, researchers published a report (Catalano et al., 2002) confirming that prevention programs that made assumptions about who should be considered “at risk” and focused on curtailing risky behaviors did not work; instead, programs that focused on youth assets, were relationship based, and were grounded in culture and context did work to support positive youth development (and avoidance of unhealthy risk). The field of youth development aims to counter deficit frames of risk to focus on strengths or assets of individuals and communities.

In many ways, the Catalano et al. (2002) study marked a wider recognition of these attitudes in the evidence and in federal funding in the United States. The research was followed by a series of studies that looked at structured versus unstructured time in programs, finding that many popular community-based models of harm reduction, such as midnight basketball, could in fact be harmful rather than helpful for participants. Thus, funding for structured programs became more prevalent.

The youth development field has been growing since the 1990s; this growth has accelerated since the 2000s, specifically around (1) the expansion of program quality and practices, (2) growing recognition of the youth development workforce, (3) the rise of coordinating systems, (4) growing scholarship around these already mentioned areas, as well as program effectiveness and outcomes (see Chapter 2 for theories that have informed the field), and (5) dedicated public and philanthropic funding (Figure 1-1 provides a timeline of some of the major events and investments in OST programs and systems since the 1990s). Evidence-based frameworks, statements, and books began to emerge to inform policy and practice at scale, leading to a deeper understanding of the field and its components (see, e.g., C. S. Mott Foundation Committee on After-School Research and Practice, 2005; Economic Policy Institute, 2008; Peterson, 2013; Pittman & Irby, 1996). The numbers of youth-serving organizations, intermediaries, and scholars dedicated to the youth development field have increased. Today’s OST programming is marked by diversity of purpose, organizational type, and resources.

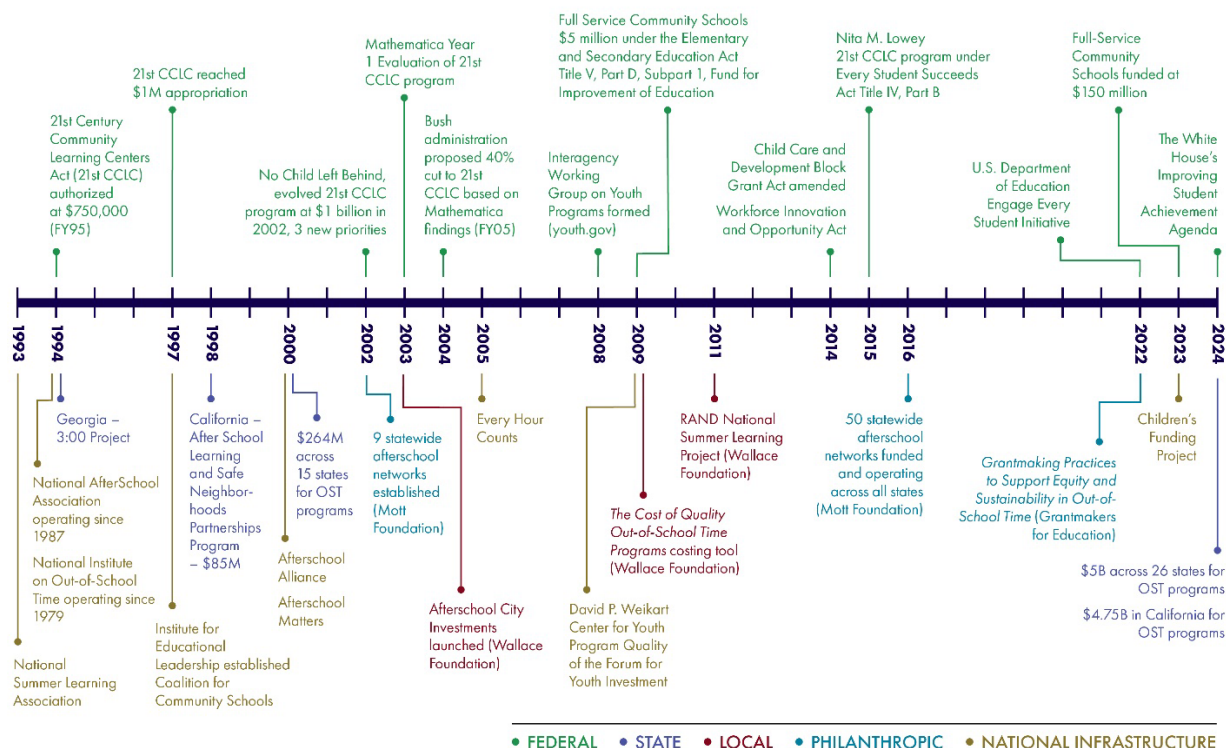


FIGURE 1-1 Timeline of major contemporary events and investments in the youth development field, 1993–2024.

NOTE: FY = fiscal year.

SOURCE: Generated by the committee.

The field was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Scholars called this a “disturbance in the ecosystem” (Akiva & Robinson, 2022, p. 4). When schools shut down in spring 2020, so did OST programs. While many OST programs reopened quickly to meet the needs of essential workers, many small OST programs, without large financial cushions, closed their doors for good. Among those programs that stayed open, leaders and staff in OST programs were intentional and active during the pandemic shutdown, adapting programming to offer online activities for young people (Fornaro et al., 2021), while others shifted their efforts to food insecurity and getting learning supplies to children (Sliwa et al., 2022). Intermediaries and philanthropic organizations⁸ supported these efforts to ensure the continuity of services and to fill gaps in services (Every Hour Counts, 2023; Hartmann et al., 2024). Still, providers remain concerned with staffing shortages and program operating costs as relief funds end (Afterschool Alliance, 2024).

⁸ For example, intermediaries and other coordinating entities assisted program providers by increasing online opportunities for staff professional development and providing funding to programs (Every Hour Counts, 2023). In addition, the Grantmakers for Thriving Youth OST Impact Group, comprising 125 foundations’ staff, pooled funding to strengthening cross-sector partnerships, leading to two reports, *Building Community From Crisis: A Collaborative Fund for the Out-of-School Time Field* (Jung, 2022) and *Grantmaking Practices to Support Equity and Sustainability in Out-of-School Time* (Grantmakers for Education, 2022). This group plays an important role in elevating OST issues across the funding community and creating space for collective problem solving and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Programs continue to serve many functions and sometimes exhibit tension around school goals (i.e., supporting young people to succeed in school) versus enrichment goals (i.e., learning topics not included in school curriculum; Akiva et al., 2023). These multiple functions and purposes have been reproduced in the ways in which programs are governed and funded, with variation across federal, state, local, and philanthropic funding streams. Funding gaps for OST programs today continue to reify a system in which more privileged families can “pay to play” to have access to more quality OST opportunities (see Chapter 8).

With the rise of coordinating entities to support program efforts came the charge of promoting access to programs for all young people through community mapping of programs and participants among other efforts. Initially, efforts to improve access focused on having programs nearby. However, access and transportation are not enough to lead to improved outcomes for children and youth—they need access to high-quality programs. While access remained a challenge, funders quickly turned to supporting quality improvement and outcome measurement efforts, potentially in response to trends in education (e.g., No Child Left Behind) and roadblocks in coordinating data systems to do the mapping. Along the same timeline, public funders started to prioritize structured, high-quality programs, drawing funding away from programs that allowed adult allies or youth development practitioners to reach children and youth where they are.

The field has continued to evolve in its thinking around quality, and efforts are underway that recognize that program quality must incorporate responsiveness to the community, family, and young people—their lives, concerns, and ways of knowing—and designing programs with child, youth, and family assets and needs at the center. These efforts remain nascent, however, and have not permeated the majority of the field. Together, these movements have largely led to programs serving those who elect to attend, but not all children and youth who could benefit. Access to quality programming has become more dire with less access among low-income and marginalized youth (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). This report is intended to point the way forward toward developments that will support broad participation in high-quality programming, so that all children and youth have the opportunity to benefit and thrive.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

In the following chapters, the committee will expand on the contemporary developments around the youth development field and OST programming introduced in this chapter. Chapter 2 reviews developmental and ecological theories that describe how young people may learn and grow within programs and what may influence them within these settings. This chapter offers frameworks and models for how the youth development field approaches programs and the tools and trainings that are used to support program quality discussed later in the report. Chapter 3 builds on ecological theories to spotlight systems and sectors within the OST ecosystem that shape learning and development in programs, and how programs are developed, delivered, and accessed. Chapter 4 reviews the landscape of OST programs and program characteristics, participation data and trends, and issues affecting enrollment and participation. Chapter 5 offers a picture of the workforce supporting OST experiences. Chapter 6 discusses the implementation of programs, looking at program quality efforts and participant experiences. Chapter 7 reviews the evidence base on effectiveness and outcomes for OST programs. Chapter 8 reviews public and private funding and policies supporting OST systems, settings, and programs. Chapter 9 lays out the path forward for the youth development field, with a list of recommendations for

policymakers, funders, and intermediaries to ensure high-quality opportunities for all children and youth.

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2 OST Theories

Children and youth live, play, learn, and grow in and across multiple settings. While learning is commonly thought of as occurring in schools, an ecosystem of people, places, and possibilities constitute an environment full of learning and development opportunities for children and youth, both in and outside of school (Akiva et al., 2022). Young people can have positive developmental experiences, for example, at home, libraries, and parks; with peers, mentors, and teachers; and on their own (e.g., daydreaming, playing, hiking). Academic theories explain the intersections within this ecosystem between settings, actors, and experiences and how they contribute to a young person’s learning and development.

This chapter introduces a sample of theories, theoretical frameworks, and models that underpin young people’s learning and development in out-of-school-time (OST) systems and settings. First, developmental theories describe how individual young people may learn and grow within programs. Second, ecological theories consider what activities matter for a young person and how OST settings interact¹ with other important contexts in their life.

There is no singular conceptual model on how children and youth learn and develop. The committee thus presents a contribution to the extant literature in compiling theories and models relevant to youth development and OST programs. These theories lay a foundation for the report’s later discussions, as their expansion and progression have informed how the youth development field approaches programs and the tools and trainings that are used to support program quality (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES: UNDERSTANDING HOW A YOUNG PERSON MAY LEARN AND GROW IN OST SETTINGS

Scholarship on youth development and OST programs occurs across multiple fields of study, including education, social work, and leisure studies, and the majority has occurred from the perspective of developmental science. For example, research in developmental psychology describes increases in autonomy in early and middle adolescence, which can lead to greater interest in and capacity for leadership in OST settings (Larson & Hansen, 2005; Mahoney et al.,

¹ This report uses *interact* and *interaction* to describe youth–adult, peer–peer, or youth–context relations. As there is potential for confusion with the statistical concept of interaction (where the effect of one causal variable on an outcome is shaped by a second causal variable [Cox, 1984]), some scholars argue for the use of *co-act* for these relations (e.g., Lerner, 2021). However, the committee opted to use *interact* because of its common usage in scholarly and practical OST contexts.

2009).² As OST attendance is voluntary, several scholars have applied motivation theories to OST contexts, particularly self-determination theory (Berry & LaVelle, 2013; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Faust & Kuperminc, 2020; Jones et al., 2021) and expectancy-value theory (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Sjögren et al., 2023; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In leisure studies, the theoretical approach of the leisure constraints theory (developed to explain adult leisure activity choices) sheds further light on voluntary attendance, considering intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints (Godbey et al., 2010). While these theories contribute to understanding, the predominant home of OST research is developmental science.

Youth development and the influence of OST contexts is complex. Many modern OST theories help capture development, describing the complex, bidirectional processes (i.e., context affects young people and young people affect context in dynamic and nonlinear ways) that transpire in relational, developmental systems. In such a system, each young person interacts with and develops in multiple, dynamic contexts. The ever-changing nature of youth development, coupled with the multifaceted contextual influences, argue that each individual's developmental path is going to be somewhat unique. In other words, "human development always involves specific outcomes in specific individuals occurring in specific places at specific times in specific ways" (Lerner & Bornstein, 2021, pp. 1–2). This is known in developmental science as the specificity principle (Bornstein, 2017). Although there are some universal underlying principles, individuals' unique experiences may differ greatly, even in shared contexts. For example, people likely agree that OST activities matter for youth development, but which experiences in which OST activities matter for which outcomes and for which young people? The theories and models presented in this chapter provide insight into this question.

Although these theories acknowledge differing individual experiences, most quantitative research in OST relies on averaging data across groups, which can produce misleading conclusions obfuscating individual variation (e.g., Speelman & McGann, 2013). The results of such research can be limiting for a number of reasons. First, averaging data across groups can create conclusions that do not apply to any real individual (Rose, 2016). Second, within-person fluctuations in survey responses (typically treated as "error") are much more common and substantive than researchers typically acknowledge; an individual's responses to survey items and scales can vary substantially from day to day (Hamaker et al., 2018; Moelnaar, 2004; Ram et al., 2005). Third, the specificity principle suggests that the subject of this report—young people from low-income backgrounds or those with intersecting characteristics of marginalization³—may experience programs differently from group averages. Thus, research that adheres to the specificity principle, such as ideographic approaches, is warranted. The committee builds on these issues in Chapter 7.

² Numerous past reports of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have reviewed the literature on the developmental stages of children and youth, and the developmental needs that support their thriving (see, e.g., NASEM, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c); therefore, this report summarizes that literature only briefly and as it pertains to OST.

³ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as "a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of 'othering' where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage" (p.1). The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See definitions in Box 1-3.

General Developmental Models

General developmental models have been used to understand and explain the role of OST programs in a young person's life. *General* indicates models that are relevant but not specific to OST. These are theoretical pictures of how a young person develops. As all contemporary developmental theories acknowledge the important role of context in development (Lerner et al., 2023), these models have been used to shed light on how time spent in OST settings can affect development.

In Lerner's original thriving model, OST programs are considered one of many factors affecting development (see Figure 2-1; Lerner et al., 2005a, 2005b). Although this model has evolved and become more specified, its original version communicates a general developmental theory that fits well with OST program theories of change. The thriving model emphasizes positive or negative spirals and the significance of individual–context interactions. This understanding of development in context (Sameroff, 2010) implies that participation in OST programs can shape young people's growth and development. The thriving model describes *development* as a series of individual–context relations that, over time, may ultimately lead to positive outcomes in adulthood (i.e., contribution to self, family, community; Lerner et al., 2005b, pp. 25–26). Individual–context relations happen across a young person's life, including within OST programs. Subsequent versions of this model include the five or six “Cs,” which have been used extensively in OST practice and are discussed later in this chapter.

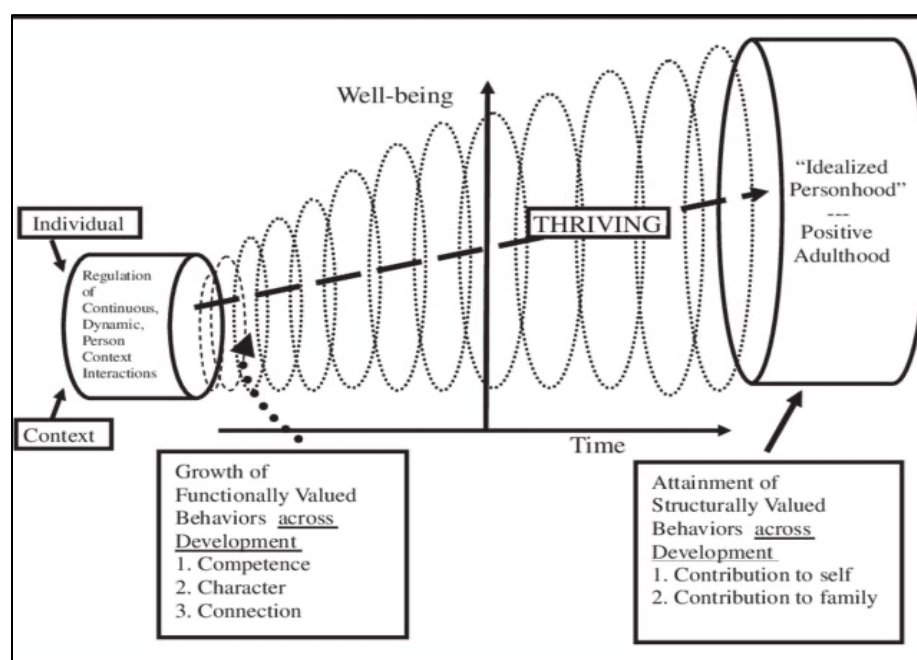


FIGURE 2-1 The thriving model.

SOURCE: Lerner et al., 2005b, Figure 1.

This model was later updated and elaborated, drawing on a longitudinal study (the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development) to the Lerner & Lerner model, shown in Figure 2-2.

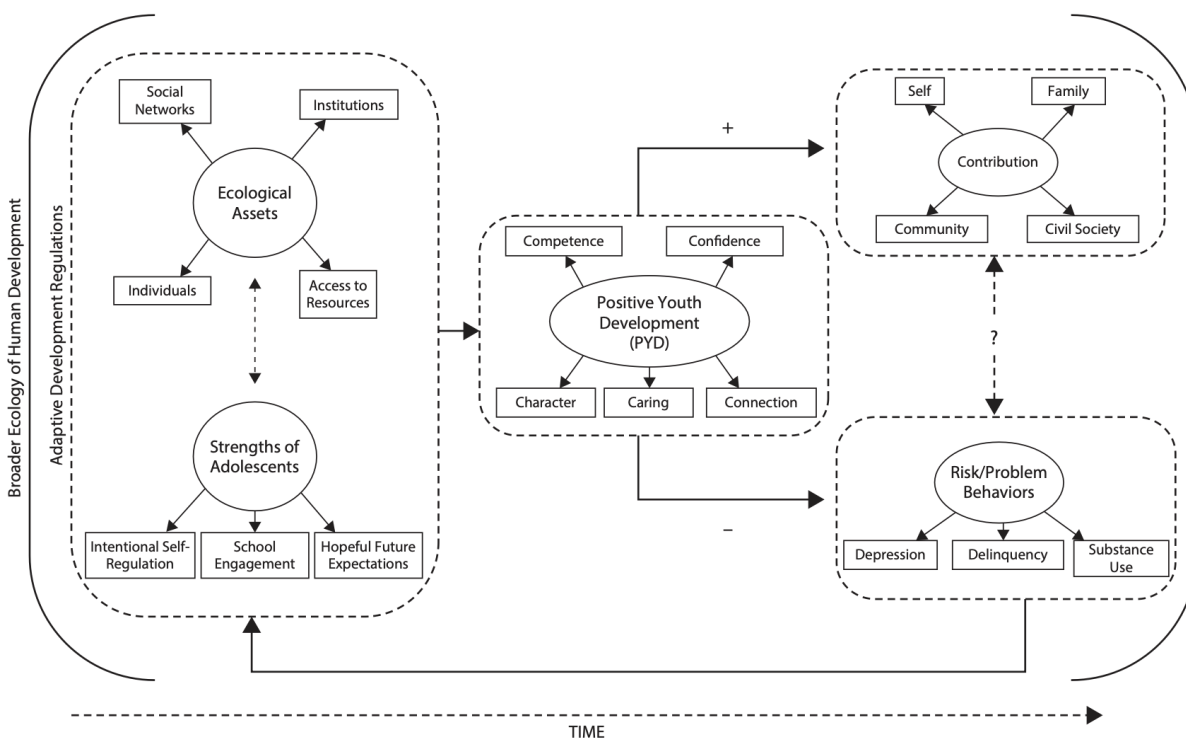


FIGURE 2-2 Lerner & Lerner updated thriving model.

SOURCE: Lerner et al., 2015.

Like the thriving model in Figure 2-1, the Lerner & Lerner model (e.g., see Lerner & Lerner, 2019; Lerner et al., 2015, 2021) stresses individual–context relations (also known as proximal processes) in a developmental systems framework. It describes positive development using the “five Cs” of positive youth development, described in the next section (see Box 2-1), and emphasizes ecological and individual assets, as well as risk. In both conceptualizations (Figures 2-1 and 2-2), the result of thriving personhood is contribution—to self, family, community, and civil society.

Many scholars and practitioners have used adolescent development research and theory to note the unique role that OST can play for adolescents. Stage–environment fit theory, originally developed to contrast the structures of junior high school with young people’s developmental needs, provides a clear example. Simply put, it is the idea that contexts are more effective when they match or “fit” with young people’s developmental stage (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles et al., 1993). For example, scholarship on adolescent development emphasizes the importance for fit in increasing independence, autonomy, and abstract and hypothetical thinking (Steinberg, 2014). OST programs can provide strong fit (e.g., youth in an advisory council making decisions about how to allocate funding).

Another youth developmental model is the framework presented in the report *Foundations for Young Adult Success* from the University of Chicago Consortium (Nagaoka et al., 2015; see Figure 2-3). This model provides a useful synthesis of research-supported concepts that seem to matter for productive development (e.g., self-regulation, knowledge, skills). The report does not, however, describe specifically the role of OST programs in young people’s lives.



FIGURE 2-3 University of Chicago Consortium developmental framework.
SOURCE: Nagaoka et al., 2015.

Positive Youth Development

The theory most associated with OST programs is positive youth development, sometimes shorted to “youth development”; many refer to OST programs as “youth development programs.” Positive youth development is understood to be (a) a developmental process; (b) a set of principles for working with young people, and (c) programs or practices for children and youth (Hamilton, 1999; Lerner et al., 2011). The principles of positive youth development have been defined in various ways, including the five Cs model (Pittman et al., 2001)—competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring—and the potential for a sixth C: contribution to self, family, community, and civil society (Lerner, 2004).

Additionally, the Search Institute’s developmental assets approach, which identifies 20 internal and 20 external assets, is also closely associated with positive youth development (Benson, 2008). And the list of features in the 2002 National Academies report *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (National Research Council [NRC] & Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2002, see Table 4-1 in this report) was hugely influential in defining the principles of positive youth development.

Although positive youth development is expansive and includes multiple theories, a few key features help define this approach. First, it is strengths based, focusing on young people’s assets and resiliency. This is especially in contrast to the “storm and stress” model proposed by G. Stanley Hall (1904), still influential today.⁴ Second, it recognizes the impact of ecological supports and opportunities and the importance of relationships. Third, most positive youth development models emphasize young people’s agency in their development and learning. These ideas are summarized by the official definition provided by the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, a set of more than 20 U.S. federal agencies related to youth development (Office of Population Affairs, n.d):

PYD is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is

⁴ See Chapter 1 for more detail on the “storm and stress” model.

productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. (para. 2)

Laying Groundwork for Critical Approaches

Some scholars have argued that positive youth development was always aligned with critical approaches. For example, Lerner et al. (2021) argued, “models emphasized that all young people could thrive when given equitable treatment and the fair allocation of the resources needed for healthy and positive development” (p. 1117). However, many scholars acknowledge that initial conceptualizations of positive youth development did not center the development of children and youth from marginalized backgrounds. Several later models make this conceptualization explicit within the positive youth development framework. For example, Coyne-Beasley et al. (2024) note that there are several important developmental tasks during adolescence, including exploring one's identity, developing and applying abstract thinking, adjusting to a new physical sense of self, and fostering stable and productive peer relationships while striving for autonomy and independence from parents. The authors argue that, during this period, young people begin to adopt a personal value system and form their racial and ethnic, social, sexual, and moral identity within a society that may provide conflicting and nonaffirming messages. They point out that striving toward an affirmed sense of self and self-esteem is best accomplished within a nurturing psychosocial context that fosters positive youth development and promotes affirmation of identities (Coyne-Beasley et al., 2024).

Relatedly, intersectionality theory, as defined by Crenshaw (1989), recognizes the intractable overlap of social positions (e.g., race, gender) that cannot be otherwise understood separately, and furthermore that intersecting systems of power inform people's social positioning and experiences. Crenshaw and her colleagues' conceptualizations of intersectionality highlight the role of race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, and identities as objects of overlapping areas of marginalization, discrimination, and structural inequality (Coyne-Beasley et al., 2024; Crenshaw, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).⁵

Ginwright and Cammorota (2002) argued that the positive youth development approach, though successful in helping move away from a problem- and risk-focused model, is limited “by promoting supports and opportunities as the only factors necessary for positive and healthy development of youth and does not examine thoroughly the ways in which social and community forces limit and create opportunities for youth” (p. 84). They argue instead for a social justice youth development (SJYD) approach that acknowledges the systems and historical drivers of gaps in opportunity and access, such as racism, and integrates critical consciousness and social action into youth development (Ginwright & Cammorota, 2002). According to Lerner et al. (2021), social justice perspectives of youth development resonate with conceptual models that view young people as agentic and important actors in their respective contexts with critical social

⁵ Another important model that has been used in positive youth development (e.g., Swanson et al., 2002) is the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) (Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 1997, 2015). As articulated by Spencer and colleagues, PVEST combines ecological theory with a phenomenological approach, asserting the importance of individuals' perception of experience (Spencer et al., 1997, 2015). Velez and Spencer (2018) use PVEST to interrogate “how structures and norms shape how youth think about themselves and their place in society” (p. 82) and how youth make meaning of contextual conditions and experiences of stereotypes and biases (Cunningham et al., 2023). PVEST is also discussed in the Ecological Theories section.

capital that helps them recognize and resist discriminatory portrayals of their identities and abilities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Lerner et al., 2021). As Baldridge (2020) notes, SJYD makes identity development central, includes critical analysis of power and systems, and considers young people as agents in promoting positive societal change (Ginwright & James, 2002).⁶ More recently, Ginwright (2018) has argued for a healing-centered approach that he described as building from positive youth development and trauma-informed care (see Box 2-1).

The SJYD approach has been significant in the youth organizing and civic engagement movement. For some youth, active civic engagement may be an adaptive means for coping with unfairness (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Ginwright, 2006; Hope and Spencer, 2017). In a recent multimethods study of middle and late adolescents in seven community organizations (four in the United States, two in Ireland, and one in South Africa), many of which served low-income or working-class communities, researchers found that the context of youth organizing promoted the skills of critical thinking and analysis, social and emotional learning, and involvement in community leadership and action (Watts et al., 2011). Related research on community leadership and action, grounded in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1973), has examined adolescents' critical reflection, motivation, and action (Diemer et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2011). Youth with higher levels of critical reflection, motivation, and action are more likely to recognize unfairness and may feel a greater sense of agency or efficacy in responding to it (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Shedd, 2015).

Two more recent variations of positive youth development are critical youth development and critical positive youth development, which are largely compatible with each other (Gonzalez et al., 2020; McGee, 2019). The former emerged from practice; as McGee (2019) articulates, it centers engaging young people in dialog around identity, power, privilege, and oppression (McGee, 2019). Gonzalez et al. (2020) presents a model in which critical reflection and political efficacy work alongside the five Cs of youth development (caring, competence, confidence, connection, character) to lead to engagement in critical action. Similarly, Zeller-Berkman (2010) argued that evaluation in the youth development field is overly focused on the outcomes of individual children and youth, and that the embrace of a critical approach would lead to more focus on community- and systems-level outcomes. Box 2-1 briefly describes healing-centered engagement, a strengths-based approach to youth development.

BOX 2-1 **Healing-Centered Engagement**

Healing-centered engagement (HCE) seeks to improve organizational culture, transform individual practices, and build healthy outcomes for young people and the adults who serve them. HCE is a nonclinical, strengths-based approach that advances a holistic view of healing

⁶ Several scholars define a *social justice perspective of positive youth development* as intentionally centering programs and spaces that foster critical consciousness, and sociopolitical development that recognizes historic inequities, empowers youth, and creates opportunities for youth participatory action research in the United States and around the globe (Lerner et al., 2020; Ozer et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2003, 2011). This work examines how positive youth development is linked to the development of positive racial/ethnic identities and how acknowledging racial barriers can use racial pride to develop caring, connected, competent citizens (Yu et al., 2021). These scholars note that developing an awareness of the sociopolitical context (a process Freire termed “*conscientization*,” is part of the pathway to youth participatory action research, in which youth analyze and develop actions to resist racism and unjust treatment (Lerner et al., 2020; Ozer et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2021; Watts et al., 2003, 2011).

and recenters culture and identity as a central feature in personal well-being for young people, their families, and those who work with them. The HCE approach is operationalized through five “CARMA” principles:

- Culture: The values and norms that connect us to a shared identity.
- Agency: The individual and collective power to act, create, and change personal conditions and external systems.
- Relationships: The capacity to create, sustain, and grow healthy connections with others.
- Meaning: The profound discovery of who we are, why we are, and what purpose we were born to serve.
- Aspiration: The capacity to imagine, set, and accomplish goals for personal and collective livelihood and advancement.

HCE has been implemented in a variety of youth-serving organizations, including the San Francisco Unified School District, the Alameda County Office of Education, the San Francisco Department of Children and Families, and the City of Oakland’s Oakland Unite.

SOURCE: Generated by the committee, with excerpts from FlourishAgenda. (n.d.).

Emphasizing Youth Agency and Involvement

As children reach adolescence, agency and authentic engagement in practice and leadership become increasingly important for identity formation (Arnold, 2017), meaning-making, and autonomy. Developmental research has consistently described increased autonomy during the adolescent years (Steinberg, 2014). Adolescence is often described as a period of differentiation from caregivers, when an adolescent’s feelings, beliefs, and decisions become their own, although they may still be highly influenced by caregivers (NASEM, 2019b).

Alongside these developmental changes, scholars and OST practitioners have described various approaches to supporting youth’s autonomy, including their voice and agency, and youth-driven and youth–adult partnerships. The youth–adult partnerships approach centers youth voice, decision-making, and interaction with adults (Zeldin et al., 2013). This approach, which has been implemented across the youth development field, as well as in several other contexts, involves allowing and supporting youth voice and decision-making, especially in areas where adults typically make decisions (Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016)—for example, having youth share feedback, lead or help lead meetings, and even engage in strategies for recruiting new youth and staff (Wu et al., 2022).

Some scholarship has investigated the challenge of implementing youth–adult partnerships in youth programs. For example, Camino (2005), described the “pitfalls” of adhering to simplified notions the approach: youth must make every decision, adults need to just “get out of the way,” and adult development is considered inadequately. Addressing these pitfalls requires skill and scaffolding. For example, the Youth-Driven Spaces Project offers cohort-based, multimonth workshops to help existing youth programs increase their youth–adult partnerships and increase youth voice and decision-making (e.g., having youth serve on an organization’s board of directors) (see The Neutral Zone, n.d.).

ECOLOGICAL THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: UNDERSTANDING WHAT MAY INFLUENCE A YOUNG PERSON IN OST SETTINGS

The second set of theories associated with OST programs is ecological theories of human development. Most prominent among these is bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), originally called ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bioecological theory is often used in discussions of OST systems and settings, as it provides a way to consider what factors might be influential in program settings and how those settings may interact with other important contexts in a young person's life, such as family and school (Vandell et al., 2015). The bioecological model puts young people at the center of concentric circles and identifies a set of systems, from proximal (close to and able to be affected by children and youth) to distal (further from them and less accessible). The *microsystem* is closest, including settings of school and OST programs. Next is the *mesosystem*, which is defined as the interactions between microsystems. In the youth development field, OST intermediaries work intentionally in the mesosystem. Farther out are *exosystems*—which, like the mesosystem, involve relationships between systems but do not involve the young person directly. Farthest from the center are *macrosystems*—society-level systems such as culture, law, and government. Finally, the *chronosystem* depicts time, both as related to important milestones in a young person's life (e.g., starting school) and the historical period in which development occurs (see Figure 2-4).

The microsystems most relevant to OST include youth development programs, schools, friends, families. The concept of microsystems, from bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), has often been applied to youth programs. That is, a youth development program can serve as a *microsystem*, defined as “a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1645). A youth development program also serves as a *behavior setting*—a context in which aspects such as physical space, materials, and staff interaction patterns evoke standing behavior patterns (Barker, 1968; Schoggen, 1989). For example, the physical features of a coffee shop evoke particular behaviors from customers (where to stand, where to sit, how to order, etc.). Based on this theory, child and youth behaviors (and outcomes) in OST programs depend on the features of these programs.

It is important to note that although macrosystems are distal to children and youth in the sense that a young person has little power to affect them, those systems affect young people's experience directly.

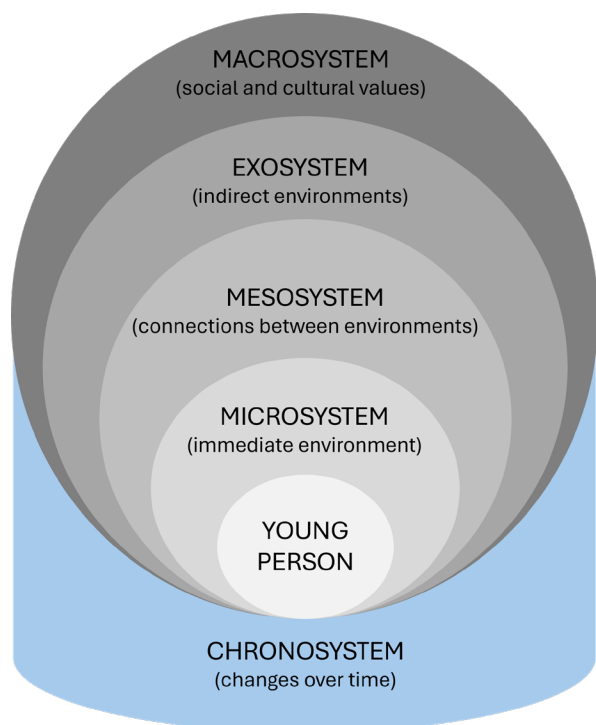


FIGURE 2-4 Depiction of bioecological theory.

SOURCE: Committee generated based on Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; adapted from Budzyna & Buckley, 2023.

The bioecological model of human development evolved over time. The final model includes Process-Person-Context-Time, a set of four concepts and propositions. *Process* indicates proximal processes, or an individuals' interaction with people, objects, or symbols; these are considered the “engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 822). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) suggest that

human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. (p. 797)

The model describes *person* as the role of personal characteristics in social interactions, *context* as the five systems in the bioecological modes, and *time* is included at multiple levels (micro, meso, and macro) to indicate development over time.

Versions of bioecological theory are common across the education and youth development fields.⁷ These versions can be powerful as they make clear how multiple factors

⁷ For example, a 2015 National Academies report discusses the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) learning ecosystem model. STEM learning ecosystem scholarship roots itself in ecological perspectives (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and some draw comparisons to biological ecosystems (Bevan, 2016) (see NRC, 2015). Scholars note that the *ecological perspective*—that STEM learning occurs over time across formal, informal, and everyday settings—aligns with research on how people learn (Bevan et al., 2018). In practice, this approach includes initiatives to design and develop existing ecosystems, strengthen cross-setting connections and partnerships, illuminate pathways for learning, and increase and broaden learning experiences for young people (Dahn et al., 2023; Vance et al., 2016). For more information on STEM learning ecosystems, see www.stemecosystems.org

influence learning in development—offering advocates of OST programs a framework for describing their importance. The bioecological model continues to be popular 50 years since its conception, likely because it helps organize influences on development conceptually in ways that support action (e.g., focusing interventions on the mesosystem to affect the microsystem).

The phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) integrates a phenomenological approach with the systems focus of the bioecological model (Cunningham et al., 2023; Spencer et al., 1997, 2015). Spencer et al. (2015) argue that a major contribution is the notion that *phenomenological experience*—an individuals’ perception of experience—shapes development, particularly identity development. PVEST emphasizes self-appraisal as key to coping and identity formation. In its final form (Spencer et al., 2015), PVEST is a cyclic model with five components, all associated with bidirectional processes: net vulnerability (risks and protective factors), net stress (overall experience of situations that challenge identity and well-being), reactive coping processes (adaptive and maladaptive), emergent identities, and stage-specific coping processes. *Emergent identities* is defined as “how individuals view themselves within and between their various experiences in different contexts” (Spencer et al., 2015, p. 758).

In their description of an integrative model, García Coll et al. (1996) argue that ecological theories, such as the bioecological theory, require “both expansion and greater specification” (p. 1893). Using research with Black and Puerto Rican young people as examples, they presented a model for development that includes social position (race and ethnicity, social class, gender), racism (prejudice, discrimination, oppression), segregation (residential, economic, social and psychological), adaptive culture (traditions, cultural legacies, economic and political histories, migration and acculturation) as factors that affect development (García Coll et al., 1996, p. 1896). As an example, “children of color who grow up in a poor, all Dominican neighborhood . . . may not have access to adequate resources such as . . . after-school programs” (García Coll & Szalacha, 2004, p. 86).

In a more recent developmental theory, the cultural microsystem model, Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) argue that in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory, *culture* is ill defined and considered part of the macrosystem, the most distal ring. They argue that this is problematic because it suggests culture is separate from microsystems/proximal experience—something that is “‘out there’ in the distal environment” (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017, p. 901). Instead, they contend, all learning and development occur within and through culture: “Culture is both the process and the content of daily activity and is thus inseparable from all contexts where developmental processes and outcomes take place, especially in the microsystems” (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017, p. 903). Based on Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian perspectives, the cultural microsystem model emphasizes how culture acts in both proximal and distal ways in many settings (e.g., family, childcare, school).

The bioecological model was instrumental in moving developmental theory away from views of child development that gave inadequate attention to context. However, the model is designed for understanding individual development in context and is not especially good at helping move larger entities, such as cities, to an ecological approach for learning (Akiva et al., 2022). For example, Hecht and Crowley (2019) argue that

this persistent focus on youth as the center of the learning ecosystem undermines the potency of the ecosystem framework [and] perpetuates the idea that learning happens at the individual level and that systemic inequity can be addressed by supporting opportunities for individuals. (p. 10)

THEORETICAL MODELS SPECIFIC TO OST SETTINGS

Models specific to OST settings and programs present theoretical frameworks for understanding how OST programs work and what makes them more or less successful, as well as the role of OST programs in society or in learning ecosystems. See, for example, the features presented in the National Academies consensus report *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (NRC & IOM, 2002). The report theorizes that, when present, these features make an OST program effective and beneficial to participants:

- physical and psychological safety;
- appropriate structure;
- supportive relationships;
- opportunities to belong;
- positive social norms;
- support for efficacy and mattering;
- opportunities for skill-building; and
- integration of family, school, and community.

Simpkins et al. (2017) extend this theory by elaborating on how these features can play out in culturally responsive ways. Chapter 6 expands on this discussion to capture additional program features that help create positive developmental settings for children and youth.

The developmental ecological model, presented by Durlak et al. (2010), in a special issue of the *American Journal of Community Psychology*, provide a basic template that is compatible with many subsequent models (see Figure 2-5).

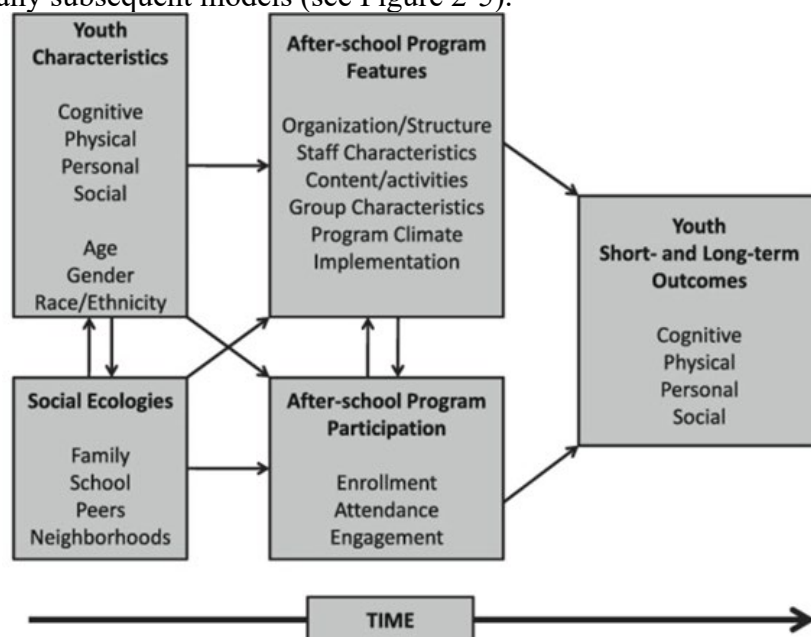


FIGURE 2-5 Developmental ecological model.
SOURCE: Durlak et al., 2010.

In *Afterschool Centers and Youth Development*, Hirsch et al. (2011) describe the PARC (programs, activities, relationships, and culture) model (see Figure 2-6). This model, built from profiles of three afterschool centers (233 site visits), suggests that the effectiveness of programs

is determined by the center's culture, its youth–adult relationships, and the nature of its programs and activities.

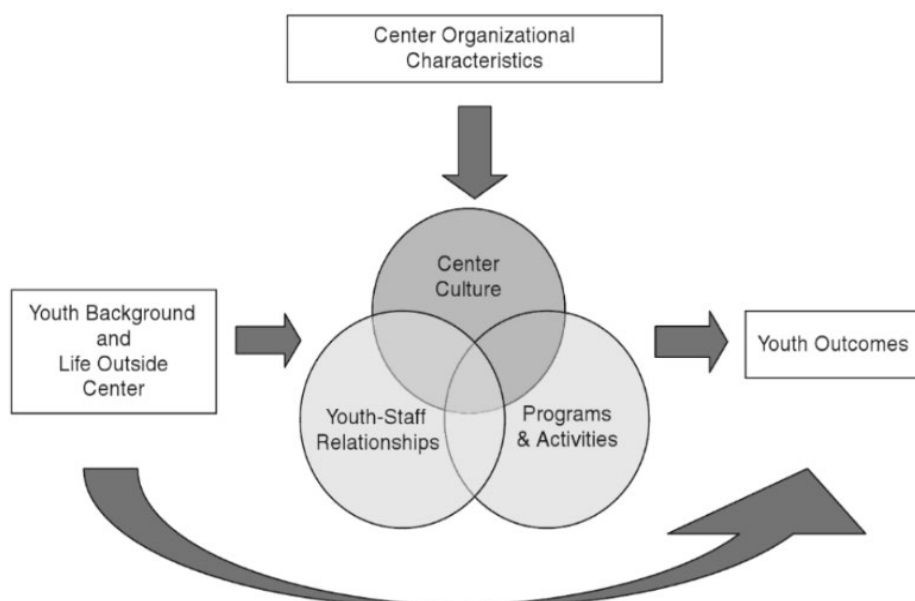


FIGURE 2-6 PARC (programs, activities, relationships, and culture) model.
SOURCE: Hirsch et al., 2011.

In an extension of the PARC model, Williams and Deutsch (2016) created the chart shown in Figure 2-7 to address how race, ethnicity, culture, and other factors shape the basic PARC features. Note that neither of these models specifies the effective features of youth programs, except to say that youth–staff relationships and program's culture matter.

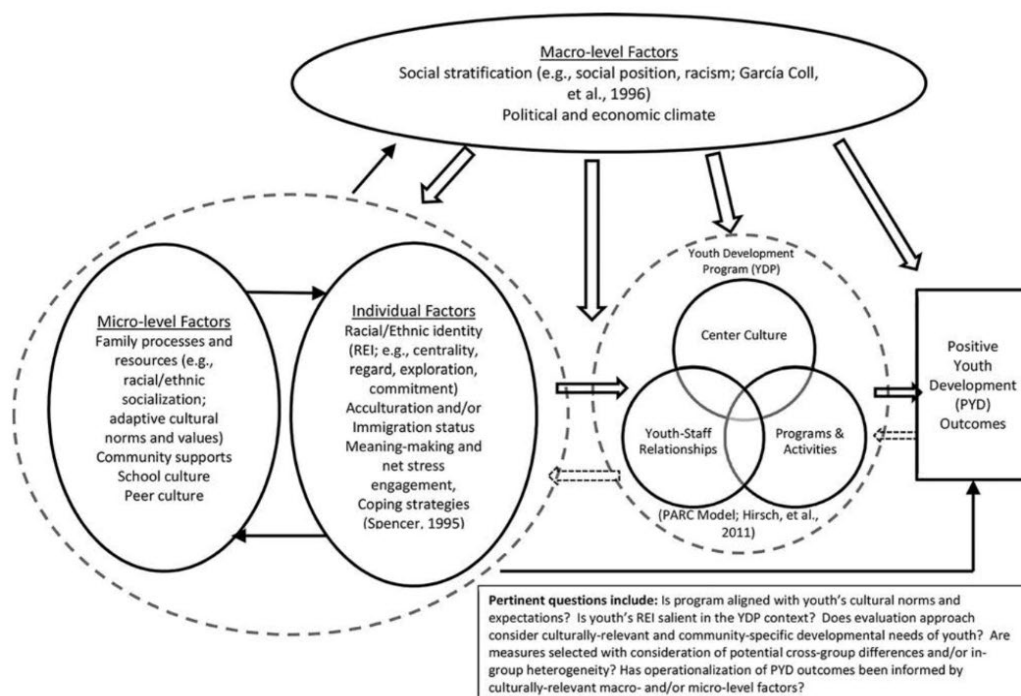


FIGURE 2-7 PARC (programs, activities, relationships, and culture) extension model.
SOURCE: Williams & Deutsch, 2016.

The Harvard Family Research Project conceptual model of participation (Figure 2-8) highlights the multiple dimensions of participation: enrollment, attendance, engagement (Weiss et al., 2005). In other ways, it is similar to the developmental ecological model of Durlak et al. (2010).

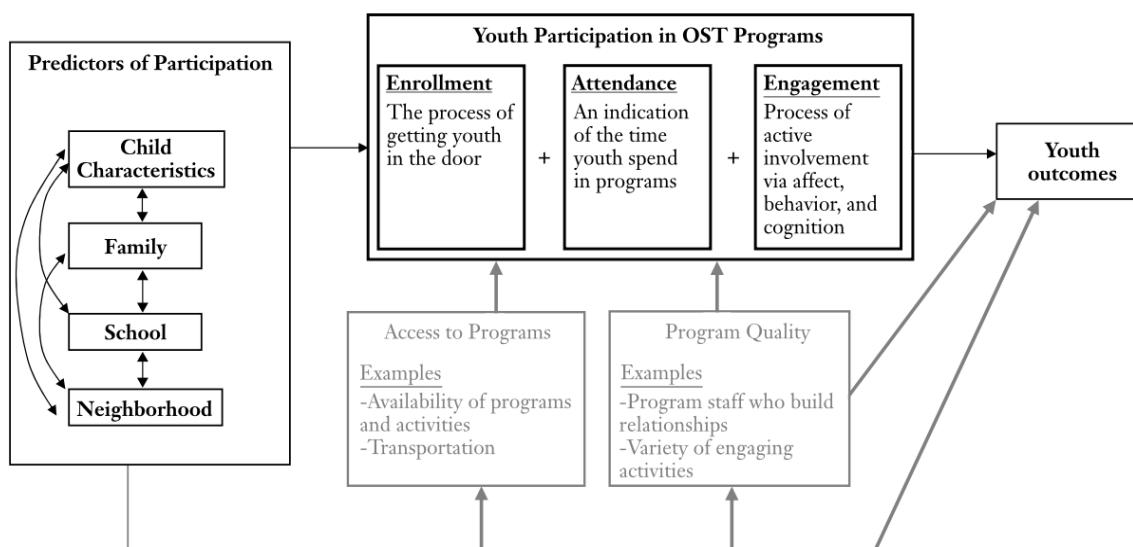


FIGURE 2-8 Harvard Family Research Project model of participation.
NOTE: OST = out-of-school-time.
SOURCE: Weiss et al., 2005.

Routine activity theory emerged from criminology and was first proposed by Cohen and Felson (2015) (see Figure 2-9). The theory posits that the likelihood of an individual to commit a crime is strongly associated with key contextual factors around them—i.e., *situational motivation*. For example, reducing opportunities for crime reduces crime. Osgood et al. (2005) apply this theory to OST settings. Part of their rationale is that the largest percentage of juvenile arrests for aggravated assault occur between 3 p.m and 6 p.m (as of 1999). They provided detailed descriptions of structured versus unstructured time and argued that participation in structured activities (i.e., OST programs, with adult supervision, which restrict how time is spent) reduces the opportunity for unsupervised time that can lead to engagement in risk-taking behaviors: “The less structured an activity, the more likely a person is to encounter opportunities for problem behavior in the simple sense that he or she is not occupied doing something else” (Osgood et al., 2005, p. 51). Routine activity theory is largely a call to reduce unstructured time, but it also provides some theoretical justification for structured OST time.



FIGURE 2-9 Model of routine activity theory.
SOURCE: Abt, 2016.

The QuEST model by Smith and McGovern (2014) targets four items: quality, engagement, skill, and transfer (see Figure 2-10). This model suggests that OST programs lead to social and emotional skill development in participants, especially over time and in multiple sessions; this growth depends on a basis of quality and youth engagement. This is related to the active ingredient hypothesis, which suggests that all social programs’ effectiveness depends on the interactions and relationships that occur in those programs—in other words, developmental relationships are the active ingredient (Li & Julian, 2012). Ultimately, this can lead to success in other contexts—most predominantly school.

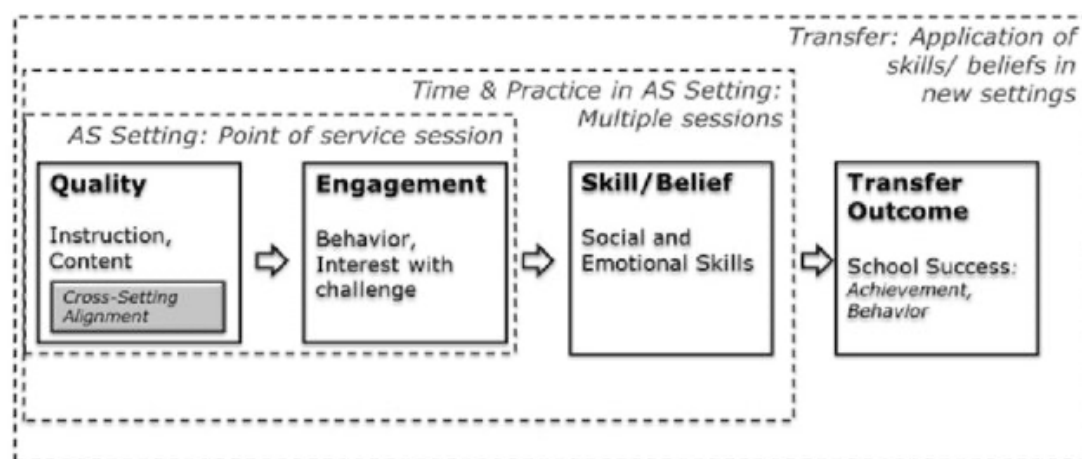


FIGURE 2-10 The QuEST (quality, engagement, skill, and transfer) model.
NOTE: AS = afterschool.
SOURCE: Smith & McGovern, 2014, p. 2.

The National Science Foundation’s LIFE (Learning in Informal and Formal Environments) Center offers the where and when learning happens model, which provides some theoretical assumptions about OST and puts OST on a spectrum from core academic classes at the top and community learning settings at the bottom (see Figure 2-11).

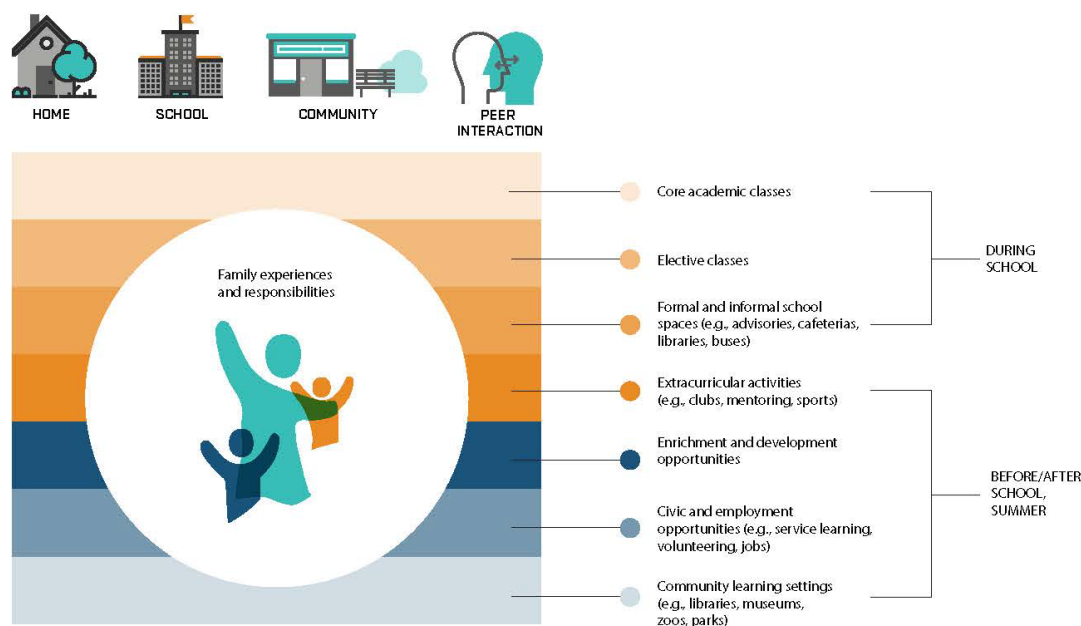


FIGURE 2-11 The where and when learning happens model: Expanding our understanding of all the places and times young people grow and learn.

SOURCE: National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019.

CONCLUSION

Developmental and ecological theories are commonly used to guide researchers and practitioners in the youth development field in their consideration of learning and human development within OST settings—including how time spent in OST settings can shape young people’s growth, the factors within these settings that might be influential, and how these settings interact with other parts of their lives. These theories have then been applied to establish OST program tools and trainings. The theory of positive youth development is most associated with OST programs, offering approaches that recognize and emphasize the strengths of young people, their circumstances and relationships, and their individual agency. In recent decades, scholars have increasingly considered the role of social position, culture, power, resources, and discrimination to understand the unique experiences of children and youth. These conceptualizations examine the ways in which social and community forces influence opportunities and outcomes.

Although these theoretical discussions are focused on learning and development broadly, other theoretical models are specific to OST settings; these focus on understanding how OST programs work, what makes them more or less successful, and their role in society. These models have connected program effectiveness to the nature of programs and activities, level of participant attendance and engagement, program quality and culture, and relationships and interactions with peers and adults.

In the chapters that follow, the report seeks to put the theories reviewed here into action describing what is known about OST programs and workforce; how programs and the workforce influence program quality and experiences; the interaction between quality and participation; and

how those interactions lead to skill-building and outcomes (e.g., improved social and emotional learning for children and youth).

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3

OST Systems

Human ecological theory examines the nested contexts of family, community institutions, and social systems within which learning and development take place. Chapter 2 offers critiques and expansions of this theory as they relate to children and youth in out-of-school-time (OST) settings. In this chapter, the committee builds off these discussions to apply a systems perspective to OST. The chapter first presents the concept of the learning and development ecosystem and then delves into the OST ecosystem, which is made up of multiple overlapping systems that not only shape learning and development within programs but also can shape how programs are developed, delivered, and accessed, as well as the experiences of young people within those programs. We identify subsystems and sectors within the OST ecosystem that serve as key opportunities to improve program access and quality. Finally, we discuss the role of coordination and investments in OST systems through intermediary organizations and philanthropy.

APPLYING A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE TO OST

Systems may be considered using the hierarchical, nested framework described by Bronfenbrenner (1979)’s bioecological model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystems, and chronosystem (described in Chapter 2). Systems can also function in a heterarchical way, meaning elements in the same level (i.e., lateral) or from lower to higher levels can have influential relationships (Peck, 2007)—this is important for considering complex systems such as learning landscapes (Tebes et al., 2014).

The concept of the *learning and development ecosystem* has taken some salience in the youth development field, as it helps people consider how multiple settings affect children and youth. Akiva et al. (2022) define learning and development ecosystems as “collections of people, places, and possibilities that constitute an environment full of learning and development opportunities—opportunities that particular youth will or will not actually experience within the ecosystem” (p. 14). They argue that to shift to ecosystem or systems thinking is to move from considering individual learners (as suggested by the bioecological model) to considering how a context works and how to shape it for the benefit of the community as a whole.



FIGURE 3-1 OST system within a learning and development ecosystem.

NOTES: OST = out-of-school-time; OSTI = OST intermediary.

SOURCE: Hartmann et al., 2024, p. 12.

Figure 3-1 depicts the learning and development ecosystem within a city and how OST providers, OST systems, and intermediaries are situated within this ecosystem. Learning and development occur in complex—not just complicated—systems (Hecht & Crowley, 2019). That is, a *complicated problem* (e.g., sending a rocket to the moon) is replicable, once achieved; a *complex problem*, however (e.g., raising a child) involves dynamic and uncertain variables, and the same practice may yield different results in different circumstances (examples from Snyder, 2013). When it comes to learning and development among the people, places, and programs in a given place, effecting change requires different practices than those designed for noncomplex systems. Ecosystem scholars have therefore called for using adaptive management strategies in learning and development ecosystems, including decentering individual learners, monitoring ecosystem health, and focusing on system-level initiatives (Akiva et al., 2022; Hecht & Crowley, 2019).

A common saying in manufacturing and quality control is “every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets” (Proctor, 2008, para. 1). This suggests that results (in this case, academic achievement or other outcomes for individual young people) are linked to aspects of the system. A systems or ecosystems view can therefore provide an alternative to individually

focused frameworks—these tend to involve deficit views in which children, youth, and families are held accountable for individual academic performance, despite systemic patterns that affect that performance (Baldrige, 2019). In this sense, systems thinking has the potential to disrupt deficit views. Systems thinking considers all the factors that shape patterns, rather than focusing on why particular children and youth do not succeed.

OST (ECO)SYSTEM

Several subsystems or sectors within an OST ecosystem can have a direct influence on learning and development in OST programs; such subsystems can also interact with OST systems, programs, staff, and participants in ways that impact program development, delivery, and accessibility. These subsystems include families, transportation, education, health care, workforce, and the juvenile justice system.

Families

Family engagement plays a critical role in OST programs. Aside from influencing their children's decisions to participate (or not) in various activities, family members are involved in OST in a variety of other ways. Parents and caregivers support and encourage their children's OST interests and often dedicate substantial time and financial resources to these activities, including shuttling them to and from program facilities and managing conflicting engagements. According to the Global Family Research Project,

Just as families play many roles in children's and youth's lives, they play many roles in OST. Family engagement in OST includes activities that happen in the schools and sites where programs are located—for example, through parent volunteer work and participation on committees. However, family engagement also includes all of the family beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that influence children's development and learning within OST settings. This can include supportive parenting that aligns with program expectations for behavior, encouraging a child's OST participation, helping a child or adolescent make informed choices about programming, discussing a child's progress in the OST program with staff, reinforcing skills from the program at home, and being an advocate for and/or leader in the program. (Bouffard et al., 2011, p. 5)

Additionally, some programs may be specifically designed with a family engagement component. One such program is the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program, which allows OST programs to spend funds on family literacy and other engagement activities (Bouffard et al., 2011). Emerging research points to the need for dual capacity-building of families and institutions in creating essential conditions, such as relational trust and collaboration, to increase strong family-program partnerships (see Mapp & Bergman, 2019). Chapter 4 further discusses the role of families in OST participation.

Transportation

Getting to and from OST activities is consistently named as a key challenge to OST attendance and growth (Patel et al., 2021). This can be an accessibility issue in both urban and rural settings (Afterschool Alliance, 2021; Sanderson & Richards, 2010). This is true for schools as well, as school-related transportation challenges have been linked to negative academic

outcomes (Hopson et al., 2022). Programs and communities address this challenge in numerous ways. Sometimes programs or collectives of programs purchase vans to transport participants. In cities with reliable public transportation, programs sometimes purchase bus or subway passes for participants. In the AfterZone Model in Providence, Rhode Island, for instance, children, youth, and families sign up for their local AfterZone, which gives them access to multiple programs and safe transportation to and from the facilities, as arranged by the city intermediary (Kauh, 2011). Chapter 4 further discusses the role of transportation in OST participation.

Education

OST programs and networks of programs interact with the schooling sector in multiple ways. Many programs send staff into schools to lead activities, both for enrichment and recruiting children and youth to their programs, a practice that has been called “insert programs” (Akiva et al., 2015). Field trips to destinations such as museums and nature centers are also common in OST programs (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008). Some cities partner with school districts to provide programming; for example, the City of Aurora, Colorado, has a long-standing relationship with Aurora Public Schools and combines city and school district resources to provide the Community of Many Providing After School Success (COMPASS) program. The OST program serves six elementary schools, with city staff providing enrichment programming and school district staff, often teachers, providing academic programming (City of Aurora, n.d.). The COMPASS program sits in the city manager’s office within the Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Department. Aurora’s city council has shown strong support for the COMPASS programs through funding allocations, and the mayor and city manager are kept abreast of the programming and conduct site visits. Programming is partly supported by one-time funding, such as mill levy money or youth services allocations from the city, which require a certain percentage of participants to qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. When selecting program locations, city staff prioritize schools in lower-income communities. The school district selects participants based on need, as indicated by factors such as income level and the need for academic support.

Scholars have studied what it takes to conduct partnerships between schools and OST programs. In 2016, the Wallace Foundation funded a 6-year project, the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative, that brought together school districts and OST programs in six communities across the United States to learn whether and how children benefit when schools and OST programs partner to improve and align social and emotional learning (SEL) activities (Schwartz et al., 2020). Implementation was an important focus for these partnerships, and analysis suggests several factors that may support implementation; these include short SEL rituals, integrating SEL, and the importance of SEL for adult leaders (Leschitz et al., 2023).

In the United States, OST programming is often seen as an add-on or complement to schools—which is not universal across the world. That is, in the United States, the value of OST is often considered in the context of school goals—OST participation is considered valuable if participation leads to academic achievement gains. This is evident in the history of legislation for the 21st CCLC program, whose primary goal is supporting students in meeting state academic standards (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). In contrast, in a 2018 resolution the Council of the European Union (2018) officially defined *youth work* as follows:

Youth work is a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature both by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the

area of “out-of-school” education, as well as specific leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders and is based on non-formal learning processes and on voluntary participation. (p. C 441/6)

Halpern (2006) called this notion—that OST programs should be evaluated solely based on their capacity to enhance academic achievement—“the big lie” and argued that holding them accountable to such goals distracts from their real value. He stated, “After-school programs are well suited to providing the types and qualities of developmental experiences that other institutions (e.g., the schools and public play spaces) can no longer provide for most low- and moderate-income children” (Halpern, 2006, p. 112). He described afterschool activities further: “These experiences, whether in the arts, humanities, sciences, civics, physical activity, or other domains, include play and sheer fun, exploration, and learning from adults skilled in different domains” (Halpern, 2006, p. 112). Indeed, OST programs are wide ranging and can lead to positive outcomes for children and youth in the multiple areas considered in this report, as discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Higher Education

Higher education plays three core roles associated with OST programs: building the capacity of youth development practitioners, exposing college students to employment opportunities in the sector, and conducting research and evaluations that advance the youth development field.

First, higher education contributes to the preparation of the next generation of youth development practitioners through certificate and degree programs. According to the National AfterSchool Association’s (NAA’s) member survey (2017), 25% of its members hold an associate’s degree, 41% bachelor’s, and 30% master’s degree or doctorate. At the field-wide level, two-thirds of OST program staff have a bachelor’s degree or higher, primarily in liberal arts and education, with younger staff holding a high school diploma or associate’s degree (American Institutes for Research, 2025).

The National AfterSchool Association’s (NAA, 2023) core competencies document outlines ladders of professional progression and associated applicable higher education trajectories. Many statewide afterschool networks have adopted standards and pathways aligned with the NAA core competencies. This has signaled further advancement of the field, and many well-established and emerging programs are conferring degrees that are preparing youth development practitioners (e.g., University of California, Irvine’s Certificate in Afterschool and Summer Education; University of Minnesota Youth Studies Program; The City University of New York Youth Studies Consortium).

Second, higher education institutions have developed partnerships to place students into practicums or other workforce development experiences (e.g., internships, summer jobs) within OST programs. For instance, the University of Pittsburgh’s Collegiate YMCA supports students’ leadership development through service on campus and in OST programs in the community as part of a practicum, or practical experience. The Posse Foundation has numerous partnerships with higher education institutions (public and private 4-year institutions across the country) to support Posse Scholars, including pathways in OST programs. Horizons National partners with universities to build OST programs, including staff capacity-building.

Third, higher education plays an important role in advancing research and evaluation of the youth development field through rigorous studies and community partnerships designed to

support local OST programs and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in youth development. For example, the University of Colorado Boulder, through its Institute of Behavioral Science¹ manages Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development,² a clearinghouse that offers a comprehensive registry of evidence-based and scalable youth development interventions shown to be effective in reducing antisocial behavior and promoting a healthy course of youth development and adult maturity. University research centers—such as the University of Virginia’s Youth-Nex center, which includes OST as one of three core research domains—are among a growing number of examples of higher education’s role in advancing the youth development field. Chapter 5 offers future discussion on higher education for the OST workforce.

Health and Wellness

The health care sector interacts with OST settings to support the well-being of children and youth, particularly individuals with health conditions that require professional health care intervention. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) reports that at least 40% of children and youth in the United States have at least one chronic health condition (e.g., asthma, diabetes, cerebral palsy). Children living at or below the poverty level have a 30% increased risk of having a chronic condition (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2021). Effective management of these conditions is essential to ensure healthy development and academic success (AAP, 2021). A common way the health care system interacts with OST programs is when an OST program is linked with a community schools model, where health care is a component of a whole-child, whole-school approach, and children are offered in-school access to dental, physical, and mental health services, supports, and referrals (CDC, n.d.). OST programs commonly offer health fairs to ensure that families have exposure and educational opportunities about their health and the health of their families, and that they can connect with providers (Action for Healthy Kids, n.d.). Finally, OST programs often have goals to improve health and minimize health risks such as obesity through healthy activity, play, and nutrition (Alliance for a Healthier Generation, n.d.). Multiple national models support participants’ health and wellness, including Girls on the Run and the National Recreation and Parks Association.

The ways in which OST programs address the chronic or serious health care needs of children is not well documented. Programs that are sponsored by public schools or federally funded are required to provide access to services to care for children with significant health care needs. School nurses can serve as a bridge between the OST and health systems and can play a role in coordinating health care between the school day and OST programs; however, they are not utilized often (National Association of School Nurses, 2024). For children and youth with minor health needs, this may not be particularly problematic. However, for individuals with more complex health needs, such as asthma or diabetes, the burden is on family members to solve how their child’s needs may be met in an OST setting. For example, children and youth with special health care needs may require specific medications or care that OST staff may not be authorized or trained to provide. As a result, parents’ options may include not enrolling their child in extracurricular enrichment activities, providing the special health care themselves, or risking their child’s health by accepting care from untrained OST staff. Given that young people from low-income communities are known to have higher rates of chronic conditions (AAP, 2021;

¹ <https://ibs.colorado.edu>

² <https://www.blueprintsprograms.org>

Houtrow et al., 2020; Kids Count Data Center, 2023), the propensity for differential access to OST participation is large.

Workforce

As noted in Chapter 1, interest and investment in OST programs is driven in part by the fact that it provides childcare for the children of working parents and that it helps prepare young people to enter the workforce. In the United States, major shifts in the labor market (e.g., gig economies, remote work) may affect supply and demand, as well as factors such as transportation needs, for OST programs. Shifts in attracting and retaining the OST workforce may result as well, as practitioners may find incentives to work in other sectors. Additionally, OST programs may offer local job fairs that may provide families and community members connections with employers, access to job training and and/or resume support, access to the technology required to search and apply for jobs, and family-focused skill development opportunities.

OST programs also may offer skills for the next generation of workers, as evidenced by an increased emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) in the youth development field (see Box 3-1) and apprenticeships.

Summer youth employment programs are on the rise in major cities, and early evidence suggests that they provide meaningful pathways to skill development, job placement, and reducing harmful activities during the summer months (Davis & Heller, 2020). These programs promise to be sustainable, with access to workforce investment funds for bringing together workforce and youth development organizations.

In addition, several national and local models, as well as funding, are available for career preparation through internships, apprenticeships, etc. Most notably, Job Corps is a 60-year-old Department of Labor investment that supports youth ages 16 and older to access job training, along with other basic supports (e.g., education, housing [Schochet et al., 2001]). See more on the OST workforce in Chapter 5.

BOX 3-1

Million Girls Moonshot: A STEM-Focused OST Initiative Applying a Systems Approach

Million Girls Moonshot equips out-of-school-time (OST) programs to eliminate barriers to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and foster engineering mindsets. Supported by the STEM Next Opportunity Fund, the Moonshot initiative identifies high-quality program models and resources that are accessible, research informed, and girl based, then brings them to scale with over 18 national partnerships. Million Girls Moonshot does not create new programs because this is not where the need exists in the STEM learning landscape. Rather, the initiative encourages program facilitators to use best practices for engaging girls in STEM, leveraging the existing infrastructure of the 50 State Afterschool Network (n.d.), which partners with the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to reach more than 100,000 local programs and 8 million youth.

Launched in 2020, Million Girls Moonshot uses a systems approach to layer into existing OST programs supports and resources, such as training, technical assistance, curricula, a STEM-access framework, and awareness-building tools. Thus, Moonshot strengthens the capacity of the OST network in each state to support a regional STEM focus; local program capacity is built to incorporate research-based, proven strategies, including implementing inclusive culturally and socially relevant content, building an engineering mindset, supporting

families as mentors, and creating transitions between programs to ensure consistent opportunities over time. Resources are delivered across the country using several effective strategies, including communities of practice, in-person and virtual conference tracks, webinars, and individualized technical assistance. The Flight Crew, a youth leadership and development program, ensures a strong youth voice in co-design and implementation.

SOURCE: Generated by the committee, with excerpts from MIT Solve, 2024.

Juvenile Justice System

On any given day, law enforcement agencies make approximately 700,000 arrests of individuals younger than 18 years of age, and a small portion are subsequently detained or incarcerated within the juvenile justice system (Puzzanchera et al., 2022). The juvenile justice system oversees cases with children and youth who are subsequently charged with violating a law or committing an offense (Puzzanchera et al., 2022). Courts within the juvenile justice system are also granted jurisdiction to recommend and grant services to young people who are currently within the system or are about to be released, transition, and return to their home communities (Puzzanchera et al., 2022). Those recommendations can include provision of OST services.

That is, young people within the juvenile justice system may receive services within the OST sector and vice versa (e.g., afterschool programs that target formerly incarcerated or detained children and youth within the juvenile justice system). Young people who are transitioning out of the juvenile justice system as detained or incarcerated individuals may also receive court-ordered or voluntary OST programs upon release back to their home communities. Importantly, OST programs are also seen as important means of diverting young people from engaging in criminal activity during the afterschool hours (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). For example, the City of Roanoke, Virginia (n.d.), coordinates an OST trauma and homicide response program known as Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of Trauma (RESET). Composed of community mentors and city staff, including public safety officers and elected officials, RESET teams visit neighborhoods affected by homicide or ongoing community violence. Recognizing the fact that residents may not have a positive response when speaking with law enforcement, program staff offer residents the option to communicate via phone rather than in person. Moreover, the city prioritizes hiring RESET mentors with lived experience of involvement with the justice system. RESET staff also provide referrals to both city-led and community-based OST programs if this is a need for a particular family and subsidizes associated costs for these programs.

THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES IN SUPPORT OF OST SYSTEMS

OST programs can be provided by public agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith and civic organizations, and schools, each operating within their own system. Rather than having one clear anchor institution or delivery mechanism, coordinating entities have been established to facilitate across these systems and manage networks of OST providers. These entities can include youth-serving organizations, mayor's offices or public agencies, school systems, community foundations, regional or state youth-serving networks, or networks of

direct-service providers. In recent decades *OST intermediaries* have emerged as coordinating entities, overseeing OST system policies and strategies and coordinating resources, money, and expertise (Dekker, 2010; Simkin et al., 2021). OST intermediaries may be situated at the county, city, state, or regional level; commonly, they are local OST nonprofit organizations and state OST networks.

Every U.S. state has a state-wide intermediary organization, known as state afterschool networks, connected with the 50 State Afterschool Network (n.d.), which was created and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Additionally, most major cities have OST coordinating entities in some form (Simkin et al., 2021) (see Box 3-2). Every Hour Counts is a national organization that serves as a connector for these city- and region-level intermediaries (see Box 3-3). While some intermediaries may offer their own programming, they generally operate a step removed from frontline activity and take a broad view of the resources and needs of children and families in the community (Hartmann et al., 2024). Another type of local- or state-level intermediary is *children's cabinets*, specialized bodies within government structures that prioritize youth-centric initiatives and foster collaboration across various sectors.

Several national organizations support intermediaries, including the National AfterSchool Association, Afterschool Alliance, and National Summer Learning Association. National affiliate child- and family-serving organizations, sometimes called the “big nationals,” support local affiliates (i.e., local programs) and interact with intermediaries. These include the YMCA, National Urban League Cooperative Extension, 4-H youth development program, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, After-School All-Stars, Girls Inc., Campfire, and Scouts. These systems feature two-way transfer of information (i.e., from local chapters to and from the national office) for disseminating ideas and processes, such as those pertaining to professional development, data-sharing, and program quality initiatives.

BOX 3-2 **Examples of City Intermediary Organizations**

Cities acting as intermediaries often have a deep reach and impact, typically including monitoring program quality, providing grant funding opportunities, facilitating data-sharing and analysis, and offering more extensive professional development (e.g., credentialing programs).

Madison's MOST Initiative

In Madison, Wisconsin, the Madison-area Out of School Time initiative (MOST) employs a full-time coordinator housed jointly in the Community Development Division and in the local school district. This structure provides the benefits of shared funding, easier access to school-day data, a strong connection with the school district, and access to multiple streams of public funds. MOST is a collaboration between the City of Madison; Dane County; Madison Metropolitan School District; and over 45 Madison-area youth-serving organizations, mainly funded by the city, the school district, and local foundations. The mayor plays a significant role in MOST's work, from facilitating annual staff awards, to site visits and calls to action, to advocating for funding at local and state levels.

MOST has a program finder tool. The initiative also supports professional development offerings and an effective practices guide. Of note is its data-sharing agreement between the district, city, and out-of-school-time (OST) providers, which facilitates data-sharing between 130 locations in real time. These data are used to determine program effectiveness and areas of improvement. Additionally, MOST's workforce initiatives have increased retention of the workforce. It has successfully advocated for and received more than \$10 million and

significantly increased the participation of children and youth who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch in summer learning programs.

Family League of Baltimore

The Family League of Baltimore, a local intermediary, is a nonprofit organization that convenes, coordinates, and funds programs to strengthen the lives of young people and families in Baltimore, Maryland. Its mission is to improve the lives of Baltimore's young people from birth to the time they enter adulthood and begin careers. The Family League's OST Funding Formula Workgroup was a small group of OST lead agency representatives and Family League staff that met monthly to explore the OST funding landscape across Baltimore and the country in order to recommend funding policies. The group reviewed and discussed literature from across the country on the cost of operating high-quality OST programming. In fiscal year 2021, the Family League (through funding from the Mayor's Office and City Council of Baltimore) awarded \$5,587,241 to support community schools and OST programming. This includes \$2,420,000 granted to 17 community-based organizations to support 44 community schools and \$3,167,241 granted to 18 lead agencies for 2,258 OST positions.

By layering OST programming into a community school, partners can leverage the existing infrastructure of the school and respond more holistically to the needs of children, youth, and their families. More than 50% of the funded partners had operating budgets under \$500,000, and 40% were first-time recipients of Family League funding.

Expanded Learning Alliance

In Los Angeles, California, the Expand Learning Alliance (ExpandLA), a nonprofit intermediary organization, connects public and private stakeholders to support OST in the city. According to a July 2023 survey of ExpandLA, private foundations, individual donors, and other sources of grant support are the major sources of funding for this program. By comparison, state and federal funds were a small percentage of the total (Berry et al., 2023).

One Albuquerque: Kids' Cabinet

In the City of Albuquerque, New Mexico (n.d.-a), the One Albuquerque: Kids' Cabinet is an appointed body of content experts and community partners who work to improve access to youth opportunities and outcomes across the city. Albuquerque's mayor created the cabinet to bring together key partners from the public and private sectors to identify service gaps, leverage resources, and drive initiatives. The work is funded by city general funds; the mayor supports the work by highlighting the needs of children and youth at all levels of government, including the legislature, and promotes youth opportunities through newsletters and social media.

The cabinet works alongside the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council and Youth Connect, a group of city departments that provide youth programming (see City of Albuquerque, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). The city offers no- and low-cost cradle-to-career services, including early childhood, before school, afterschool, and summer programs; career exploration; internships; and employment opportunities. Through the city's budget, the administration ensures that families with low incomes can access social services, hot meals, and safe places for children and youth when they are not in school.

The One Albuquerque Kids' Cabinet currently has three areas of focus: public safety, early learning, and OST. The OST committee began its work by conducting a landscape analysis (Diaz & Studio 13, 2021) to identify gaps in services across the city. Through the city's leadership, summer youth programs in 2023 took place in 306 locations and had an increase of 13% in program registration (City of Albuquerque, 2023). In 2024, the Kids' Cabinet was focused on attendance and reengagement, violence prevention and intervention, and elevating young voices through a school-based podcast.

SOURCE: Generated by the committee.

Intermediaries take on various roles within a locale, but they generally provide the following functions³:

- mobilize and coordinate stakeholders;
- understand the needs of families and identify service gaps;
- oversee a comprehensive approach to quality and workforce development;
- establish data systems and accountability;
- build coalitions and advocate for funding; and
- direct resources so they are used effectively.

The emergence of intermediaries changed the landscape of OST governance from a focus on the single organization—with inconsistent program quality and limited funding—to a connection with a system that guides and supports programs to promote quality and access in OST systems (Little & Donner, 2022). Intermediaries also work to promote access and opportunity for all children and youth; for example, they can intentionally support programs in building capacity to embed strategies, such as culturally sustaining practices, to meet the needs of all children and youth (Hartmann et al., 2024). Table 3-1 offers more detail on the range of coordination functions intermediaries take on. In 2012, the first-ever national survey of OST intermediary organizations reported that intermediaries need to be given time to show positive results, with the 3-year mark proving to be a turning point for organizations; of the 212 organizations surveyed, those who had been involved in the OST space for at least 3–5 years were able to report positive impact in a variety of areas involving funding, quality, participation, and policy (Donner, 2012). This suggests a need for more stable funding sources as newer intermediaries find their footing within the OST landscape and begin to lay the groundwork for long-lasting efforts in their communities.

In sum, intermediary organizations serve as the backbone of complex OST systems. However, unlike schools, OST programs do not have a uniform federal, state, or local organizing structure to ensure equitable funding, standards for quality practice, and a prepared workforce with pipelines for growth. In many ways, the early funding for intermediaries and other cross-sector coordinating entities enabled an organizing framework for systems. However, this funding remains precarious because of the lack of legislated resources for intermediaries and other cross-sector efforts (see Chapter 8 for more information).

TABLE 3-1 Coordination Functions of OST Intermediary Organizations

Coordination Functions	Description
Within the Out-of-School-Time (OST) System	
OST quality standards	An OST system’s formal definitions of the elements that constitute quality OST programming.
Common OST data collection/analysis	The collection of data about children’s participation in OST programs from multiple providers that is managed collectively as well as data on program quality.
Shared vision/goals for OST system	The facilitation of conversations with groups across the OST/youth development sector to develop a shared vision or set of goals for OST.

³ Presentation by Jessica Donner at committee public session, October 2023.

Professional development on providing OST	The provision of professional development resources and opportunities for OST organizations.
Public communications about OST programs	Communications from the that elevate the value and benefits of the OST sector and advertise about OST programs to inform parents and children and the wider community about OST options, services, and program locations.
Sustainability planning support, including staffing	Aid to OST providers on fundraising and long-term sustainability planning, including assistance with staff recruitment and retention.
Funding provided by intermediary	Grant funding to OST providers in the city, using their own resources or pass-through funding.
Convening of OST providers	Lead meetings with provider staff and conversations to build consensus on issues in the field.
OST program logistics: transportation, meals, space	Logistical support for OST programming, such as securing programming space, assisting with transportation, and connecting providers with programmatic resources.
External to the OST System	
OST policy advocacy at the city and/or state levels	Advocacy at the state and local levels to build public support and influence OST policy and funding decisions.

SOURCE: Hartmann et al., 2024, p. 13.

BOX 3-3

Every Hour Counts: A National Network of Intermediary Organizations for System Level Impact

Every Hour Counts is a national coalition of local intermediary organizations. It works in partnership with over 3,500 schools, districts, community-based organizations, and local leaders that provide OST programming to more than 500,000 students each year. The network also works in close collaboration with other national organizations such as the National Summer Learning Association, National Afterschool Association, Afterschool Alliance, National Urban League, and Coalition for Community Schools. Its goal is to make the case for the value of coordinated OST systems that facilitate the work of service providers, public agencies, funders, and schools. Its work includes (Every Hour Counts, n.d.):

- supporting a community of practice by sharing promising practices and engaging in knowledge-sharing activities,
- leading demonstration projects that test the feasibility of policy and practice concepts and disseminates findings and tools for replication,
- serving as a clearinghouse of information about expanded-learning systems,
- convening stakeholders to share knowledge and ideas,
- advocating for policy change, and
- providing local, customized technical assistance.

Every Hour Counts operates with the understanding that positive outcomes for children and youth 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). The network has developed a framework that describes common measures for outcomes at the youth, program, and system levels.

SOURCE: Generated by the committee, with excerpts from Every Hour Counts, n.d., 2021; Little & Donner, 2022.

THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY IN SUPPORT OF OST SYSTEMS

Funding is a critical factor in OST systems. The priorities of funders can shape important aspects of the OST ecosystem, affecting programs and ultimately children and youth. Federal, state, and local government investments are key pieces of the OST funding landscape and are discussed in detail in Chapter 8. In addition to public sources, private philanthropy plays an important role in supporting OST systems (see Box 3-4 for philanthropic funder types).

By design, philanthropy differs from government investments. Philanthropies have the flexibility to refresh, pivot, and grow in shorter strategic cycles, as guided by their boards, staff, the funder community, and grantees' feedback, and as informed by trends and directions in the field. Philanthropic funding can range in type, duration, structure, and purpose. Philanthropies have supported multiple efforts over time that have been actualized through intermediary channels or cross-sector efforts:

- Building an evidence base for the positive developmental benefits of participation in high-quality OST programs—beyond impact on test scores and grades.
- Shifting from a deficit-focused narrative—that frames OST programs as preventing young people from engaging in risky behaviors—to a strengths-based narrative that frames OST participation as a valuable, even critical, experience on the developmental pathway to success for young people.
- Supporting a recurring national parent survey—America After 3pm—which helps show parent demand for and access to OST programs for their children, with data on differences by race, geography, and family income.
- Focusing on program quality and building systems to observe, assess, and support providers to increase program quality.
- Building the intermediary infrastructure at local, state, and national levels to offer technical assistance for improving program quality, building capacity for policy work, increasing public funding for OST programs, supporting field research, and supporting the workforce.
- Building OST providers' capacity to support young people's social and emotional learning and character development.
- Supporting national organizations in the education and civic spaces to engage their constituencies around OST opportunities (e.g., superintendents' associations, organizations of local government officials).
- Building a policy and advocacy infrastructure to sustain and expand public funding at local, state, and national levels.

- Supporting increased capacity for youth voice—at the program level and in policy, advocacy, and research spaces.
- Listening to proximate voices in strategy development; infusing priorities for reaching underserved groups into their own funding distributions; supporting community efforts to map how OST funding is distributed and who is accessing programs; and supporting community-level efforts to redirect funding to support traditionally excluded populations.

Several national philanthropic funders are actively involved in OST systems, including most prominently the Wallace Foundation (n.d.) in supporting citywide systems and the Mott Foundation in supporting the 50 State Afterschool Network (n.d.), as well as early investments in STEM ecosystems by the Noyce Foundation (Traill & Traphagen, 2015). In 2003, the Wallace Foundation invested in five cities—Boston; Chicago; New York City; Providence; and Washington, DC—to build systems that coordinate quality OST programs. The focus on infrastructure, quality through evidence-based practices, and leadership helped the Wallace Foundation expand in 2012 to additional cities—Baltimore, Denver, Fort Worth, Grand Rapids, Jacksonville, Louisville, Nashville, Philadelphia, and St. Paul. The investments led to citywide quality standards, a body of citywide evaluations, and an embedded coordinated systems to support OST programs. Several other national foundations also fund systems that support OST programs—for example, the Susan Crown Exchange and the Overdeck Family Foundation—along with numerous family foundations with regional foci.

Philanthropic actors have also, at times, worked in tandem to advance the youth development field. For example, the Grantmakers for Thriving Youth Out-of-School Time Impact Group,⁴ a funder circle, was launched to increase knowledge of field issues, build strategic relationships, and promote collaboration across funders and the field (Traphagen & Goldberg, 2024). As Traphagen and Goldberg (2024) note, “philanthropy’s role includes supporting the robust field infrastructure that high-quality programs depend on: research, policy and advocacy, communications, innovations in practice, professional development, a well-supported workforce and effective measurement and evaluation” (p. 2). To realize these goals, the group holds field convenings and funding meetups, shares field resources, and solves problem together.

Philanthropy will continue to play a critical role in the youth development field; however, as research and practice show, there are ways that the funding community could better address some of the common, cross-cutting challenges that have played a role in limiting the quality, access, and sustainability of OST programming. According to the Bridgespan Group (2005), OST providers tend to sustain their programs primarily as a result of available funding opportunities rather than strategically implementing their own mission. This is in large part because of the design of funding terms that have increasingly favored shorter funding cycles of 1–3 years, alignment with foundation’s own strategic directions, emphasis on innovation over sustainability, and specific population foci. For instance, OST organizations that grow faster tend to be those focused on target populations, such as young people involved in the child welfare system, over services to children and youth in general (Campbell & Menezes, 2010).

⁴ A group comprising 125 foundations’ staff and guided by a steering committee of 12 foundations—through 20 national funders—invests in programming and grantmaking, ranging from academics, STEM, literacy, arts, social and emotional learning, attendance, high-dosage tutoring, quality tools, and frameworks (Traphagen & Goldberg, 2024 [memo]).

Additionally, funders commonly set restrictions on indirect costs, often below the grantees' own indirect rates,⁵ that can hinder organization's sustainability in the long run (McCray & Enright, 2016). There are persistent disparities in access to OST grants, from funding informational sharing due to no-solicitation policies for access to grant writing and compliance capacities, disproportionately affecting smaller, direct-service providers and favoring larger, more established grantees. The noted barriers can perpetuate an imbalance between funders and (potential) grantees. Although the issues of information access, capacity, and support have been voiced by the field, the funding community has only recently begun to incorporate commitments to addressing these challenges in their grantmaking, from missions, project funding mechanisms, and award priorities.

In a Wallace Foundation (2022) brief, for example, OST-involved interview and focus group participants were asked to address advances and challenges within OST programs, including the following recommendations:

- payment of livable wages to OST staff,
- creation of employment ladders of opportunities for staff, and
- establishment of professional development opportunities to help OST programs center racial and social justice within their program's work.

Chapter 8 discusses ways philanthropy could address these recommendations to democratize information, access, support, and ensure continued growth of OST.

BOX 3-4

Philanthropic Funding Types Supporting OST Systems and Settings

Four core philanthropic funding types support out-of-school-time (OST) programs: national foundations, regional foundations, community foundations, and corporate giving.

National Foundations

National Foundations have macro visibility due to their vast geographic span and flexibility to engage in innovations, sustainability, and transformative changes. They include such funders as the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Wallace Foundation, among others. Their investments can be used to spark innovation and engage in research longitudinally. They commonly fund large-scale projects, intermediary organizations, frameworks, and tools that could have field-wide utility and contribute to the overall advancement of the field.

Regional Foundations

Regional foundations play an important role in financing OST providers and intermediaries located in multiple counties, areas within states, or a cluster of states. The Lilly Endowment, for instance, grants funds to various youth-serving intermediaries and direct-service providers, including Indy Summer Youth Programs, the Indiana Afterschool Network, Girls Inc., and Junior Achievement of Central Indiana. The Lilly Endowment (n.d.) has also funded the Indiana Youth Institute (2024), which has invested in youth-worker well-being, giving 61 state and local OST organizations grants in fall 2024 alone.

Community Foundations

Community foundations are public charities with specific geographic and funding area purposes. Some are focused on a particular county or counties, while others cover a

⁵ Indirect rates are used by nonprofits to cover overhead costs that support the administrative and operational aspects of an organization, such as office space, computers, printers, audits, human resources, and staff professional development.

metropolitan area or a cluster of counties. Their focus is often on improving the lives of local communities. They can take many forms in education, from scholarship funds to small grants to direct-service providers.

According to the Council on Foundations (n.d.), there are hundreds of community foundations across the country, many of which fund direct-service access and programming for children, youth, and families. For example, the Skillman Foundation in Detroit focuses investments in youth voice through OST programming and youth and community leadership, and has granted \$750 million to direct-service organizations. Another example is the Cleveland Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio, which funds Greater Cleveland youth development programs that provide neighborhood-based OST programming, college and career preparation, scholarships, and crime prevention. United Ways across the country also play an important role as grantmakers for OST programs. Each area establishes its own set of services, including grantmaking opportunities, that can cover direct services, childcare, counseling, and other supports.

Corporate Giving

Corporations also engage in philanthropic giving. At times, they might be labeled “corporate responsibility,” with giving designated toward a particular cause comprised of staff volunteer service, percentage of revenue, and individual customer transactions. Other corporations might also create an independent, stand-alone entity to engage in grantmaking on a range of strategic investments.

SOURCE: Generated by the committee.

CONCLUSION

The *learning and development ecosystem*—a collection of people, places, and possibilities that constitute an environment full of learning and development opportunities—has been used to understand multiple, overlapping systems that shape the creation of OST programs, access to these programs, and ultimately the experiences they provide for children and youth. Applying a systems view to OST programs supports consideration of all the factors that shape outcomes for children and youth, rather than focusing on why particular children and youth do not succeed. It provides an alternative to individually focused frameworks, which can involve deficit views in which children, youth, and families are held accountable for individual outcomes, despite society-level systems—such as culture, law, and government—that affect those outcomes.

The subsystems and sectors within an OST ecosystem, such as families, education, and transportation, all serve as entry points for implementors, funders, researchers, and others to improve programs, and these discussions are expanded on in other areas of the report. Two critical actors supporting the OST ecosystem are intermediaries and philanthropies. Intermediaries are coordinating entities, commonly local OST nonprofit organizations and state OST networks, that oversee OST system policies and strategies and coordinate resources, money, and expertise. They work at a higher level to facilitate across the OST ecosystem and manage networks of program providers. Intermediaries can assist underresourced providers in building partnerships with local stakeholders, applying for or identify funding opportunities, and identifying appropriate staff development training. OST systems are also greatly supported by private philanthropic organizations, which continue to make investments in strengthening intermediaries, building the evidence base around OST programs to improve program quality,

and building infrastructure to expand public funding at local, state, and national levels, among other areas. Later chapters will expand on the ways intermediaries and philanthropies are working to improve program capacity and OST experiences for children and youth.

CONCLUSION 3-1: Intermediaries, such as state afterschool networks, local OST intermediaries, and children's cabinets, serve a critical function in coordinating, funding, and collecting data on OST systems, and in providing technical assistance to local OST programs, activities, and related services. However, more research is needed on the tangible effects of intermediary supports on OST outcomes.

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4

OST Programs and Participation

As stated in the Blue Book, a program represents a number of elements and decisions that together constitute a program setting (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2002). Some of these dimensions represent deliberate choices made, such as a program’s focus, curriculum, and level of structure; others result from external factors such as location, level of resources, and governance. This chapter provides an overview of scholarship that describes OST programs and activities across a wide spectrum of settings. We first summarize the landscape of OST programs serving the nation’s children and youth and how these programs vary across multiple dimensions. We cover the topics that programs address, how they are structured, and how they operate.

The chapter then presents demographic information about participation in OST programs across the U.S. population of children and youth and examines trends over time, as well as demand for and participation within programs. We discuss key factors that can affect program participation—including enrollment, attendance, and engagement—disaggregated by demographic characteristics highlighting differential access among these groups. Understanding who is participating, who wants to participate, and why they may not be is a precursor to identifying strategies for increasing participation and ensuring access to high-quality out-of-school-time (OST) opportunities for all.

THE LANDSCAPE OF OST PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Diversity is a defining feature of OST programs in that they address a broad range of topics of interest to children and youth. Some entities offer science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) and STEAM (STEM + art) programs. For instance, most cities have programs that specifically teach young people to code. Academic-focused programs provide homework support, mentoring, and sometimes supplemental academic learning (e.g., online math programs). Some programs define themselves mostly as safe hangout, drop-in spaces. Others specialize in art, including visual arts, music, dance, drama, new media, and literary arts. There are programs designed to support affiliate groups, such as those for LGBTQ+ youth, and others that engage young people in youth organizing and activism. Still other programs defy categorization—the boat-building apprentice program of the Seaport Foundation in Alexandria, Virginia,¹ for example. Some programs are centered on youth voice and leadership, such as the Neutral Zone in Ann Arbor, Michigan,² and meditation programs, such as the Mindfulness Teen

¹ <https://alexandriaseaport.org/apprentice-program>

² <https://www.neutral-zone.org>

Retreats, operated by Inward Bound.³ Youth programs are as diverse as the variety of things that can be learned, and while the field has not yet landed on a standard way to categorize them, researchers are working to do so, as explained in the sections below.

OST programs and activities occur within a variety of settings, including school-based OST programs, national programs with regional affiliates (e.g., YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America), independent grassroots organizations, cultural institutions (e.g., museums, libraries), municipal agencies (e.g., youth detention centers, parks and recreation centers), residential group homes, faith-based spaces, and outreach programs focused on essential needs (e.g., for unhoused youth) (Baldrige et al., 2021). Figure 4-1 depicts this variation across sectors and provider types and indicates some of the typical program focus areas across those sectors and settings. The sections below summarize programs' focus, location, and structure, painting a picture of the broad landscape of OST programs serving children and youth in the United States.

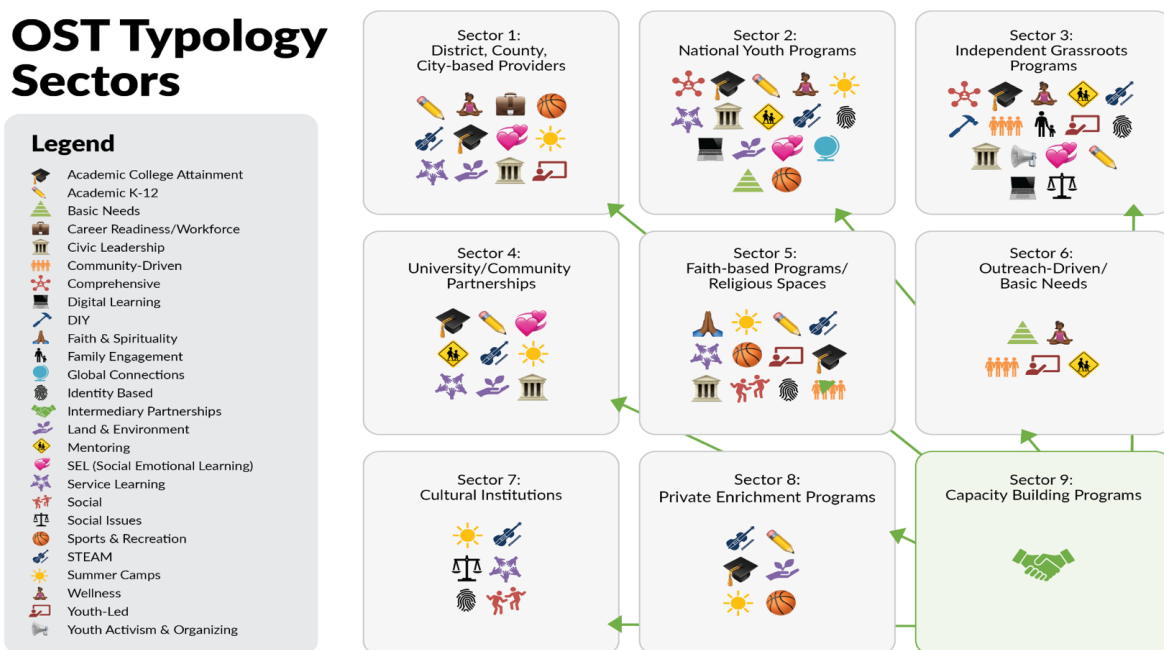


FIGURE 4-1 Landscape of out-of-school-time (OST) settings, programs, and activities.

NOTE: STEAM = science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics.

SOURCE: Baldrige et al., 2021.

Variations by Focus

OST activities vary according to their primary focus and the type of programming offered to participants. In a review of 246 studies, Neild et al. (2019) studied both multicomponent and academic OST programs. Multicomponent programs are further differentiated to include a focus on career and/or leadership development or on social supports, such as case management and increased family involvement. Academic programs, according to Neild et al. (2019), can be grouped into arts, sports, STEM, physical activity and healthy living, and school-sponsored extracurricular activities. Other scholars organize the focus areas similarly; for example,

³ <https://inwardboundmind.org>

McCombs et al. (2017) used three broad categories to organize OST programs: multicomponent, programs, and specialty programs.

Multicomponent programs provide a variety of academic and nonacademic activities for children and youth. Their activities may include homework help, enrichment activities, recreation, and snacks, and may be led by school teachers, youth development practitioners, library staff, museum staff, or informal educators. As mentioned, some multicomponent programs focus on career and leadership development—for example, the Leaders of Tomorrow Program in Clarkston, Georgia, engaged predominantly refugee and immigrant young people with a leadership program co-created with youth participants (Clarkston Community Center, n.d.). The program included a strong focus on community engagement, with youth working on a community project during their time in the program. For example, youth participants developed a student government and a parent-teacher association for their school. Participants also had access to speakers who discussed career readiness, leadership roles, and workforce readiness. Leaders of Tomorrow had a podcast (Clarkston Talks), a summer camp at the local community center, and wraparound services for children, youth, and families, such as a full food pantry.⁴

Academic programs include summer learning programs, tutoring, or enrichment. In these programs, youth development workers may provide enrichment and recreation, but most of the time is dedicated to academic instruction provided by certified teachers. For example, Community Lodgings (n.d.) is a community-based organization in Alexandria, Virginia, that offers transitional housing for families experiencing homelessness and affordable long-term housing for families with lower incomes. Community Lodgings also offers an OST program with year-round academic support to local children and youth, partnering with the Alexandria City Public Schools to ensure their activities correspond with what participants are learning in school. The program is supported by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) grant. In addition to academic support, it provides daily meals, recreation, and mentorship.⁵

Specialty programs have a particular focus such as art, music, drama, sports, technology, or leadership development. These programs are often taught by someone with content expertise, sometimes include a fee, and primarily seek to help children and youth develop specific skills. Specialty programs may focus on STEM (e.g., 4-H Robotics program,⁶ Girls Who Code⁷); civic engagement (e.g., Citizen Schools⁸), or arts (e.g., Life Pieces to Masterpieces⁹). The program Guitars Over Guns (n.d.), for example, offers arts education and mentorship for young people from vulnerable communities across the country, with the help of professional musicians and artists. Participants meet with their musician or artist mentors 2 days per week for 2 hours, with a goal of preparing four ensemble performances over the course of a year.¹⁰

Variations by Location

OST programs exist across the United States in a variety of urban, suburban, mixed-rural, and rural settings. Urban areas have the highest concentration of OST programs, likely because of population density and access to such resources as program providers, partners, and

⁴ Public information-gathering session, April 18, 2024.

⁵ Public information-gathering session, February 8, 2024.

⁶ <https://4-h.org/programs/robotics>

⁷ <https://girlswhocode.com>

⁸ <https://www.citizenschools.org>

⁹ <https://lifepieces.org>

¹⁰ Public information-gathering session, April 18, 2024.

transportation. A 2016 Afterschool Alliance survey estimated that 13% of children and youth in rural areas participate in OST programs, while 25% of children and youth in urban areas participate (Fischer, 2019). Young people in rural areas are more likely to participate in jurisdiction-run programs (such as a parks and recreation department) or 4-H than their urban counterparts (Fischer, 2019).

Location can influence the size of a program's resources and how it shapes its activities. Local programs are likely to form goals that respond to and prioritize community needs. For example, a program may offer arts clubs if those courses have been deprioritized in schools; another program may form a climbing club if it is located near natural climbing areas. Local programs may be part of community-based organizations, school districts, city parks and recreation centers, museums, faith-based organizations, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums, scout groups, and citizen science programs, among others. Most take place in a single setting, but some rotate daily or weekly among locations.

While state or national programs, such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Scouts, and the Cooperative Extensions 4-H program, typically have steady sources of funding and structure and privilege implementation of program models and national requirements, nonaffiliated local programs may experience challenges in accessing resources and evaluation services to assess their impact on participants. Chapter 7 discusses funding sources at federal, state, and local levels.

Variations by Structure

OST programs vary by structure—namely, who offers the program and when it is offered (e.g., before school, summertime, weekly). Many schools offer OST programs, with sports or music extracurricular activities. Some schools also offer specialty clubs, such as science and chess clubs. As mentioned above, national organizations that offer OST programs include Boys & Girls Clubs of America or the YMCA. Other entities offering OST programs include small nonprofits, libraries, content-specific organizations (e.g., art museums), and universities (e.g., Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics, and Computing [CEISMC]¹¹ at Georgia Tech). A 2020 survey of over 3,000 parents identified programs that their children participated in during the school year (see Table 4-1).

TABLE 4-1 Out-of-School-Time (OST) Programs That Parents Reported Their Children Participate In, 2020

Entity Offering OST Program	Parent-Reported Participation
Public school	50%
Boys & Girls Clubs of America	14%
Private school	14%
City or town (including parks and recreation department)	13%
YMCA	10%
Religious organization	8%
Childcare center	8%
Library	7%

¹¹ <https://www.ceismc.gatech.edu/ng>

Museum or science center	5%
YWCA	4%
4-H	4%
Other	7%

SOURCE: Afterschool Alliance, 2020a.

Smaller municipalities, which tend to have limited resources, often facilitate OST programs through their parks and recreation departments or libraries. Many cities are expanding and enhancing more traditional forms of OST programs—moving from conventional sports-centric models to more holistic programming frameworks, for example. Some cities provide OST programming through a comprehensive, OST-specific department (e.g., the City of Tempe, Arizona [n.d.], Kid Zone Enrichment Program). The program was founded in 1986 and currently serves approximately 1,300 children from preschool to age 8 years at 15 school-based program sites. The City of Tempe uses approximately \$5 million in general funds to support the program’s annual budget, with supplemental funds provided by the State Department of Economic Security and participant registration fees. The Kid Zone Enrichment Program sits within the Community Health and Human Services Department, under the office of Education, Career and Family Services; it receives strong support from the mayor, city manager, and city council (Stockman, 2024).

OST programs may take place before school, after school, and/or during the summer. Most meet on a regular basis throughout the year, but some meet for only part of the year.¹² For example, a theater-based program might meet for rehearsals and performance, then not meet again until it is time to prepare for the next performance. Programs may meet every weekday (e.g., 21st CCLCs) or at regular intervals (e.g., a dance class that meets weekly). A meta-analysis of OST programs conducted by Lauer et al. (2006) indicates that temporal variations of OST programs do not influence their effectiveness. Before-school programs, such as those offered by the YMCA, may offer academic support, free play, games, or physical activities (Black et al., 2015; Cradock et al., 2019; Whooten et al., 2018). Some provide breakfast. Many OST programs that operate during the school year also operate camps during the summer—both day and resident camps. Summer programs are described more fully in the National Academies consensus report, *Shaping Summertime Experiences* (NASEM, 2019). Some programs use external and/or internally developed curriculum to teach activities, while other programs offer leisure activities or co-create curriculum with youth (e.g. Thiebault & Witts, 2014).

The following sections shift from talking about the landscape of OST programs to what is known about the demographics of children and youth attending those programs across the United States, trends in participation over time, key factors affecting their participation, and opportunities to increase participation.

¹² While this report is focused on structured programming that is attended with regularity, some organizations or youth centers provide “drop-in” programming for children and youth, which offers flexibility to those who may experience challenges in attending regularly or who do not want to commit to a structured program (Chechak et al., 2019). Prior research points to challenges posed to unstructured programs, including negative developmental outcomes (Mahoney et al., 2004).

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPATION IN OST PROGRAMS

Understanding the current state of youth participation in OST programs, as defined in this report,¹³ is challenging given that few sources of population-level data on participation exist. Even more challenging is isolating the data to understand variation in OST participation by subgroups.

The nationally representative reports from the Afterschool Alliance’s America After 3PM (AA3) survey provide the most comprehensive dataset on youth participation in OST programs and therefore serve as the basis for the committee’s assessment. It is important to note that the survey assesses participation across all OST programs serving all children and youth, not only programs serving primarily those from low-income households. AA3 surveys¹⁴ randomly selected adults who live in the United States and are the parent or guardian of a school-age child who lives in their household. In the most recent AA3 study (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b), over 30,000 households were surveyed with questions about the ways in which their child or children are cared for in the hours after school, participation in organized activities and summer experiences, and household demographics. For consistency with this report, this chapter uses the term *OST programs*; however, AA3 used *afterschool programs*, which it defined as (Afterschool Alliance, 2020a):

a program that a child regularly attends that provides a supervised, enriching environment in the hours after the school day ends (typically around 3 P.M.). These programs are usually offered in schools or community centers and are different from individual activities such as sports, special lessons, or hobby clubs, and different from childcare facilities that provide supervision but not enrichment. (p. 1)

In this section, the committee first recaps participation rates from AA3 surveys among children and youth in the United States by race and ethnicity, household income, grade level, and community type, as well as demand for programs. Data reported here are based on results from the 2020 survey. Survey results from 2004, 2009, and 2014 are included to illustrate trends over time. The committee also offers the most recent data, from an Afterschool Alliance survey conducted in the summer of 2022; however, it is important to note that the 2022 survey utilizes a considerably smaller sample size than past surveys ($N \sim 1,500$), and therefore should be interpreted with caution. Then the committee looks at the makeup of participants within programs.

Demographics of OST Participation Among All U.S. Children and Youth

For 10 years, child and youth participation in OST programs in the United States steadily increased, with approximately 11% (6.5 million) of school-age children and youth participating in 2004 to 18% (10.2 million) in 2014. In 2020 (prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic),

¹³ The committee defines *OST programs* as structured school- and community-based programs offered outside of school hours that are not part of the school curriculum and that occur with regular frequency. These include programs offered before school, after school, on weekends, or during the summer.

¹⁴ The survey used a blend of national consumer panels, with the goal of completing at least 200 interviews in every state and Washington, DC. In states where this goal could not be reached using online panels, supplementary telephone interviews were conducted.

participation in OST programs declined to 14% (7.8 million) of the overall school-age population (see Figure 4-1). Analysis of a smaller sample of households in 2022 indicates that participation rates have further declined, which suggests impacts of COVID-19, but research utilizing larger and more representative sample sizes would offer a more accurate assessment. Despite the limitations of the 2022 analyses, the recent drop in participation warrants further examination to understand potential drivers.

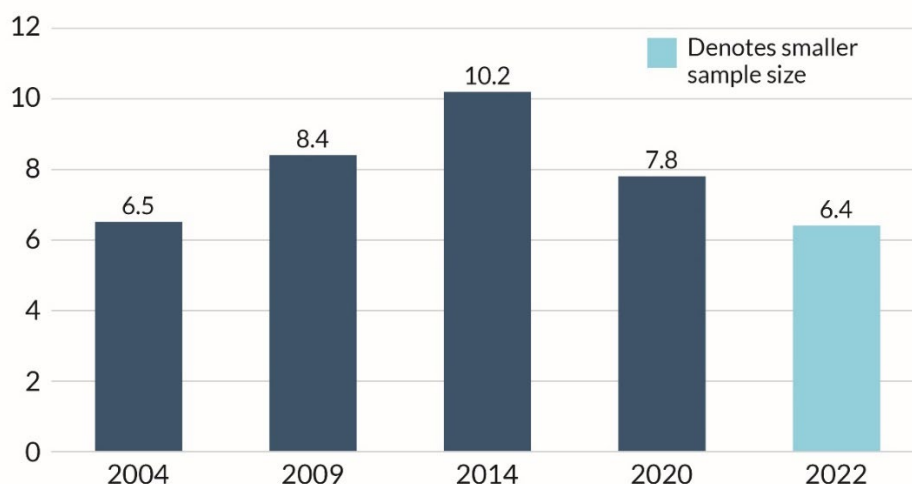


FIGURE 4-2 Number of participants in out-of-school time programs by the millions, from 2004, 2009, 2014, 2020, and 2022.

NOTE: Survey data from 2022 were nationally representative, but the sample size was significantly smaller than in previous years—the study surveyed 1,489 adults in the United States who were the parent or guardian of a school-age child who lives in their household.

SOURCE: Data from Afterschool Alliance, 2020b, p. 34; 2022a.

Participation by Race and Ethnicity

According to data from the Afterschool Alliance, participation rates among all White children and youth in the United States has remained constant since 2004; however, participation in OST programs among Black, Hispanic, and Asian youth decreased notably between 2014 and 2020 (see Figure 4-2). A sharp decline among Hispanic children and youth participation is evident. According to Afterschool Alliance (2020b, 2022), Black and Hispanic families have high unmet demand (60% for Hispanic children and 54% for Black children); additionally, Black and Hispanic parents disproportionately report experiencing barriers to entry such as programs being too expensive, unavailable in their communities, or lacking safe and reliable transportation options for their children, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

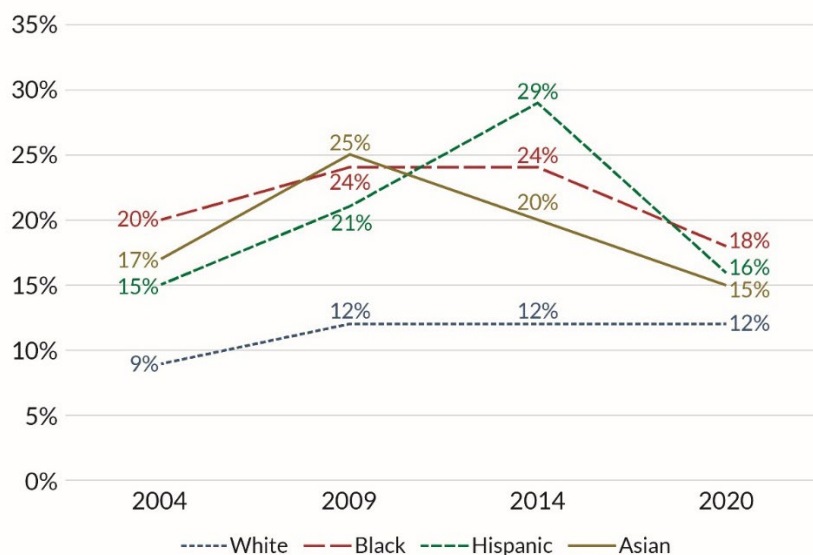


FIGURE 4-3 Percentage of U.S. children and youth participating in out-of-school-time programs by race and ethnicity, in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2020.

NOTE: Consistent data on participation rates for Native American and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander groups are not available.

SOURCE: Data on 2009, 2014, 2020 are from Afterschool Alliance, 2020b, p. 36. Data on 2004 was commissioned from the Afterschool Alliance and provided to the committee in July 2024.

Participation by Household Income

According to data from Afterschool Alliance (2020b), participation among children from higher-income families has increased since 2009 but fluctuated among those from low-income households, with an overall decline from 2014 to 2020. Of the 7.8 million children and youth overall in OST programs in 2020, 2.7 million were from low-income households (see Figure 4-4a). Figure 4-4b further breaks down participation rates among children and youth from low-income households in 2020 by race and ethnicity, showing that Black and Asian children and youth from low-income households are more likely to participate than White and Hispanic youth from low-income households (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b, 2024). Results from the AA3 survey indicate that unmet demand for afterschool programs has grown to roughly 24.6 million young people as of 2020 (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b), with about 11 million children from low-income families reporting that they would participate in an afterschool program if they had access to one (Afterschool Alliance, 2024).

OST PROGRAMS AND PARTICIPATION

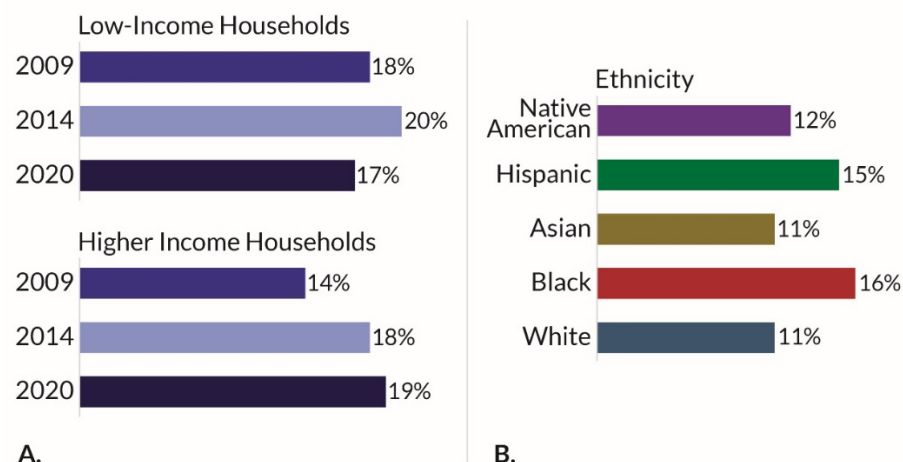


FIGURE 4-4 (a) Changes in the percentage of U.S. children and youth from low-income households participating in out-of-school time programs since 2009. (b) Participation of children and youth from low-income households in 2020, by race and ethnicity.

SOURCE: Data for (a) from Afterschool Alliance, 2020b, p. 36. Data for (b) was commissioned from the Afterschool Alliance and provided to the committee in July 2024.

Participation by Grade Level

Data from the AA3 survey show fluctuations in OST program participation by grade level since 2009. Between 2009 and 2014, participation rates increased across children and youth in elementary, middle, and high school with decreases across grade levels noted between 2014 and 2020 (see Figure 4-5). Unmet demand remains the highest among children in grades K–5 at 56%, with grades 6–8 at 47% and 9–12 at 36%; all three groups have experienced an increase in demand since 2009 (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.).

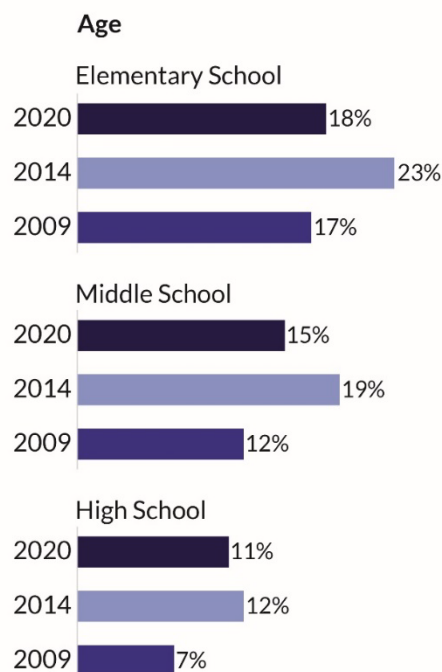


FIGURE 4-5 Changes in participation in out-of-school-time activities by grade level since 2009.
SOURCE: Afterschool Alliance, 2020b.

By Region and Community Type

Across the United States, participation in OST programs has decreased between 2014 and 2020, despite minimal changes in overall child and youth population numbers. Georgia, Indiana, Wyoming, and Idaho saw the smallest decline in participation, while the biggest drops in participation occurred in Washington, DC; Rhode Island; Maine; and Nevada. Trends in participation from 2004 to 2020 by locale show decreases among children and youth living in urban and rural neighborhoods, while those in suburban neighborhoods remained steady (see Figure 4-6). Afterschool Alliance (2021b) reports that unmet demand in rural areas has been on the rise, jumping from 39% in 2009 to 47% in 2020. Within rural communities, unmet demand is yet higher among low-income and Black, Latino, and AANHPI (Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander) children all reporting demand higher than the rural average.



FIGURE 4-6 Percentage of U.S. children and youth participating in out-of-school-time programs by community type, in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2020.

SOURCE: Data were commissioned from the Afterschool Alliance and provided to the committee in July 2024.

Demographics of Participants Within OST Programs

The makeup of children and youth within OST programs provides additional information when trying to understand participation trends, particularly among children and youth from marginalized¹⁵ backgrounds. Table 4-2 presents the profile of OST participants by select demographic characteristics. As noted above, data from the 2022 survey have been included but need to be interpreted with caution because of the small sample size. Data from the Afterschool Alliance (2024) describe the following trends:

- Within programs, most participants are White, of elementary school age, and from households with higher incomes. Between 2014 and 2022, the composition of participants shifted, with Black and Hispanic children and youth composing a growing percentage of OST participants.
- Within programs, the sharpest decline among participants between 2014 and 2020 was among children and youth from low-income backgrounds. In 2014, 45% of participants were reported to be from low-income families, compared with 34% in 2020, despite steady increases in participation among children and youth from low-income backgrounds between 2009 and 2014.
- Within programs, the racial composition of participants from low-income families mirrors the composition of overall participants, with the majority of youth from low-income communities being White.

¹⁵ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering’ where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage” (p.1). The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See Box 1-3 in Chapter 1.

- Within programs, across both urban and suburban settings, low-income families compose a smaller percentage of participants. Among those participants in rural settings, the distribution of children from low- and high-income families is more similar.

In addition, Afterschool Alliance (2024) reports that, in 2020, approximately 19% of participants identified as having some form of special need (self-defined) or as having a specific physical, emotional, or learning disability.¹⁶ The 2020 AA3 survey asked participants about primary language and cultural identification; 10% of Hispanic OST participants reported speaking primarily Spanish at home (Afterschool Alliance, 2024). Data on immigrant and refugee status are not available. Data on multiracial youth within OST programs are also not available.

TABLE 4-2 Out-of-School-Time Program Participants by Select Demographics

	2009	2014	2020	2022
White	60%	71%	60%	67%
Black	14%	15%	19%	14%
Hispanic	14%	11%	21%	29%
Asian	8%	8%	7%	3%*
Native American	1%	2%	2%	1%*
Low Income	41%	45%	34%	32%
White			50%	56%*
Black			24%	17%*
Hispanic			27%	37%*
Asian			3%	2%*
Native American			3%	1%*
Higher Income	59%	54%	66%	68%
White			65%	72%
Black			16%	12%*
Hispanic			18%	25%*
Asian			8%	3%*
Native American			2%	1%*
Female		49%	49%	47%
Male		51%	50%	53%
Urban	40%	30%	32%	36%
Low Income			36%	30%*
Higher Income			64%	70%
Suburban	47%	44%	47%	50%
Low Income			27%	28%*

¹⁶ Respondents were asked, “Has your ____ grader been identified as a student with special needs, or diagnosed with a specific physical, emotional or learning disability?”

Higher Income			73%	71%
Rural	14%	21%	20%	14%
Low Income			46%	50%*
Higher Income			54%	50%*
Unsure		5%	1%	0%

* Very small sample size.

NOTE: 2022 survey data were nationally representative, but the sample size was significantly smaller than in previous years—the study surveyed 1,489 adults in the United States who were the parent or guardian of a school-age child who lives in their household.

SOURCE: Data were commissioned from the Afterschool Alliance and provided to the committee in July 2024.

UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATION IN OST PROGRAMS

Current survey data illustrated above shows that between 2014 and 2020 participation in OST among children and youth has declined, with over one-third of those participating coming from low-income households. Participation among Black, Hispanic, and Asian populations declined but remained constant for White children and youth, and among low-income households, Black and Asian children and youth are more likely to participate than White and Hispanic youth. Participation rates also decreased across grade levels with high school-age participants continuing to participate in lower rates than elementary- and middle school-age participants. Finally, participation among children and youth living in urban and rural neighborhoods declined, while those in suburban neighborhoods remained steady (Afterschool Alliance, 2024).

Although on the surface participation in an OST program may seem to be a simple factor (i.e., Did a child attend or not?), participation is complex. *Participation* includes intensity (how often young people attend), duration (how long they attend), breadth (the degree to which they participate in multiple types and number of activities), and engagement (how involved they are when attending a program) (Bohnert et al., 2010). Participation in an OST program affects a young person's experiences within the program and developmental outcomes, which will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7. This section offers information to better understand what factors affect participation rates.

Although literature has established a distinct gap in OST program participation by income (Snellman et al., 2015), the reasons for this gap are less agreed upon (Bennett et al., 2012). Parents with low incomes report that they would like their children to be involved in OST programming but that they can experience significant barriers to entry, often shaped by society-level systems such as government policy, that wealthier families do not face. These barriers include, but are not limited to, atypical parental work schedules, knowledge of available programs, program fees, and concerns regarding neighborhood safety (Vandell et al., 2019). Beyond barriers, children and youth and their caregivers take into account other considerations when deciding whether or not to participate in OST programs. Understanding both barriers and other considerations can support the development of strategies to promote participation. The following sections delve into these issues, first looking at pathways to entering programs.

Onramps to OST Participation

Parents and Guardians Decide

Parents and guardians are largely the ones deciding whether to enroll their children in OST programs and in which type of programs. Parents find and select OST programs in a number of ways (see Figure 4-7). In a study by Learning Heroes (2021), parents reported that the two most common ways to find a program were speaking to other parents or children who participate in the program and seeking out information from the program itself. The factors shaping these decisions are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

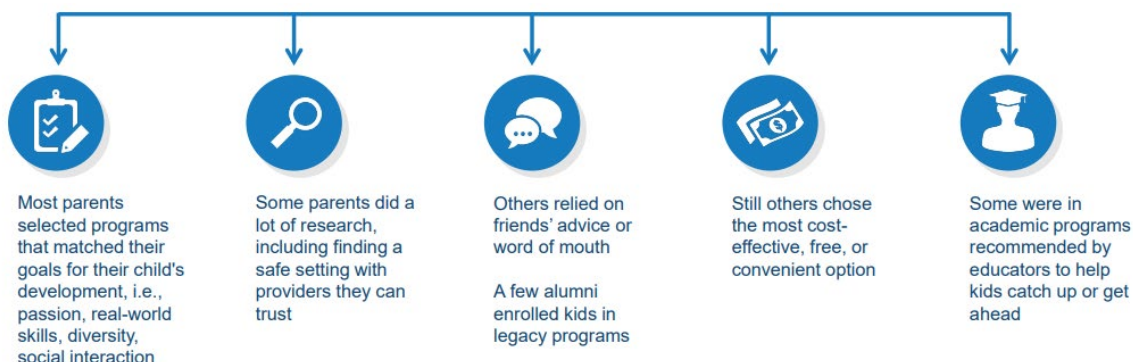


FIGURE 4-7 Parents choose out-of-school-time programs through multiple pathways.
SOURCE: Learning Heroes, 2021.

Children and Youth Decide

As children and youth get older, they become increasingly likely to be the main decision-makers in their attendance, making choices on their own from a larger selection of specialized extracurricular activities (Akiva et al., 2014).

Juvenile Courts Decide, with Parents and Guardians

For young people with risk of or prior juvenile justice system involvement, enrollment in OST programs can be a voluntary choice made by their parents or guardians (Miller et al., 2012). Placement into an OST program may also be recommended by a juvenile judge after adjudication or other disposition of a juvenile court case (Afterschool Alliance, 2020c). This is based on the juvenile justice system notion of *parens patriae*—the court is viewed as a “parent” that can make decisions and recommendations for a young person with juvenile justice system involvement (Feld, 2017).

There is limited evidence regarding *how* children and youth within the juvenile justice system are placed into OST programs, but OST programs have historically been viewed as an important component of services for this population (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Leone et al., 2002; Peter, 2002). The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act’s 2018 reauthorization specifically mentioned nondetention options (e.g., training programs, OST programs) as including delinquency prevention programs or as replacement options for juvenile facility detention (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2018). Finally, OST programs have been viewed as potentially helpful in addressing a variety of post-release and transition needs for children and youth reentering their home communities after juvenile justice system

involvement; OST programs can support social skill development, provide in-depth training for skills, and support the development of consistent one-on-one mentoring schedules with invested professionals (Youth.gov, n.d.).

Key Factors Affecting Enrollment and Participation

As the majority of OST programs for children and youth are attended voluntarily, the question of why individuals join and continue to attend is prominent. Individual-, program-, and system-level factors affect OST program participation as the following section illustrates, describing often-cited factors shaping decision-making around and access to OST programs, which can contribute to differences across subgroup participation.

In considering these factors, it is important to remember that the reasons behind enrollment, the challenges that families and young people face to program participation, and the potential ways to alleviate these challenges depend on each family's situations and contexts. For example, some programming requires parent involvement for younger children, whereas older youth may be managing attendance independently and may exert a stronger voice in what they do outside school. Additionally, while a barrier to attendance may be present in urban, suburban, and rural contexts, such as lack of transportation, the underlying reasons that make it a barrier and the opportunities to address the barrier may be quite different based on the setting.

Program Availability, Program Location, and Transportation

Data from the Afterschool Alliance (2020b) reveal that Black and Hispanic parents from low-income households cite (1) the availability of programs in a community, (2) their proximity to the neighborhoods where youth live, and (3) the availability of safe transportation to and from programming as important reasons for their decision not to enroll their child in an OST program; they report these issues more often than White parents from low-income households (p. 32). Parents living in areas of concentrated poverty were also more likely than their higher-income counterparts to report lack of safe transportation (51% vs. 39%) (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b).

The availability of free transportation facilitates attendance (Kamrath, 2019), whereas a lack of transportation and the associated safety issues (e.g., having to walk or take public transportation in the dark) hinder attendance (Maljak et al., 2014). As reported by Clarke et al. (2023), nationally, 17% of youth (age 14 to 17) have been indirectly exposed to community violence, and the risk of multiple exposures increases significantly among young people living in urban areas, where violent crime is concentrated in low-resource neighborhoods. Urbanicity plays a role in access to public transportation, but even for youth in urban areas with access to public buses or trains, transportation costs and safety may still hinder their use. In many communities, public transportation options may be scarce or unreliable, making it challenging for children and youth to travel to and from OST program sites. In rural areas, 40% of residents in the United States have no public transit options (Brown & Stommes, 2004). Box 4-1 details considerations, barriers, and demand around OST programs in rural settings.

Transportation challenges are ever present in rural communities, but, as described in Lindsay (2020), can be compounded for many individuals with disabilities. As Archer (2021) points out, although these barriers to accessing high-quality OST programming are due to racialized marginalization, they are often compounded by economic inequality. The author finds that Black, Latine, and Native American youth are far less likely to have access to reliable public

transportation because of the impacts of historical and present-day discriminatory transportation policies (Archer, 2021).

BOX 4-1 Considerations, Barriers, and Demand Around OST Programs Among Rural Families

Data from the Afterschool Alliance's (2021a) America After 3pm survey show that in 2020 approximately 4.5 million children and youth in rural communities would be in an out-of-school-time (OST) program if one were available, increasing from 3.1 million children and youth in 2014; for every rural young person in a program, four more are waiting to get in.

Families living in rural communities look to OST programs for a variety of reasons: "keeping their children safe, providing help with homework, promoting physical activity and consumption of healthy snacks and meals, and giving working parents peace of mind when they are at work" (Afterschool Alliance, 2016, p. 23). Families living in rural areas cite cost, transportation, and program location as the primary barriers to enrolling their child in an OST program. Reported barriers to access in rural communities have increased since 2014 (see Figure 4-8).

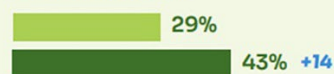
Percentage of rural families reporting the following were an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program

● 2014 ● 2020 ● Percentage point change

Programs too expensive



Hours of operation



No safe way to and from programs



No available programs



Inconvenient program locations



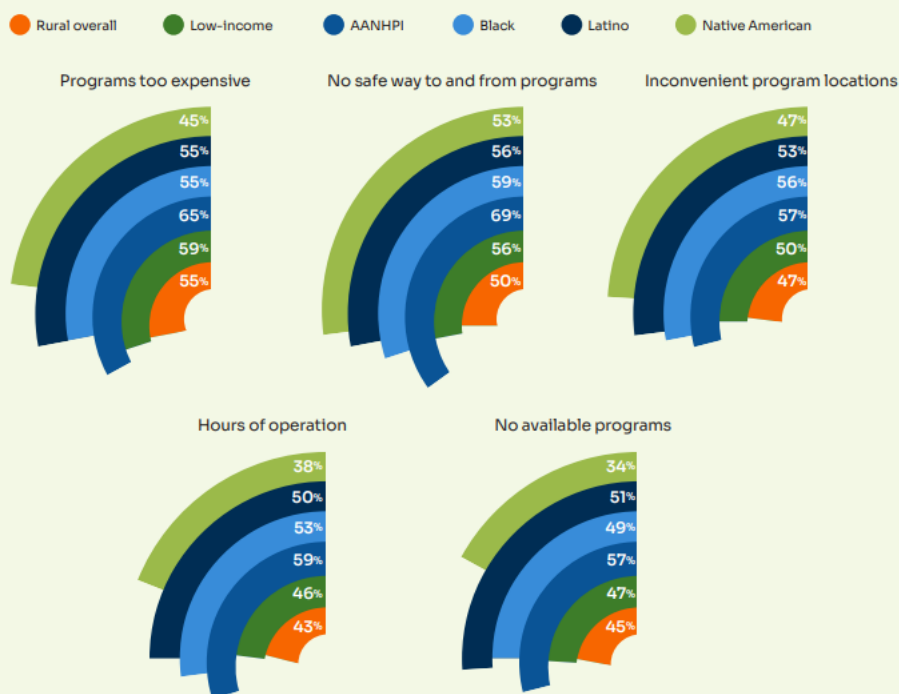
FIGURE 4-8 Factors in decision-making on out-of-school-time program participation among families living in rural areas, from 2014 to 2020.

SOURCE: Afterschool Alliance, 2021a, p. 17.

Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander families living in rural areas cited transportation (69%) and program cost (65%) as two primary access barriers (see Figure 4-9; Afterschool Alliance, 2021a). Similarly, Black families living in rural areas reported that transportation (59%) and inconvenient program locations (56%) were the most significant barriers to enrolling their child, with cost also factoring in greatly (55%). These statistics were higher for these groups than for rural families overall. Native American parents (53%) were more likely to cite transportation as a barrier than rural families overall (50%). A relatively small percentage of Native American families cited cost (45%) and availability of programs (34%) as barriers to access (Afterschool Alliance, 2021a).

Figure 4: Barriers are greater for rural families with low incomes and rural families of color

Percentage of rural parents reporting that the following were important factors in their decision not to enroll their child in an afterschool program

**FIGURE 4-9** Barriers to out-of-school time program participation for rural families with low incomes, disaggregated by race.

NOTE: AANHPI = Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander.

SOURCE: Afterschool Alliance, 2021a, p. 18.

Data from Afterschool Alliance (2021a) also show that, compared with the 47% of rural children overall who would be enrolled in an OST program if one were available, 59% of Black children and youth and 57% of Hispanic children and youth living in rural communities lack access. Similarly, 57% of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander children and youth in rural communities would be enrolled if a program were available to them. Fifty-two percent of rural families with low-income would enroll their child if a program were available, compared with 54% for rural families overall (Afterschool Alliance, 2021a, p. 7).

Program Costs and Family Resources

Many OST programs require fees for participation to cover operating costs (e.g., salaries and benefits, facilities). A survey of Pennsylvania-based OST providers found that more than one-third of OST programs received 75% of their funding from parents (Joint State Government Commission, 2021). In parent surveys, program costs remain a key concern, with 57% of parents reporting that the cost of OST programs was an important factor in their decision not to enroll their child (Afterschool Alliance, 2022a, p. 3). Fees can make programs inaccessible to families from low-income households, contributing to the gap in participation seen between families with low and high incomes. Parents with higher incomes spend more money on goods and services aimed at enriching the experiences of their children (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). AA3 data show that higher-income families spend more than five times as much on those opportunities than

families in the lowest income bracket (~\$3,600 per year and ~\$700 per year, respectively [Afterschool Alliance, 2020b]).

Families with low incomes may also have to prioritize where they apply their resources; they may require older children to stay at home to supervise younger siblings at times or may have to manage financial resources for OST activities across multiple children. Families may have to make difficult decisions on which activities to support for which children or decisions between an activity for one child versus the family overall (Ramos Carranza & Simpkins, 2023). Families may be encouraged to enroll their children in programs if all their children could attend one program, which would alleviate the responsibility of older siblings to take care of younger siblings and reduce transportation problems for parents who need to pick up multiple children at the end of the day (Cornelli Sanderson & Richards, 2010).

A 2012 study conducted qualitative interviews of 51 parents at two urban middle schools and observed class differences in activity participation that were consistent with prior studies: the middle-class children participated in the most activities and the working-class children participated in the least, on average (Bennett et al., 2012). The parents' responses revealed that although children from both groups participated in in-school activities at similar rates, their OST activity participation differed greatly: working-class children's participation was largely centered around school and religious activities, with almost no reported participation in activities that middle-class children attended (e.g., private music lessons, summer programs at universities). This led researchers to suggest that financial constraints and other barriers to entry may lead working-class families to turn primarily to social institutions in their neighborhoods, such as schools and churches, to find activities for their children (Bennett et al., 2012).

Family Involvement

As mentioned in Chapter 3, family involvement in OST programs can mean many things (e.g., buying equipment, volunteering, managing schedules) and can support increased youth participation in OST programs. In one of the committee's public sessions,¹⁷ a program leader shared:

The biggest advice that we have is really about the relationship that the staff can have with parents. There is such an enormous amount of buy-in to our program from our parents. They are such champions of our organization not only with their own children, but with each other, talking about the organization, supporting each other. And so, it really is that relationship between the organization and the parents. . . . When that trust is there, our kids can keep coming back.

Parent leadership is an intrinsic part of some activities. In 2015, the Pew Research Center (2015) conducted a national survey of 2,000 parents—nearly one-third of respondents reported coaching their child in a sport over the course of the previous year, particularly fathers and parents of children over age 13. Elsewhere, it was found that most parents with a daughter in the Girl Scouts of America were involved with the program in some way and that they were largely responsible for the Girl Scout Cookie sales operations, the organization's largest fundraising activity (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2012; Vandell et al., 2019).

In 2007, researchers examined retention patterns in an New York City OST initiative that included programs serving children and youth in grades K–12 in both school-based and center

¹⁷ Public information-gathering session, February 8, 2024.

settings (Pearson et al., 2007). They found that family outreach was associated with higher participant retention and that programs with higher retention rates were more likely to have a *parent liaison*—a volunteer or staff member serving as a go-between for program and families. Of the largest program option, 53% of programs with high rates of youth reenrollment in 2006–2007 had a parent liaison in the first year of the initiative, compared with 39% of programs with medium retention and 31% of programs with low retention (Pearson et al., 2007). Researchers found that this trend was especially noticeable in programs run through community centers (Pearson et al., 2007).

Program Awareness

Child, youth, and family awareness about programs can be a barrier to OST enrollment (Cornelli Sanderson & Richards, 2010). Parents and caregivers may not be aware of the existence of OST programs because information about these programs is not reaching them, possibly because of language barriers or because the information is not coming through channels they frequently use or trust. For example, in their study of Mexican-origin families, Simpkins et al. (2013) found that parents viewed the church as a familiar and trusted institution where their children attend religious classes, and they preferred their children engage in church-based activities. The majority of parents received information directly from the church regarding activities, whereas other activities were often filtered through their children (Simpkins et al., 2013).

OST programs may struggle with visibility within the community, possibly because of a lack of physical presence in the community or insufficient advertising in places where families gather, such as community centers or local events. For example, if information is shared primarily through school channels and a parent does not regularly check school notices or newsletters, they may miss out on learning about available programs. Relatedly, OST programs may not have direct channels to children, youth, and families to make them aware of program availability.

Even if families are aware of OST options for their children, they may not be familiar with what these programs entail. For example, Simpkins et al. (2013) report that immigrant families may be unfamiliar with OST activities if they come from an area where these kinds of activities were not available or if they differed from those in the United States (e.g., different expectations, location).

Family Perceptions and Values

Families overwhelmingly see the value of high-quality OST programs for their children, with 94% of parents reporting being satisfied with the OST program their child attends (Afterschool Alliance, 2020a). Parents are more likely to enroll their children in OST activities if they believe these activities will benefit their child. Benefits include (1) providing alternative to spending time unsupervised with peers or doing sedentary activities, (2) giving children the freedom to follow their interests and improving skills they already showed aptitude for, (3) offering opportunities for personal development and academic enrichment, and (4) socialization with peers and strengthened family relationships (Barnett & Weber, 2008; Vandell et al., 2019). Data from AA3 surveys show that parents believe OST programs provide time for kids to engage with their peers and reduce unproductive screen time, get kids more excited about learning, and reduce the likelihood that they will use drugs or engage in other risky behaviors (Afterschool Alliance, 2020a). The benefits of participation extend to parents as well. When asked about

supports they receive from programs, 78% of parents with a child enrolled in an OST program report that programs help them keep their jobs, and 71% say that programs allow them to build their skills through classes or workshops offered (Doleh, 2021).

Researchers have also reported both the similarities and differences between what parents from different income brackets say they prioritize. In one study when asked about their feelings regarding children's participation in structured activities, parents from two class groups (working-class and middle-class) cited reasons for enrolling their children in an activity: common to both groups were a child's interest and opportunities for personal development, academic knowledge, keeping active, and socialization. However, middle-class parents also reported a desire to customize children's activities, wanting to ensure that children were enrolled in programs that meshed well with their abilities and interests. Working-class parents, on the other hand, cited safety and opportunities for social mobility as reasons that activities were beneficial for children (Bennett et al., 2012).

These activities also provide benefits that certain groups consider valuable. For example, Latine families cited *respeto* and *familismo* as benefits their children could gain from participating in activities, while Asian families cited family support, and European American families cited competition and effort (Barnett & Weber, 2008; Lin et al., 2018; Vandell et al., 2019).

Lareau (2003) found that families, particularly families with limited resources, were unlikely to support children's participation if activities were not valued. AA3 data show that half of parents without a child in an OST program report that they feel these programs would expose their child to negative influences, experiences, and values. This concern is greater among Hispanic and Black parents (Afterschool Alliance, 2020a).

Family perceptions may determine whether an adolescent participates in an activity and the quality of their participation (Ramos Carranza & Simpkins, 2023). In their study of Mexican-origin families, Ramos Carranza and Simpkins (2023) report that parents perceived the commitment required by organized activities (in terms of time and resources) as constraining their ability to participate in other culturally valued activities, such as spending time together as a family and attending church. Additionally, Simpkins et al. (2013) found that the majority of Mexican-origin youth interviewed in their study expressed a desire for a program environment that allowed them to speak both English and Spanish; however, their parents did not see the language gap as a barrier since their children were bilingual.

Participant Interests and Motivations

Across studies, scholars have found that attendance is facilitated by the availability of desired and fun activities, the presence of friends, a desire for a safe space where participants could avoid trouble, and the availability of snacks (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Fuller et al., 2013; Hicks et al., 2022; Kamrath, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Maljak et al., 2014).

Motivations to attend specialty programs can also connect to the type of program. For example, in a study of eight youth activism programs, Akiva et al. (2017) found that youth were drawn to both youth-adult relationships and the topic of youth activism, alongside the belongingness and sanctuary of the program. In a series of studies focused on a girls' physical activity program and affiliated body image curriculum (Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Marttinen et al., 2020; Meza & Marttinen, 2019; Simon et al., 2021), the creation of a gender-specific environment and activities appeared important for facilitating comfort and, therefore,

engagement in the program. Similarly, specific pedagogies were reported as facilitating youth engagement:

- a narrative approach to STEM education for girls (Pinkard et al., 2017);
- an afterschool math program for Latine youth that uses a curriculum linking math and social and emotional learning skills to other contexts, as well as to participants' personal values (Yu et al., 2021);
- projects that connect to the larger sociopolitical context (Vakil, 2014); and
- digital technology programs for urban youth (Thompson & Diaz, 2012).

Chapter 6 offers more discussion of the experiences of children and youth within OST programs and how this may affect their participation.

Moreover, evidence from Baldridge et al. (2024) and Williams and Deutsch (2016) shows that racism and discrimination may hinder young people's motivation, sense of belonging, and positive developmental outcomes. In a study of programs whose participants were Mexican-origin children, Ettekal et al. (2020) found that staff included stereotypical cultural activities as an approach to integrate cultural awareness into programs; however, youth and parents perceived a cultural misalignment that led to dropping out of activities.

In an ethnographic study of OST programs serving immigrant youth with a range of ethnic and language backgrounds in San Francisco, California, Gast et al. (2017) found that funding mandates, capacity issues, and the increasingly broad range of youth served limited the programs' ability to support native-language usage, so they adopted English-only policies. Additionally, Gast et al. (2017) report that while staff sought to support and empower immigrant youth, English-language learners were often left on the sidelines and had limited opportunities to develop social capital in OST programs.

Program Timing and Competing Activities

As shown in Figure 4-5 (earlier in this chapter), as youth get older, they are less likely to participate in OST activities. Adolescents may forego participation in programs for a variety of reasons—competition from other activities, including extracurricular activities (e.g., sports), obligations such as mandated tutoring, care responsibilities for family members, dislike of the people running the programs, or lack of parental permission (Borden et al., 2005; Hicks et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Maljak et al., 2014; Perkins et al., 2007). Another competing activity for older youth, especially those from low-income families, is employment. For youth from low-income households, employment is often motivated by the need to help with household expenses, whereas more affluent youth usually work to purchase luxury goods (Purtell & McLoyd, 2013).

BOX 4-2

Unsupervised Time—An Alternative to OST Participation

One alternative to children and youth participating in out-of-school-time (OST) activities is spending time unsupervised. As noted in Chapter 1, the public's concern about unsupervised youth prompted the emergence of organized OST activities (Halpern, 2002). This concern continues, given the outcomes associated with spending time unsupervised.

According to recent data, as many as 7.7 million children and youth spend time unsupervised (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b, p. 7). The number of young people who spend time unsupervised increases as they age. Findings from a national survey suggest that 4% of

elementary school, 18% of middle school, and 35% of high school children and youth spent time alone and unsupervised after school (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b, p. 17); however, a recent study of 2,900 largely Latine youth from low-income backgrounds suggests the number may be higher, with 36%–49% of children in Grades 3–5 and 67%–75% of children in Grades 6–8 spending some time alone and unsupervised (Simpkins et al., 2024). Not only do increasing numbers of young people spend time unsupervised as they age, even within the same family (Mahoney & Parente, 2009; McHale et al., 2009; Shumow et al., 2009; Updegraff et al., 2006; Vandivere et al., 2003), children and youth also are likely to spend greater amounts of time unsupervised as they age. Simpkins et al. (2024) report that sixth-grade adolescents (largely Latine from low-income backgrounds) spent 2 or more days per week unsupervised, on average, which was significantly higher than third-grade children, who spent about 1 day a week unsupervised.

Although adolescents are more mature developmentally and better equipped to do things independently than children, spending time unsupervised is associated with negative outcomes for children and youth in grades K–12. In fact, elementary and middle school children who spend time in organized OST activities but also spend substantial time unsupervised have similar poor outcomes as those who are not participating in organized OST activities (Gülseven et al., 2024; Vandell et al., 2022). One interpretation is that spending substantial time unsupervised lessens the potential positive effects of OST activities. This pattern is particularly consistent concerning the time children and youth spend unsupervised while spending time with peers. Several studies have documented positive associations between unsupervised time with peers and various indicators of problem behavior both in the United States (Flannery et al., 1999; Haynie & Osgood, 2005) and internationally (e.g., Dutch adolescents; Hoebe & Weerman, 2016). Spending time unsupervised with peers in high school was a consistent predictor of higher substance use during high school and into adulthood (Hsieh et al., 2023; Lee & Vandell, 2015), as well as risky and externalizing behavior (Lee et al., 2018), compared with adolescents' participation in organized OST activities and paid employment.

PROMISING STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING OST PARTICIPATION

Local intermediaries and municipalities, operating as coordinators, funders, and systems builders, are uniquely situated to positively influence participation in OST programs. The following sections describe efforts by these entities, as well as programs themselves, such as using data and mapping to improve availability and accessibility of programs and addressing challenges around transportation, program costs, incentives for participation, and program awareness that can result from systemic barriers to access to OST programming for children and youth. In some instances, intermediaries have addressed access and opportunity issues by meaningfully involving youth and families in the process.

Using Data to Address Access Gaps

Many intermediaries use data primarily for compliance purposes (e.g., meeting minimum quality standards). However, more robust systems allow for data to be collected and analyzed in ways that attend to more specific community needs (e.g., identifying and addressing program deserts in high-poverty communities). Some local intermediaries use geographic information system (GIS) technology to identify service gaps. Municipalities will conduct landscape analyses of varying degrees of complexity to identify these challenges and opportunities. At a macro

level, many municipal agencies map their OST programs, allowing them to know where programs exist and where they do not; where there are OST oases and where there are deserts (Sayin & Calma, 2023). More detailed data may include where certain types of programs (e.g., STEM) are concentrated, allowing agencies to identify barriers to access.

More complex uses of data include analysis across linked datasets—for example, to layer juvenile crime, housing, and community health statistics. In their most developed forms, municipal OST coordinating entities utilize individual-level statistics to yield more nuanced information about specific individuals' needs and related program outcomes.

The City of Baltimore, Maryland, uses data from several city departments to produce a robust picture of the city's OST system, including impacts of the system on community and municipality-wide health and well-being (Spoonier, 2011). The coordinating entity—the Family League of Baltimore—receives and analyzes data from OST programs, the Baltimore City Public Schools, the Baltimore City Police department, and various human service agencies. This aggregation of data allows the City to assess the degree to which OST programs support a variety of citywide goals, such as reducing juvenile crime and the teen pregnancy rate and increasing the number of youth who complete high school on time. Although most mapping efforts appear to be done at the state level and leverage existing relationships with research organizations (e.g., California), other local intermediaries map their program locations for similar purposes.

Recognizing the complex nature of collecting and reporting on the vast amounts of data collected, some intermediaries and municipalities have created dashboards and reports that make interpreting data much more accessible. These dashboards often include program type, age served, and location (Gamse et al., 2019). For example, the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma, has developed a publicly available interactive map for stakeholders to identify where programs are (and are not) (The Opp Project, n.d.).¹⁸ Similarly, the City of Philadelphia (n.d.), Pennsylvania, has developed a program locator tool to identify programs in different neighborhoods. Additionally, promising data on school–OST partnerships indicate the potential for cross-sector collaboration on establishing best practices for collecting and using data to address access and opportunity barriers. However, the committee did not assess the degree to which these partnerships already exist.

Increasing Access to Safe and Reliable Transportation

“There is a whole list of barriers that would keep a parent from being able to access a program. . . . So, transportation has been an important part of who we are since our founding,” shared one program leader in a public session with the committee¹⁹. Dedicated funding for programs to cover transportation costs can support program participation. Funders often have restrictions around the use of funds for this purpose (see Chapter 8). Local intermediaries and cities can also provide this type of funding; for example the City of Philadelphia provides funding to programs specifically for transportation to and from program locations. Some municipalities have enacted policies that have positively impacted young people's ability to access public transportation services. For example, Tulsa Transit partners with Tulsa Public Schools (n.d.) to provide high school students free transportation on public transit lines, in part to increase access to OST programs. Similarly, the City of Sacramento, California, through its

¹⁸ <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/justine.gramling/viz/shared/74X2YT4HZ>

¹⁹ This public session took place on February 8, 2024.

RydeFreeRT program, provides free public transportation for young people through grade 12. Transportation initiatives in cities around the country may close gaps in access to OST programs.

Youth in rural communities are also challenged by the lack of safe, reliable transportation to and from program sites (Afterschool Alliance, 2021b). This is largely due to lack of funding to support adequate transportation infrastructure and services. Though not directly related to OST, a number of rural communities are piloting services to reduce transportation gaps that may positively impact access to OST programs for these youth. Often supported by grants from federal and state governments, such as the Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program, rural communities are implementing and evaluating “on-demand micro-transit” programs, which may be more cost effective and responsive to community need. Unlike private ridesharing companies, these (largely) non-profit organizations work with small towns and cities to provide transportation to residents. For example, the city Wilson, North Carolina, a city of about 50,000 people located 50 miles east of Raleigh, has partnered with RIDE to provide low-cost (\$1.50/ride) transportation for seniors and residents with disabilities. These direct-to-consumer services could be expanded to include transportation for youth to and from OST programs (North Carolina Department of Transportation, 2023; Rural Health Information Hub, n.d.; Sherfinski, 2022).

Reducing or Eliminating Program Costs

Local intermediaries have implemented policies for reducing or eliminating program fees for low-income households. These policies include (1) scholarships; (2) sliding pay scales based on family income or the concentration of poverty in the neighborhood in which they live; (3) stipends for older youth to participate; and, (4) where possible, making program participation free for families with low incomes. For example, through a mix of both public and private support totaling over \$55 million in 2017, the City of Philadelphia provided funding to OST program providers, allowing them to offer free programming (Hartmann et al., 2017). Similarly, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), a local OST intermediary in Rhode Island, braids funding sources in part to ensure that youth from low-income communities can participate in OST activities. Many programs supported by PASA utilize scholarships or provide free programming to eligible participants. The Digital Harbor Foundation in Baltimore employs a “pay what you can” model so their program has no fixed cost, which allows for a wide range of participation.

Incentivizing Participation

As youth get older, OST programs compete against paid employment for their time. A mixed-methods study of OST programs in six U.S. cities—Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; New York, New York; Providence, Rhode Island; San Francisco, California; and Washington, DC—found that participation incentives can matter for attendance, engagement and retention, and that different types of incentives matter in different ways to older youth in urban areas (Deschenes et al., 2010). Reported incentives commonly included field trips, jobs, and school credit. Other incentives were food, grocery store gift cards, movie tickets, bus passes, and clothes. In interviews, OST providers stated that incentives offered a way to encourage participation by supplying youth in high-poverty areas with basic needs. Compensating youth from low-income households is a strategy programs can employ so youth do not have to choose between supporting household income and participating in enriching OST experiences (Young,

2023). Providing stipends can reduce differences in OST participation between higher-income and lower-income families by reducing financial barriers. Programs that offer youth stipends see higher demand rates and incentivize youth participation and engagement (Murray et al., 2021). Cities can offer stipends or encourage compensation at the programs in their communities. For example, the Seattle Youth Employment Program, run by the City of Seattle, Washington (n.d.), offers participation stipends to youth ages 16–24 from low-income backgrounds who receive job skills training and internship placement through the program. Stipends, especially those that can be competitive with wages, is a costly program component and can be challenging for underresourced or small program providers, which can in turn limit available program slots (Murray et al., 2021). However, dedicated investments in these kinds of incentives at the federal and state levels and by private funders can promote OST participation for youth from marginalized backgrounds.

Increasing Program Awareness

Some cities are actively considering how to connect families with existing OST programs. For example, in Miami-Dade County, Florida, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, The Children’s Trust, and Jewish Community Services of South Florida collaborated to establish a helpline for families to find OST options. Families can call 211 or visit its website. The helpline is free of charge and available 24 hours a day, with information in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and “most every other language” spoken in Miami-Dade County, according to organizers (WLRN, 2023).

In public sessions²⁰, the committee heard from program leaders on outreach strategies they have employed to increase enrollment. Many program leaders talked about sending program staff to schools to recruit youth, a strategy employed by Sitar Arts Center, an organization providing arts-based programming in Washington, DC. Program staff of the Virginia-based Urban League of Hampton Roads go into settings where children and youth are most likely to be comfortable, such as meeting with them during lunch to talk about the program.

Building trust and rapport with children and youth was a common theme heard among program leaders to increase program awareness and increase access to young people in the community. Staff of the Leaders of Tomorrow Program at the Clarkston Community Center in Georgia volunteer at the local high school in order to develop relationships with youth who may be interested in joining the program. The University of Arizona’s Tribal Extension Program, which is part of 4-H, is youth-created and works closely with the Hopi tribe, the community being served. Volunteers from the community are screened and vetted and then charged with leading the programs. All of the children, youth, teachers, and project leaders are from the community. Lastly, Momentum Bike Clubs based in South Carolina, a program focused on fostering positive mentoring and relationships to children and youth in Grades 6–12 through cycling; the director shared that the program partners with a school, where teachers serve as mentors and can recruit children and youth into the program. This approach benefits both the program and participants—participants develop stronger relationships with their teachers, who learn about challenges the children and youth may be facing at home.

²⁰ These public sessions took place on October 19, 2023, February 8, 2024, and April 18, 2024. More information about these sessions and the participating organizations can be found at <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/promoting-learning-and-development-in-k-12-out-of-school-time-settings-for-low-income-and-marginalized-children-and-youth#sectionPastEvents>.

PASA also relies on recruitment strategies based on making direct personal contact with youth. Recruitment fairs inform youth and families about program options. Staff conduct targeted phone outreach to recruit participants and send reminders about sessions to increase participation once young people are enrolled (Kotloff, 2010).

Centering Youth and Community in Policy and Programming

Intermediaries can address opportunity gaps by centering youth and communities in systems-building efforts. Adopting participatory approaches to increase access and opportunity, OSTs intermediaries may convene youth in a council or create standing youth and community board positions to promote power-sharing in decision-making. For example, there is a small but growing movement among states and school districts to have students serve as board members, albeit some without voting power. As of 2021, 31 states allow local boards to have student representatives with 7 allowing the elected members to vote (Roberts-Grmela, 2024). Additionally, some school districts have begun paying student board members to eliminate financial barriers to participation for low-income youth (Velez, 2025). This strategy to foster shared leadership could be adopted by municipalities with child or youth offices or intermediaries managing OST programs. Deschenes et al. (2010) provide empirical evidence on approaches that align with participatory decision-making practices and could be adopted to increase participation in OST. Among others, these practices include a high number of leadership opportunities and youth council/decision-making groups. Similarly, youth can be engaged directly in more discreet initiatives aimed at increasing access to OST (Deschenes et al., 2010). Box 4-3 illustrates examples of successfully engaging youth to improve data collection, program awareness, and program opportunities.

BOX 4-3

Youth-Centered Approaches to Supporting Participation in OST Programs

The City of Houston, Texas, partners with the Houston Endowment, the County Department of Education, and United Way of Greater Houston to support the citywide Out 2 Learn (O2L) (n.d.) program. Initiated in 2018, O2L works to address the out-of-school-time (OST) service deserts in high-need and/or low-income communities. Partners work toward expanding access to high-quality OST services through a coordinated, youth-centered approach to professional development, community investment, and community awareness of the importance of quality services and youth voice. The Mayors' Office of Education and Youth Engagement employs a full-time staff member to coordinate the program with the support of a program director, and the City provides approximately \$495,000 in general funds in addition to funding from the Houston Endowment.

In addition to City-run OST programs, O2L (n.d.) offers a program finder tool identifying and describing OST programs across the greater Houston area. O2L hosts quarterly meetings for OST professionals to discuss program quality, trends, best practices, and opportunities for providers to network and collaborate. O2L also conducts outreach throughout the greater Houston area to raise awareness of the importance of OST.

O2L prioritizes incorporating youth into program design and decisions. In 2022, O2L piloted the Youth Leaders Project (YLP), providing \$500 stipends for young people in eighth grade through college to update the OST program database. The YLP brought together youth committed to promoting equity and increasing accessibility to OST programs for all Houston families. Participants were able to identify 277 program entries needed to be added or edited to

the database, as many programs changed, opened, or closed as a result of the pandemic. Because of the success of the YLP, program partners elected to continue the project beyond the pilot phase and continue to recruit youth and acquire funding to host future cohorts.

An example of a youth-centered approach to continuous improvement in OST settings is Youth GO. Adaptable to any OST program, Youth GO is “an approach to gathering participant perspectives that can be implemented with the resource and staff constraints OST programs commonly face” (Stacy et al., 2018, p.35). Using a continuous improvement approach, Youth GO employs a five-step process for gathering youth perspectives, in which youth and staff work collaboratively at each stage. For example, in Step 1, “Climate Setting,” youth are introduced to each other, general goals are discussed and then youth work with facilitators to create community agreements. Employing youth participatory action research strategies in Step 4, “Selecting,” facilitators assist youth in discussing themes and categories from their data collection efforts, which are then used by staff to adjust programming based on youths’ needs. Individual programs could adopt Youth GO to center youth in continuous improvement at scale.

As evidenced by these examples and by other studies focusing on youth participatory action research, intermediaries can play a key role in closing gaps in access. These critical approaches to both systems-building and programming can create better opportunities for all children and youth to participate in OST programs (Baldrige et al., 2024; Palmer et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

A defining feature of OST programs is their multiplicity. They vary across multiple dimensions, without a standard organizing categorization. Who offers programs, the kinds of activities offered, their geographic location, whether they serve meals are all dimensions that paint a picture of the broad landscape of OST programs serving children and youth in the United States; these dimensions also affect participation in OST programs. The variance is beneficial because it allows programs to meet participants’ and communities’ unique needs. However, existing data do not provide an accurate map of programs across the country, especially those that serve children and youth from low-income households, including the types of programs and where they are situated, which can help to identify gaps in service.

Despite high levels of satisfaction with OST programs among parents and a decade of steadily increasing participation, the number of children and youth participating in OST programs declined between 2014 and 2020 to 14% (7.8 million) of the overall school-age population (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b). Of the 7.8 million 2.7 million were from low-income households (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b). As described above, participation rates among Black, Hispanic, and Asian youth decreased between 2014 and 2020, and Black and Asian children and youth from low-income households are more likely to participate than White and Hispanic youth from low-income households (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b). The data reported in this chapter provide some indication of the profile of OST participation; but these data are limited, and the picture of participation for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds in OST programs is far from clear, which hinders not only program design but also the ability to secure funding for those most in need.

Moreover, the ability to discern participation across subpopulations is challenging. Interpretations based on a single demographic dimension mask critical differences among subgroups of children and youth. Given the increased awareness that the impact of multiple

social determinants is cumulative (Braveman et al., 2011), it is imperative that OST participation data are collected in a way that permits examination at the intersections of such demographics, in order to truly understand OST programming participation, gaps, and needs. The gaps in data around OST participation present an opportunity to improve data collection. For example, in rural areas, communities may rely on partnerships with universities or nonprofit organizations to address gaps in resources and information. These opportunities are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

While OST participation has declined, unmet demand has continued to rise, increasing to 24.6 million children in 2020. Unmet demand is highest among Black and Hispanic populations, suggesting that barriers to participation in OST are not evenly distributed. According to survey data, program cost, lack of safe reliable transportation, and program awareness and availability remain key challenges to accessing OST programming (Afterschool Alliance, 2020b). State and local intermediaries, municipalities, and programs have implemented policies and strategies that have shown promise for tackling these challenges.

Given the increasing unmet demand, critical approaches to addressing barriers to participation in OST may be more successful than traditional approaches to policymaking and system-building, which often exclude people from marginalized communities. Debates about what constitutes evidence and who should be involved in policymaking continue to evolve, but individual programs and intermediaries have demonstrated the capacity to collaborate with youth and communities to close gaps in participation in OST.

CONCLUSION 4-1: Systematic information of OST programming at a national level, including the type of programming, location, and populations served, is needed to offer a clearer understanding of the availability and accessibility of programs for children and youth.

CONCLUSION 4-2: Understanding OST program participation among children and youth in the United States necessitates examining participation at the intersections of multiple demographics. However, there are no population-level data on OST participation for some groups of children and youth, such as young people with chronic health conditions, disabilities, and special needs, and young people experiencing homelessness, involved with the juvenile justice system, or from immigrant families. Data on intersections of marginalization are also lacking.

CONCLUSION 4-3: The limited available data indicate that despite steady increases in participation among children and youth in the early 2000s, participation rates declined between 2014 and 2020, especially among Black, Hispanic, and Asian youth. While participation has declined, unmet demand has continued to rise. Population-level or nationally representative data that report on participation at intersecting demographics, although not currently available, are critical to document and explore reasons for these trends.

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²¹ The Wallace Foundation commissioned the paper *OST Sector Typology*, by Bianca J. Baldrige and Deepa S. Vasudevan, alongside research assistants Virginia Downing (University of Wisconsin–Madison), Pablo Aquiles-Sanchez (University of Wisconsin–Madison), and Edom Tesfa (Harvard University). An updated version for an academic journal is in progress by the authors.

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5

OST Workforce

The quality and competency of the workforce supporting out-of-school-time (OST) programs are important elements of program quality, contributing to young people’s level of engagement in programs and the impact of programs on their outcomes. Staff are a critical piece of young people’s experiences in OST programs. The relationship between OST staff and participants for their experiences and outcomes is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 and 7. This chapter¹ focuses on the staff themselves—offering a picture of the multifaceted role that they play, the beliefs that inform their approaches to working with children and youth, and competencies and practices that may foster positive youth development. The committee follows the path of youth development practitioners in OST settings, discussing motivations, educational background, and experiences that lead individuals to enter the field of youth development, as well as often-cited challenges that push them to leave their job or the field altogether. The chapter ends with discussion of opportunities to strengthen the career trajectories of youth development practitioners to create more stable and high-quality OST settings for children and youth.

Key Chapter Terms

Direct-service or frontline staff: Staff who work directly with youth and deliver programs, supports, and services.

Youth development practitioner: Adult leaders who guide youth through social, educational, and personal development, often in informal educational spaces. This includes professionals and volunteers.

Youth work: Activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature conducted by, with, and for young people.

PROFILE OF THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORKFORCE

The contexts, populations, and settings in youth development are varied—thus, there is no narrow or universal definition of the profession. However, the committee’s review found that the profession centers on fostering the holistic development of children and youth, and that youth development practitioners are adult leaders who guide children and youth through social, educational, and personal development within informal educational spaces. They operate within family, community, and societal contexts, emphasizing a developmental-ecological perspective

¹ This chapter was greatly supported by a commissioned paper authored by two researchers: Dr. Bianca Baldrige, Harvard University, and Dr. Deepa Vasudevan, American Institutes for Research.

that underscores the interplay between individuals and their physical, social, cultural, and political surroundings (Freeman, 2013; Fusco et al., 2013; Krueger, 2002).

Throughout the report the committee uses the term *youth development practitioner*, however those who engage in this work may be recognized by other titles, including but not limited to *youth workers, informal educator, afterschool practitioner, teaching artist, coach, or counselor*. Youth development practitioners operate within many youth-serving settings across many sectors, including school districts, community-based organizations, United Ways, cultural institutions such as libraries and museums, detention centers, recreation and parks, faith-based institutions, group homes, and other spaces (see Figure 4-1 in Chapter 4).

According to the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (n.d.), roughly 2.53 million youth development practitioners work in the United States. (For comparison, in 2022, public schools in the United States employed 3.2 million full-time equivalent teachers [National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.]). Still, this count of youth development practitioners may not fully reflect the workforce’s size, as many volunteer and part-time positions span various locales where young people are confined or need support (Baldrige et al., in preparation). In addition, many professions would not be counted because of their context, though youth development is a key part of their job; for example, teen librarians spend their days supporting youth development, but their profession is listed as *librarian*. Indeed, taking the frame of “allied youth fields,” Robinson and Akiva (2021) suggest that professions associated with supporting youth development include child welfare, juvenile justice, police, mental health, housing, transportation, and others. In this sense, far more professions are involved in youth development than in teaching.

No sources provide population-level data on youth development practitioners in the United States. Therefore, the committee examined existing survey data to better understand practitioners’ characteristics and experiences. Organizations such as the National AfterSchool Association, as well as independent researchers, have conducted surveys to gauge the breadth of experiences of youth development practitioners. The most recent and largest survey to date is the Power of Us 2022 Workforce Survey (American Institutes for Research [AIR], 2025), a national cross-sector survey of over 10,000 paid staff and volunteers who work with children and youth outside of classroom settings. Without population-level data, it is not possible to assess the extent to which this sample represents the youth development workforce, but the survey helps to build a national profile of these workers. Table 5-1 offers recent data from over 7,000 paid staff survey respondents. Survey results indicate an overrepresentation of females and of White youth development practitioners (AIR, 2025). Most respondents hold full-time positions, and most are located in metropolitan areas.

TABLE 5-1 Select Characteristics of Respondents to the Power of Us Workforce Survey

Characteristics	Survey Respondents
Age	
18–25 Years Old	19%
26–39 Years Old	37%
40–54 Years Old	28%
55 Years and Up	14%
Race/Ethnicity ^a	
American Indian	1%
Asian	3%
Black or African American	14%

Hispanic or Latinx	17%
Middle Eastern	<1%
Native Hawaiian	<1%
White	56%
Two or More Races/Ethnicities	7%
Unsure	1%
Not White	
Not White	43%
Sex	
Female	74%
Male	21%
Position Type	
Full Time	71%
Part Time	20%
Other	9%
Tenure in the Field	
Earlier Career (<15 Years)	53%
Sustained Career (>15 Years)	45%
Work Location ^b	
Metro Area	80%
Non-Metro Area	20%
Leadership Position	
Yes	73%
No	27%

^a Respondents could select more than one race/ethnicity, so percentages will not sum to 100%.

^b Metro area and nonmetro area are defined based on the rural-urban continuum from the USDA:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-continuum-codes/documentation>

SOURCE: Generated by the committee. Data from AIR, 2025.

Roles and Responsibilities

Professional preparedness for youth development practitioners entails content-based knowledge and preparation, knowledge and experience engaging in youth development practices, and managerial adeptness. The Power of Us Survey outlined common roles and titles that youth development practitioners may hold in OST settings (AIR, 2025):

- An *organizational leader* (e.g., executive director, officer, president) leads the organization or a major team at the organization.
- A *program leader* (e.g., program manager, program director, program coordinator, youth development manager) oversees the development, design, and implementation of one or more programs, supports, and services to youth at the organization.
- A *site leader* (e.g., site director, camp director, club manager, youth minister, youth librarian, head coach) oversees the implementation and supervises the delivery staff at a site.
- *Frontline staff* (e.g., instructor, youth development professional, activity specialist, camp counselor, coach, museum educator, childcare provider) work directly with youth and deliver programs, supports, and services at the organization.

In practice, the lines between these roles are often blurred, with practitioners wearing many hats and their job expectations evolving to meet the needs of the programs, which can add to the difficulties in defining this profession. Most of the respondents in the Power of Us

survey—regardless of role—reported that they work directly with youth (AIR, 2025). It is also common for youth workers to share both anticipated and unanticipated job responsibilities, which can range from activity planning and engaged supervision to event planning, meal preparation, transportation, custodial work, and grant writing (Baldrige, 2018; Bloomer et al., 2021; Vasudevan, 2019). In addition, youth development practitioners might take on family-like responsibility for their youth participants—as first responders in emergencies, advocates at school and court, and both temporary and long-term legal guardians (Bloomer et al., 2021; Starr, 2003; Vasudevan, 2019). They often self-identify as multihyphenates (e.g., artists and youth workers), taking on “boundaryless” constructions of their professional identities, in terms of time commitment, occupational role development, and engagement approaches with young people (Vasudevan, 2019). Researchers have raised concerns that youth workers often have to play the role of hero—or take on too many roles in the lives of youth—without adequate training, support, professional mentorship, or sense of being valued in the work (Anderson-Nathe, 2008; Baldrige, 2019; Baldrige et al., 2024; Van Steenis, 2020; Vasudevan, 2019).

In public sessions with OST staff,² the committee heard that many were accustomed to taking on formal and informal responsibilities as part of their role within the program, including organizing programming, managing funding and compliance, engaging with families and communities, and negotiating resources for transportation and food, among others. Despite the mental and physical exhaustion that youth development practitioners may face, “they are still fairly engaged and feel a high degree of pride and accomplishment in their field” (Barford & Whelton, 2010, p. 281). For example, one program leader shared:

I come and speak at panels like this, I respond to funders, and then I change clothes and learn how to make slime with first graders. . . . We all wear a lot of hats because if we had an immense amount of funding, we would be able to not do both of those things in a 2-hour period. But we do learn a huge number of skills through this work because we do have to wear as many hats as we need to wear to make sure that we are accomplishing our goals.

Beliefs and Practices

As with their occupational roles, youth development practitioners hold diverse, multifaceted identities and belief systems that inform their approaches to their work (Baldrige, 2018; McLaughlin et al., 1994; Noam & Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2013; Vasudevan, 2019; Walker & Larson, 2006). Beliefs about children and youth and the systems they navigate influence their everyday work with young people and, consequently, young people’s experiences within OST programs. Some studies have illuminated that many practitioners use ecological, system-based thinking and actively resist individualistic savior narratives about their work with children and youth living in poverty and from marginalized³ communities (Baldrige, 2014; Ross, 2013;

² Recordings of these sessions can be found at https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/41823_02-2024_the-experiences-of-youth-and-practitioners-in-afterschool-programming-a-public-information-gathering-session-of-the-committee-on-out-of-school-time-settings and https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/42554_04-2024_the-experiences-of-youth-and-practitioners-in-afterschool-programming-part-ii. For a proceedings in brief, see NASEM (2024).

³ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering’ where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting

Singh, 2021; Travis Jr., 2010). However, Starr (2003) also documented that youth workers can take on savior mentalities in some cases, as well as deficit-oriented views of youth and families. Fusco et al. (2013) and Baldrige (2020a) argue that some feel obliged to take this approach based on the framing and requirements of directors and funders. These underlying beliefs influence how participants are treated in OST programs and can translate to negative experiences and decreased engagement with programs (Anderson & Larson, 2009; Baldrige, 2019; Fusco et al., 2013; Starr, 2003).

Early research documented common traits, beliefs, and practices of youth workers (Halpern, 2002; Hirsch, 2005; McLaughlin et al., 1994); however, the study of everyday youth work practices and on-the-job experiences is limited and in need of deeper inquiry (Larson et al., 2015). Youth development practitioners often draw on practice-based wisdom that informs their everyday approaches to connecting and relating to young people (Baizerman et al., 2013). Scholars have studied the complexity of practice-based dilemmas that youth workers must confront daily and their strategies to address ethical issues (Walker & Larson, 2006).

Core Competencies

Core competencies include the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes needed to create and support positive youth development settings (Astroth et al., 2004). In general, youth development researchers agree that staff characteristics are critical to high-quality youth development programming and the experiences of children and youth, but there is no consensus around what those characteristics are or how youth development practitioners should best acquire them (Astroth et al., 2004). Given their varied roles (e.g., planner, facilitator, trainer, mentor, counselor, manager, supervisor), practitioners may require a broad range of competencies. According to Larson and colleagues (2015), “The work of running a program and facilitating youth development is more complex and multidimensional than is generally appreciated” (p. 74). Vance (2012) depicts three forms of youth development practitioner knowledge, building on the model of teacher knowledge from Shulman (1986): pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. Akiva et al. (2023) lays this out as a generalized model of educator knowledge. As shown in Figure 5-1, the focus in youth development (an enrichment context) is on building relationships, leading activities, navigating context, topical knowledge, and specialized youth development knowledge.

experiences of disadvantage” (p.1). The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See Box 1-3 in Chapter 1.

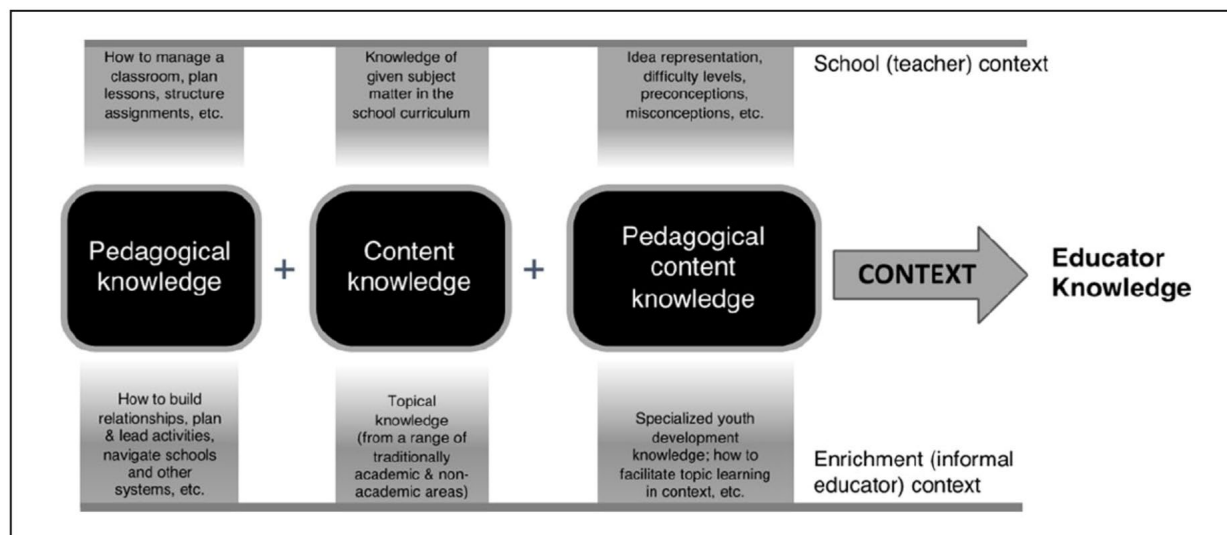


FIGURE 5-1 Model of knowledge and expertise for all educators.

SOURCE: Akiva et al., 2023.

Although staff can foster motivation and engagement in youth (Chung et al., 2018), they also have the potential to decrease participation or affect young people’s experiences negatively if their practices lack quality. In recent decades, a number of organizations have made recommendations around core competencies, with similar themes, including program planning, developmentally appropriate practice, behavior management, cultural competence, and professionalism (Curry et al., 2013; Garst et al., 2019; Newman, 2020; Vance & Goldberg, 2020). The National AfterSchool Association identified similar core knowledge competencies across multiple roles and experience levels, adaptable to state standards of practice and training (Warner et al., 2017). Christensen and Rubin (2020) assessed two review articles that included over 20 competency frameworks for youth development practitioners, finding that a few competencies were least cited but likely critical for staff working with children and youth from marginalized backgrounds: mental health and trauma-informed practice, building leadership, advocacy and empowerment, and intentional cultural responsiveness and humility.

As stated in the National Academies report on summertime experiences (NASEM, 2019) cultural responsiveness is a key component of intentional programming. Programs that are not responsive to students’ cultural values, beliefs, and backgrounds are, at a minimum, unlikely to attract and retain youth, and at worst could do harm. As mentioned earlier, program staff often start in the field as a program participant, so they are well situated to promote cultural and linguistic competence in programming (Baldrige, 2019). In education, for example, Perry (2019) found that there are benefits in academic performance, persistence, and self-worth when a student has a teacher who looks like them (i.e., is the same race/culture) (Perry, 2019); similarly, Sanchez (2016) found positive results in mentoring studies, where mentors and mentees can create shared trust and experiences. The same may be true in OST programs. Although they are limited, current statistics of demographics of the youth work profession do not mirror estimates of the racial demographics of children and youth in programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2020; AIR, 2025). This could pose a challenge to the authentic implementation of contextually rich, culturally responsive programming (Wallace Foundation, 2022). Chapter 6 offers further discussion of the link between program staff and cultural competence and what it means for program quality.

Bright (2015) critiques competency trainings for their potential to reproduce “structures of hierarchy and inequality, and for failing to acknowledge experiences of oppression and discrimination” (p. 32). It is equally important to value and honor the vital knowledge, skills, and abilities developed more informally through staff members’ experiences and situatedness within communities, without the assumption that knowledge must be formally acquired to be valid.

ENTRY TO THE FIELD

A small body of research shows that—like most workers in the education, care-based, and helping professions—many youth development practitioners enter the field through part-time paid or volunteer work during high school and college. Some grow up attending youth programs and feel inspired to give back, while others describe their unintentional entry into the profession through a first job (Vasudevan, 2019). This section discusses some motivations driving individuals to enter the field through formal and informal pathways.

Motivations

While those outside the profession may have notions of youth work as babysitting or a steppingstone to other careers, youth development practitioners tend to perceive their work as deeply necessary to the public good, collective well-being, and community transformation (Starr, 2003). In general, they understand their work as being “for a cause” (Starr, 2003, p. 3) and hold complex understandings of the systems in which they operate (Ross, 2013). In the words of one experienced youth worker, “We are the glue that holds communities together” (Vasudevan, 2019, p. 88). Through qualitative interviews with 20 youth practitioners, Vasudevan (2019) reports that those who stay in this workforce often express deep commitments to working with children and youth, drawing on service-oriented callings driven by place-based, social justice, spiritual, and self-reflective personal missions.

In a qualitative study of youth practitioners, Baldrige et al. (2024) report that many youth development practitioners from marginalized backgrounds cite inspiration from educators and mentors when they were youth, or a steadfast belief in the power of education and mentorship in guiding young people from marginalized backgrounds (see also Heathfield & Fusco, 2016; Starr, 2003; Watson, 2012). Many of these youth workers want to give back or pay it forward to honor the youth workers, mentors, and educators who guided their paths (Baldrige et al., 2024).

The Power of Us survey showed that most respondents joined the youth development field in their teens or early 20s because of a sense of purpose (e.g., passion, interest, mission) or personal connections (e.g., recommendations from friends or family, participation in the same or a similar program as a young person) (AIR, 2025).

Education and Experience

There is no unified set of educational prerequisites or standardized training to enter the youth development field. Professionalization, in the form of standardized licensure and credentialing pathways, has been debated for decades as a path toward sustainability in the field (Borden et al., 2011; Fusco, 2012; Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2013; Vasudevan, 2017). Scholars and advocates have raised concerns that standardization of practices will

promote a “case management” approach to engagement with youth, thus hindering the more relational, organic, and collective aspects of youth work in practice (Fusco, 2012; Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2013). Additionally, Baldrige (2020b) argues that requiring higher education and specialized youth development degrees may increase racial and class stratification in this work.

Still, youth development practitioners have a range of formal educational and training experiences (Fusco, 2012; Vasudevan, 2019). Some hold high school diplomas, while others have advanced degrees and vocational content specializations. In the Power of Us Survey, 40% of respondents held a bachelor’s degree, most commonly in education (23%), liberal arts (19%), health and medical sciences (11%), business (9%), or social work (9%); the survey also revealed that a master’s degree was more common for respondents who are older, are White, serve in leadership positions, and have been in the field for 15 years or more (AIR, 2024).

Depending on their goals and purposes, some organizations require an associate’s or advanced degree; others might require a high school diploma or lived experience with a particular setting or community. Some youth development practitioners come to OST settings after gaining hands-on experience as a volunteer—for example, members of AmeriCorps, a national service program, can choose to volunteer with youth-serving organizations, offering insight into the youth development profession and a chance to gain practical and leadership skills. Americorps Vista, in particular, places volunteers in local-level agencies and organizations that serve low-income communities (AmeriCorps, n.d.).

The practice of bringing in young local community members and former program participants as volunteers or staff has long been a practice in OST programs and continues today (Halpern, 2003). Originally an expedient and cost-effective way of staffing programs with few resources, it is now a more intentional strategy that offers older youth a pathway to leadership development and adult staff roles. As one program leader shared in a public session, “We have volunteers from three different universities that come in every day, about 40 weekly volunteers. . . . In the 7 years since [I started], a number of those volunteers have become staff members of the organization.”⁴ This strategy also benefits programs by fostering a strong sense of mission and continuing relationships between participants (Matloff-Nieves, 2007).

It should be noted that, beyond degrees, organizational condition and resources matter, as does occupational identity construction (Bloomer et al., 2021; Vasudevan, 2019). Past research demonstrates that on-the-job professional development, connection to youth, and belief in capabilities are stronger predictors of career continuity than a previous degree (Hartje et al., 2008). Choosing youth work as a profession, otherwise known as “work volition,” also matters for career continuity (Blattner & Franklin, 2017). And Vasudevan (2019) reported that those who persisted in youth development occupations often cited supportive supervisors and external mentors (e.g., college professors) who offered practical and theoretical guidance in the work. Regardless of how youth workers enter the profession, research over the last 30 years demonstrates that youth workers find joy and fulfillment in their work with youth despite the challenges and precarity that exist within the field (Baizerman, 1996; Baldrige, 2018; Halpern, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000; Starr et al., 2023; Vasudevan, 2019; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006).

⁴ Public information-gathering session, February 8, 2024.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND ADVANCEMENT OF STAFF IN OST SETTINGS

Despite reports of high job satisfaction and a desire to stay in the workforce long term, many youth development practitioners leave their positions just after a few years because of numerous challenges (Halpern et al., 2000; McLaughlin, 2000; National AfterSchool Association, 2006; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006). Over 75% of respondents in the Power of Us survey stated they are “very committed” to the youth development field and over 50% have remained in the field since their first job; yet most respondents noted they have had between two and five different jobs in the field over their career (AIR, 2025). So while youth development practitioners appear dedicated to staying in the field, they are unlikely to stay with the same program or organization long term. Understaffed programs are more likely to have program waiting lists, leaving young people without program access. Furthermore, understaffing can lead to more burnout for existing staff, and high turnover can jeopardize the trust built with participants. Understaffing leads to more focus on recruitment, which takes focus away from improving program quality. As one program leader stated in a public session, “At my previous position, all I did was hire and interview, and it really took away from the other work I was doing—data analysis, growing the program, growing partners, all of that stuff.”⁵ Hiring can be challenging—job expectations often evolve in part because relying on grant funding can mean meeting new requirements or expectations, which can make it difficult to write accurate job descriptions or adequately describe responsibilities to job applicants.

The following sections offer a glimpse into some of the challenges youth development practitioners face that contribute to attrition or may sway individuals against entering the field.

Visibility, Recognition, and Respect

Youth development practitioners are often an afterthought as educators and mentors in young people’s lives. For many reasons, including credentialism, status hierarchies, and the cultural reality that in the public imagination, *teacher* is synonymous with *educator*, youth development practitioners are often left out of broader educational policy and research discourse (Baldrige, 2018; Pozzoboni & Kirshner, 2016). Even though families, school-based professionals, and young people rely on the capabilities, talents, and supervision provided by these professionals and youth-serving organizations, this reliance has not translated into unified public codification, external recognition, or consistent structural support for the youth development workforce. Over the past 3 decades, national and local efforts to elevate the status of this workforce have increased through standards, certification processes, and national advocacy; however, youth development practitioners continue to experience challenges regarding visibility, recognition, and respect (Baldrige, 2019; Borden et al., 2020; Fusco, 2018; Hirsch, 2005). For example, practitioners recently described how they were called on as essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic to take on the work of facilitating community hubs and online learning—this put them in a vulnerable position without an increase in benefits and compensation (Baldrige et al., 2024). In Vasudevan’s (2019) study of career “persisters,” some youth development practitioners shared that, despite their sense of personal fulfillment from their job, they experienced stigmatization among friends and families in their chosen career path, and they observed financial devaluation within larger community organizations that provide services for both adults and young people.

⁵ Heard in public session panel held by committee on February 8, 2024.

Historically, in the United States, the work of developing relationships, organizing local civic activities, engaging in service, and providing care for children has often been the responsibility of women and people from racially marginalized populations (Daniels, 1987; Hochschild, 2003). In this paradigm, scholars have argued that service-oriented professions, such as social work and nursing, become codified as “semi-professions” when compared with fields such as law and medicine (Abbot & Meerabeau, 1998; Mehta, 2013). What is more, youth development and health care practitioners within the nonprofit structure face what Sarah Jaffe (2021) calls a “labor of love ideology,” in which the nobility of these professions is praised—but not necessarily rewarded—by the larger society.

Compensation

Nearly 20 years ago, researchers and advocates conducted national and local surveys to identify critical needs and challenges faced by the youth development workforce, identifying depressed wages and inadequate benefits as common issues (Halpern et al., 2000; McLaughlin, 2000; National AfterSchool Association, 2006; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006). These issues appear to persist today. Most respondents (69%) of the Power of Us Survey identified better pay and/or benefits as a needed job improvement. This sentiment was more common among respondents aged 18–25, most of whom receive an hourly wage, not an annual salary, which they reported at less than \$20 per hour. For comparison, full-time teachers earn about \$30 per hour on average (AIR, 2025).

This common experience of low wages combined with demanding work, including long hours that often extend into evenings and weekends, creates a significant challenge in terms of retaining and stabilizing the workforce. Lower-paid employees are more likely to seek new job opportunities compared with those with higher salaries. In its findings from a workforce survey, the National AfterSchool Association (2006) reports bifurcation—a “tale of two workforces”—with full-time program directors and managers expressing more stability and support and higher compensation rates than part-time, direct-service staff.

However, results from the Power of Us Survey suggest promising progress in perceptions around wages in the youth development workforce (AIR, 2025). Three out of five (about 60%) respondents (combining leadership and nonleadership practitioners) suggested that they are paid a fair amount for the work they do; of those in nonleadership positions, 58% indicated they are paid fairly.

The results from the Power of Us survey aside, average wages for youth development practitioners remain low relative to the cost of living, especially for younger entrants into the field. When asked what they would change about their jobs, respondents cited better pay and benefits (AIR, 2025), followed by less stress (discussed in the following section).

Many youth development practitioners face financial predicaments when entering this workforce (e.g., student loan debt), and they often employ individual coping strategies to persist in the field (Baldrige, 2020a; Vasudevan, 2019), such as taking on additional jobs, relying on family finances, and renegotiating work boundaries at the individual level; however, these individual choices often come at a personal cost, such as prolonging educational advancement and repayment of debt, pay reductions, and adapting life planning (Vasudevan, 2019). Vasudevan (2019) reports that practitioners cite gentrification, housing affordability, and student loans as creating additional barriers to their ability to continue in the field. In a study of Black youth development practitioners, Baldrige (2020b) documents food insecurity, housing instability, and homelessness among respondents.

Job Stress

The blurring of personal and professional boundaries is both a testament to the enthusiastic commitment of youth development practitioners and a source of challenge in navigating organizational expectations and the potential for emotional burnout (Bloomer et al., 2021; Vasudevan, 2019). Bloomer et al. (2021) explored the effects of role ambiguity, finding that, although youth workers are often initially offered some core guidance about their responsibilities, their duties expand over time:

I really would like to know what my job role is. I feel like years ago it used to be to recreate, since I am in recreation, but it seems like in the last 10 years or so, we're not really recreation anymore. It's like we're trying to be everything else, plus recreation. I have to be a social worker, I have to be a janitor. . . . I have to go out and weed and blow grass. We have to do the food. It's just the list goes on and on and on. . . . We've added it seems like 15 or 20 other titles to the list of what we have to do. (p. 5)

Relatedly, Colvin et al. (2020) identified tensions between public stakeholders' interpretation and expectations of practitioners' responsibilities in library and OST settings compared with practitioners' understanding of their primary obligations and activities in these contexts. Whereas external stakeholders held context-driven, narrow stereotypes of the work in these settings (e.g., organizing books, providing academic tutoring), practitioners defined and prioritized the relational aspects of their work with children and youth (Colvin et al., 2020).

Although human-serving occupations can be fulfilling, the emotional labor required can result in high stress (e.g., Kim, 2011). OST staff working in programs serving low-income communities may be more likely to work with children and youth facing challenges in their home lives; in a public session, one program leader shared⁶:

Staff burnout is definitely an issue, and from my experience, it doesn't have to do with pay or compensation, it has to do with a lot of the trauma that our kids come from. And often afterschool or out-of-school time is the space where they feel safest and have the time to share. Building trusting relationships with youth is probably the most important work that we do all day, every day. And so, we try to give them the opportunity to share that trauma, and they do. And that takes a lot of emotional energy. And I think nobody's in this for the compensation. . . . We do this because we love it. Because we really, really care about the futures and the well-being of these young people. So, there is burnout because it's not just a 9 to 5. It's an all day, every day. It's a part of your soul if you're doing this work.

Job stress can decrease the use of educator practices that support healthy development, lower the quality of adult-child relationships, and increase burnout and attrition (White et al., 2020). The Power of Us survey found that almost half of respondents (47%) feel burned out at work and that 37% indicated that less stress was a needed improvement in their job (AIR, 2025).

⁶ Public information-gathering session, February 8, 2024.

Opportunities for Professional Development

Professional development can help practitioners work more effectively with or on behalf of children and youth (Peter, 2009). The variety in professional development topics mirrors the variation in the youth development field, as programs have different foci that may require specialized professional development (e.g., sports, academic enrichment, STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics]). Training preferences and perceptions of critical training topics vary among youth workers from different regions, though their overall experiences and perspectives may be similar (Evans et al., 2010).

Professional development in the youth development field consists of workshops; trainings; on-site orientations and mentoring programs; seminars and conferences; local, regional, and statewide networks; online resources; community-driven approaches; and other opportunities focused on improving the skills of staff who work with children and youth (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006; Mahoney et al., 2010; Pheng & Xiong, 2022). Although there are currently no uniform standards for professional development in this field, there is guidance on to the quality, competences, and trajectories, as exemplified in statewide afterschool networks (e.g., 2014 Washington State Quality Standards [School's Out Washington, 2014]) and the National AfterSchool Association's (2023) core competencies. Professional development options cover a variety of topics, such as youth development issues, activities and program planning, and human resources administration. Box 5-1 offers details on some professional development approaches. With some consensus, researchers have found that high-quality professional development is sustained, coherent, content focused, and based in a community of learners.

Most respondents in the Power of Us survey stated that they participate in trainings, webinars, and conferences for professional learning, and most (84%) have access through their employer (AIR, 2025). These rates were lower for early career respondents and those in part-time or nonleadership positions. Respondents reported lower participate in collaborative professional learning with colleagues or experts, such as professional networking (36%), professional learning communities (25%), coaching (22%), or shadowing (12%). Furthermore, four out of five respondents overall shared that their professional learning met their needs. Yet when asked about improvements to their professional learning opportunities, 34% noted that they want more professional development opportunities, and 40% noted that they wanted more resources such as funding and materials to participate in professional learning (AIR, 2025).

There has also been a growing recognition of the important role young people and community play in building capacity of youth development professionals. Baldrige et al. (2024) found that critical practices for furthering OST capacity-building include healing and restorative activities; intergenerational learning; and liberatory, antiracist practices that lift up lived experiences, honor cultural traditions, and acknowledge sociopolitical contexts (Baldrige et al., 2024; Ginwright & James, 2002; example in Renick et al., 2021).

BOX 5-1

Professional Development Approaches for Youth Development Practitioners

General Training

This approach is the most common among professional development opportunities for youth development practitioners. It consists of workshops on relevant topics at national or regional conferences (usually in the form of one-time sessions lasting 1–2 hours), at out-of-school-time (OST) worksites, and through regional quality improvement initiatives. The goal of

these workshops is to provide one-time or short-term training content, often without follow-up support to integrate knowledge into practice. General training approaches can sometimes improve program quality (Fukkink & Lont, 2007), but effects can be limited and short lived (Akiva et al., 2017).

Continuous Improvement

Quality improvement systems drive continuous improvement in youth development practices. Coaching and staff practices include in-service training to build professional knowledge and skills and opportunities for staff participation in decision-making through site-based teams. Quality improvement systems can be as or more effective than general training. However, they involve long lists of standards that can seem overwhelming and impractical in low-resource settings. Such systems tend to operate on top-down assumptions, as external experts developed the measurement tools and system administrators defined quality by these measurements. Youth development practitioners may be involved in improving quality, but not in actively defining what quality should look like in any given setting (Akiva et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2013).

Strengths-Based Support

This approach begins with identifying existing strengths in program or staff practices, rather than the problematic areas. The orientation of training shifts from prescribing best practices *to* staff to identifying *with* staff the effective practices already occurring at a site. Then, with facilitation, the staff may begin to consider amplifying or “growing” these practices. Like the continuous improvement approach, the strengths-based approach commits to longer-term, continuous engagement with staff in a facilitative role. Also, the strengths-based approach focuses on supporting quality improvement in local contexts, rather than relying on general prescriptions. Unlike the continuous improvement approach, which relies on comprehensive and often complex definitions and measurements of quality, the strengths-based approach engages and relies on more intuitive assessment and judgment from the staff and site leaders (Akiva et al., 2017).

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities use a practice-focused method to serve as a platform for enhancing the capabilities of youth development practitioners in various educational settings. Typically, a professional learning community engages a cohort of 10–15 professionals in multiple workshops to address a shared goal, such as problem-solving, improving practice, or learning new skills. The goal, along with the length and frequency of the workshops, depends on the group’s needs. Three components are key to professional learning communities: practice to build skills and confidence; reflection to assess progress and foster accountability; and collaboration to share experiences, solve challenges, and build relationships among participants (Vance et al., 2016).

SOURCE: Generated by the committee, with excerpts from Akiva et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2013; Vance et al., 2016; and Fukkink & Lont, 2007.

Organizational Constraints and Culture

Funder expectations to quantify success have placed pressures on program leaders to rapidly increase youth participation numbers and to track metrics such as daily attendance as the primary measure of youth engagement; youth workers have found these expectations to be misaligned with their cultivation of spaces in which youth can attend and participate in programming as needed (Fusco et al., 2013). Although some programs are created to focus on nonacademic areas—such as identity development, sociopolitical development, and critical

consciousness-raising—donors can instead incentivize focusing only on academics at the expense of these other vital forms of youth development (Baldrige, 2014; Kwon, 2013). These pressures constrain flexibility and creativity in organizations that initially draw and motivate youth development practitioners in this career path (Baldrige, 2019; McLaughlin, 2018; Vasudevan, 2019). Practitioners and program leaders who spend time pushing back on directives from the organization’s board or funder demands, instead of engaging with youth in the way they would like, may simply exit the field.

In addition to the factors mentioned earlier (e.g., financial precarity and familial pressures), in interviews with youth development practitioners, Baldrige et al. (2024) and Vasudevan (2019) found that uneven access to ongoing professional pathways for marginalized populations of youth development practitioners can prompt their exit from direct-service engagement. These practitioners reported encountering barriers to promotion and access to leadership positions, disparities in pay and benefits, and managerial pushouts associated with internal climates of inequities and tokenization (Baldrige et al., 2024). Furthermore, some youth development practitioners cite racism in the workplace, as well as a deficit framing toward youth (e.g., youth needing to be fixed), which counters their belief system and diminishes their motivation to remain in the field (Baldrige, 2019; Wallace Foundation, 2022).

OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE WORKFORCE TRAJECTORY FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

Each one of our programs have had to find our own ways to survive. And there are different funding streams that do that, but the more stability, the more structures, the more support there is, I think the more that you will see the opportunities for staff to have careers in this space and not just as a stepping-stone in a larger journey.⁷

Invest in Job Quality

As stated, the quality of programs is tied to the quality of staff, but more importantly for this chapter’s discussion is understanding that staff quality is impacted by the quality of jobs in the youth development field. The challenges that youth development practitioners face create instability in the OST workforce. To address this instability, the National AfterSchool Association (n.d.), a professional association comprised of 30,000 youth development practitioners serving in OST spaces, released a resource that lays out job quality standards and guidelines for policy advocates and policymakers, government agencies, philanthropic organizations, OST intermediaries, and others (see Figure 5-2). At the core of these standards are fair and livable wages and high-quality working conditions (i.e., safe, inclusive, and supportive environments). Researchers have found that supportive supervisors and a positive work environment can buffer the effects of stress, thereby decreasing burnout (Boyas et al., 2013; Maslach et al., 2001; White et al., 2020). When employees perceive that their supervisors care about their emotional well-being, they are, on average, more motivated and committed to their job (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

⁷ Stated by a program director in a public information-gathering session, February 8, 2024.

At its October 2023 public session, the committee heard from OST organizational leaders on the need for employers to commit to creating higher-quality jobs. While this commitment can lead to important program-level impacts, system-level impacts are also possible if funders can incentivize and encourage job quality improvement in the same way they have incentivized improving program quality—by funding elements of job quality directly. For example, the Minnesota Foundation for Women funded “rest grants” for 40 nonprofit women leaders, primarily in youth development, to cultivate rest and well-being (Smith, 2023).

State and federal governments can enhance job quality at the highest levels through legislation and regulations. During and after the pandemic, federal support was provided through the American Rescue Plan and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds Act, which supported OST programs (discussed further in Chapter 8). Some states and cities used these funds to invest in youth workers by helping to provide a living wage.

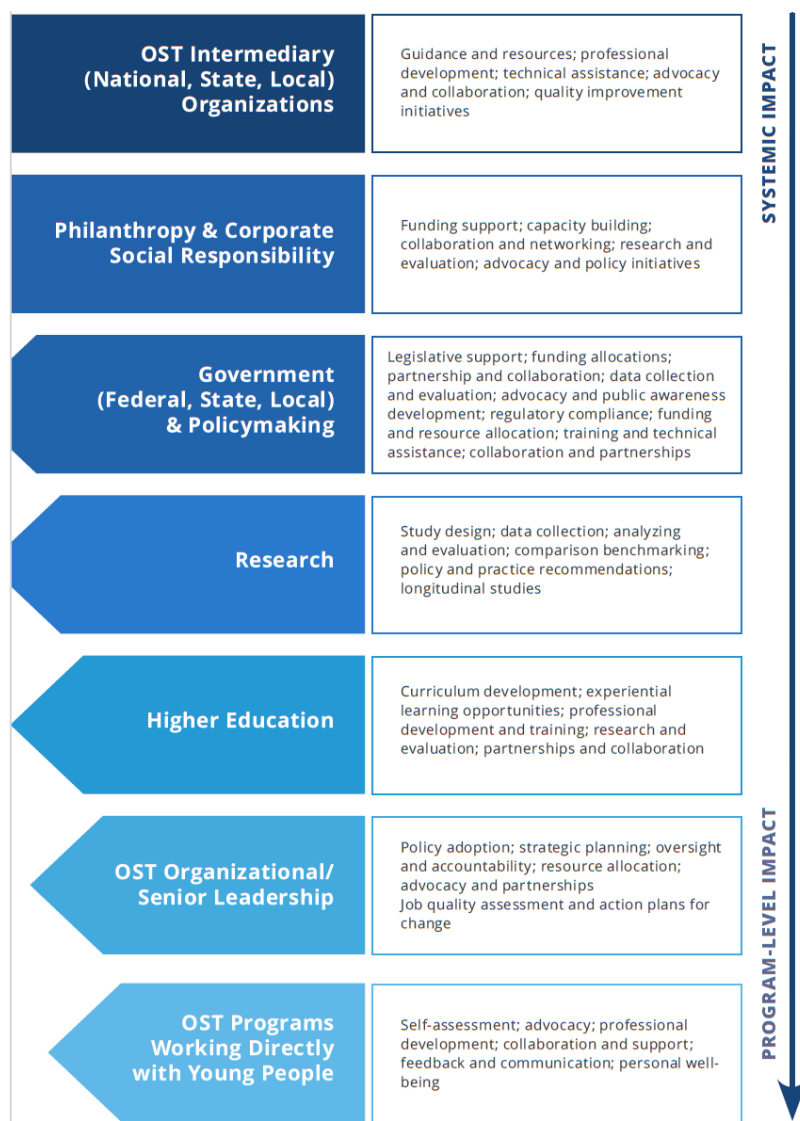


FIGURE 5-2 Roles for key stakeholders to improve job quality for youth development practitioners in out-of-school-time (OST) settings.

SOURCE: National AfterSchool Association, n.d.

Other key elements of job quality are training and career development. Regardless of entry, pathway, or organizational requirement, long-term youth development practitioners express a desire for more preparation and knowledge in their work (Peter, 2023). Both private and public institutions have responded to this demand by establishing new training programs and expanding existing ones (Borden et al., 2020). Training can include professional development initiatives, certification, and graduate programs (Silliman et al., 2020).

Some youth development practitioners receive opportunities for professional development through organizational training or intermediary organizations, such as state-level OST networks, that often have relationships with school districts and local governments. When organizations invest in employees through professional development, it signals to employees that they are valued, which can promote job satisfaction and effectiveness (White et al., 2020). However, staff members are often limited to what their organizations can afford; for staff working with lower-resourced community organizations, accessing educational opportunities can be difficult. Both organizational support and dedicated funding appear key to expanding professional development opportunities for youth development practitioners. National and local intermediaries can also directly provide professional development and even workforce credentials, and/or they can provide information on professional development and supports for workforce pathways (e.g., credentials, postsecondary learning opportunities).

Furthermore, postsecondary learning opportunities can support continuing education for OST staff and open formal pathways to recruit interested individuals. Evans et al. (2010) note low levels of organizational support for continuing education in youth development work. These opportunities are scarce, but undergraduate and master's programs in youth development show promise in providing multidisciplinary and praxis-oriented approaches to preparing practitioners to enter the field or continue their education in pursuit of career advancement (see Box 5-2). Some higher education institutions extend opportunities to preservice teachers to build their capacity, working together with youth development professionals to build, for, instance, equitable practices in the classroom (e.g., Renick et al., 2021). Mahoney et al. (2010) note that a comprehensive approach to professional development would ideally provide both pre- and in-service training for the afterschool workforce; they identify university–community partnerships as a viable path for this training. Vandell and Lao (2016) further detail strategies for workforce engagement in partnership with community organizations and universities.

BOX 5-2

Examples of Higher Education Degree and Training Programs

Undergraduate and master's programs that prepare youth development practitioners may be housed in different departments, including social work, community psychology, education, youth development, sociology, anthropology, and public health (Brion-Meisels et al., 2016).

- The University of California, Irvine Department of Education offers a certificate in afterschool education that combines fieldwork and research. Graduate students work alongside faculty members to conduct research investigating the OST experience, while undergraduates have the chance to work directly in OST and summer programs.
- The City University of New York's Youth Studies Consortium serves as a clearinghouse to increase capacity for youth studies at the university by developing new courses, certificate and degree programs, web resources, counseling services for students, and faculty research

- opportunities. Available coursework includes associate, undergraduate, and master's degrees, as well as certificate programs.
- Rhode Island College offers a bachelor's degree in youth development through its school of education. This multidisciplinary program combines courses in education, social work, and nonprofit studies to prepare students to work with populations aged 3–21 in a variety of settings. The program includes a student-chosen minor or self-designed concentration composed of five-plus courses, in addition to a 180-hour internship.
 - The University of Minnesota offers a youth studies major through its school of social work. The program includes coursework and experiential learning. Students engage community through regular site visits, program observations, community-engaged learning, international exchanges, and internships.
 - Clemson University's Youth Development Leadership Program is a non-thesis master's degree designed to prepare students for a career addressing the physical, emotional, environmental, and social issues that young people may be facing. The program also partners with a variety of youth-related agencies and organizations to provide learning and work opportunities for students.
 - Innovative Digital Education Alliance (IDEA), formerly known as Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) and AG IDEA, is a consortium of 20 public universities who provide online education. The consortium has offered a variety of online courses, certificates, and degrees in areas pertaining to agriculture and human sciences to over 11,500 students.
 - The University of Louisville's Social Justice Youth Development Certificate provides youth development professionals in Louisville with training and resources over the course of 30 weeks. The first semester of the program focuses on racial affinity groups as well as racial processing and healing, while the second semester focuses on equity and cultural humility.

Providing these support structures not only helps improve young people's experiences; it also offers an organizational advantage by decreasing staff turnover (Hartje et al., 2008). More comprehensive training opportunities can enhance youth development practitioners' competencies and OST program quality (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006; Peter, 2023; Rhode Island Kids Count, 2003). Staff members who feel competent at their jobs and receive ongoing supervision, support, and professional development trainings are more likely to have intentions of continuing to work in the field, thus increasing staff retention rates (Astroth et al., 2004; Hartje et al., 2008; Hassett, 2022).

Further Data Collection and Research on the OST Workforce

As noted, the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (n.d.) estimates that there are 2.5 million youth development practitioners in the United States. In 2003, the Annie E. Casey Foundation estimated that there were between 2 million and 4 million frontline youth services workers in the United States (Yohalem & Pittman, 2006). These discrepancies reflect the challenge of accounting for the accurate number of youth development practitioners in the country, given the lack of population-level data collection on this workforce. Some efforts are underway to counter this. The Bureau of Labor Statistics oversees the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC),⁷ a federal statistical standard used by federal agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data. This system allows for the collection of data on topics such as employment and earnings, skills

⁷ For more information see <https://www.bls.gov/soc/>.

and education, demographic characteristics, and working conditions. To date, no standard has been applied to youth development practitioners. Thus, the California AfterSchool Network (n.d.) is pursuing such a designation, as a dedicated SOC code would enable the “consistent quantification of the OST workforce, providing essential data on its size, demographics, and trends . . . [it] would streamline partnerships with workforce agencies, fostering collaborative relationships conducive to achieving shared goals” (p. 1). Without this data collection, policymakers, advocates, researchers, and others in the youth development field lack an accurate picture of youth development practitioners on a national scale, which restricts policy-level support for these workers. More research is needed across the spectrum of recruitment and retention, with foci including (1) criteria and best practices for preparing youth development practitioners to enter the field and for continued training and education for those in the field; (2) specific competencies to serve children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds; (3) cost of staff turnover to participants and organizations; and (4) the impact of greater investments in job quality measures, such as wages, benefits, job design, and career advancement.

CONCLUSION

Youth development practitioners are adult leaders who guide children and youth through social, educational, and personal development within informal educational spaces. They are paramount to the success of OST programs. It is widely believed that programs for children and youth are most successful when staff are creative, well trained, skilled at building relationships, and capable of making long-term commitments to programs. Staff must be effective at connecting with young people and understanding their needs, developing and executing interesting activities, interacting with families and other stakeholders in the OST ecosystem, and communicating the mission and policies of the program, among other areas (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006).

In practice, there is great variation in the roles of this profession, the responsibilities they take on, and the educational and experiential paths they take to join the field. Youth development practitioners can be executive directors who oversee program administration or instructors who work directly with participants; they may be volunteers or part- or full-time staff. They often fulfill many roles to meet the needs of the program and the young people they serve; a program leader may be serving meals to participants one day and writing grant proposals the next day. Some might be school-age youth earning valuable work skills; others might be AmeriCorps volunteers or trained youth development specialists with master’s degrees. This heterogeneity has helped the field remain flexible, innovative, and inclusive.

Whether programs focus on violence prevention or arts-based learning, youth development practitioners prioritize building positive, meaningful relationships with young people (Colvin et al., 2020; Hirsch, 2005; Watson, 2012) and are crucial to fostering positive outcomes for youth (Bouffard & Little, 2004; Newman, 2020; see further discussion in Chapter 6 and 7). Finding and retaining high-quality staff is critical to helping participants develop and sustain an interest in OST programs.

Research finds that youth development practitioners are committed to their work and the youth they serve; however, as this chapter reviews, they face challenges around recognition, compensation, job stress, and professional development that can affect their likelihood to enter or stay in the field. These challenges lead to staff turnover, an often-cited problem in the youth

development field, as it impacts program availability and quality. Lower staffing levels mean lower organizational capacity and fewer program spots for children and youth, and they require program directors to spend more time on hiring instead of on program development. At the same time, without a federally recognized occupational code and formalized apprenticeship designations, there are no wage protections, which has prompted both public and private funders of OST programs to often (unintentionally) underestimate the needs of staff, from allowable use of dollars for staff compensation, to indirect rate restrictions on talent development and retention.

Based on its findings, the committee offers the following conclusions in support of actionable recommendations (presented in Chapter 9) to improve recognition of this essential workforce and to support its growth and strengthen the career trajectories of its members.

CONCLUSION 5-1: Youth development practitioners face a number of challenges that can influence retention, such as lack of recognition and respect, low wages, job stress, and limited training and professional development. Addressing the challenges contributing to staff attrition in OST programs requires organizational commitment and capacity. Especially for programs serving primarily children and youth from low-income households that rely on public funding, commitment and capacity often depend on system-level support structures and funding.

CONCLUSION 5-2: The quality and competency of the workforce supporting OST programs are important elements of program quality, contributing to young people's level of engagement in programs and the impact of programs on their outcomes. More professional development opportunities through education and training (e.g., through postsecondary degrees, certificates, and organization-led trainings) for individuals interested in or currently serving in youth development can help build the OST workforce pipeline and strengthen career trajectories, which ultimately will strengthen program quality.

CONCLUSION 5-3: Formalizing national population-level data collection of youth development practitioners can provide a more accurate number and understanding of these staff, which can support policy-level improvements for the OST workforce.

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6

OST Implementation: Program Quality and Experiences

Program quality, participation, and engagement are inextricably linked and can drive youth outcomes, as discussed in earlier chapters. Variation in program quality helps to account for differences in effectiveness; the youth development field has focused increasingly on improving the quality of both program design and implementation to best meet participants' needs. This chapter focuses on program quality in out-of-school-time (OST) settings, including assessment and common indicators of quality; the implementation of quality improvement systems across OST programs, activities, and settings and the organizations that drive quality improvement; and the costs of high-quality OST programs. The chapter then zooms into the programs themselves, summarizing scholarship on the experiences of children and youth that happen in OST programs. Finally, the chapter concludes by describing program quality assessment and improvement initiatives.

OST PROGRAM QUALITY

Numerous studies have found that higher program quality is associated with better participant outcomes (e.g., Christensen et al., 2023; Durlak et al., 2010; Gliske et al., 2021; Kuperminc et al., 2019; Vandell et al., 2022). In the youth development field, *quality* refers to OST program practices that support programmatic goals and individual outcomes for youth and staff (Palmer et al., 2009). The quality of practices and youth experiences in programs can vary greatly depending on numerous factors, including staff leaders' experience and skills, environment and resources, and social interactions within the program. Program quality generally includes aspects of the physical space, psychological safety, structure, adult–youth interaction, and the provision of learning opportunities (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). There is no single way in which the field collectively defines the construct, as evidenced through a variety of operationalizations within research, frameworks, standards, and measures. Variations in how quality is operationalized might be due to (a) differences in practices and desired outcomes among OST programs and (b) evolutions in prioritizing specific themes of quality to better meet the needs of children and youth (Lentz et al., 2024).

Most current quality rubrics or initiatives tacitly take a universal standard or “best practices” approach; that is, they assume a practice affects all children and youth in similar ways and a best practice generally is experienced as such by all. However, individuals may experience programs in ways that differ from other young people or from the “average” experience (Spencer et al., 1997), and dilemmas of practice that are not clearly covered in quality rubrics are common (Larson & Walker, 2010). In addition, Wilson-Ahlstrom & Martineau (2022) argue that quality standards are often developed in ways that are “color neutral” and reflect and reify the dominant

culture (Wilson-Ahlstrom & Martineau, 2022). An emphasis on universal standards therefore risks overlooking the specific needs of children and youth from marginalized backgrounds (Wilson-Ahlstrom & Martineau, 2022).

The field operationalizes quality through research and evaluation (e.g., Erbstein & Fabionar, 2019; NASEM, 2019a) and frameworks, standards, and measures developed by research and capacity-building intermediary organizations (e.g., David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, 2020; National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2023). Evaluation practice¹ has shaped the field in ways that affect the availability, design, and implementation of OST programs for children and youth from low-income households or marginalized² communities. Increased emphasis on evaluation that includes program quality (and other potential moderators) would enhance understanding of what is happening inside OST programs, helping to discern factors that contribute to program quality, facilitate implementation fidelity, and provide opportunities for continuous quality improvement. OST evaluation includes individual program evaluations; larger, multisite evaluations; and evaluation requirements in funding streams such as 21st Century Community Learning (CCLC) grants. Single-site evaluations usually occur in response to funder requirements, but the resources required for an evaluation are often better aligned with cohort-based or multisite evaluations.

Evaluation is one critical part of the continuous quality improvement process for OST programs. When sponsors require evaluation to be included in program funding, it shapes the nature of activities proposed, leading to the creation or modification of logic models and a focus on the production of evidence. For example, the Advancing Informal STEM Learning program of the National Science Foundation requires that research and innovations developed in this program are evaluated, usually with a focus on fidelity to the proposed activities (Bell et al., 2016). Like the rest of the social services field (McCall, 2009), many OST evaluations focus on youth development outcomes, addressing whether evidence suggests that the program is meeting its intended goals; however, some address program quality.

Assessing Program Quality

Program evaluation can be *summative*, focused on the results of a program after it concludes (i.e., “Did the program lead to gains for participants in intended or unintended areas?”). Or program evaluation can be *formative*, using data and data methods to learn about a program underway, typically with the intention of applying that learning to improve the program. Formative program evaluation is usually concerned with or leads back to program quality (i.e., “What are we doing that’s working well and what could be improved?”). Similarly, evaluators sometimes distinguish between process evaluation (focused on implementation) and outcomes evaluation (focused on effectiveness in producing change) (e.g., see Patton, 2014). In multisite

¹ Evaluation of OST programs has occurred in three phases: Phase 1, from the founding of the field up to the mid-1990s, was about defining positive youth development in contrast to problem-focused approaches; Phase 2, from the mid-1990s through mid-2010s, included a focus on content and understanding elements of program quality; Phase 3, occurring now, focuses on programs as contexts for development, including better definition of youth development programs, better measurement, and stronger evaluation designs (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016).

² In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering’” where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage” (p.1). The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See Box 1-3 in Chapter 1).

design it can be challenging to include measures for program quality, as this is a multidimensional factor that is difficult to measure with accuracy. In this context—and with the rise in program quality improvement systems and organizations that support these systems—many OST sites have moved to assessing program quality as a form of evaluation. They typically assess process quality through observational methods and assess participants’ experiences and outcomes through surveys or other methods; they then report these to funders as evaluative evidence.

In the decades since the National Academies published *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (National Research Council [NRC] & Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2002), quality improvement tools and processes that specifically target OST programs have emerged (for a fuller description of this history, see Akiva & Robinson, 2022). Much of this can be traced to the “Features of Positive Developmental Settings” presented in that report (see Table 4-1 in NRC & IOM, 2002, p. 90). Program quality rubrics emerged to assess these features (or variations on these features), usually observationally or through program self-assessment (e.g., “How do we know if a particular setting provides ‘opportunities to belong’?”). Quality improvement processes have been developed alongside these rubrics to help OST sites, often within regional cohorts (i.e., groups of people from programs in the same city or community), to improve program quality systematically.

Several observational rubrics for OST programs were published in the early 2000s. The most used of these are the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA) from the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality³ and the Assessment of Program Practices Tool from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Most tools involve observing OST program sessions, then scoring on low-medium-high rubrics. Some tools have shown predictive validity such that higher program quality scores associate with higher scores in survey ratings in various outcome areas (e.g., Smith & Hohmann, 2005; C. Smith et al., 2012; Tracy et al., 2016). Although evidence suggests that quality mediates the impact of OST programs, quality tools are used infrequently in effectiveness research and evaluation.

An important factor in assessing OST program quality and program evaluation is how participatory they are, including the ways in which young people are or are not included in evaluation design. As discussed above and in previous chapters, participatory research is generally defined as research *with* rather than *on* people and involves participant involvement in multiple aspects of a study, which can include study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of findings (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Youth participatory research or evaluation is a subset of this approach that specifically involves young people in the various aspects of evaluation. Krenichyn et al. (2007) noted that although positive youth development approaches often promote participation, youth participatory evaluation of programs is rare. Cooper (2017) suggests that participatory evaluation has multiple benefits; it is the right thing to do, it provides better information, and people are more likely to support an evaluation they have been a part of. She notes that it is beneficial for young people and community organizations, as it leads to gains both for participants (e.g., “the interests and priorities of the

³ Of available observational tools, the Youth PQA has been used in more scholarship and is likely most used in the field. The Youth PQA was tested for validity and reliability in an extensive validation study (Smith & Hohmann, 2005) and the associated continuous improvement process (the Youth Program Quality Intervention) was shown to be effective in a randomized control trial (C. Smith et al., 2012). The Youth PQA has since been used in multiple published studies (e.g., Akiva et al., 2013; Beymer et al., 2023; Herman & Blyth, 2016; Jean-Baptiste et al., 2022; Naftzger et al., 2023).

participants shape the evaluation questions”) and for organizations/communities (e.g., “increased likelihood of collecting relevant and appropriate information” [Cooper, 2017, p. 59]).

The youth development field uses research, frameworks, standards, and measures to operationalize quality. These resources often include a series of specific, observable practices (referred to as indicators) that signal quality. In reviewing field-based resources supporting practices—including frameworks, standards, and measures including indicators—that are universal to different program contexts, nationally applicable, commonly measured, and contemporary generally, indicators of quality fall into four broad domains: operations, staffing, environment, and implementation (Lentz et al., 2024). As reviewed in Lentz et al. (2024), quality as it relates to *operations* includes indicators capturing a program’s scope and design, budget, and data use (Lentz et al., 2024). Indicators related to *staffing* include job quality and staff practices (Lentz et al., 2024). Common program quality indicators related to *environment* include safety and wellness; diversity, equity, access, and inclusion; and relationship-building (Lentz et al., 2024). Finally, indicators of *implementation* include activity planning, youth development practices, and participation (Lentz et al., 2024).

Quality Improvement Systems

Quality rubrics are the basis for quality improvement systems (QIS), which are in operation for OST programs in many locales across the country. A major driver of the development of QIS—from program providers, funders, municipal governments, and advocates—is the aim of providing higher-quality programming at scale, focusing their measurement on group-level data. QIS systems are designed to align efforts across the youth development landscape (e.g., OST programs, schools, municipal agencies) to set common goals, identify challenges, and target supports to improve OST availability and quality.

Multiple national organizations now provide suites of services (e.g., improvement tools, professional development, coaching) to support OST programs—usually regional cohorts of multiple programs—to improve quality through processes of assessment, improvement planning, coaching, and professional development for practitioners. For example, the Youth Program Quality Improvement system, promoted by the Forum for Youth Investment, operates in nearly every U.S. state and several places internationally (Akiva & Robinson, in press).

At the program level, a QIS focuses on ensuring that opportunities and experiences provided are adequately serving children and youth from low-income households and marginalized backgrounds (Every Hour Counts, 2021). Program-level QIS functions include collecting data to understand the nature of programs across the locale, the degree to which they meet the needs and desires of the children and youth they serve, and to what extent content is grounded in the lived experiences of program participants. A QIS at the program level also assesses the quality of program leadership and staff (i.e., management practices and staff competencies). Through collecting and analyzing program-level data, local intermediaries have been able to improve the supports given to programs and program staff in the form of targeted professional development (Gamse et al., 2019). For example, under the Wallace Foundation initiative, “Denver and Saint Paul providers relied on YPQA [Youth Program Quality Assessment] results to inform professional development content for their staff” (Gamse et al., 2019, p. 30).

To date, much of the QIS research and evaluation in OST is focused on group-level data and does not assess intraindividual changes as a result of OST participation. The focus of QIS at the individual level is on ensuring that children and youth are participating at high levels across

the locale and experience engaging activities that drive the development of skills, mindsets, and habits that prepare participants to thrive. Together, the multitiered efforts of QISs in many cities across the United States have led to marked improvements in access and quality in OST, especially for children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds (S. Smith et al., 2012).

Efforts to drive continuous improvement using a QIS have been tested and appear to yield meaningful improvements in OST practices. With a focus on quality assessment, improvement planning, coaching, and staff practices, S. Smith et al. (2012) found that higher-fidelity implementation of continuous improvement practices is related to the quality of instruction. Continuous improvement practices included (1) manager participation in the youth program quality improvement process, (2) a focus on instructional improvement, (3) utilization of continuous improvement practices among managers and staff, (4) improvements in instructional quality, and (5) increases in staff employment tenure.

In summary, QISs are increasingly used across local communities, in line with findings at the state level. They have been shown to support well-coordinated goals, standards, processes for data collection, and associated outcomes—including improvements in management, instruction, and outcomes for children and youth. QISs have also supported municipal-wide improvements in access and quality.

Cost of High-Quality OST Programs

High-quality OST programs have been found to support young people's learning and development (Lester et al., 2020). However, the youth development field lacks a shared understanding of the resources required to operate high-quality OST programs. The last comprehensive study of OST program costs was published in 2009 (Grossman et al., 2009). The report quantified three factors in program cost: (1) frequency, duration, and intensity; (2) funding and resource availability; and (3) local context, funding structures, and the needs and interests of children and youth. The report found that hours and wages played primary roles in cost differentiation, which at the time of the report's release, was on average \$7 per hour per individual during the school year; \$10 for adolescent programs, and \$8 during summer. Grossman et al. (2009) found that the costs of quality OST programs vary greatly, primarily because of program directors' choices, program structure, activities offered, available resources, and local conditions. Additionally, school-year programs catering to multiple age groups were more expensive than those serving a single age group. Staff wages are a significant cost driver, with teen programs being more costly compared with those for younger participants because of the higher hourly staff wages. Interestingly, teen and nonteen summer programs were less costly hourly than school-year programs because their fixed costs could be spread over more hours (Grossman et al., 2009).

Other research focuses on understanding cost drivers and ways to improve program efficiency, rather than overall OST program cost. These studies identified mechanisms for addressing cost issues, such as hiring staff based on projected daily attendance (Schwartz et al., 2018), limiting the number of sites to control administrative costs, and partnering with community agencies to share facilities (Kanters et al., 2014). Although researchers suggest that these strategies can be effective in the short term, sustaining them can be challenging given the limitations of short-term grants (Afterschool Alliance, 2021; Townsend & Lawrence, 2022).

As many years have passed since the report by Grossman et al. (2009), the estimates have become outdated and do not reflect current conditions and contemporary policy or practice

issues. An updated cost study is necessary to reflect advances with respect to quality programming. In addition, the youth development field calls for more specific information about the cost of building high-quality programs and how costs vary according to program model, participant populations, program location, and staffing structures. Recent calls for supporting the youth development workforce underscore the importance of understanding the cost of quality and allocating funding that adequately covers its cost, such as recruiting and retaining direct-service staff (e.g., Afterschool Alliance, 2022; Baldrige et al., 2024; National AfterSchool Association, 2022). Although it is widely acknowledged that OST programs require resources and funding to operate, the literature reveals a need for more empirical studies on the costs associated with operating a high-quality OST program (Lentz et al., 2024).

OST EXPERIENCES: WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE OST PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

This section discusses program features, practices, and processes documented by researchers across the diverse program types and activities serving children and youth from marginalized backgrounds. Qualitative studies that center the voices of participants and staff (alongside nonexperimental quantitative studies) are particularly valuable for understanding what happens inside the “black box” of programs—how participants and staff experience programs, what may be working well, what may need improvement, and where to start making improvements.

This literature builds on the eight features of positive developmental settings offered by the 2002 National Academies report *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*: (1) physical and psychological safety; (2) appropriate structure; (3) supportive relationships; (4) opportunities to belong; (5) positive social norms; (6) support for efficacy and mattering; (7) opportunities for skill building; and (8) integration of family, school, and community efforts (NRC & IOM, 2002). As noted earlier, these eight features have come to underpin many practice guides and quality assessments and are foundational to practices today. Since the publication of the 2002 report, qualitative research has captured additional program practices that help create positive developmental settings for children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds: implementing equity practices, such as culturally sustaining practices (e.g., Elswick et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2021, 2022) and critical pedagogies (e.g., Caporale et al., 2016; Ngo, 2017; Park, 2016; Son, 2022; Sulé et al., 2021); building supportive youth–adult relationships (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Sheltzer & Consoli, 2019); honoring youth voice and choice in structures and programs (e.g., Bulanda & McCrea, 2013; Thompson & Diaz, 2012); and intentionally cultivating a positive and inclusive program climate (e.g., Langhout et al., 2014; Ngo, 2017; Provenzano et al., 2020).

Common in this literature are descriptions of program curricula that are culturally responsive, flexible, and co-created with young people. Similarly, OST programming and curricula are frequently described as project-based, grounded in real-world issues, and offering links to young people’s daily lives and opportunities to explore their identities (e.g., McGinnis & Garcia, 2020; Thompson & Diaz, 2012). Common program structures also include collaborative learning, training staff on program curriculum and practices, and flexibility for staff to adjust curricula and activities to meet the needs of the individual participants in their group or program (e.g., Soto-Lara et al., 2021).

Table 6-2 summarizes the eight features of positive developmental settings outlined in NRC & IOM (2002) and adds the importance of culturally sustaining practices and critical

pedagogies, and youth voice. The table also highlights examples from the literature for how each of the 10 features can support children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds.

TABLE 6-2 Features of Positive Developmental Settings—Annotated

Features	Descriptors	Considerations for Supporting Children and Youth from Low-Income and Marginalized Backgrounds: Examples From the Literature
Physical and psychological safety	Safe and health-promoting facilities, and practices that increase safe peer group interaction and decrease unsafe or confrontational peer interactions	• Program developers and staff can draw on specific culturally based practices to create culturally affirming spaces for children and youth (e.g., Sulé et al., 2021). • Participants and staff report the importance of space configuration, including differentiating space by activity or creating a physically welcoming environment even when the physical surroundings are otherwise not inviting (e.g., Hennessy Elliott, 2020; Tichavakunda, 2019). • Programs can implement culturally relevant pedagogy and practices that foster identity development and safe environments (e.g., Johnson, 2017; Jones & Lynch, 2023; Yu et al., 2021).
Appropriate structure	Limit setting, clear and consistent rules and expectations, firm-enough control, continuity and predictability, clear boundaries, and age-appropriate monitoring	• Holleran Steiker et al. (2014) provide an example of collaborating with youth to adapt drug prevention programming to be culturally grounded and more appropriate for older audiences.
Supportive relationships	Warmth, closeness, connectedness, good communication, caring support, guidance, secure attachment, and responsiveness	• Programs can emphasize collaborative relationships between staff and youth and among peers in the program (e.g., Hicks et al., 2022; Soto-Lara et al., 2021; Vickery, 2014). They might focus on singular shared identities (Johnson, 2017; Son, 2022) or on a shared overarching identity and learning to connect with people from different backgrounds (e.g., Soto-Lara et al., 2021). • Adult staff can serve as role models and share their stories with participants to build a sense of identity and relationships (e.g., Lalish et al., 2021; McGinnis & Garcia, 2020; Sheltzer & Consoli, 2019). • Mentoring models can foster connections and expand the social capital of children, youth, and families in their programs (e.g., Means, 2019).
Opportunities to belong and the intentional cultivation of a responsive and inclusive*	Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, social engagement, and integration; opportunities for sociocultural identity formation; and support for	• Some programs are grounded in frameworks explicitly connected to the cultural background of the children and youth they serve and facilitating empowering spaces (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Johnson, 2017). • Programs can give children and youth space to reject or act in ways contrary to norms or stereotypes that may constrain them in other spaces (e.g., Simon et al., 2021).

program climate	cultural and bicultural competence	Programs can cultivate belonging, where children and youth experience the freedom of identity expression (e.g., Theriault & Witt, 2014).
Social contribution	Young people and community centered, opportunities to contribute using individual and local assets, scaffolded opportunities for leadership	Programs can include service-related activities, including neighborhood cleanups (Fuller et al., 2013) and volunteering at food banks (Monkman & Proweller, 2016).
Support for efficacy and mattering	Youth-based empowerment practices that support autonomy and making a real difference in one’s community; practices that include enabling, responsibility-granting, and meaningful challenge; practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance levels	- Programs can adopt mission statements and organizational structures that promote community engagement and involvement (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Fenzel & Richardson, 2018; Monkman & Proweller, 2016; Park, 2016). - Participatory and youth-driven program activities can emphasize participants’ ability to create positive change in their communities (Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Chung et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Langhout et al., 2014; Sulé et al., 2021). - Programs can include community engagement, youth activism, and citizenship principles in their missions and organizational structures (Brown et al., 2018; Fenzel & Richardson, 2018; Monkman & Proweller, 2016; Park, 2016).
Opportunities for skill-building	Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural literacies, media literacy, communication skills, and good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment; and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital	- Programs can connect racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences and practices with academic activities, such as reading comprehension (e.g., Jones & Lynch, 2023), writing (e.g., McGinnis & Garcia, 2020), science (Ryu et al., 2019), and math programs (Yu et al., 2022). - Program developers and staff can adapt activities to reflect participants’ cultural backgrounds (e.g., Harrison, 2023), including using their strengths as a resource for learning new content (e.g., Ryu, 2019).

Integration of family, school, and community efforts	Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community	• Programs engaging families can provide time for family bonding and positive influence on younger siblings (Whitson et al., 2020), family inspiration in college and career aspirations (Means, 2019), and identifying the various roles family play in encouragement and academic help (Perry & Calhoun-Butts, 2012). • Programs can build partnerships among schools and community-based organizations to connect in-school and out-of-school spaces (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2016; Sulé et al., 2021).
Adoption of culturally sustaining practices and critical pedagogies	Opportunities to increase critical consciousness and critical engagement, support for identity development, culturally relevant and responsive practices/pedagogy and programs across different content areas, fostering safe collectives between peers and with adults	• Program leaders can include multicultural resources to provide opportunities for participants to see themselves in fiction and nonfiction stories (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Jones & Lynch, 2023; Park, 2016; Pinkard et al., 2017; Son, 2022). • Programs can implement culturally relevant practices that encourage participants to connect their ethnic and linguistic practices and interests with program tasks (Johnson, 2017; Ryu et al., 2019; Vickery, 2014; Yu et al., 2022). • Programs can incorporate traditional cultural practices (e.g., dance, music, language, food) into program structures (Doucet & Kirkland, 2021; Johnson, 2017; Ryu, 2019; Ryu et al., 2019). • Programs can provide opportunities for written, digital, verbal, and theatrical storytelling, allowing children and youth to express their identities and experiences (McCormick et al., 2015; McGinnis & Garcia, 2020; Ngo, 2017; Park, 2016).
Programs and structures that honor youth voice and choice	Opportunities to support youth agency, leadership, and empowerment; shared-decision-making models and youth participatory action; co-designed and co-constructed programs and activities	• Programs can provide opportunities for youth empowerment and leadership by integrating youth voice (e.g., Langhout et al., 2014). • Programs can offer decision-making power shared between adults and youth (e.g., Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Anyon et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2018; Bulanda & McCrea, 2013; Langhout et al., 2014; Whalen et al., 2016).

* As described in the Blue Book (NRC & IOM, 2002):
“How is inclusiveness across cultural groups achieved? Simply bringing different groups into contact with each other does not necessarily lead to mutual understanding and respect; the conditions of contact are critical” (Merry, 2000; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000[b]). Experimental studies introducing multiethnic cooperative learning groups have demonstrated that such experiences increase crossethnic group friendships and, in turn, increase a sense of belonging in the school and the classroom (Slavin, 1995)” (p. 9).

SOURCE: Generated by the committee; adapted from NRC & IOM, 2002.

Culturally Sustaining Practices and Critical Pedagogies

Forming personal identity is a task of development that is particularly salient during adolescence (NASEM, 2019c). As summarized by Coyne-Beasley et al. (2024) and Williams and Deutsch (2016), as young people grow older, they become increasingly aware of and attuned to their social status, and institutions, policies, and practices may reinforce status hierarchies and stereotypes about members of groups that are nondominant or stigmatized in society. Many OST programs specifically aim to provide children and youth a space to explore, understand, and navigate their identities (e.g., Caporale et al., 2016; Pinkard et al., 2017). Some programs draw on critical frames, engaging participants in the interrogation of systems and structures, both historical and contemporary, that impact their lives (e.g., Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Brown et al., 2018; Caporale et al., 2016; Carey et al., 2021).

Ladson-Billings (2021) describes a focus on culturally relevant learning as a classroom-based pathway for understanding and fostering the competence of children and youth from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The tenets of culturally relevant learning rest upon ideas of (1) learning; (2) cultural competence of the educators—that is, understanding the contexts in which children and youth are growing and learning, and including these experiences in pedagogical strategies; and (3) the development of participants' critical consciousness and promoting their ability to see their social conditions, understand what is and is not of their doing, and recognize the interpersonal and larger systems that contribute to their station and well-being, often with a commitment to change (Ladson-Billings, 2021). As documented by García-Coll (1996) and Ladson-Billings (2021), OST programming can reflect the principles of culturally relevant learning in numerous ways, such as building upon strengths-based approaches to recognize participants' race, language, and heritage in ways that foster their identities (García Coll, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2021). As Gay (2000) describes, such programming uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of racially and ethnically diverse children and youth (that is, their lived experiences and frames of reference) as conduits for developing programming that is more personally meaningful, has higher appeal, and may be learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). Numerous qualitative studies of OST programs illustrate the nuanced variation and adaptation of cultural relevant practices in OST programs with and for children, youth, families, and communities (see examples in Table 6-2).

As described by Barton & Tan (2009) and Ryu et al. (2019), explicitly inviting participants who have been marginalized because of their ethnicity, language, or nativity to contribute knowledge is a strengths-based strategy that connects participants' family and learning microsystems. Ryu et al. (2019) explored how Burmese youth who were refugees navigate their identities in OST programs. The research team collected videos of learning processes accompanied by audio recordings of group interactions in an effort to understand how participants made sense of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) content. Analyses focused upon the earlier quarter of the 21 sessions, one-third of which included responsive practices, to best understand the earliest phases of navigating identity and engaging familiar cultural content in understanding science. For example, in learning about climate, participants used the words “zig” and “zag” to take turns sharing and recalled products native to their culture for protecting the skin from the harsh effects of sun. Though trepidatious and less confident early on, the youth engaged and valued each other's perspectives while learning about the science of climate and weather. Creating a space for children and youth to draw upon their

culture in STEM learning illustrates how to integrate “funds of knowledge” with young people who are refugees (Ryu et al., 2019).

Similarly, Yu et al. (2021) characterized culturally responsive programs for Latine youth: (1) promoting an inclusive, safe, and respectful program climate, particularly in regards to culture, language, race, and ethnicity; (2) engaging in personal conversations between staff and youth versus more exclusive and isolating experiences; (3) providing opportunities for mutual learning across diverse cultures and perspectives; and (4) promoting a range of social and emotional skills that honor cultural values about emotional development. Yu et al. (2021) built on previous work by Soto-Lara et al. (2021), who examined culturally relevant approaches to fostering STEM identities for youth who feel stereotyped and excluded from STEM areas by their gender, ethnicity, or race. STEM programming for middle school children was conducted in minority-serving, university-based OST programs (Soto-Lara et al., 2021). In interviews with 28 participants (50% female), the adolescents shared the program processes they thought contributed to their enhanced STEM learning—incorporating advanced math concepts in real-world examples such as real estate investments, and engaging in collaborative learning, campus tours, and informal conversations. This work highlights identity-supporting practices that can contribute to math identities among Latine youth (Soto-Lara et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021).

In summary, the available qualitative and ethnographic literature highlights innovative, strengths-based approaches for integrating participants’ backgrounds into programming; these approaches can be culturally sustaining for children and youth who are marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, nativity, and/or language. The participants and program leaders taking part in these studies report that culturally relevant pedagogical approaches can celebrate diversity, help to reduce stereotypes, and foster “learner” identities in topics ranging from science and math to art and literacy (Ryu et al., 2019; Soto-Lara et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021). While much examination of culturally sustaining practices in OST settings has focused on race and ethnicity, some studies show that these concepts can apply to other marginalized groups; and some studies have examined these tenets for LGBTQ+ youth (Carey et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2015), bilingual youth (Perry & Calhoun-Butts, 2012; Ryu, 2019) and marginalized gender groups (Schnittka & Schnittka, 2016; Simon et al., 2021). This body of work offers prospects for future research into methods that might be particularly effective for fostering positive effects in OST programs for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds.

Supportive Relationships

Decades of robust literature on child and youth development find that supportive familial, caregiver, and adult relationships play a significant role in fostering positive outcomes for children and youth. They need secure attachment from adults as a foundation for healthy development and strong relationships (NASEM, 2019b, 2019c). Similarly, peers play an important role in youth development (NASEM, 2019c).

Studies suggest that participants value the relationships built with peers, mentors, program staff, and caregiving/helping others. In some cases, these relationships are credited as an important component of the program’s success (e.g., Bulanda & McCrea, 2013; Kamrath, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2016). Both the relational climate (e.g., trust; Meza & Marttinen, 2019) and instrumental features of the relationships (e.g., staff helping with tasks, teaching skills, brokering networks) have been identified in the literature as important (Perry & Calhoun-Butts, 2012; Sheltzer & Consoli, 2019). Study participants, staff, and researchers use phrases such as “comfortable,” “empowering,” “welcoming,” and “family-like” to describe program spaces built

through strong relationships between adults and young people and among the young people as peers (e.g., Pavlakis, 2021; Ryu et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2022). Monkman and Proweller (2016), for example, describe the program they studied as offering “space to ‘be,’ space to ‘grow,’ and space to ‘do’” (p. 191). Participants often reported that they could “be themselves” in such OST programs (e.g., Doucet & Kirkland, 2021).

Peer Relationships

Many programs identify the collective relationships they foster among participants as important for their work. Relationships with peers are seen as contributing to positive, trusting, and fun program climates (e.g., Chung et al., 2018), and participants report using each other as resources for learning (e.g., Tichavakunda, 2019). Studies have explored how relationships within programs facilitate participation and learning in the program. Participants report that peer relationships influence motivation to join and continue in the program (e.g., Hicks et al., 2022; Vickery, 2014; Whalen et al., 2016). For example, participants in an afterschool physical activity program reported, “For the people that struggle or have challenges . . . they see that there’s somebody out there that has the same challenges. So you see you’re not the only one struggling with the same thing” (Whalen et al., 2016, p. 645).

Some programs use a peer-mentoring model, whereby peers or near peers with greater experience or expertise work with less experienced program participants to support their learning (e.g., Clement & Freeman, 2023; Hillier et al., 2019; Robinson-Hill, 2022). For example, the Training Future Scientist program, implemented at a community afterschool program in Chicago, used peer-led cooperative-learning groups and working role models to create authentic science experiences (Robinson-Hill, 2022). Participants reported benefits such as personal growth and development and enhanced peer leadership skills. One peer leader reported that they realized that age does not influence “how much a person can learn, how intelligent a person is, nor the capacity of their mind space” (Robinson-Hill, 2022, p. 128).

Some studies note, however, how peer interactions can reinforce or (re)create social boundaries between identity groups (e.g., Doucet & Kirkland, 2021; Hennessey Elliott, 2020; Schnittka & Schnittka, 2016). That said, most studies emphasize the positive nature of peer relationships, including how young people foster positive social norms that create welcoming environments and how these relationships provide support and motivation for program participants (e.g., Cavendish et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2019; Ryu et al., 2019).

Youth–Adult Relationships

Youth–adult relationships also are often noted as critical processes that contribute to programs’ success. Program staff are often noted as critical for both maintaining the structure of the program (e.g., Bulanda et al., 2013) and fostering supportive relationships with the participants (e.g., Whalen et al., 2016). Adult staff can serve as role models and share their stories with participants to build a sense of identity and relationships (e.g., Lalish et al., 2021; McGinnis & Garcia, 2020; Sheltzer & Consoli, 2019).

Relationships with adult staff are also a mechanism for engaging children and youth in programming (e.g., Marttinen et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021) and for building trust (e.g., Brown et al., 2018; Meza & Marttinen, 2019). Some programs prioritize time for staff to get to know participants through both program activities and informal conversations (Marttinen et al., 2021; Soto-Lara et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021).

Recognizing the critical role of adult staff, some programs specifically hire staff who they feel will be able to foster close and caring relationships with program participants (e.g., Kamrath, 2019). Yu et al. (2021)—in their qualitative study of a high-quality OST STEM program serving middle school-aged Latinx youth from economically underprivileged communities—found that relationships with adult staff from similar backgrounds as the youth was as a common strength. McGovern et al. (2020), moreover, described a weekly youth coalition that organized monthly events in a rural community. McGovern et al. (2020) reports that program leaders leveraged shared backgrounds to form meaningful relationships with youth and established trusting relationships with families. The study found that program leaders served as trusted allies with participants and supported the young people in navigating discrimination and developing leadership skills (McGovern et al., 2020).

In some programs, adults purposefully share power with children and youth (e.g., Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Langhout et al., 2014). In studies of these programs, shared decision-making power between adults and young people has been described as critical for fostering relationship-building between adults and young people (e.g., Anyon et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2018; Bulanda & McCrea, 2013; Whalen et al., 2016).

Several studies also note practices that encourage collaboration between participants and adults beyond staff, such as peer-led discussions and design-based challenges (e.g., Jones & Lynch, 2023; Kennedy et al., 2016; Soto-Lara et al., 2021). These include facilitating connections to wider networks of people and institutions, such as the program bringing in local experts or leaders to speak with participants or links to colleges and universities (e.g., Lalish et al., 2021; Vickery, 2014). For example, Science Club was founded in 2008 as a mentor-based afterschool program for underserved middle school youth in Chicago (Kennedy et al., 2016). Through weekly, inquiry-based, small-group instruction in a dedicated laboratory setting at a Boys & Girls Club, participants build authentic science skills and receive the support of scientist-mentors (i.e., Northwestern University graduate students from a variety of STEM disciplines, including chemistry, biology, engineering, and neuroscience). The relationship between mentor and mentee is bidirectional: mentors teach STEM skills while learning new approaches to science teaching and communicating with the children and youth they serve. According to Kennedy et al. (2016):

Youth focus groups and interviews conducted as part of the project evaluation confirmed Science Club members' engagement and overwhelmingly positive feelings about their experience. Members clearly identified themselves as part of an academic, social, and emotional support system that included peers, scientist-mentors, and Science Club staff. In interviews, youth often named the social and supportive environment as an important factor in their enjoyment of Science Club. One youth noted, "They make me feel like I matter." Another participant said the community is integral in "Pushing me and keeping my drive and that hope, that fire lit, to keep going." This support played a critical role in participants' academic and social development in middle school, high school, and beyond. For example, Science Club leaders regularly help students with applications to and full-ride scholarships for selective-enrollment high schools, provide paid "high school mentor" positions to program alumni, and assist college-age alumni in finding summer internships. (p. 6)

Through mentoring models that foster such connections, programs expand the social capital of children, youth, and families in their programs (e.g., Means, 2019). Formal mentorship

training for staff, however, has not been widely studied. Hillier et al. (2019) examined mentorship training on program models, goals, and activities; how to manage sessions; effective listening and communication skills; problem-solving; and potential challenges of being a mentor.

In summary, the literature demonstrates the relevance of relationships as a mechanism for learning and engagement. Although relationships as key to high-quality OST programs has been a long-standing focus in the field, few programs appear to include explicit support and time for relationship-building in their activities and structures, nor for training staff on best practices in mentoring and relationship development. This represents an opportunity for further improvement across the field.

Youth Voice, Leadership, and Co-Design

As mentioned in Chapter 2 there is variation in the degree to which youth voice, decision-making, and leadership are prioritized or incorporated into programs or activities, with practitioners and scholars using varied terms for these qualities. However, youth–adult partnership has gained ground as a clear and concise depiction. Zeldin et al. (2013) define *youth–adult partnership* as the practice of

(a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue. (p. 388)

Youth–adult partnerships have been studied across multiple contexts, but primarily in OST programs. Programs can enact youth–adult partnerships (i.e., incorporate youth voice) in a number of ways: offering participants choices about which activities to participate in, inviting children and youth to provide formal or informal feedback on program design, and offering an opportunity for shared decision-making with adults and hands-on leadership development (Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016). Scholars have noted that facilitating youth–adult partnerships is not simply a matter of letting young people lead (Camino, 2015), but it requires skill and strategy from adult facilitators—this has been referred to as “leading from behind” (Larson & Angus, 2011, p. 84). Scholars have also identified challenges and tensions in supporting young people as they assert power and agency (Medina et al., 2020; Serrano et al., 2022)

As a form of youth–adult partnership, programs engaging preteens and adolescents can offer opportunities for children and youth to engage in peer mentoring/teaching and leadership (Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016), lead activities or programs (Delgado, 2004; Kruse, 2019), and serve on executive or advisory boards (Zeldin, 2004). In these settings, younger children can observe older youth in leadership activities, such as mentoring, teaching, organizing, which models future roles for younger children. Developmentally appropriate youth–adult partnership efforts in OST programs may include participatory action research, program evaluation, and social entrepreneurship.

A growing body of literature recognizes that young people’s developing competencies in flexible problem-solving, their awareness of and concern with others, and their openness to exploration and novelty make adolescence an opportune time for supporting agency and leadership and promoting engagement—OST settings offer an opportunity for children and youth to develop such skills (NASEM, 2019a). OST scholarship identifies programs with positive relationships on youth empowerment and leadership, specifically programs that include a youth

participatory action research (YPAR)⁴ component (e.g., Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020; Anyon et al., 2018) and those that integrate youth voice, decision-making, and/or leadership (e.g., Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016; Langhout et al., 2014).

For example, a group of Indigenous Oaxacan youth and young adults, with the support of diverse adults, led a 2-year YPAR project to document the civic engagement pathways of migrant and Indigenous youth in California (Oaxacalifornia Reporting Team, 2013). Youth explored questions on gender roles in civic participation, and the unique cultural and linguistic situation of Oaxacan youth, who navigate Oaxacan culture vis-à-vis Mexican, Mexican American, and other American cultures. Youth in the research team were bilingual or trilingual—some spoke an Indigenous language at home, Spanish with friends, and English in schools. Its research report describes how the program provided an opportunity for youth to safely develop an understanding of their identity and explore intra- and interethnic dynamics that support or hinder civic participation and social mobility (Oaxacalifornia Reporting Team, 2013).

In many programs, young people are considered co-constructors of activities and knowledge, contributing to feelings that the programs are youth-centered spaces. Participants often contrast this with other spaces in their lives (e.g., Yu et al., 2022). Founding OST programs in youth development and cultural competence can contribute to a common view of young people as assets and a focus on their holistic development. At the same time, challenges can arise when partners do not share those views (e.g., if some program partners hold a more deficit view of young people and their families; see e.g., Pavlakis, 2021). Box 6-1 summarizes perspectives from young people who shared with the committee their personal experiences in an OST program that serves low-income communities or households.

BOX 6-1 **Young People's Experiences in OST Programs**

The committee held two information-gathering sessions in February and April 2024, during which young people shared personal stories of their time in an OST program. They were asked to share how they got involved in the program, what they enjoyed about the program, and what their participation in the program has meant for their lives.

When asked to share what they like most about their programs, young people often spoke about the variety of activities and clubs within their programs and the opportunities to grow. For example, a young adult from South Dakota noted her enthusiasm to participate in an entrepreneurship program, where she learned how to run her own business, create a resume, and practice interviewing skills. Others shared how programs offered them a chance to support their communities and families. For example, a high schooler from Arizona shared that through his 4-H program, he is engaged in community volunteer projects that support the Hopi Reservation where he lives. A high schooler from Georgia said that one of her favorite things about her program is that it offers a platform for participants and families, largely from an immigrant and refugee community, to have their voices heard. The program elevates the voices of independent young people.

Speakers shared that in their programs they can express themselves through painting, sewing, and graphic design, and they can develop soft skills such as public speaking, multitasking, managing projects, and networking. One middle schooler added, “There are so many different ways, so many different things I’ve learned from this program that can really help me in my future of going to high school and college.”

⁴ Defined in Box 7-1.

These young people spoke time and again of engagement, encouragement, and support from staff and peers as crucial to their positive experiences, often referring to them as a family. High school students from the Washington, DC, area spoke about their programs as a “second home” and “a place where you can come and be safe just in case something’s happening outside of the program.” Another noted that she loves the “positive mentorship and having people who actually care.” A high schooler from Florida, shared that program staff “give us courage and encourage us to be better just by showing us love,” with staff serving as role models in his life.

Finally, the young people talked about the impacts of their experiences on their perspectives. One speaker said that his experiences “showed me there is a different side of the world when you do right.” Another said, “they have opened me to so many experiences and opportunities that I still talk about to this day.” A high schooler from Washington, DC, said that the experiences he has had in his program “changed my viewpoint on a lot of things, a lot of people, and it has changed the way I think before I react to certain situations. . . . Your thoughts, words, and actions will determine your destiny, and Life Pieces [the program] has taught me that. So, I can use that in what I say, what I do, and how I react.”

THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES IN SUPPORT OF PROGRAM QUALITY

Intermediaries play a strong role in supporting program quality and the practices described in this chapter that underpin quality implementation. Intermediaries support quality through creating common quality practices and metrics across systems, standing up quality standards or competencies via the design of shared data systems (i.e., management information systems), and through shared data use and evaluation.

Every Hour Counts (2021) released an updated continuous improvement framework that provides a high-level perspective on QIS. Developed by a group of leaders of OST intermediaries across the United States, the framework organizes outcomes into three levels: system, program, and youth (see Figure 6-1). This organization provides a useful way for OST program leaders to assess their current practices, set goals, and implement targeted strategies for improvement. Local municipalities that have developed QIS typically assess quality at all three levels.



FIGURE 6-1 Continuous improvement framework.
SOURCE: Every Hour Counts, 2021.

At the systems level, QISs are concerned primarily with ensuring that the OST system is coordinated in a way that ensures continuous improvements in quality and quality at scale, and in a way that ensures that investments and outcomes across OST programs are sustainable. OST intermediaries overseeing a QIS coordinate efforts to (1) create common goals; (2) define standards for the field; (3) adopt a program quality assessment tool; and (4) develop and oversee an management information system as a means of achieving those goals. Systems-level considerations also include data collected on cost to determine what financial resources are required to meet the goals set forth by the OST intermediary and their partners and identifying program locations to assess the degree to which all children and youth have access to high-quality programming.

For example, under the Wallace Foundation’s Next Generation Afterschool System Building Initiative, system leaders noticed a sharp decline in summer learning opportunities in a high-poverty neighborhood in a particular city, based on data uploaded by program providers (Gamse et al., 2019). Although the decline in availability was attributed to temporary issues with facilities, the prompt availability of data made it possible for the intermediary to notify the city about the broader problem. In response, OST system leaders collaborated with city agencies and

private funders to create a priority list of 15 neighborhoods. Their approach was to focus on these communities first and then expand their programming and impact from there (Gamse et al., 2019).

In 2010, RAND published a study of a prior Wallace Foundation initiative intended to support the development of a QIS in each of five cities (McCombs et al., 2010). Although the cities took varied paths toward developing a QIS, they generally followed a parallel model of developing a common vision and goals, developing or adopting standards, and adopting a quality assessment tool. A primary goal of this initiative was to develop a data system that could accurately monitor participation across demographic characteristics to understand who was attending OST programming and to what degree. In the years since the initiative, many more local intermediaries have developed and used QIS to support access and quality improvements.

Program Quality Standards

Many intermediaries that oversee OST programs use quality standards. These standards are the measures or indicators of a high-quality program, ideally reflective of the current evidence on best practices and related outcomes, as well as specific community needs (National League of Cities, 2016). Of central focus for a local intermediary creating or adopting quality standards is ensuring that children and youth are attending high-quality, safe, supportive OST programs with clearly defined and measurable goals and outcomes (Russell & Little, 2011). These quality standards are typically derived from existing research and already existing standards from states and other locales. Local quality standards for OST primarily serve the following purposes:

- Provide a common language to define quality in OST programs and settings
- Define quality OST programming specific to that locale
- Support the professionalization of the field
- Serve as a foundation for program and practice decisions
- Provide a framework for evaluation and continuous improvement
- Inform various stakeholders, including the general public, about the quality of available programs

A survey of OST coordinating entities found that a majority (63%) of municipalities were using quality standards (Simkin et al., 2013). Nearly all (39 out of 43) that reported using quality standards also had an associated assessment tool. At the state level, 42 states have developed quality standards and guidelines (American Institutes for Research, 2020). Many local OST intermediaries adopt or adapt their state's quality standards.

Standards typically contain a set of categories, with elements providing detail about necessary or desired components and specific standards set for each element. Common categories for quality standards include safety, health, and well-being; environments; supportive relationships; program management; program activities; staffing and professional development; and program evaluation. Reflecting growing evidence from the literature on the science of learning and development (Cantor et al., 2020), and based on community need (e.g., shifting demographics), some municipalities have also followed the lead of their state's coordinating entity in adopting standards detailing social and cultural competencies.

The process for the development of local quality standards can vary in part based on the governance structure of OST programs in that locale. In some cases, an OST governing body

representing a larger municipality in the state has partnered with the state’s governing body to draft both the municipality and the state’s standards. This is done to ensure alignment and to provide an opportunity to drive the adoption of standards across the state. For example, in Louisville, Kentucky, two members from a state-wide organization served on the local committee that developed quality standards (Starr et al., 2016). This led to the creation of city-specific standards, as well as an eventual set of standards for the state level (Kentucky Out-of-School Alliance, 2011). Many cities followed a similar path in the development of their standards. For example, in 2006, Grand Rapids, Michigan, convened a group of community partners who were part of the Expanded Learning Opportunities Network to review the current research on OST practices and outcomes and existing OST standards, in order to ensure theirs reflected the current evidence. The National AfterSchool Association⁵ Standards were primary artifacts used to develop standards for OST programs in Grand Rapids. Community members and leaders were engaged to review and provide feedback on the standards before they were finalized. Similarly, the Tulsa Opportunity Project—the intermediary coordinating OST efforts for the city of Tulsa, Oklahoma—convened program providers, the Tulsa City School District, and city agencies to draft the standards. Community organizations and individual members were convened to discuss and provide critical feedback on the standards prior to their codification.

In recent years, recognizing the emerging evidence on the central importance of context and culture in learning and development, a few state intermediaries, including School’s Out Washington (2014), have developed standards and assessment tools on cultural competence and relevance. Given that many local intermediaries adopt or adapt state standards, an increase is likely in the creation of standards for cultural relevance and competence in OST programs in local communities.

Management Information Systems

Gamse et al. (2019) is one of the more comprehensive reports on local efforts to utilize data to support OST program access and quality improvements. In the Next Generation Afterschool System-Building Initiative, the Wallace Foundation chose cities based on strong mayoral leadership and meaningful local investment in youth development. Before the initiative, cities rarely collected basic information, such as the number of participants participating in local OST programs (Wallace Foundation, 2010). By 2016, all participating cities had created management information system (MIS) to reliably collect and store data, and to make that data usable for analysis and reporting (Gamse et al., 2019). In observing this initiative, Gamse et al. (2019) identified three types of investment—people, processes, and technology—that are key to developing capacity to collect and use data for systems-level improvement. The initiative also demonstrated key system activities (Gamse et al., 2019):

- “Define data elements collectively across all stakeholders.
- Create staff position(s) focused on monitoring data accuracy and quality.
- Build data entry and analytic capacity and confidence through professional development (PD) and other trainings focused on data use.
- Provide diverse formats of PD to reach and engage wide range of system users with differential technological and data savvy.
- Collect data systematically from participating providers.

⁵ At the time, National Afterschool Association was known as the National School-Age Care Alliance.

- Review data elements to assess usefulness (e.g., dosage and retention at the individual level may yield more useful information than average daily attendance rates).
- Leverage use of standardized reports and dashboards to make data available and accessible.
- Pilot planned system changes with a smaller group of OST providers before implementing network-wide” (p. 16).

Municipalities developing or selecting an MIS have typically employed one of three strategies based on the degree to which an MIS or other data system was already being utilized. Cities studied as part of the Next Generation Afterschool System-Building Initiative convened partners to discuss the development and use of an MIS. Where an MIS had not existed previously, partners discussed existing data and data uses and debated what data elements would be necessary. Where an MIS did already exist, discussions focused on refinement rather than a wholesale rebuild. Among the eight cities, data initially selected for inclusion in the MIS were program attendance, program quality, school data, and youth development and social and emotional learning measures.

Data and Evaluation

Intermediaries collect a variety of data related to individuals, program quality, and community assets and challenges regarding youth development in their community. Intermediaries use these data to evaluate and improve OST program quality and overall system health. And agencies use these data to make informed policy and practice decisions to support high-quality programming. Many local intermediaries have moved toward *results-based decision-making*⁴—using youth development outcomes to determine the necessary combination and intensity of supports that will yield high-quality programs. More advanced data systems have allowed for data to be used beyond basic accountability to support continuous improvement. Where capacity exists, local intermediaries conduct their own evaluations of the OST system and individual programs. Where internal capacity is lacking, cities also leverage relationships with local colleges and universities to conduct evaluations. Generally, intermediaries use data to:

- Track attendance and participation (to support access, enrollment and quality improvements)
- Assess the needs of children and youth, families, and communities
- Develop, adapt, and implement a municipality-wide program quality assessment tool
- Conduct and support program- and city-level evaluation efforts
- Develop common, systems-level outcome measures and indicators
- Drive continuous improvement efforts

Training is afforded to OST organizations in many communities by the local intermediary on both the purposes of collecting data and the actual process for data collection, including basic data collection practices, how to accurately enter data into the system, and ensuring data privacy. To maintain data quality, intermediaries have developed data monitoring processes that include

⁴ The absence of information in research and program evaluation on youth-specific change can place constraints on results-based decision-making.

“common definitions of indicators, standardizing processes and timelines for data entry and cleaning, and giving feedback to providers about the data that had been entered (e.g., timeliness, missing or incorrectly entered information)” (Gamse et al., 2019, p. 12).

One common challenge noted by municipalities in collecting data relates to accessing school-related data. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act requires programs to obtain parental consent to access data. Local intermediaries typically enter into agreements with OST providers, school districts, and cross-sector partners to share data. These agreements are central to a robust data system, specifying who is formally part of the OST system and who can access and use the data. To address this yearly challenge, some cities have adjusted policies so that parents need to opt their child in only once throughout their educational career.

CONCLUSION

The youth development field has coalesced around the importance of OST program quality, as evidenced by the many research syntheses, frameworks, standards, and measures described in this chapter. Common indicators of quality across OST settings can include operations, staffing, environment, and implementation. However, how the field names, defines, and measures quality varies, as do the common indicators that are prioritized. Most quality approaches take a universal, best-practice approach that, in most cases, is not explicit about barriers that disproportionally affect low-income and marginalized children and youth. Research is needed that examines how traditional-standards approaches may affect cultural practices and participation, as are thoughtful critiques of the dominant quality approaches.

The committee’s review of qualitative research captured program practices that contribute to the creation of positive developmental settings for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds. Common in this literature are descriptions of program activities that are culturally responsive and co-created with young people, which are critical additions to the features of developmental settings that have emerged since the 2002 National Academies report (NRC & IOM, 2002).

Furthermore, recent scholarship highlights how historical notions of quality—particularly as articulated in existing frameworks, standards, and measures—fail to account for the important role of equitable learning environments for children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds. That is, environments where all students have equal access to learning opportunities, regardless of their background or abilities, and where the program actively works to address individual needs to ensure all students can reach their full potential (see, e.g., Baldridge et al., 2024; Wilson-Ahlstrom & Martineau, 2022). Many authors highlight ways in which critical approaches to positive youth development can be integrated into programs more intentionally (Case, 2017; Imani-Fields et al., 2018; McDaniel, 2017; Tyler et al., 2020; Wilson-Ahlstrom & Martineau, 2022). These conversations can shape how program quality is defined and operationalized in OST programs. Future research will need to consider these principles in definitions and measurement of quality.

CONCLUSION 6-1: Adopting culturally sustaining practices and critical pedagogies, building supportive relationships with program peers and staff, honoring youth–adult partnerships, and intentionally cultivating a positive and inclusive program climate are key features of positive developmental settings and contribute to program quality.

CONCLUSION 6-2: More research is needed to explore associations between specific indicators of quality and outcomes, and to provide additional guidance for focusing on or prioritizing elements of quality to improve outcomes for all children and youth.

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Effectiveness and Outcomes of OST Programs

The committee was tasked with reviewing the evidence on the effectiveness and outcomes of out-of-school-time (OST) programs for promoting learning, development, and wellbeing for children and youth from low-income households. This chapter summarizes existing research on OST programs for children and youth—that is, according to research, which activities, practices, and experiences are effective for promoting learning, positive development (social, emotional, cognitive, and physical), and well-being for children and youth. To the extent possible and consistent with our charge, we focused on children and adolescents from low-income households and other marginalized¹ groups, but much of the existing research focuses on youth overall.

Given the variability and the nature of OST programs described in previous chapters, answering the seemingly simple question “Do OST programs matter for youth development?” is complicated. Therefore, this chapter begins with a discussion of factors that might help pinpoint for whom and under what circumstances programs are effective in supporting positive youth development, followed by a summary of our methodology in reviewing the literature.

The committee reviewed a significant number of studies. In order to make the content more accessible, the chapter first offers takeaways on the state of the evidence for each developmental outcome reviewed and its findings on moving the state of research on OST programs and activities forward. The chapter then goes on to offer more detailed discussion of the studies reviewed, organized by area of youth development outcome. Within each area, we discuss experimental and nonexperimental evidence and then consider the effects within childhood and adolescence when possible.² The text includes some details on the studies, such as their methodological frames, but more detailed information can be found in Appendix A. Key terms used in this chapter are defined in Box 7-1.

¹ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering’” where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage” (p.1).” The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See Box 1-3 in Chapter 1.

² When possible, within each outcome domain, the committee separated its review of studies by those on children (ages 5–12) and those on adolescents (13–18). Some studies included individuals whose age spanned across these categories; in these cases, the committee determined where best to place these studies. Additional information on the age of the populations studied is available in Appendix A.

Key Chapter Terms

Risk-taking behaviors: Behaviors are risky because of the uncertainty of their potential outcomes. Unhealthy risk-taking can result in adverse consequences that outweigh their potential gains and may delay or harm young people’s development. Healthy risk-taking involves socially acceptable and constructive risk behaviors.

Social and emotional learning: The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes for developing healthy identities, managing emotions, achieving personal and collective goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining supportive relationships, and making responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, n.d.).

Social and emotional skills or competencies: The knowledge, skills, and behaviors gained through the natural process of development and through intentional skill-building.

CONSIDERING PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: WHEN, HOW, AND FOR WHOM

As described in Chapter 6, OST programs vary in terms of quality and the developmental experiences they provide. As a result, not all programs are equally effective in promoting positive youth development. Additionally, some children and youth are more influenced by programs than others. Though the average effect of programs on young people’s outcomes often is used as evidence of their effectiveness, differences across activities and individuals create variability in the size of the effects; some youth may experience large positive gains whereas others may be unaffected, or even perhaps negatively impacted (Shonkoff, 2017).

A variety of factors at the setting-, activity-, and individual levels contributes to the diversity in program effects (Simpkins, 2015; Vandell et al., 2015). At the setting level, the content and quality of an activity are central dimensions to understanding effectiveness, which outcomes they affect, and the diversity in their effects (Simpkins, 2015; Smith et al., 2018; Vandell et al., 2015; Williams & Deutsch, 2016). First, the linkages between a young person’s participation in an OST activity and their specific outcomes are likely to vary based on the content (e.g., goals and programming) of the activity (as noted in Chapter 2) and what developmental opportunities are afforded by the activity. For example, a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) program is likely to influence a young person’s STEM outcomes, but the extent to which it influences other academic domains (e.g., reading) or other areas of development (e.g., social and emotional learning, mental health) will depend on what else is emphasized in the programming and how it is executed and organized (e.g., teamwork, group goals).

At the activities level, quality shapes what youth take away from OST activities (see also Chapter 2 and 6). In a seminal meta-analysis, Durlak et al. (2010) provides empirical evidence that participation in OST programs is associated with participants’ positive outcomes only when the programs were high quality; participation in lower-quality programs was associated with little or no change in children’s outcomes. Recently, scholars have argued that culturally responsive practices are essential components of high-quality activities, particularly for marginalized youth (Simpkins et al., 2017; Wilson-Ahlstrom & Martineau, 2022). In fact, some Latine middle school adolescents have reported being marginalized, experiencing discrimination, or having other negative experiences in OST activities (Lin et al., 2016; Ma et al., 2020).

Culturally responsive practice can help address these concerning experiences in activities, as documented in Chapter 6 (see also, e.g., García Coll, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Variability is also evident at the individual level. Recent work suggests that the benefits associated with participating in an activity depend on what other things children and youth do after school. For example, participating in OST programs is associated with positive youth development unless they are also spending significant amounts of time unsupervised (Gülseven et al., 2024; Vandell et al., 2022).

Because activities are voluntary, some young people do not attend *any* OST organized activities. In some cases, nonparticipation is a choice; in other cases, hindrances might include the lack of financial resources to support involvement, knowledge of available programming, or transportation (see Chapter 4). Young people who do not participate in organized activities can spend their time after school in a variety of ways, such as hanging out with peers unsupervised, working, making meaningful contributions to their families (e.g., caretaking), getting engrossed in social media, or investing in an informal skill-based activity they enjoy (e.g., drawing, reading), among other activities (Vandell et al., 2015). This variability is key in studies that compare participants and nonparticipants, though historically it has not been considered, and the nonparticipant group (as well as the participant group, for that matter) has been treated as a single homogeneous group (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006). Moreover, children and youth often have multiple options for OST activities. Although this has been less well-studied, it is possible that young people who attend different activities (e.g., 4H as compared to an arts program) may experience the same benefits and have similar outcomes. This is important when comparing individuals who participate in a specific activity with those who do not. Documenting and accounting for possible moderating factors, including other interventions in the child's environment, such as tutoring, psychotherapy, mentoring, neighborhood support, and other OST activities is important for future research (Mahoney & Zigler, 2006).

The young people who attend activities, even among those who attend the same activity site, can experience the same activity very differently from one another. Young people who attend the same activity vary in terms of how often they participate, the extent to which they are engaged and enjoy the activity, their experiences at the activity, and other individual factors (such as their relationships with other participants and staff) (Simpkins, 2015; Vandell et al., 2015). For example, the same activity could be a supportive environment for one individual and a marginalizing space for others (Lin et al., 2016; Ma et al., 2020). Such variability can emerge because youth are treated differently, youth engage in the activity in different ways, and the activity may be a better fit for some youth than others.

Of the various individual factors, the amount of time young people spend in activities has been the most heavily researched. The amount of time is important because it takes time for individuals to develop new skills, relationships, habits, and belief systems (Bohnert et al., 2010; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The multidimensionality or complexity of participation makes its impact sometimes challenging to assess, and existing studies vary in how and how deeply participation is assessed. Yet, simply spending time in an activity is not enough. How much participants learn depends on how engaged they are in the activity, how much they enjoy it, and the extent to which it is core to their sense of self or identity. Children and youth who are engaged or invested will likely learn more than a participant who does not want to be there or is a wallflower in the corner. For the most part, research shows support for what might be called

the “more is better” hypothesis. In other words, greater participation intensity, depth, engagement, and even breadth is associated with greater benefits (Bohnert et al., 2010).³

In spite of these challenges, existing research may shed light on implementation, scalability, and sustainability, as well as programs and approaches that are associated with positive outcomes for children and youth. To the extent possible, the committee organized the literature to take into account these sources of variability, including the setting, person, time, process, and domain (Bornstein, 2017; Lerner et al., 2024; Shonkoff, 2017; Simpkins, 2015). The literature review is organized by the domain or area of youth development (e.g., academic outcomes, social outcomes) and the age of the population studied (i.e., children and adolescents). To the extent possible, we examined whether aspects of the activity setting (e.g., content or type of the activity), developmental processes (e.g., youth–staff relationships), and individual-level indicators (e.g., time spent in activities, whether youth were members of a marginalized group) helped pinpoint when activities had positive effects and when they did not. However, our ability to address these issues was contingent on the existing literature. In some cases, the programs and approaches discussed may require additional evaluation to infer causal impacts on particular outcomes. In other cases, studies may provide insights that can inform policy and practice decision-making even if the programs, approaches, and outcomes they describe are not amenable to a causal study.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The committee derived literature for review from several sources. First, we commissioned the external consultants Mathematica and Youth-Nex to conduct systematic literature reviews. Mathematica’s review focused on quantitative research (including original data analysis and meta-analyses). Youth-Nex’s review focused on qualitative and mixed-methods research (Forrester et al., 2024; O’Connell et al., 2024). The committee worked closely with these consultants to set the parameters of their searches and narrow results. Additionally, the results of a systematic literature review conducted by committee member Dr. Sandra Simpkins with Dr. Deborah Vandell, both professors at the University of California, Irvine, were made available to the committee.⁴ Lastly, members of the committee identified relevant literature through their own work as researchers and experts in the youth development field.

The goal of this review was not to provide an exhaustive review nor meta-analytic findings. Rather, the goal was to draw on all types of research (e.g., randomized controlled trials and correlational studies, quantitative and qualitative) to summarize current knowledge on the linkages between young people’s OST activities and their developmental outcomes. Given the number of publications, the committee prioritized studies that were

- conducted in the United States,
- published in peer-reviewed journals,
- published since 2000, and

³ There may be some threshold to this rule such that benefits taper after a large intensity or breadth of involvement (e.g., Rose-Krasnor et al., 2006). A counter-suggestion, which has been called the “over-scheduling hypothesis,” suggests that too much activity involvement might be stressful and bad for children and youth. However, there is little empirical support for this hypothesis (Mahoney et al., 2006).

⁴ The literature review conducted by Dr. Simpkins and Dr. Vandell was supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Grants G2020-06433 and G2017-00786, which were led by Dr. Vandell as principal investigator).

- focused on OST programs (specifically, organized activities offered outside of school during the academic year; summer camps, tutoring, and museums were not included).

In addition, the committee prioritized longitudinal studies (rather than cross-sectional studies), as these provide evidence on potential longer-term effects; and, within quantitative studies, we prioritized those that were randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental designs, as they provide evidence on causal inferences. We used (1) RCTs and quasi-experimental designs to discuss the causal effects of young people's activities; (2) other quantitative findings to describe the relations between activities and outcomes; and (3) qualitative findings to describe potential outcomes, mechanisms, or processes that might account for how young people's activities influence their development.

When applying the tools of science to social policy, programs, and practice, a long-standing tension exists between, on one hand, the desire for science to inform policy and program effectiveness and, on the other hand, the realities and limitations of research in addressing dynamic, evolving, and contextualized social programs.

A key question in assessing causality in studies is whether subjects were randomly assigned to receive the treatment (i.e., participate in OST activities). Such random assignment could be achieved two ways: through an explicitly experimental design—that is, an RCT—or through a natural experiment (i.e., quasi-experiment) that randomizes subjects into the treatment or control arms. In general, RCTs enable strong statements about cause because demographic characteristics are balanced across the experimental and control groups in random fashion. Some RCTs are conducted on novel programs or practices in a determined amount of time. While analyses of data from an RCT might involve comparing the average scores of experimental and control groups, there are additional ways to examine effects. Growth curve modeling allows investigation of normal trajectories of increasing or decreasing characteristics, such as academic achievement or reduced risky behaviors. Growth curve modeling could also compare the trajectories of youth participating in a program versus a comparison group. For example, while risky behaviors with substances or delinquency might be growing among a population, program participation might work to maintain lower levels of risk. Growth curve models might be used in RCTs or other quasi-experimental designs.

Limitations of RCT designs include that they may restrict access to OST for young people in the control group, and that information about long-term effects might not be desirable. To balance these concerns, a natural experiment might be more appropriate. However, natural experiments may include what scientists call regression discontinuity or instrumental variable approaches (see Box 7-2 for discussion of other methodological strategies that address these challenges).

Even with results from RCTs or quasi-experimental study designs, some notes of caution are acknowledging in extrapolating causality:

RCTs, instrumental variable studies, or regression discontinuity designs identify the effect of the treatment on the treated as a local average treatment effect. What this means is that the effect is generalizable to the compliers who took the treatment. In an RCT, that group is those in the treatment group who complied with the program. In the highest-quality RCTs, program compliance is measured and might be used to examine whether it fostered the most desirable effects. In an instrumental variable or regression discontinuity design, compliers are those who were induced by the randomizing factor to take the treatment but who would not have otherwise (i.e., not those who would never participate nor those who would always participate).

Second, OST programs need to be adapted to the local context to survive and be successful (Cole & Distributive Literacy Consortium, 2006). An OST activity that shows effectiveness in one context is not guaranteed to show effectiveness in others. However, when OST activities, programs, and practices demonstrate effectiveness in multiple settings and across increasing numbers of participants, this constitutes evidence for the generalizability of the program or practice (i.e., the ability to apply the findings of one study to a broader audience). In cases where an RCT and replication are possible, attention to implementation is critical. When implementing an OST activity in a new context activity leaders have several options: (1) strictly replicating the program with no changes, (2) making small adaptations of the program to fit the local context, or (3) reinventing the program by merging some original key aspects with substantially new components (Morel et al., 2019). Programs that specify key elements and characteristics, such as their necessary duration and frequency, and include elements amenable to adaptation, foster flexibility and local ownership.

For example, if policymakers want to scale up programs that demonstrate significant, meaningful, and salubrious causal effects of particular OST activities, they must estimate how local contexts might influence implementation and effects. For example, those seeking to replicate a high-quality program that attracts highly skilled staff will need to consider potential constraints on the labor supply of experts in the domain in which the program focuses. Programs that are brought to scale may not fit all subpopulations' needs well. This points to the need to analyze the efficacy of programming; a number of demographic and individual characteristics, such as gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, can help determine whether programs provide greater benefits to some participants than to others. In a number of these cases when the research effects vary because of the individuals participating or the communities in which they are offered, qualitative methodologies can be helpful in uncovering important unknown parameters.

Adaptive designs build upon research that provides information on variation in efficacy by certain characteristics of the participants, staff, and/or programs (Collins et al., 2004). These characteristics are considered *tailoring variables* that inform decision-making regarding who receives specific program components. For example, an academically oriented OST program might work better for youth who need more instruction (scoring at a well-specified cutoff) than youth who are faring well in their studies (above the specified cutoff). For another example, programs that are not sensitive to the sociocultural backgrounds of the youth being served may not be as effective for all participating youth. Adaptive designs use variations first to analyze potentially different needs and decision rules for when additional or supplemental components of programming might be useful. In the previous example, a standard program might be delivered to youth; if necessary, additional support might be added to cover linguistic, academic, or social dimensions. Evaluation of the adaptive design could use experimental or quasi-experimental designs to compare the standard programming with added supplementary programming, and to examine if the standard or adaptive programming worked better for various subpopulations of participants. New innovations in adaptive designs would be helpful in sorting out for whom the program works best and in what conditions.

In summary, research designs and methods vary and have different strengths and limitations in answering questions of social significance that may be used to inform considerations for implementation, policy, and practice. To this end, the committee offers a comprehensive presentation of available evidence, including experimental and observational

studies that use quantitative and/or qualitative data, across a range of outcomes. We present the evidence with intentional language on evidence generation and application.

BOX 7-2

Common Research Methods in Evaluating OST Programs and Activities

The social sciences comprise a vast array of research methods, models, measures, concepts, and theories. This box briefly describes study designs and approaches that are commonly used to study out-of-school-time (OST) programs and activities. Researchers can collect cross-sectional or longitudinal quantitative or qualitative data as part of randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, and correlational studies. They may use *cross-sectional data*, which are collected at one time point, or *longitudinal data*, which are collected over time—often multiple years.

Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs)

In these experimental studies, an intervention or treatment is tested to determine whether it has a causal effect (Shadish et al., 2002). Participants are randomly assigned to either receive the intervention or participate in a comparison group that does not receive the intervention, providing a robust counterfactual. These studies assess effectiveness, or whether the intervention produces the intended effect in practice. In the case of organized OST activities, RCTs test whether an activity or aspect of the activity (e.g., improving quality, staff training) impacts youth development. In any research design, the generalizability of the findings is uncertain because of having a small number of children and youth participate in the study or being conducted at only one site, particularly if the participants or site do not represent the larger population and subpopulations utilizing OST. RCTs generally require an advance estimate of sample sizes; cluster randomization or matching can facilitate designs that have sample sizes sufficient for improving generalizability. Additionally, the use of RCTs may be limited because they often require much more time and expense than other approaches, or they may be precluded by ethical considerations (can be considered ethically objectionable if it denies a child or adolescent a service or treatment known to be beneficial). RCT designs that withhold helpful OST programs for long periods of time from comparison groups of children are key concerns. Alternative designs might test one approach to OST versus another, but this design precludes analysis of the impact of solely participating in an OST program. RCTs are increasingly being used in social science research, and data generated from an RCT, if well designed, have high internal validity and can produce an estimate of a causal relationship. These studies have been successfully conducted to inform policy (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2018a; NASEM, 2012, 2019).

Quasi-Experimental Studies

These observational studies are like RCTs in that they focus on testing whether an intervention or treatment has a causal effect by comparing participants or settings that received the intervention with those that did not (Shadish et al., 2002). The investigator may manipulate the intervention but does not control which participants receive the intervention.

The central difference between RCTs and quasi-experimental studies is that participants or settings are not randomly assigned to the intervention and control groups. Two groups are formed through various nonrandom processes. Because they do not involve randomization, these studies may not control for the effects of secondary variables, so the observed outcomes could be the result of any combination of a range of confounding factors. This means it is more difficult to attribute any effects to the experiment. There may be preexisting differences between

groups participating in an OST program (e.g., those who desired to participate versus those who did not) that might account for effects rather than programming in and of itself.

Despite the limitations of estimation based on observational data, quasi-experimental studies can be very useful for identifying associations that can then be studied more rigorously using other approaches (IES, 2018b).

Correlational Studies

These are nonexperimental studies that are not testing a particular intervention or treatment but examine the relations among indicators (Shadish et al., 2002). Correlational studies can address questions beyond whether an intervention or treatment are related to desirable outcomes. They can address exploratory questions, such as understanding potential mechanisms involved or testing how multiple experiences in activities or multiple activities after school might be associated with young people's adjustment.

With this type of design, one cannot say that participation "caused" an effect, only that participation was "associated" with certain types of outcomes. Correlational studies of OST programs often include young people who do and do not participate in an activity, though some correlational studies focus on only young people who participate in an activity. These studies range from small studies on one specific activity to large, nationally representative samples with thousands of young people who participate in a vast range of activities (IES, 2018c).

Additional Study Types

Additional study types used in the youth development field include mixed-methods research, meta-analysis, program evaluation.

Mixed methods research focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a better understanding of research problems than using either approach alone (NASEM, 2015). The quantitative methods help to address causal effects while qualitative methods can be paramount to identifying unanticipated effects, experiences, or processes that are unknown to the researcher.

Meta-analysis is an application of quantitative methods to combine the results of different studies. A statistical analysis is typically made of a common numerical summary, such as an effect size, drawn from different studies. Meta-analyses and other research syntheses are often employed to reduce the uncertainty of cause-and-effect assessments of policy or program interventions. By statistically combining the results of multiple experiments, for example, the effect of a policy or program can be estimated more precisely than from any single study of an intervention. Moreover, comparing studies that are conducted with different participants in different settings allows for the examination of how different contexts affect the outcomes of a policy or program. However, if individual studies are flawed, then so will be a meta-analysis of them; thus, meta-analyses often specify standards of quality for the studies to be included (NASEM, 2012).

Program evaluation is a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer questions about a program (Metz, 2007). It focuses on understanding program goals, establishing criteria for success, and gathering data to compare program performance with success criteria. Logic models are commonly used in program evaluation to define who the program is trying to reach and what it is trying to achieve, and to describe how to translate program resources into near-term results and long-term impacts (NASEM, 2013). OST program evaluations can identify "what works" and "what does not work," describe implementation and outcomes of a program to the community and funders, improve staff member's frontline practice with participants, increase a program's capacity to engage in continuous quality improvement and plan for the future, and build knowledge for the field (Metz, 2007).

Qualitative Studies

Many types of studies can be classified as qualitative, including ethnographic, historical, and other case studies; focus group interviews; content analysis of documents; interpretive sociology; and comparative and cross-national studies. Qualitative data may be derived from documentary sources, field observations, interviews with individuals or groups, and discourse between participants and researchers.

Case studies are in-depth investigations of subjects, groups, or phenomena in their real-world contexts, providing researchers with a clearer view of the problem at hand. Case studies can be employed for three distinct types of scientific ends: descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory. A *descriptive* study is to describes a phenomenon in detail in its real-world context. An *explanatory* study explains why and how certain conditions come into being. An *exploratory* study examines a phenomenon with the intention of identifying fresh research questions for subsequent studies (NASEM, 2020; National Research Council [NRC], 2003; Priya, 2021).

Participatory action research involves the participation and leadership of those who experience issues and who take action to produce emancipatory social change by conducting systematic research to generate new knowledge. Participatory research methods value the inclusion of the voices, perspectives, and questions originating from those intended to benefit from the research. In this way, those impacted by the research most directly become active participants in the process (NASEM, 2022, 2023). *Youth participatory action research* is an approach used among middle and high school-aged youth—young people explore and identify a topic of interest to them, design and implement the research, and then plan and implement an action project based on their findings to improve their lives and their communities (Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

Ethnography is a qualitative method designed to immerse the researcher in the context of individuals and programs. Ethnography is appropriate for deeply exploring and describing what individuals do and why they do it from their own perspective. There are two key features distinguishing features of the ethnographic approach. First, ethnography seeks to understand culturally based behaviors and beliefs from the perspective of a community's members and to use local perspectives. Second, the researcher is the primary tool for data collection, which takes place under conditions that the ethnographer cannot control (Pelto, 2013; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2003).

OUTCOMES: OVERALL TAKEAWAYS

As evident throughout this chapter, there is a wealth of research on the outcomes associated with young people's participation in OST programs. While this chapter does not provide an exhaustive review, it summarizes current knowledge about the linkages between young people's OST programs and a range of developmental outcomes. This section summarizes overall takeaways; later sections describe the research findings in greater detail.

The first overall takeaway is that OST programs vary in terms of quality and the developmental experiences they provide. As a result, some studies show positive associations and others no effects. Although the committee was unable to test this statistically, the effects may be less consistent and smaller for some outcomes compared with others. The review did not make clear whether certain activities are more effective, whether activities have larger effects on

certain outcomes than on others, or whether the preponderance of evidence varies by the methods used in the research. Some of the findings suggest that activity effects depend, at least in part, on the alignment of the activity content and the area of development, supporting the specificity principle (Bornstein, 2017, 2019). As noted in scholarship on early childhood programs, it may be more helpful to ask questions such as, “What about the program works?” and “For whom does it work and for whom does it not work?” (Shonkoff, 2017, p. 6). The committee presents suggestions for future research to help move the field in this direction.

Many of the quantitative studies, particularly the experimental studies, focused on comparing the outcomes of youth who participated in a specific activity with those who did not. The next most widely used examined the associations between outcomes observed and the amount of time spent in a specific activity. These designs highlight average effects. Although it is helpful to understand average effects, it is unlikely that every activity is equally effective or that each activity has the same effect on all participants (Lerner et al., 2024; Shonkoff, 2017). As we noted at the outset of this chapter, participants and nonparticipants are quite diverse groups (Simpkins, 2015). Individuals’ experiences vary even when they attend the same activity site in terms of the amount of time they spend there, their engagement, the centrality of the activity to their sense of self, how they are treated by others, and how well the activity fits their needs and personality. These differences among young people who attend an activity will change how large of an impact an activity can have and if it will affect them in positive or negative ways.

The second overall takeaway is that OST programs and activities have potential to bring about some positive change across a range of outcome domains, including socioemotional and interpersonal skills; physical, mental, and behavioral health; substance use prevention; school success; and civic engagement (see Box 7-3).

BOX 7-3

Outcomes Affected Positively by OST Programs and Activities

Social and Emotional Learning Outcomes

- **Persistence:** Experimental findings suggest that out-of-school-time (OST) programs that choose activities aimed at improving skills and motivation have the potential to improve persistence. However, the number of studies on these relations is quite small. More work is needed to understand under what circumstances (e.g., for which types of activities, what activity experiences) and for whom participation in these activities might help build persistence.
- **Sense of Responsibility:** Qualitative research suggests that adolescents and parents think that one of the benefits of participating in organized OST activities is developing a stronger sense of responsibility (Dunn et al., 2003; Marshall et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2009). More quantitative studies need to examine the generalizability of all these development processes, as the effects are larger for certain adolescents and some activities seem more effective than others.
- **Work Habits:** Correlational studies suggest that organized OST activities are associated with a young person’s work habits and that these skills can help them excel academically. However, the results suggest that these associations may vary by activity type, quality, and developmental period. More work is needed to understand what developmental experiences within OST activities help strengthen young people’s work habits.

- **Self-Control and Emotion Regulation Skills:** Research using experimental designs and programs that serve adolescents who are struggling present mixed findings in terms of the extent to which participating in programs is associated with changes in their self-control. Qualitative studies in childhood and adolescence provide some guidance on staff practices that may be associated with adolescents' emotion regulation skills, including creating positive norms and having positive relationships with participants. These results might provide insight into why the findings on participation or time spent in activities are mixed.
- **Prosocial Behavior:** The pattern of associations between a young person's organized OST activities and their prosocial behavior is mixed when researchers measure activities simply in terms of whether youth participated in activities or how much time they spent in activities. The research suggests that OST activities have the potential to promote prosocial behavior among diverse young people (Monkman & Proweller, 2016), but that potential depends on activity quality and content, and participants' experiences in the setting. Although prosocial behavior might happen more often in specific types of OST activities, it might be more fruitful to consider which experiences within those activities (e.g., behavioral expectations/norms, relationships) might be associated with a young person's prosocial behavior, as well as the extent to which highlighting prosocial behavior is associated with these outcomes.

Youth Identity and Culture

The research on youth identity and culture draws upon a variety of approaches, including correlational studies, quasi-experiments, rigorous randomized designs, and mixed quantitative and qualitative designs that describe *both* effects and processes of how programs might prove helpful. Research demonstrates that programs in which children and youth feel safe and supported, and that intentionally include culturally informed programming attuned to the contexts of their lives, can result in more positive perceptions of their social identities, values of respect, and cooperation. These results are related to increased caring, connection, and competence; improved academic achievement; and reduced risk for violence and substance use.

Civic Engagement

- **Volunteering and Community Service:** Several correlational studies suggest that participating in activities during adolescence, particularly if those activities were focused on volunteering or community service, is associated with volunteering later in adolescence and in early adulthood.
- **Political Engagement:** Although adolescents' OST activity participation is not consistently associated with their voting behavior, more recent work suggests that OST activities can inspire participants to learn about political issues and support confidence to influence these issues. Some studies suggest that the extent to which activities promote participants' sociopolitical development depends on the extent to which these issues are a core component of the OST program and mission of the activity (Brown et al., 2018; Park, 2016). Understanding how the activity is structured (e.g., centering youth voice, sharing decision-making [Brown et al., 2018; Park, 2016]) may help illuminate why some activities may be better positioned than others for promoting individuals' sociopolitical development.

Outcomes for Academic Success

With some exceptions, RCTs and quasi-experimental studies note that the OST activities they explored did not have positive effects on test scores or school grades—the academic outcomes most connected to within classroom experiences. The studies showed that OST activities tend to have more positive effects on other important academic outcomes, such as attendance, high school graduation, and college attendance. OST programs that showed positive effects in these studies were typically intensive, including many hours of participation and targeted programming.

Violence Prevention, Substance Use Prevention, and Mitigation of Other Risk Behaviors

Experimental studies across multiple city programs found that these programs consistently reduced involvement in the criminal justice system and led to improvements in a range of positive youth development outcomes. Overall, the relationship between OST program participation and prevention of violence, substance abuse, and/or other risk behaviors is mixed, as varied as the programs themselves, the mitigating variables in the studies (e.g., depth and breadth of participation, skill development, peer influence).

Outcomes for Physical and Mental Health

- **Physical Health:** OST programs that include a physical health component have demonstrated somewhat mixed results, but some studies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving the physical outcomes of interest for children and youth. Limitations to the current studies include the heterogeneity of the programming and target audiences, as well as limited detail provided about the research design and types of intervention activities. School-level randomization and multiple assessments are necessary to better understand the effectiveness of OST interventions (Beets et al., 2009). Future studies need to provide more comprehensive assessments of physical activity and the utility of a physical activity program to promote activity both within and outside of the program.
- **Mental Health:** There is relatively little concrete evidence about how OST programs relate to the mental health of children and youth, especially pertaining to internalizing behaviors such as depression and anxiety. Yet, there is some indirect indication that OST programs might impact outcomes that relate to mental health. For example, some studies included social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes, and the programs under study demonstrated favorable effects in the domains of problem behaviors, positive youth development, relationships, and beliefs, which could be correlated with mental health outcomes (Onyeka et al., 2021).

Outcomes for Family and Peer Relationships

To date, no studies separate out the effects of differential selection into participation and the treatment effects of participating in OST activities on family and peer relationships; this is an area where high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental evidence is greatly needed.

Long-Term Outcomes

Several studies use nationally representative, longitudinal datasets—such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, and the National Educational Longitudinal Study—to examine observable associations between program participation and longer-term outcomes. More randomized trials are needed, particularly for children and youth from marginalized

backgrounds, to determine long-term outcomes for young people who participate in OST programs.

The third overall takeaway from the committee's review of existing research is that moving forward, it may be more fruitful to focus on what *specific* practices and experiences foster *specific* outcomes for which specific youth rather than (or in addition to) testing the average effects of an overall activity on a range of outcomes across all children and youth (Bornstein, 2017, 2019; Shonkoff, 2017).

Young people are more likely to learn skills, beliefs, and habits that are the focus of the activity. For instance, participants may be more likely to learn teamwork and value playing fairly *if* that is core to their team's values and practices but not if the team thrives on competition and doing anything to win. Ngo (2017) found that art activities can promote young people's understanding of their ethnic identity when the leaders have used art as a mechanism to explore these topics, but one might not expect these effects in an art activity that never addresses ethnicity.

To understand which outcomes an activity affects, researchers need to understand what participants are doing and being exposed to in the activity. It is time to move beyond testing whether participation in an activity is associated with a range of outcomes, as this approach makes assumptions about the uniformity of experiences in activities. Scholars and evaluators need to think critically about what happens at each activity site and what aspects of development should be affected given what they do.

This nuanced thinking is evident in many qualitative studies of activities in which researchers purposely describe what experiences in activities develop particular outcomes (e.g., responsibility, initiative [Larson, 2000; Larson et al., 2006]). These considerations need to be taken into account in quantitative studies, including experimental studies. Setting-level indicators, such as activity content, staff training, and daily programming, could be manipulated through experimental designs to test whether specific practices and experiences matter for what areas of development. This work would also help the field move beyond the need to test every specific activity to an understanding of the practices and aspects of quality that promote development. Programs could then use this information to ensure they incorporate the practices and aspects of quality that have been shown to promote the areas of development they want to impact.

It would also be helpful to have a stronger alignment between the questions posed and the evidence. The field wants to know if organized activities help support a young person's positive development. However, most of the studies test whether outcomes measured at one time point vary based on whether or how often a child or youth participates in an activity. Assessing such differences across groups (which are known as interindividual differences) does not provide any information about individuals' development (which are known as intraindividual changes; Lerner et al., 2024; Nesselroade & Molenaar, 2010; D. Yu et al., 2021).

To understand whether an activity affects young people's development, researchers need to measure outcomes over time with longitudinal data and chart their development. Because children and youth develop at varying rates and at different times (e.g., some learn a skill faster than others), and come from different backgrounds with varying needs, the committee encourages scholars to consider individual differences in development and how specific experiences in activities can support the development of specific areas of youth functioning for

specific youth (Bornstein, 2017, 2019). There may be periods of development when activities can be particularly influential on certain areas of development, such as supporting youth's identity during adolescence, which is when identity processes are at the forefront (NASEM, 2019).

In summary, the current literature is promising. Scholars can capitalize on the strengths of multiple research methods to provide a deeper understanding of what types of programs and activities matter, when and how they matter, for whom, and for which outcomes (Bornstein, 2017, 2019; Lerner et al., 2024; Shonkoff, 2017; Simpkins, 2015; Smith et al., 2021). These questions are vital to further develop theories on youth development and inform effective practices that will support low-income and marginalized children and youth.

OUTCOMES FOR POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive youth development encompasses a variety of outcomes, including competence, confidence, connections, character, caring, and contribution (Lerner et al., 2021). The positive youth development framework overlaps with frameworks on social and emotional learning and character development. Three broad areas have received consistent attention in the literature: (1) social and emotional skills, including persistence, a sense of responsibility, work habits, self-control and emotion regulation skills, and prosocial behavior; (2) racial/ethnic identities and cultural values; (3) contributions to community and political engagement. The patterns of the findings for many of these outcomes of positive youth development are nuanced and reviewed in greater detail below.

Social and Emotional Learning

Several studies suggest that participating in activities is associated with a variety of social and emotional skills (Fuller et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2016; Soto-Lara et al., 2022; M. Yu et al., 2021), such as persistence, responsibility, work habits, self-control and emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior (see Box 7-4). Given this variety, several frameworks have been developed to facilitate study and program design.

One common framework describes five broad categories: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). These skills help individuals socially, academically, and psychologically throughout life.

However, several scholars have critiqued traditional social and emotional learning (SEL) frameworks for being founded on the practices and ideas of majority groups that are already pervasive throughout society and institutions (e.g., school systems and curriculum) (Camangian & Cariaga, 2022; McCall et al., 2023). They argue that SEL frameworks and programs need to be created based on the culture, practices, and ideals of groups in ways that promote youth development in culturally affirming ways and that center the marginalized group's beliefs and practices and addresses the barriers the group has endured (Camangian & Cariaga, 2022; Ieva & Beasley, 2022). Camangian and Cariaga (2022) argue that such conceptualizations of SEL can help move away from the narrative that individuals simply need to work harder or that they need to be fixed; instead, frameworks could help develop OST settings and practices that celebrate young people's humanity and support their positive sense of self in spite of a marginalizing society. At the time of this report, research on OST activities and SEL has been based on more

traditional conceptualizations of SEL. But program staff and researchers can also consider these newer conceptualizations of SEL programming for young people.

Youth report that, compared with classroom settings, organized afterschool activities offer more opportunities for growth in many SEL skills, including emotional regulation, a sense of initiative, teamwork, and prosocial norms (and sometimes friend groups) (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). Moreover, in a meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2010), children who attended high-quality after-school activities demonstrated more positive social behavior, which included many social and emotional skills (e.g., cooperation, positive interactions), compared with children who attended low-quality activities. Similar findings have emerged in another meta-analysis on SEL (Yao et al., 2023). However, in a third meta-analysis, significant effects on positive social behavior emerged only for youth who were not at a high risk for poor outcomes (Ciocanel et al., 2017).

Critiques by Camangian and Cariaga (2022) potentially shed light on these mixed findings, suggesting that it is possible that they resulted from the activities not being affirming spaces or addressing the current experiences of children and youth from marginalized backgrounds.

BOX 7-4

Outcomes for Social and Emotional Learning: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Persistence

- A social skills intervention in an afterschool program increased boys' persistence in the classroom (Graham et al., 2015).
- Children and adolescents who participated in OST out-of-school time (OST) activities or higher-quality activities demonstrated more persistence than their peers (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Vandell et al., 2022)

Sense of Responsibility

- Parents and youth reported developing a stronger sense of responsibility through participation in OST activities (Dunn et al., 2003; Dworkin et al., 2003; Hemphill & Richards, 2016).
- Staff can help build a sense of responsibility intentionally through a variety of strategies (e.g., Salusky et al., 2014; Walsh et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2009).
- Adolescents' sense of responsibility is related to participation in OST programs across activity, school, and family settings (Hemphill & Richards, 2016; Raffaelli et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2009; Whitson et al., 2019).

Work Habits

- Though the amount of time youth spend in activities does not consistently improve their work habits, spending time in higher-quality activities does improve work habits (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Liu et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2010; Vandell et al., 2022).
- Work habits partially explain the links between the time 10th graders spent across a range of activities and changes in math achievement from 10th to 12th grade and college attendance (Morris, 2016).

Self-Control and Emotion Regulation Skills

--Findings are mixed, with some studies (Feinberg et al., 2013; Hirsch et al., 2011; McMahon et al., 2021; Riggs et al., 2010; Zebehazy & Smith, 2011) finding that youth who spend more time in OST activities have more self-control than their peers, whereas others (Bohnert & Ward, 2013; Morrison et al., 2000) found no significant differences.

--Staff's relationships with youth and their behavior (e.g., modeling emotion regulation skills, helping youth talk about and process emotions) are associated with youth's self-control (Larson & Brown, 2007; Liu et al., 2020; Wade, 2015).

Prosocial Behavior

--Findings have varied; in some studies, the time youth spend in activities is associated with prosocial behavior (Helseth & Frazier, 2018; Kauh, 2011; McMahon et al., 2021; Vandell et al., 2020), but other studies found no differences based on participation (Champine et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016; Villarreal & Gonzalez, 2016).

--Variability may stem from variation in the activities (e.g., intentional focus of a program on prosocial behavior, activity quality) (Hansen et al., 2003; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999) and variation among the youth (e.g., level of engagement, their relationships with peers and staff) (Benson & Bruner, 2018; Bolter & Kipp, 2018; Lynch et al., 2016; Rutten et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2017).

Persistence

Young people's *persistence* is their ability to keep going despite failure, obstacles, or challenges; it can help individuals in a variety of settings throughout their lifespan. OST programs often ask children and youth to learn new skills, compete against others, or complete tasks, which provide opportunities to learn and practice their persistence. The evidence concerning associations between young people's participation in organized OST activities and their persistence spans elementary through high school. One experimental study addressed causal effects (Graham et al., 2015); three described correlations between indicators.

Children. Graham et al. (2015) conducted an experiment of an intervention program executed within an afterschool program that aimed to improve social skills and academic motivation to Black boys in grades 3–5 who were seen as aggressive by their teachers and peers. The intervention focused on the boys' social skills (e.g., inferring intent, emotion regulation) and academic motivation (e.g., goal setting, mastery focus) through 32 lessons. The boys who received the intervention program demonstrated increased persistence in the classroom across the 12-week program, whereas the boys in the control group demonstrated declines in their persistence. These experimental findings suggest that OST programs that choose activities aimed at improving skills and motivation have the potential to improve persistence. However, do these links between activity participation and persistence emerge among a broad array of afterschool activities?

Children and adolescents. Two correlational studies of racially/ethnically diverse children and youth (66%–77% Latine) suggest that participation in high-quality programs and extracurricular activities was associated with young people's persistence (Gülseven et al., 2024; Vandell et al.,

2022). Specifically, these studies report that children and youth who spent most of their time in high-quality afterschool programs and extracurricular activities demonstrated more persistence in the classroom (and larger increases over time) than those who spent substantial time unsupervised, regardless of whether they also spent some time in programs and/or extracurricular activities.

Adolescents. Two studies examined the associations between OST activities and persistence in adolescence. In a sample of youth, about two-thirds of whom were Black, participation in school-based OST activities in eighth grade was associated with persistence in eighth grade and improvements in persistence from grades 8 to 11 (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). These longitudinal associations, however, did not emerge for OST recreational programs held in the summer and school year.

One study examined the relations between the quality of an OST program and adolescents' persistence. Among a sample largely composed of middle school children and youth from low-income (78% eligible for free- and reduced-lunch, 74% youth of color) and majority non-White backgrounds, those who attended high-quality OST programs demonstrated larger gains in their persistence over 1 year than peers who attended lower-quality programs (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013). Of the three components that made up quality, only emotional support provided by staff predicted increases in persistence; positive peer relationships and opportunities for autonomy were not related.

In summary, research suggests that participation in OST activities can help improve young people's persistence over time, particularly if the activity is high quality; however, the number of studies on these relations is quite small. More work is needed to understand under what circumstances (e.g., for which types of activities, what activity experiences) and for whom participation in these activities might help build persistence.

Sense of Responsibility

One goal of socialization is to help ensure that young people will grow up to be responsible adults. A sense of responsibility starts to develop early on as children and youth take responsibility for their behavior and choices, as well as chores, schoolwork, work, or other tasks they are accountable for. In several studies, parents and youth reported that one benefit of participating in organized afterschool activities was developing a stronger sense of responsibility (Dunn et al., 2003; Dworkin et al., 2003; Hemphill & Richards, 2016; Whitson et al., 2019). These studies included children and youth in grades 6–11. In contrast to the body of research on persistence, much of the existing research on activities and young people's sense of responsibility is based on qualitative work and describes potential mechanisms by which participating in OST activities might promote young people's sense of responsibility.

Adolescents. Organized OST activities might support young people's developing sense of responsibility through several potential mechanisms. Simply participating in an OST activity puts more demands on one's time. One study explored how Canadian high school students balanced their activity commitments with the other things they needed to attend to after school, including schoolwork and relationships (Marshall et al., 2014). Another study showed that Black middle schoolers from low-income households felt they had to be more responsible at school so that they met the participation requirements for their activities, such as maintaining passing grades and not missing school the same day as the activity (Hemphill & Richards, 2016). Finally,

many activities have requirements, including consistent attendance, being on time, having all of the necessary gear, and following the rules established by the activity, which young people from low-income backgrounds and their parents thought helped develop a sense of responsibility (Dunn et al., 2003; Hemphill & Richards, 2016).

Wood et al. (2009) reported that adolescents and staff believe that central to building a youth's sense of responsibility through OST activities are (1) the specific tasks youth do in OST programs (e.g., finishing tasks for a blood drive or preparing for a team competition) and (2) roles adolescents take on in which they are responsible for aspects of the activity (e.g., being president or overseeing a specific job for a theater production).

For example, leaders have used basketball as a mechanism to teach broader life skills to 9- to 11-year-old Black and Pacific Islander children (Walsh et al., 2010). During each practice session, staff led discussions on responsibility and had the children set goals, take on increasing responsibilities for the team (e.g., leading part of practice to organizing a full practice), and reflect through journaling on their sense of responsibility across contexts. Importantly, the coaches continuously set new goals as participants successfully completed smaller leadership roles, which provided new opportunities for continued growth.

Salusky et al. (2014) and Wood et al. (2009) report that racially/ethnically diverse adolescents in a range of rural and urban programs felt these types of experiences were more effective when they (1) afforded opportunities for adolescent ownership and agency; (2) balanced adolescent autonomy and structuring the task (e.g., deadlines, ground rules, structured roles); and (3) included clear, high expectations with the needed support and consequences.

Collectively, these reports describe some of the potential strategies that OST staff can use in a range of activities to support development of a sense of responsibility for young people. Although the nature of activities may prompt participants to be more responsible (e.g., ensuring they are on time and have their gear), staff may be able to intentionally develop a sense of responsibility by designing developmentally appropriate tasks and roles that continuously scaffold participants' development.

Several qualitative studies and one longitudinal correlational quantitative study suggest that (1) young people's sense of responsibility is the culmination of their experiences in multiple settings and (2) youth believe the influence of activities on their sense of responsibility positively shapes their behavior in other settings, such as home and school (Hemphill & Richards, 2016; Raffaelli et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2010; Whitson et al., 2019). For example, Black and Pacific Islander middle school students felt that fulfilling their responsibilities in athletic activities, such as being on time and taking care of their equipment, helped them be more responsible at school in terms of their personal school tasks (e.g., turning in their homework more consistently) and by being responsible to their larger school community (e.g., helping others who are lost on their schoolwork, working as a team) without being asked to do these things (Hemphill & Richards, 2016; Walsh et al., 2010). The generalizability of these patterns was assessed in a longitudinal quantitative study of 355 ethnically diverse (37% Latine, 30% Black) 11- to 20-year-olds who attended a range of project-based afterschool activities. Specifically, they found that participants who were more responsible at the activity were also likely to exhibit increased responsibility at home at the next time point, and vice versa (Raffaelli et al., 2018). In other words, the findings suggest that children and youth build and carry their sense of responsibility with them across settings.

Although participation in organized OST activities is related to a stronger sense of responsibility, the effects are larger for certain participants and within particular activities. For

example, quantitative data from a mixed-methods study suggest that young people who participated more than 3 hours per week in a music activity demonstrated more responsibility than those who participated less often (Whitson et al., 2019). Another source of variability across adolescents is that some parents help reinforce and hold their child accountable for the responsibilities they have in their OST activities, which can strengthen the lessons that those activities instill (Dunn et al., 2003; Marshall et al., 2014).

Moreover, some activities may be better positioned than others to develop a sense of responsibility. For example, only 24 out of 108 racially/ethnically diverse adolescents (22%) at a range of rural and urban programs felt their organized activity helped them become more responsible (Wood et al., 2009). Most of the adolescents who felt they developed a stronger sense of responsibility through participation in an OST activity attended 3 out of 11 activities. The work reviewed earlier in this section provides insight into some of the strategies that may address why adolescents felt some activities may be more effective than others.

In summary, qualitative research suggests that adolescents and parents think that one of the benefits of participating in organized OST activities is developing a stronger sense of responsibility. Several experiences and opportunities are associated with developing young people's sense of responsibility, including giving them developmentally appropriate roles with responsibilities or charging them with tasks they are responsible to complete. Such strategies can be integrated into a variety of activities, which was evident in one study on a sports activity (Walsh et al., 2010). Although one study suggests that adolescents' responsibility in a program is related to how responsible they are at home and vice versa (Raffaelli et al., 2018), more quantitative studies are needed to examine the generalizability of all these development processes and understand what activities for which youth might be effective (Dunn et al., 2003; Marshall et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2009).

Work Habits

Young people's work habits (also known as approaches to learning and noncognitive skills) include a young person's ability to work effectively and efficiently within educational or work settings. Children who have stronger work habits in elementary school are more likely to have higher grades and more advanced courses in high school, as well as more years of schooling by age 26 (Simpkins et al., 2020). Compared with classroom activities, afterschool activities provide more opportunities for adolescents to develop aspects of work habits, such as time management, setting goals, and exerting sustained effort (Hansen et al., 2003). Most studies on activities and work habits are correlational studies that take into account a rigorous set of control variables, including indicators of young people's prior work habits (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Morris, 2016). Researchers have examined these relations across grades 1–12. In several studies, researchers examined the extent to which work habits helped explain the relations between activity participation and youth's academic outcomes (Carolan, 2018; Morris, 2016).

Children. Two correlational studies examined how racially/ethnically diverse children (66%–77% Latine) from low-income backgrounds spent their time across multiple OST settings, including afterschool programs, extracurricular activities, and unsupervised time, and then tested whether their work habits varied across these settings (Gülseven et al., 2024; Vandell et al., 2022). Participants who spent most of their time either in a high-quality OST program or at both a high-quality OST program and in other extracurricular activities typically had stronger work

habits than children who largely spent their time across extracurricular activities and being unsupervised.

Although these patterns are promising, other findings suggest children's participation in activities may be associated with their work habits only for certain types of activities and when activity quality is high. In elementary school, diverse children in grades 1–3 had greater gains in work habits (which they labeled “approaches to learning”) when they participated in dance and sports activities compared with other art activities or clubs (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). In addition to activity type, the quality of the activity is associated with children's work habits. Results from a study focused on elementary school-aged children from families of diverse social classes (13%–21% of parents had a high school degree or less) suggest that providing a variety of age-appropriate activities was associated with children developing stronger work habits over time, but that positive youth–staff relationships and opportunities for autonomy were not related to changes in work habits (Pierce et al., 2010). Another study found that the closeness and conflict first-grade children experienced with activity staff were not associated with their work habits a year later, once a host of covariates were included (Liu et al., 2020). Moving forward, it will be helpful to consider what developmental experiences in activities are related to children's work habits.

Adolescents. Studies on adolescents' work habits considered the time adolescents spent in activities, the activity type, and activity quality. The associations during adolescence are somewhat mixed. The time sixth-grade participants spent in OST activities was not related to development of their work habits from fifth to ninth grade (Liu et al., 2021). However, data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), a nationally representative dataset with a socioeconomic and racially/ethnically diverse sample of high school students, suggest that students' work habits (which were labeled noncognitive skills) partially explained the relations between the time 10th graders spent participating in OST and extracurricular activities and changes in their math achievement from 10th to 12th grade and whether they attended a 4-year college after high school (Morris, 2016). These relations emerged across a range of high school activities, including academic OST activities, junior varsity and varsity sports, and school clubs (intramural sports participation improved math achievement but did not predict 4-year college attendance) (Morris, 2016). Also, adolescents felt they had comparable opportunities to develop their time management skills and other aspects of work habits across a range of activities (Hansen et al., 2003).

In terms of activity quality, two studies suggest that ratings of the overall quality of middle school students who attended higher-quality OST activities had stronger work habits later on compared with those who attended lower-quality activities (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Liu et al., 2021). Though indicators of overall quality were important, the findings for specific dimensions of activity quality were mixed. Kataoka and Vandell (2013), for example, examined three aspects of program quality, including emotional support from adult staff, positive peer relationships, and opportunities for autonomy. Only emotional support from adult staff predicted increases in participants' work habits (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013).

In sum, these studies suggest that organized OST activities are associated with a young person's work habits and that these skills can help them excel academically. However, the results suggest that these associations may vary by activity type, quality, and developmental period. More work is needed to understand what developmental experiences within OST activities help strengthen young people's work habits.

Self-Control and Emotion Regulation Skills

Being able to control one's emotions, behaviors, reactions, and impulses is an important life skill. The current research has examined self-control both as a broad construct and as the ability to manage emotions, which is a key aspect of self-control. Adolescents report that organized OST activities offer more opportunities to learn to regulate their emotions compared with classrooms and sometimes friend groups (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson & Brown, 2007; Larson et al., 2006). The opportunities to develop self-control might be more abundant in certain types of OST activities—specifically, greater gains in self-control were reported in faith-based, service, and sport activities than in academic and leadership activities (Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). Our review of the existing research on young people's participation in organized OST activities and their self-control or management of their emotions is based on three experimental studies and several correlational studies utilizing quantitative and qualitative data.

Children. Researchers have used experimental designs in two studies to examine whether an activity influenced changes in their self-control later. One study tested an intervention named Siblings Are Special (SIBS), which focused on building positive relationships among fifth-grade children and one of their younger siblings in second to fourth grade; the intervention used 12 sessions to cover a variety of topics (e.g., fairness, respect, understanding feelings) (Feinberg et al., 2013). Children who were randomly selected to participate in the SIBS intervention had higher self-control than children in the control group 4 weeks after the intervention, even after taking into account participants' level of self-control before the intervention. A second experiment looked at changes in third- to fifth-grade girls' self-control after participating in Girls in the Game, a 30-week program with the goal of building girls' confidence, skills, and strengths through athletics (Bohnert & Ward, 2013). The diverse group of girls (36% Black, 60% Latina), who resided in underserved, urban, low-income communities, were randomly selected into the program. There were no differences between the girls who participated in Girls in the Game in terms of their self-control compared with girls in the control group (Bohnert & Ward, 2013). Thus, the experimental findings are positive for SIBS, but null for Girls in the Game.

Two studies tested the extent to which an OST program could be protective for Latine children from low-income backgrounds who were struggling either academically or socially. In both programs, children were not randomly assigned; rather, they were selected for the program if they were identified as struggling by teachers. Both programs served elementary school children each day after school and focused on a range of activities, including academic tutoring and development of social and emotional skills (e.g., respect, problem-solving). Most of the children (grades 1–6) in the first program, Generacion Diaz, were selected primarily because they were performing below grade level academically, though some were selected because of poor classroom behavior or low parent involvement (Riggs et al., 2010). This study focused on differences among children who attended the program. Among children who had weaker emotional regulation skills when they enrolled, children who attended the program frequently had stronger emotion regulation skills than children who attended the program less regularly. A second study tested if a program in a community with high poverty levels could help fifth- and sixth-grade Latine children avoid later substance use issues (Morrison et al., 2000). Children were enrolled in the program if they were identified by teachers as having at least three risk factors that are associated with later substance use (e.g., low academic achievement, low-income family, behavior problems, problems with peers). Children with fewer risk factors were placed in

the comparison group. There were no significant differences between children in the two groups in terms of their ability to manage their anger (Morrison et al., 2000). Thus, parallel to the experimental studies, the correlational findings concerning programs serving children who are struggling are mixed.

Two studies tested the extent to which children's relationships with OST staff is related to their self-control, using data from the Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). One study found that, while controlling for the quality of children's relationships with teachers and mothers, the more conflict children experienced with the OST staff, the lower their self-control 1 year later (Liu et al., 2020). Although this study found that children's self-control was not related to the closeness they felt to staff, a different study (Wade, 2015) using the same data found that children who felt close to staff had larger increases in their self-control from first to fifth grade. Both studies suggest that children's relationships with staff matter, but their findings differ about whether closeness or conflicts matters.

Adolescents. In one experimental study among high school students in the After School Matters program in Chicago, adolescents who were randomly assigned to a paid internship program experienced smaller declines in self-regulation skills compared with their peers who were assigned to the control group (Hirsch et al., 2011). In addition, findings from two correlational studies suggest that adolescents who participate in organized activities have stronger self-control than those who do not participate. Using a nationally representative sample of adolescents in special education, researchers examined whether participating in extracurricular activities was associated with self-control (Zebehazy & Smith, 2011). This study included adolescents aged 13–16 with visual impairments; those who participated in extracurricular activities exhibited more mature self-control than those who did not participate. In addition, McMahon et al. (2021) found that adolescents demonstrated stronger emotion-regulation skills after participating in a 6-week yoga program as part a broader OST activity compared with adolescents in the same activity who did not participate in yoga.

Another study used qualitative data to explore what staff behaviors were related to high school adolescents' regulation of their emotions in a theater program (Larson & Brown, 2007). Several staff practices were identified as ways to support adolescents' emotion regulation, including staff modeling emotion regulation skills, helping adolescents talk about and process their emotions, and creating norms around supporting each other and experiencing emotions in the activity. Thus, Larson and Brown (2007) found that relationships with participants, staff behaviors, and the norms and culture they create could shape youth's emotion regulation.

In summary, research using experimental designs and programs that serve adolescents who are struggling present mixed findings in terms of the extent to which participating in programs is associated with changes in their self-control. Qualitative studies in childhood and adolescence provide some guidance on staff practices that may be associated with adolescents' emotion regulation skills, including creating positive norms and having positive relationships with participants. These results might provide insight into why the findings on participation or time spent in activities are mixed.

Prosocial Behavior

Prosocial behavior includes helping, cooperating with, and being kind to others. Ethnically and racially diverse high schoolers reported that they experienced more prosocial

norms (e.g., learning about helping others) and teamwork in organized OST activities than in classrooms and friendship groups (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). That said, the linkages between activities and a young person's prosocial behavior are mixed when researchers measure activities simply in terms of whether youth participated in activities or how much time they spent in activities. The research suggests that OST activities have the potential to promote prosocial behavior among diverse young people (Monkman & Proweller, 2016), but that potential depends on activity quality and content, and participants' experiences in the setting. For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see the review by Zarrett et al. (2021a).

Children. One RCT in the committee's review examined the impact of OST activities on prosocial behavior. Specifically, researchers tested if the PAXIS Institute's Good Behavior Game (PAX GBG) helped improve children's behavior in an OST setting (Smith et al., 2018). The PAX GBG uses team-based games with group rewards to foster several social and emotional skills, including emotion regulation and cooperation. Randomization occurred at the program level—some programs received training to execute the PAX GBG and other programs did not. After being matched based on geographic location, racial/ethnic composition of participants, and family socioeconomic status, half of the 72 programs were randomly selected to receive the PAX GBG intervention. Children in the programs that received the intervention exhibited more prosocial behavior over time than children in the control group (Smith et al., 2018).

Several correlational studies have examined the links between children's OST activities and their prosocial behavior. Two correlational studies of racially/ethnically diverse youth (66%–77% Latine) found that young people who participated in high-quality OST programs and extracurricular activities demonstrated more prosocial behavior at school than their peers who spent substantial time unsupervised (Gülseven et al., 2024; Vandell et al., 2022). Three additional studies examined the associations between boys' participation in Boy Scouts with their kindness and helpfulness. When comparing boys who did and did not attend Boy Scouts (6–11 years of age, 63%–85% White, 9%–18% Black), researchers found no differences on kindness, but that boys in Scouts were more helpful to others over the next 4 years compared with their peers who were not in Scouts (Wang et al., 2015). Two additional studies on the same dataset examined the variability *among* boys who participated in Boy Scouts. They found that differences in the duration and intensity of participation and whether boys also participated in other activities were not associated with their concurrent kindness or how much they helped others (Champine et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016). Though boys' prosocial behavior may not be associated with the amount of time they spent in Boy Scouts, these data suggest that boys' prosocial behavior may be related to how engaged they were during the meetings and the overall engagement of the group. Specifically, boys who were highly engaged while at Boy Scouts were likely to exhibit more kindness and helpful behavior than were their less engaged scouting peers (Lynch et al., 2016). The effects for kindness were larger if boys were part of a group that had generally high youth engagement. In addition to youth's engagement, research suggests that the extent to which an activity is associated with children's prosocial behavior may depend on the content and quality of the activity.

The extent to which participating in an activity is associated with the development of children's prosocial behavior likely depends on the extent to which the activity emphasizes caring and cooperation among other aspects of prosocial behavior. For example, a small study of elementary school children, many of whom had behavioral or learning disabilities (75%), demonstrates the potential utility of afterschool programs designed to build children's prosocial

behavior (Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). The program was designed to build several social and emotional skills, including responsibility, self-control, cooperation/teamwork, respect, and caring. In qualitative data, the children reported that they learned how to cooperate and get along with others as part of the program (Muscott & O'Brien, 1999).

Other studies suggest that broader aspects of quality are associated with changes in children's prosocial behavior and collective efficacy (which is the extent to which children feel they can promote good behaviors and diminish negative behaviors in others). Elementary school-aged children (grades 2–5, 24% Black) who attended a general afterschool activity in the Northeast (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, YWCA) were more likely to demonstrate growth in their prosocial behavior from fall to spring if they felt they belonged at the activity, experienced supportive relationships with staff and peers, received less harsh behavior from staff, or were in activities where staff and children were engaged (Smith et al., 2017). Although fewer associations emerged for the growth in children's collective efficacy, children were more likely to have strong efficacy collectively when they experienced supportive relationships with peers, higher child engagement, and less harsh behavior from staff compared with their peers.

Adolescents. Correlational studies with middle schoolers show mixed findings when participants in OST activities are compared with nonparticipants. For example, sixth-grade students from low-income and ethnically marginalized backgrounds who participated in a citywide general OST program in Providence, Rhode Island, exhibited higher prosocial behavior at the end of the year than their peers at school, despite having the same levels of prosocial behavior when starting the program (Kauh, 2011). Helseth and Frazier (2018) developed and implemented a peer-assisted social learning (PASL) model to leverage natural opportunities for peer-mediated problem-solving. Relative to those in the comparison group, middle schoolers in PASL demonstrated stronger social skills and behavior. McMahon et al. (2021) and Vandell et al. (2020) report similarly positive emotional and behavioral outcomes. In contrast, for Hispanic middle schoolers from low-income backgrounds (79%), participating in school-based activities (sport or nonsport) was not related to changes in prosocial behavior between grades 6 and 7 (Villarreal & Gonzalez, 2016). As noted at the outset of this chapter, many young people who are not participating in an activity may participate in different activity that is equally beneficial, which makes comparisons unclear.

Another reason for the mixed findings could be that activities vary in quality and how much they intentionally focus on prosocial behavior. For example, high school adolescents (26% Black, 8% Asian/Latine/Native American) reported that faith-based and community activities developed stronger prosocial norms than art and sport activities (Hansen et al., 2003). One study (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013) examined changes in prosocial behavior among racially/ethnically diverse middle school students from low-income backgrounds (74% people of color; 78% eligible for free- and reduced-lunch) who attended high-quality general OST programs (where quality was determined by observations and interviews with staff). The study found that middle schoolers who attended higher-quality programs had larger increases in their prosocial behavior with peers over a 1-year period compared with peers attending lower-quality programs (Kataoka & Vandell, 2013). When the researchers examined three specific dimensions of quality, they found that emotional support from adult staff was related to children's prosocial behaviors, but positive relationships with peers in the activity and the number of opportunities for autonomy were not associated with children's prosocial behaviors.

Several studies discuss athletes' prosocial behavior on and off the field and the extent to which their prosocial behavior was related to experiences on their sports team. Predictors of how

much prosocial behavior young people exhibited while participating included their teammates' behavior, feeling supported, and individuals' attitudes. Bolter and Kipp (2018), for instance, found that U.S. athletes aged 10–15 years (14% non-White, 12% from low-income backgrounds) were more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior toward both their teammates and opponents if they felt a stronger sense of connection with their teammates. The study also examined the role of coaches in promoting prosocial behavior. Results showed that, feeling connected to coaches was not related to their concurrent prosocial behavior toward teammates or opponents. However, certain coach behaviors—modeling good sportsmanship, sets expectations for good sportsmanship—were related to athletes' prosocial behavior (Bolter & Kipp, 2018). Rutten et al. (2008) observed young people in the Netherlands aged 9–19, including 49% ethnic minority, who were largely from lower-income backgrounds. Their results suggest that athletes were more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior on the field if they felt supported by their coach or felt more strongly about the importance of fair play (Rutten et al., 2008). Although athletes' prosocial behavior on and off the field were strongly correlated, their off-field prosocial behavior was not associated with any indicators of their sports activity, which included attitudes of the athlete or coach, feeling supported by the coach, and the moral climate of the team (Rutten et al., 2008). Finally, a time-diary study of Canadian adolescent hockey players suggests there may be day-to-day fluctuations in athletes' prosocial behavior (Benson & Bruner, 2018). Athletes were more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior on days when their teammates exhibited more prosocial behavior and less antisocial behavior. Thus, the work suggests that athletes' prosocial behavior *during the activity* may vary by teammates' behavior (Benson & Bruner, 2018; Bolter & Kipp, 2018), the extent to which athletes feel supported by teammates or coaches (though the evidence is mixed; Benson & Bruner, 2018; Bolter & Kipp, 2018), and their attitudes about fair play (Rutten et al., 2008). These indicators, however, did not predict athletes' prosocial behavior off the field (Rutten et al., 2008).

In summary, the pattern of associations between a young person's organized OST activities and their prosocial behavior is mixed. Although how much time they spend in activities was not a strong predictor of their prosocial behavior, a study of Boy Scouts shows that the level of children's engagement during the activity was related to their prosocial behavior (Lynch et al., 2016). Some correlational studies of sports suggest that the extent to which adolescents exhibit prosocial behavior may vary by their teammates' behavior, feeling supported, and their attitudes about fair play. Though prosocial behavior might happen more often in specific types of OST activities, it might be more fruitful to consider which experiences within activities (e.g., behavioral expectations/norms, relationships) and the extent to which activities highlight prosocial behavior as part of OST programming might be associated with a young person's prosocial behavior.

Youth Identity and Culture

Scholars have studied whether culturally informed OST that is intentionally attuned to “youth's culture and everyday lives” might serve to promote positive youth development, particularly fostering adaptive sociocultural values, positive racial/ethnic identity, and more positive behavioral outcomes (Simpkins et al., 2017, p. 11; see also Brittian Loyd & Williams, 2017; Catalano et al., 2002). OST spaces attuned to culture and contexts can help young people from marginalized backgrounds, who may face interpersonal and societal challenges, thrive in their learning and behavior (Lerner et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that a positive sense of

social identity is important to more success and better adaptation (Oyserman et al., 2002; D. Yu et al., 2021).

Cokley (2007) defines *ethnic identity* as individual feelings, involvement, and sense of belongingness to their cultural background; it generally refers to a sense of shared nationality, language, religion, or culture. Hughes et al. (2026) defines *racial identity* as referring to a sense of shared experiences based on one's perceived physiology or race, a concept largely recognized as having more social than epigenetic evidence. Given that the two terms are inextricably related and difficult to separate, this section uses the phrase *racial/ethnic identity*.

Research and meta-analytical reviews have found that children and youth who feel “happy and proud” about their identity as part of a racial/ethnic group are found to also demonstrate more positive cognitive development, better mental health and socioemotional adjustment, and more effective coping with discrimination (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Neblett et al., 2013; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2009; D. Yu et al., 2021; see Box 7-5). Various research methodologies have been used to explore OST programs, and their results generally support the potential of programs to positively impact both young people's sense of identity and their positive behavioral outcomes. Results for adolescents and children are explored separately, as identity development is a phenomenon of increasing relevance as young people grow.

BOX 7-5

Outcomes for Youth Identity and Culture: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Children

- Research has found that safe, supportive, and engaging out-of-school time (OST) programs can foster positive cultural values (Smith et al., 2018); culturally informed strategies have also been shown to be important, such as for enhancing motivation for math learning by providing students with examples that are relevant to their lives (Yu et al., 2022).

Adolescents

- Cherry et al. (1998) find that OST programs can be safe and supportive spaces for youth who are managing the stresses of marginalization (Cherry et al., 1998). For example, Belgrave et al. (2004) report that Black middle school girls who participated in a culturally centered program focusing on harmony and prosocial skills had higher racial/ethnic identities, rejected stereotypical notions of their group, reported less relational aggression, and tended to be more likely to perceive themselves as leaders among their peers (Belgrave et al., 2004).

Children. In one of the earliest studies of OST and identity, Cherry et al. (1998) partnered with schools and faith-based institutions in urban communities to implement a comprehensive model of child and family support among 169 Black fifth and sixth graders. The culturally oriented programming was designed to promote shared values of work, responsibility, and a positive sense of racial heritage via a 16-week program, field trips, and other activities. A quasi-experimental design included nonparticipating children in the same or neighboring school. Analyses revealed no baseline differences between the groups before the intervention began, an indicator of some degree of initial similarity between the groups. However, at the conclusion of the program, statistically significant differences were detected—the children who received the intervention exhibited greater cultural knowledge and racial/ethnic identity, in addition to

reduced problem behavior and more teacher-reported strengths. This work points to the potential role of community-engaged OST programming for building a positive sense of identity and promoting positive youth development.

Research on OST program quality has found that safe, supportive, and engaging programs can foster positive cultural values (e.g., respect for adults, communalistic values of sharing) and less problem behavior (Smith et al., 2018). In a randomized study of 73 OST programs and 500 elementary-age children, the intervention programs received technical assistance throughout 26 weeks of the academic year to strengthen program processes that have been determined by prior research to be critical—namely, appropriate structure, supportiveness, engagement, and belonging (NRC & Institute of Medicine, 2002; Durlak et al., 2010). Higher-quality intervention programs were found to be particularly impactful for Black participants and were related to multiple aspects of positive youth development, including competence (perceived ability to positively influence peers), connection (to the OST program), caring, and (for Black participants specifically) to cultural values of respect for adults. Smith et al. (2017) found that when programs are characterized by more support and engagement, children from a variety of backgrounds have more respect for the adults in leadership; this relation was found to be the strongest among African American participants (Smith et al., 2017). Thus, OST programs demonstrate promising effects upon multiple aspects of culture and positive youth development.

In general, but not without exception, OST programs have shown positive effects on racial/ethnic identity when examined with sufficient rigor. One study of a culturally centered program that included an emphasis on racism, discrimination, and preparation for bias exhibited reduced racial/ethnic identity for the intervention participants (Lewis et al., 2012). However, research on cultural socialization practices—centering the heritage, accomplishment, and cultural values of a group—has overwhelmingly been associated with positive outcomes (Hughes et al., 2006; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Although the effects of preparation for bias are typically mixed, this process is of overwhelming concern for marginalized parents, who report wanting their children to be equipped and ready to respond appropriately in instances of discrimination, bias, and threats to their personal safety (Hughes et al., 2006; Lewis et al., 2012). While a focus on shared cultural values and a positive sense of cultural heritage can be helpful, OST program providers (as well as parents) need to use developmentally appropriate methods when engaging in programming or discussions aimed at preparing children for discriminatory experiences. As argued by Umaña-Taylor & Hill (2020) strategies for adequately preparing children for discriminatory encounters while protecting their health and well-being is an area deserving of further attention in research and practice (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020).

Research exploring ways to promote STEM learning has found that culturally informed strategies are important for enhancing motivation for math learning (Yu et al., 2022). In a university-based OST program with 129 Latine middle schoolers, culturally responsive strategies were used to teach math, drawing upon everyday knowledge in their communities, recognizing, valuing, and integrating cultural experiences in ways that support learning and motivation. This mixed-methods study included both quantitative data on the potential effects and qualitative participant perceptions of the critical, impactful elements of the program. In a (presumably one-group) pre–posttest design, participants were found to increase in the perceptions of their math abilities. Importantly, the qualitative data from the children studied highlighted the process by which potential effects were achieved. Participants pointed to the helpfulness of real-life examples, relevant to their cultural backgrounds (Yu et al., 2022):

When [my mentor] uses real-life examples, I feel it's easier to understand and solve the math problems because with real-life examples, some people do it and it actually works.

I get to learn new math, math in different ways based on different cultures, and different strategies . . . that's what I've learned. I see many kids doing math differently. I get amazed by different ways of math and the strategies you can use. (p. 7)

Yu et al. (2022) go on to say that acknowledging, valuing, and drawing upon the cultural wealth of young people is a strengths-based approach to building math confidence.

Correlational research has also found that feeling connected to supportive OST programs is related to young people's feelings about and perception of their racial/ethnic group (Augustine et al., 2022). This study drew upon a subsample of 186 Black children ages 7–11 (mean age = 8.44) in 55 OST programs, half of whom were serving children from low-income backgrounds (mean of 51.64 free/reduced lunch eligibility), participating in a larger study. Children who reported that they felt close to adults and peers in their OST programs also felt “happier and proud” about their racial/ethnic identity and reported less engagement in problem behaviors, including predelinquent behavior and experimentation with substances (Augustine et al., 2022). This work reveals that when OST programs foster a sense of connection, children are likely to feel more positively about their identities and have lower risk for problem behavior and substance use (Augustine et al., 2022).

Varying research methodologies are helpful, even when we cannot necessarily determine whether the effects are indeed causal. For example, in research with young Black and Latinx youth, Yu et al. (2021a) found that typologies of a positive racial/ethnic identity are related to positive youth development—namely, caring, competence, and connection. In a sample of 234 elementary-age children from low-income and/or marginalized backgrounds (mean age = 8, 77% Black, 23% Latine, nearly half characterized by 45% free/reduced lunch eligibility), latent profile analysis was used to examine children's typologies (D. Yu et al., 2021). Those who reported being proud (high racial/ethnic identity) and high on positive youth development (i.e., a sense of caring for others, self-competence, and a sense of connection to their OST programs), were found to exhibit high levels of academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores (D. Yu et al., 2021). This correlational research finds that associations between positive identities, development, and academic achievement can inform the development of programming that can impact all three important aspects for children.

Adolescents. OST is recognized as opportune for encouraging young people's prosocial skills, caring, values, and character. Building a positive sense of cultural heritage in OST programs has been tested as a strategy for reducing risky behavior and substance use among a female-only sample. Culturally oriented programming was the center of an intervention for 59 urban Black middle-school girls, with a mean age of 11 (Belgrave et al., 2004). The intervention centered on the cultural values of harmony and purpose, and the prosocial skills of listening and caring. The intervention was analyzed using a rigorous randomized study that included 30 weeks of tutoring and 16 weeks of programming for the intervention group, compared with a tutoring-only condition for the randomized comparison group. Although the analyses detected no significant differences between the groups before the intervention began, it found statistically significant differences at the conclusion of the programs. The girls who participated in the culturally centered program had stronger racial/ethnic identities, meaning they rejected stereotypical notions of their group, and they reported less relational aggression (e.g., exclusion, spreading rumors) and tended to be more likely to perceive of themselves as a leader among their peers

(Belgrave et al., 2004). The study demonstrates that, particularly among middle school girls, OST programs can promote helpful cultural values; foster more positive racial/ethnic identities in the face of discrimination; and encourage more cooperation, sense of community, and leadership (Belgrave et al., 2004).

The impact of culturally informed approaches to OST programming have also been explored in correlational research among Latine children and adolescents (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Riggs et al., 2010). In a study with data from Times 1 and 2, 9 weeks apart, researchers sought to examine the association of OST participation as reported by participants with program quality, degree of cultural socialization in programming, and levels of family ethnic socialization (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001). The measure of *ethnic socialization* assessed the degree to which children and youth reported learning “more about my cultural/ethnic background through conversations with other people in the youth program, including staff” and being “free to express my opinion of my ethnic/cultural background while I am in the youth program.” In hierarchical regression analyses, both family- and program-level ethnic socialization were found to be associated with higher levels of ethnic identity at Time 2 among Latino youth and adolescents (Riggs et al., 2010).

At a time when more attention is being given to disciplinary disparities, culturally oriented programming has been explored as an approach for Black boys who are disproportionately at risk for school disciplinary action and potential substance abuse and violence (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Based upon the cognitive-cultural model, it was hypothesized that engagement in the Imani Rites of Passage (IROP) program with an emphasis on collective values would increase social competency and self-esteem and thereby reduce risk for violence and substance use. The IROP was initially evaluated in 2004 and has been in effect for over 20 years (Whaley & McQueen, 2020). The quasi-experimental design included 60 total youth: 30 were males (mean age 16), 93% of whom had African ancestry, who were referred to the program by school officials; and 30 were comparison youth who were willing to be assessed but did not participate in the intervention, most residing in low-income neighborhoods. Preassessments revealed few intervention/comparison group differences except that the intervention group was 8 months older on average. In comparing pre and post scores, as hypothesized, the intervention youth scored higher on several indices, including a positive racial/ethnic identity, higher self-esteem, and improved social competence (Whaley & McQueen, 2020). While decreases in risk for violence and substance use were not detected among the youth who received the intervention, these risks significantly increased in those who did not receive the intervention. The results reveal that culturally oriented programming such as IROP can increase a positive sense of group identity, a sense of shared responsibility, and reduce risk for violence and substance use among young Black males from low-income backgrounds (Whaley & McQueen, 2020).

Culturally responsive methods have been integrated with trauma-informed methods to support African refugees in an OST program offered by a university in West Tennessee (Elswick et al., 2022). As described in Elswick et al (2022), refugee populations are surviving adverse childhood experiences in which they have been intensely and continually exposed to civil unrest, war, extreme poverty, community violence, religious persecution, and unexpected natural disasters; immigrant and refugee children and youth have the challenges of learning new languages, culture, social systems, and contexts while also managing past traumas. The Trauma Healing Club is a 10-week OST program that includes two parent-support sessions and draws upon evidence-based, trauma-informed, cognitive-behavioral strategies that include integrating

familiar cultural elements. Elswick et al. (2022) describe how the program used African music and drumming and holistic peer-based mentoring with evidence-based modules on mindfulness, meditation, and relaxation; they found the intervention to be effective in reducing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Analyses of the pre and post data on the 88 participants (51 were male) examined scores on PTSD symptom scales, which had 100% and 85% completion rates respectively. (Note: The authors do not indicate whether the study was randomized, nor do they reference a comparison group.) Children and youth who participated in the program saw a reduction in PTSD scores, from clinically relevant highs of 25, down to 8 at posttest, on average. The children and youth involved reported that both the intervention and the musicality was important to their development (Elswick et al., 2022):

I learned how to bring happiness and relaxing into my life.

I enjoyed making my own beat because it made me happy and to feel your own energy.

I enjoyed the drumming because it took my stress away. (p. 164)

Elswick et al. (2022) indicated that OST is important in its capacity to use trauma-informed and culturally relevant practices in ways that benefit the mental health of children and youth who are refugees and immigrants.

Collectively, the research on youth identity and culture draws upon a variety of research approaches, including correlational work, quasi-experiments, rigorous randomized designs, and mixed quantitative and qualitative designs, that describe *both* effects and processes of how programs might prove helpful. Consistent with the literature on models of racial/ethnic identity and socialization, the evidence on preparing children and youth to face racial and cultural barriers is mixed, and it is often associated with less adaptive social and emotional responses. On the other hand, the research demonstrates that programs in which children and youth feel safe and supported, and that intentionally include culturally informed programming attuned to the contexts of their lives, can result in more positive perceptions of their social identities, values of respect, and cooperation. These results are related to increased caring, connection, and competence; improved academic achievement; and reduced risk for violence and substance use.

Civic Engagement

Individuals, including young people, can make significant contributions to their community and society more broadly by caring and getting involved. Civic engagement includes the ways individuals contribute to their community to make it a better place (Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). Youth can get engaged in their community by volunteering; helping people, organizations, and causes; protesting unjust practices or other forms of political involvement; and, when they are of age, voting in elections. Civic engagement has benefits not just for the person engaging in it, but also for the surrounding community. The seeds of civic engagement may be sown in childhood and blossom during adolescence when there is significant development in individuals' civic behaviors and beliefs (e.g., civic efficacy) (Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020). For example, some Black and Latine adolescents from low-income backgrounds told researchers that their high school civic program “inspired them to be proactive, concerned, and engaged in their communities” (Monkman & Proweller, 2016, p. 190). Recently, scholars have expanded traditional definitions of civic engagement (e.g., volunteering, voting) to include youth activism and organizing, such as adolescents working toward improving the quality of their local schools (Ginwright, 2010; Kirshner, 2015; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Wilson et al., 2023; Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020).

Several studies have tested whether young people’s participation in OST activities is related to their later civic engagement. The existing studies utilize rigorous longitudinal correlational designs in which researchers controlled for youth factors (e.g., gender, grades), family factors (e.g., socioeconomic status), and prior indicators of civic engagement or beliefs related to civic engagement (for an in-depth review on this topic, see Zarrett et al., 2021a; see also Box 7-6). Given the growth in civic behaviors and beliefs during adolescence, it is not surprising that the existing research focuses on activities and civic engagement in adolescence or adulthood. Some studies report that these relations hold up in the long run—predicting civic engagement into participants’ 20s or 30s (Barber et al., 2013; Kim & Morgül, 2017; Obradović & Masten, 2007). As evidenced below, the findings are more consistent for volunteering and community service than for political engagement (e.g., Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Glanville, 1999; Metzger et al., 2018; Smith, 1999). Also, civic-related adolescent activities predicted later civic engagement more consistently than other types of activities, such as sports (e.g., Braddock et al., 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

BOX 7-6

Outcomes for Civic Engagement: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Volunteering and Community Service

- Several studies have found evidence that organized out-of-school-time (OST) activities, particularly those that are civic-related, can promote adolescents’ civic development in adulthood (Barber et al., 2013; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Kim & Morgül, 2017; Metzger et al., 2018).
- Patterns discovered by researchers have been replicated across several datasets and various demographic groups, including those defined by race/ethnicity and, socioeconomic status, and in both rural and /urban communities (Gardner et al., 2008; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Mueller et al., 2011; Zaff et al., 2011).

Political Engagement

- Political engagement as an outcome is understudied, but some research suggests that some activities during adolescence have the potential to support adolescent political engagement and sociopolitical development (Barber et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2008).
- Program participation is not consistently associated with voting behavior, but some work suggests that OST activities have the potential to inspire young people to further educate themselves and believe that they can influence issues that matter to them (Brown et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2020; Park, 2016; Trott, 2020).
- Some programs focus on activism projects, which can be empowering for marginalized youth and help them think about more deeply about societal issues (Brown et al., 2018; Carey et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2020; Park, 2016; Trott, 2020; Wilson et al., 2023).

Volunteering and Community Service

One of the central ways individuals can contribute to their community is through volunteering and community service. Several studies have found evidence that organized OST activities, particularly if the activities are civic-related activities, can help promote adolescents’ development around civic engagement into adulthood (Metzger et al., 2018). For instance, young people who spent time volunteering during middle and high school were more likely to continue to volunteer 1–2 years later (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Metzger et al., 2018) and when they

reached their 20s and 30s (Barber et al., 2013; Kim & Morgül, 2017). These positive links emerged in large, nationally representative datasets with diverse young people across the United States (Barber et al., 2013; Kim & Morgül, 2017), among rural and urban communities (Metzger et al., 2018), and among samples that were primarily Black (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). Based on data collected in over 30 states across the United States, participating in community-based programs, such as 4-H, in eighth grade and high school was also associated with later civic engagement (Mueller et al., 2011; Zaff et al., 2011). These findings on civic engagement also emerge when researchers consider overall activity participation. For example, several studies suggest that young people who participated in a larger number of activities or spent more time in activities during middle and high school are more likely to volunteer later on (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006, 2010; Gardner et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2008; Mahoney & Vest, 2012; Metzger et al., 2018; Mueller et al., 2011; Smith, 1999). However, the evidence that participation in non-civic-related activities (e.g., sports participation) predicts volunteering is weak (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). Finally, there is some evidence based on the NELS that participating in activities over multiple years evidenced stronger associations with volunteering (Gardner et al., 2008). Overall, organized OST activities may help adolescents build civic-related behavioral habits, as well as beliefs about civic engagement that promote continued engagement in their community years down the road, well after their participation in the OST program has ended.

One central question is whether civic engagement that is required will have the same effects as voluntary civic-related activities. Metz and Youniss (2005) conducted a natural experiment in middle- and upper-middle-class communities outside of Boston, where they compared the volunteering of high school students (78% White) before and after the school district implemented a community service graduation requirement. Regardless of whether it was required, participants who volunteered earlier in high school or volunteered over several years had a stronger interest in politics and higher intentions to be involved civically in the future. Although most of the effects were similar across adolescents, having volunteering as a graduation requirement was particularly beneficial for adolescents who were less likely to volunteer early in high school by increasing their intention to vote and volunteer after high school (Metz and Youniss, 2005).

In summary, several correlational studies suggest that participating in activities, particularly if those activities were focused on volunteering or community service, during adolescence is associated with volunteering later in adolescence and early adulthood. These patterns have been replicated across several datasets and various populations defined by race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and in both rural and urban communities.

Political Engagement

The flexibility of organized OST activities enables them to help young people learn about and address political issues that concern them (Brown et al., 2018; Park, 2016). With the exception of voting, existing research suggests that some OST activities during adolescence have the potential to be transformative for their sociopolitical development and can support their political engagement right after high school and into their 20s and 30s (Barber et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2008).

Several researchers have used large datasets to test whether participating in activities is associated with young people's engagement in political activities (e.g., attending a protest) or voting behavior as adults. Participation in high school civic-related activities was related to adults' engagement in political activities when tested with nationally representative datasets that

included a diverse array of youth across the country (Glanville, 1999; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Smith, 1999) and among a local sample with approximately 67% Black youth (Fredrick & Eccles, 2006). In addition, four studies using data from the NELS suggest that participating in school- or community-based activities in eighth grade (Frisco et al., 2004) or high school (Braddock et al., 2007; Gardner et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2008) was associated with voting in the local and presidential elections at ages 18 and 20. However, these positive linkages with voting did not replicate in three other national datasets (Glanville, 1999; Kim & Morgül, 2017; Mahoney & Vest, 2012).

More recent, largely qualitative studies describe the potential of activities that focus on activist, political, or climate issues that are of concern for young people (Brown et al., 2018; Carey et al., 2021; Ginwright, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2020; Kirshner, 2015; Park, 2016; Trott, 2020; Wilson et al., 2023). For example, Wilson et al. (2023) describe how program staff helped channel Black adolescents' frustration and anger about closures and funding challenges in their local schools to learn about educational and political systems, so they could work toward improving the quality and options in their schools. Across these qualitative studies, participants described activities as empowering spaces where adolescents learned about themselves, the issues and concerns of various groups, and political systems in different countries. They enabled young people to think about themselves within multifaceted political systems and the complexity of political decisions. Adolescents reported developing a strong sense of self-efficacy around these issues, such as feeling like they had power to change the current situation (Brown et al., 2018; Carey et al., 2021; Ginwright, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2020; Kirshner, 2015; Park, 2016; Trott, 2020; Wilson et al., 2023).

Though adolescents' OST activity participation is not consistently associated with their voting behavior, more recent work suggests that OST activities can inspire participants to learn about political issues, and support confidence to influence these issues. Some studies suggest that the extent to which activities promote participants' sociopolitical development depends on the extent to which these issues are a core component of the OST program and mission of the activity (Brown et al., 2018; Park, 2016). In addition to content covered in each session, understanding how the activity is structured (e.g., centering youth voice, sharing decision-making [Brown et al., 2018; Park, 2016]) may help illuminate why some activities may be better positioned to promote individuals' civic engagement.

OUTCOMES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Several research studies have sought to estimate the effects of OST activities on a young person's learning outcomes. The studies analyzed the effects of these activities on a range of learning outcomes, including test performance, grades, school attendance, and academic progress. This area of development had the largest number of RCTs and quasi-experimental studies, 11 in total. With some exceptions, the RCTs and quasi-experimental studies note that the OST activities they explored did not have positive effects on test scores or school grades—the academic outcomes most connected to within classroom experiences. The studies showed that OST activities tend to have more positive effects on other important academic outcomes, such as attendance, high school graduation, and college attendance. In addition to these RCTs, this section also reviews some longitudinal correlational studies on potential long-term associations, as well as qualitative findings to explore potential mechanisms behind these effects.

Overall, the available RCTs demonstrate that OST activities can have important positive effects on participants' academic outcomes, though positive effects are clearly not a guaranteed outcome (see Box 7-7). OST programs that showed positive effects in these studies were typically intensive, including many hours of participation and targeted programming. The research also shows that even intensive programs rarely have positive effects on test performance or grades. Instead, effective programs tended to benefit participants through increases in school attendance and school progression, which are key outcomes for later success.

BOX 7-7

Outcomes for Academic Success: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Test Scores

Most randomized controlled trials (RCTs) conducted on out-of-school-time (OST) programs did not find significant positive effects on test scores, though Herrera et al. (2013) demonstrates the potential of some OST activities to do so.

Grades

Some studies have found that OST programs can improve participants' grades (Garcia et al., 2020;), though positive effects have not been consistent across programs (Hirsch et al., 2011; James-Burdumy et al., 2007).

Attendance

Some OST programs have demonstrated beneficial effects on attendance, though not all studies found positive effects (Gottfredson et al., 2010; Modestino & Paulsen, 2023).

Graduation and Educational Attainment

- OST programs have demonstrated positive effects on participants' educational progress at the middle school level via course credits (Komisarow, 2022) and at the high school level via initial college enrollment (Avery, 2013) and likelihood of graduating on time (Modestino & Paulsen, 2023).
- A study of one OST program found an impact on a number of educational progress factors for boys, such as graduation, college attendance and completion, and 2-year degree attainment (Theodos et al., 2017).

Test Scores

Research shows that OST activities can have positive effects on test scores, but most studies that have assessed the effects of OST activities have not found significant results. One exception is Herrera et al. (2013), which demonstrates potential for some OST programs to improve children's academic test performance. The authors studied the effects of Higher Achievement, an intensive achievement-oriented OST program that provides approximately 650 hours of academic instruction per year, as well as enrichment activities and targeted, academic mentoring. The study included the five Higher Achievement programs operating in Washington, DC, and Alexandria, Virginia, when the study began, each of which include approximately 85 participants. Researchers randomly assigned 952 children entering fifth or sixth grade and meeting Higher Achievement's admission requirements to either the program or comparison group. Herrera et al. (2013) surveyed participants and measured their achievement in reading comprehension and math problem-solving prior to random assignment, as well as 1, 2, and 4

years after random assignment; they found no effect of the program on academic achievement after 1 year but significant positive effects in both subjects after 2 years. At the 4-year follow-up, when about half of the participants were in high school and thus no longer had access to the program, those who had participated in the program continued to have higher math scores than those in the comparison group (Herrera et al., 2013).

In contrast, most of the RCT studies of OST activities do not find significant effects on achievement scores. For example, Garcia et al. (2020) also assessed the effects of Higher Achievement, but in more recent years; unlike Herrera et al. (2013), they found no effects on achievement scores. Similarly, at the elementary school level, James-Burdumy et al. (2007) studied the effects of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) in 12 school districts and 26 OST centers, at which 2,308 elementary school students who were interested in attending a center were randomly assigned either to the treatment or control group; they found no statistically significant effect on reading test scores. And Roberts et al. (2018) studied the effects of an OST reading intervention for children in grades 3–5 with reading difficulties. All treatment participants received 30 minutes of computer-based instruction plus 30 minutes of small-group tutoring for four to five times per week. The researchers found no statistically significant effect on reading comprehension, and the point estimates were low and both positive and negative (Roberts et al., 2018). This lack of program effects may be due to the program's high attrition and absenteeism. At the middle school level, Gottfredson et al. (2010) studied the effects of an OST program for middle school students that operated for 9 hours per week for 30 weeks and included academic assistance along with a prevention program and recreational activities; they found no significant differences between the treatment and control groups on measures of academic performance. At the high school level, Modestino and Paulsen (2023) used randomized admissions lotteries for youth who applied to the Boston Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) to estimate the effect of being selected to participate in the program. SYEP started in the early 1980s and each summer connects approximately 10,000 young people ages 14–24 to local employers. Participants are paid minimum wage, work up to 25 hours per week, and receive 20 hours of job-readiness training. The study found no effect on achievement test scores (Modestino & Paulsen, 2023). Similarly, Avery (2013) studied the College Possible program, which provides a 2-year OST program to high school juniors and seniors, including SAT and ACT test preparation services, college admissions and financial aid consulting, and guidance in the transition to college. The study included 238 participants, of which 134 were randomly assigned to the program. The author found little evidence of effects on ACT performance (Avery, 2013).

The lack of consistent positive findings for test scores is not surprising. Tests measure learning across a range of academic content areas, capturing the full school year of learning. Even if OST activities benefit student learning in a specific area in which they are struggling, this area might be only a small part of the what the test measures capture. Gains in the area covered by OST activities might not show up as a substantial change in the overall test score. Moreover, many standardized tests measure the performance of children performing around grade level, and those whose levels of learning are either much lower or much higher than the average for grade level receive much less precise scores. As a result, if OST programs are focused on children and youth whose performance falls far from the mean, gains in these individuals' test scores might not show up as clearly on a standardized test.

Grades

Studies of OST programs have more positive effects on school grades, but again, results show inconsistent effects across programs. At the elementary school level, the Garcia et al. (2020) study of Higher Achievement found significant positive effects on grades in English, math, and science. While Garcia et al. (2020) did not find positive effects of the Higher Achievement program on test scores or grades 1 year after the participants applied to the program, they did find positive effects on grades 2 years after application. At the middle school level, Komisarow (2022) studied StudentU, a 21st CCLC that provides academic programming; healthy meals and snacks; parent/caregiver outreach; coaching, advising, and mentoring; and referrals for children and families to other community services. It serves 50 middle school students in each cohort, starting in sixth grade. The program is oversubscribed and selects participants via lottery, which provides a randomized comparison group for those receiving admission to the program. Rising sixth graders in StudentU attend Summer Academy, an intensive 6-week program that aims to improve participants' academic performance and social and emotional well-being. Following Summer Academy, participants receive 15 hours per week of afterschool programming for 30 weeks during the school year. Those who won the lottery for admissions obtained GPAs early in high school that were approximately 0.16 points higher than those who did not win the lottery (Komisarow, 2022). StudentU had stronger effects on participants with low baseline achievement scores. These participants achieved GPAs that were higher by 0.37 grade points. At the high school level, Modestino and Paulsen's (2023) study of SYEP finds small but significant positive effects on high school GPA, increasing GPA by 0.13–0.21 points.

Positive effects on grades have not been universal among the programs that researchers have studied. The study by James-Burdumy et al. (2007) of 21st CCLC programs found no statistically significant effect on course grades in math, English, or science for elementary-school-aged children. At the high school level, the Hirsch et al. (2011) study assessed the effects of After School Matters (ASM), an OST program for high school students in Chicago that provides work experiences somewhat like SYEP, but after school instead of in the summer. ASM offers paid apprenticeship experiences in a wide array of areas, such as technology, arts, and sports. The authors studied 535 youth randomly assigned to participate in an apprenticeship and found no significant effects of the program on school grades, though the lack of effects could be because the vast majority of the control group (91%) participated in another organized after school activity (primarily) or paid work (James-Burdumy et al., 2007).

School Attendance

Some studies have demonstrated that OST programs can have beneficial effects on attendance. At the high school level, for example, Modestino and Paulsen (2023) found that lottery winners for the Boston SYEP had higher school attendance. However, not all studies found positive effects. At the middle school level, Gottfredson et al. (2010) studied a program that provided 9 hours per week for 30 weeks of academic assistance, along with a prevention program and recreational activities as mentioned above; they found no significant differences between the treatment and control groups on measures of school attendance, conduct problems, prosocial/antidrug attitudes, social competence, school bonding, or positive peer influence. At the high school level, the Hirsch et al. (2011) study of ASM found no significant effects of the program on school attendance or on marketable job skills; while they did find indications that the

program affected self-reported identification with school, behavioral problems, and self-regulation, they did not find effects on four other self-reported measures of positive youth development. Theodos et al. (2017) studied the High School Internship Program of the Urban Alliance; they found no effects on a wide range of outcomes, including being suspended during senior year, chronic absenteeism, taking the SAT or ACT, and filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

A number of dissertations analyzing the association between OST programs and attendance rates have been completed in recent years, indicating an increasing interest that will hopefully generate impactful work in this area of study (Agnew, 2019; Carr, 2021; Kelepolo, 2011; Nelson-Johnson, 2007; Nesbit, 2015). Many of these dissertations have focused on children and youth from marginalized backgrounds (Hinojosa, 2018; Holloway, 2017; Lanford, 2019; Nguyen, 2007; O'Brien, 2017), which will allow researchers to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which OST programs impact these populations.

Graduation and Educational Attainment

Programs also have demonstrated positive effects on participants' progression through school (Mahoney & Vest, 2012). At the middle school level, Komisarow (2022) found that children who won the lottery for admissions to StudentU accumulated 0.45 more credits by the end of ninth grade, and the effects were larger for those with low baseline achievement scores, who accumulated 0.82 more course credits. Similarly, at the high-school level, Avery (2013) found that the College Possible program increased initial enrollment at 4-year colleges by more than 15 percentage points, though not college enrollment overall. And Modestino & Paulsen (2023) found that lottery winners for the Boston SYEP were 4.4 percentage points more likely to graduate from high school on time and 2.5 percentage points less likely to drop out of high school during the 4 years after participating in the program relative to the control group. Survey data suggest that the Boston SYEP may affect academic outcomes by increasing aspirations to attend college, gaining basic work habits, and improving social skills during the summer. Similarly, the Theodos et al. (2017) study assessed the effects of the High School Internship Program of the Urban Alliance, which provides training, mentoring, and work experience to high school seniors in Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; Northern Virginia; and Chicago, IL. The program targets seniors in high school at risk of not transitioning to further education or meaningful work and includes a paid internship in an office setting, soft and hard skills job training, and coaching. While Theodos et al. (2017) did not find effects for the full sample, they did find positive effects for males on a range of outcomes, including graduating from high school, attending college, completing 2 years of college, attaining a 2-year degree, and attending a college with higher SAT scoring students; however, they also found negative effects on holding a postprogram job and employment in the first year.

Other researchers have posited that an individual's educational progression can be impacted by the relationships they form within OST programs, as opposed to programs themselves. For example, Viau et al. (2015) explained that organized activities are likely to provide young people with increased social capital, or positive social relationships that can provide a variety of positive developmental outcomes for children and youth. They point out that strong relationships with peers and supportive adults can result in better educational attainment, among other positive outcomes. Viau and Poulin (2015) conducted a later study that found no significant difference between the activity groups regarding educational status, though they suggest that this could be due to a variety of factors, such as stricter analyses. Martin et al.

(2015) indicated that for economically disadvantaged young men, positive family relationships predicted involvement in activities that promoted educational attainment in adulthood.

Some qualitative research has yielded examples of potential mechanisms for increasing educational attainment. After being identified as a school “in need of improvement,” one high school implemented an evening school program to reduce suspension, failure, and dropout rates (Kamrath, 2019). In its first year, the program graduated 100% of the student participants, all of whom were in danger of dropping or failing out of school. One teacher explained, “Some kids have a lot of trouble acclimating themselves in a large classroom because they have difficulties with other students. And here they can work by themselves or with the aid of a teacher so some students really kind of enjoy it once they get in here for a few days” (Kamrath, 2019, p.157). In a sports-based program studied by Fuller et al. (2013), participants were able to have valuable downtime with program staff they respected, engaging in discussions about college and their futures. When interviewed, one student told researchers, “I changed my mind. I do want to go to college now” (Fuller et al., 2013, p. 477).

Additionally, many non-RCT studies have assessed the relationship between OST programs and academic outcomes, including domain-specific programs that focus on skill-building outcomes in specific areas of interest (Box 7-8). These studies show positive relationships across a range of outcomes. For example, Provenzano et al. (2020) evaluated an El Sistema–inspired OST music education program to determine its impact on social, educational, and developmental health outcomes for 93 fifth-grade children in a racially/ethnically diverse, low-income elementary school in Ann Arbor, Michigan. They found significant changes in participants’ perception of their music-making ability and in their connection to other children through pre- and posttests (Provenzano et al., 2020). Participants also noted an enhanced sense of school pride and broader community recognition. Similarly, an evaluation of Washington State’s 21st CCLC program, which involved children in grades 4–12, compared them with a set of children matched on observable characteristics; Naftzger et al. (2015) found small, but negative associations between program participation and the rate of unexcused absences and disciplinary events.

Additionally, Haghighat and Knifsend (2019), Henry (2011), Palmer et al. (2017), Lleras (2008), and many others have utilized datasets such as the NELS and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Most of these researchers were able to observe some positive, statistically significant associations between program participation and educational attainment in late adolescence and early adulthood, showing the importance of longitudinal data collection in this area of study.

Longitudinal studies may be more likely to find positive relationships because they assess OST programs that are of higher quality than those assessed by RCTs or because they do not fully adjust for factors outside of the program analyzed and, as a result, do not accurately estimate the size of the effects. For example, in the Naftzger et al. (2015) study, participants were screened on having stayed in the program for a period of at least 30 (or 60) days, suggesting self-selection not just in who participates but in who sticks with it, which may in turn explain the small positive impacts found. As a result, the committee has chosen to rely on the results from well-powered RCTs in identifying effects.

BOX 7-8
Program-Specific Learning

Domain-specific out-of-school-time (OST) programs have a specialized focus such as the arts, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), or physical activity. Although they teach specific skills, researchers theorize that these programs have broader effects, such as peer collaboration, greater sense of agency, responsibility, and more (Clement et al., 2023; Hicks et al., 2022).

Arts

Many researchers have documented the outcomes of arts-focused OST programs, particularly those serving young people who may not be able to easily access arts activities during their daily schooling. Arts programs have had a variety of observed effects, including enhancing learning and social relationships for younger participants (Cavendish, 2016; Sheltzer & Consoli, 2019). Multiple researchers have observed that older youth from marginalized communities who were involved in writing, theater, and music programs were gained a greater sense of personal agency and furthered their identity development through their creative work (Ngo, 2017; Provenzano et al., 2020). For example, Johnson (2017) demonstrated that participants in an OST writing club improved their writing skills while centering their lived experiences in a way that supported their identities (Johnson, 2017).

STEM

STEM programs allow participants to explore fields they may not typically have access to (Ryu et al., 2019; Wozniak et al., 2023) and have been found to improve program-specific skills, such as math, and more general skills, such as academic performance, school engagement, and social and emotional learning (Hicks et al., 2021; Thompson & Diaz, 2012; Yu et al., 2021b). Programs can also spark further learning and career interest in participants. For instance, in the Digital Youth Divas program, researchers observed girls shifting from simply doing what was asked of them to working on ideas they formulated independently (Pinkard et al., 2017). Participants in a Texas digital media club were exposed to valuable professional networks, where they reported an increased ability to see themselves succeeding in the field (Vickery, 2014).

Physical Activity

A multitude of OST programs has been developed with a focus on promoting physical activity for adolescents. Programs that focus on physical activity have been observed to have effects on physiological statistics such as body mass index, as well as other characteristics such as responsibility and social relationships (Clement & Freeman, 2023; Fuller et al., 2013). For example, an adventure-based outdoor program targeting young people who face increased risks found that participants had a positive perception of the activities they were engaged in and reported gaining greater self-confidence, school attachment, and maturity as they completed challenges such as long hikes and engaged in nature learning (Merenda, 2021).

OUTCOMES FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION, SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION, AND MITIGATION OF OTHER RISK BEHAVIORS

Historically, one goal of OST activities has been to supervise young people and prevent them from engaging in violence, substance use, or other risky behaviors (Halpern, 2003). Violence and substance use prevention and the mitigation of other risk behaviors have not only individual sequelae but community-level consequences as well. A review of 13 experimental studies across multiple city programs found that these programs consistently reduced

involvement in the criminal justice system and led to improvements in a range of positive youth development outcomes (Li & Jackson-Spieker, 2022). A number of studies measure violence perpetration or victimization, substance use, and other risk behaviors as outcomes with respect to OST activities (see Box 7-9).

BOX 7-9

Outcomes for Violence Prevention, Substance Use Prevention, and Mitigation of Other Risk Behaviors: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Children

- Studies conducted with younger children have found mixed results, with one study (Huang et al., 2014) finding that participants in an OST program had lower juvenile crime rates than their nonparticipant peers, while another (Staecker et al., 2015) found no changes pre- and postintervention.
- Substance use prevention programs have also had mixed results with younger children, with some children increasing resilience factors while not decreasing reported substance use (Morrison et al., 2000; St. Pierre et al., 2001).

Adolescents

- Evaluations of several OST programs focused on violence prevention have found mixed results, causing researchers to posit that participants' backgrounds have an impact on their outcomes in these programs (Gottfredson et al., 2010; Jiang & Peterson, 2012; Rorie et al., 2011).
- Other studies focusing on substance use prevention and mitigation of other risk behaviors have found similarly mixed results.; Several researchers concluded that substance abuse and other risk-taking behaviors can change depending on how a young person spends time outside of school, but that organized activities can be a deterrent for engaging in these behaviors (D'Amico et al., 2012; Hsieh et al., 2023; Schinke et al., 1988; Tebes et al., 2007).

Children. Though the bulk of the research exploring the relations between OST program participation and prevention of violence or harm focuses on adolescents, a few studies have been conducted with elementary school children. An evaluation of the LA's BEST OST program concluded that participants had lower juvenile crime rates compared with children who did not participate; comparison children were matched to the participants based on several characteristics and behavioral indicators (Huang et al., 2014). However, another study found less-promising results: Staecker et al. (2015) relied on a pre- and post-comparison to study third to fifth grade students who participated in an OST violence prevention program. They found no change postintervention on a variety of bullying and other problem behavior measures (Staecker et al., 2015).

One study sought to evaluate the U.S. Department of Education's (2014) 21st CLCCs program and found that for elementary school students (boys in particular), participation increased problem behavior; for middle schoolers the evidence was weaker but still negative for some outcomes (James-Burdumy et al., 2008). The authors speculate that there may be three mechanisms through which OST programs increase problematic behavior during school hours: (1) Children and youth may act out more in school because they are fatigued due to the extra hours spent at school in the OST program. (2) There may be negative peer influence in the OST

settings. Dishion and Dodge (2006) describe ways in which groups of deviant adolescents can encourage and reward problem behaviors, unbeknownst to staff. Having mixed groups of youth with higher levels of achievement and better behavior would be preferable. This phenomenon is particularly of concern in programs with less supervision of OST spaces (Mahoney et al., 2004). (3) The disciplinary standards may be lower in OST settings, causing a spillover effect during school hours. James-Burdumy et al. (2008) find some evidence supporting the notion that the standards of behavior are different in the OST programs, but they cannot rule in or out any of the three possibilities. While some OST programs are staffed by educators, many are staff by paraprofessionals and youth workers who need training in effective behavioral management and supporting shared behavioral norms that discourage acting out (Vandell & Lao, 2016).

Some OST programs have also focused on the reduction of alcohol or other substance use among children (Morrison et al., 2000; Ross et al., 1992), with mixed results. For example, Morrison et al. (2000) studied the effectiveness of OST programming and parent education and support as a prevention approach for youth who are at risk for substance abuse compared with classmates who are at lower risk. Young people who participated in the OST program demonstrated an increase in or maintenance of key resilience factors, such as bonding to school, parent supervision, and teacher-rated behavior, but not a decrease in reported substance use (Morrison et al., 2000). Furthermore, in a pre- to posttest evaluation, St. Pierre et al. (2001) studied the effectiveness of a multicomponent OST substance abuse prevention program (Stay SMART) for second- and third-grade children who had high risks. The program was designed to reduce risk factors known to predict later substance abuse and to bolster protective factors shown to mitigate risk. Improvements included children's competencies to solve peer and school problems and their refusals to engage in high-risk behaviors (St. Pierre et al., 2001). Overall, the lack of studies in this area focused on children shows that there is still a great need for further research.

Adolescents. Many studies have investigated a potential association between OST program participation and decreases in violent behavior, with mixed results. An evaluation of the All Stars OST program included 447 middle school students who were randomly assigned to participate in the year-long program or to a control group; the researchers found no effects of the 14 lessons intended to reduce violence, bullying, and other behaviors (Gottfredson et al., 2010). In a follow-up evaluation of the All Stars program, Rorie et al. (2011) found that as program structure increased, violent behavior declined, although violent talk such as threats increased (p. 105). However, Gottfredson et al. (2010) noted that their sample differed from other evaluations of the All Stars program, containing a much lower percentage of White participants and higher numbers of male participants and individuals from low-income households. The authors posited that their mixed findings may be due to the All Stars program being a poor fit for their sample; Rorie et al. (2011) used the same sample, so it is possible to apply the previous theory to their findings.

As described in previous sections, Hirsch et al. (2011) evaluated After School Matters (ASM)—a Chicago OST apprenticeship program for high school students—using randomization to treatment or control groups. They found that when considering all participants from the sample, regardless of program completion, those assigned to program participation experienced a smaller rise on a problem behavior index than those in the control group did. The two items that showed significant differences between the groups were “selling drugs” and “participating in gang activity,” suggesting that assignment to the program had a preventive impact. When

analyzing only those participants who completed the program, researchers found that the treatment group still reported selling drugs significantly less than the control group (Hirsch et al., 2011).

In some cases, researchers were not able to directly trace results back to program participation. For example, Fit2Lead is a park-based OST internship program in Miami-Dade County, Florida, focusing on violence prevention. D’Agostino et al. (2019, 2020) evaluated Fit2Lead using a difference-in-differences approach against matched zip codes that did not have this program implemented. Areas where Fit2Lead was implemented showed lower youth arrest rates post-treatment, suggesting that there may be an effect, though there may be residual differences between the treated and nontreated areas and/or spillover effects (D’Agostino et al., 2019, 2020).

Many researchers have also theorized that social relationships, with both peers and adults, can impact the effects of programs on violent behavior in youth. Denault and Poulin (2008) conducted a study of adolescents on their involvement with extracurricular activities and found that activity peer-group integration and activity leader support were significant when interacting with gender: they observed that the more boys perceived they were socially integrated in the activity peer group, the greater their problem behaviors were, but the more they perceived support from the activity leader, the lesser their problem behaviors were (Denault & Poulin, 2008). In another study on the social context of youth participation, Denault and Poulin (2012) found that when peers in organized youth groups were perceived to have high levels of “deviancy,” participants’ likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors increased. Crean (2012) analyzed cross-sectional data on urban middle schoolers and found that breadth of involvement in extracurricular activities had an indirect effect on reduced “delinquent behavior” related to decision-making skills, but the intensity of participation had a direct “delinquency-enhancing” effect. The researchers theorized that since not all participants form productive relationships with their program leaders, they may spend more time with other youth in their activities in a way that leads to negative social influence and further exacerbation of existing behavioral issues (Crean, 2012).

Finally, a study of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) (Jiang & Peterson, 2012) found that the associations of extracurricular activity participation with violence depended on immigration status. They found that for nonimmigrant (i.e., third-plus-generation) U.S. adolescents, involvement in sports and/or nonsports extracurricular activities was associated with a lower likelihood of involvement with violence, but that for immigrant (i.e. first- or second-generation) youth, that relationship was flipped (Jiang & Peterson, 2012). Overall, findings of studies that focus on adolescents are mixed, though researchers have posited several theories that merit further study to pin down the causes of these wide-ranging results.

Several studies have also focused on substance use as a main outcome of interest. For example, Agans et al. (2014) analyzed data from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development that spanned 6 years. They found that changes in an adolescents’ breadth of activity participation were associated with “increased substance use, depression, and risk behaviors” relative to their peers who maintained a consistently high likelihood of participation (Agans et al., 2014, p. 919). They also found that consistent placement in the high-participation group was associated with lower levels of substance use in the final year of the study (12th grade) compared with those who were consistently assigned to the low-participation group, though findings for other risk or problem behaviors were more mixed (Agans et al., 2014).

D’Amico et al. (2012) conducted a cluster RCT with 9,500 diverse participants from 16 middle schools to evaluate CHOICE—a voluntary OST program for younger adolescents that was found to reduce both individual- and school-level alcohol use in a previous pilot study. Students at the eight schools that received the CHOICE program were less likely to initiate alcohol use during the academic year compared with students at the eight control schools (D’Amico et al., 2012).

Other studies report similar findings: substance abuse and other risk-taking behaviors change depending on how a young person spends their time outside school, and organized activities can often serve as a deterrent for engaging in risky behaviors (Hsieh et al., 2023; Lee & Vandell, 2015; Metzger et al., 2011; Moilanen et al., 2014; Schinke et al., 1988; Tebes et al., 2007).

Sexual health-oriented OST programs for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds have also been studied. Kaufman et al. (2018) assessed the effectiveness of a culturally centered, multimedia, sexual risk-reduction intervention known as the Circle of Life, aimed to increase knowledge and self-efficacy among Native American and Alaska Native youth. The research team partnered with Native Boys & Girls Clubs in 15 communities across six Northern Plains reservations and conducted a cluster RCT among 10- to 12-year-olds ($N = 167$; mean age = 11.2). Each club was randomly assigned to intervention or the attention-control program, After-School Science Plus. Kaufman et al. (2018) found that, compared with the control group, youth in the intervention scored significantly higher on knowledge questions about HIV and sexually transmitted diseases at both follow-ups. In addition, self-efficacy to avoid peer pressure and self-efficacy to avoid sex were significantly higher at posttest, and self-perceived volition (standing up for personal beliefs) was significantly higher at 9-month follow-up. There were no differences between groups in terms of behavioral precursors to sex (Kaufman et al., 2018).

In sum, the relationship between OST program participation and prevention of violence, substance abuse, and/or other risk behaviors is mixed, as varied as the programs themselves, the mitigating variables in the studies (e.g., depth and breadth of participation, skill development, peer influence), and the outcomes discussed in this chapter.

OUTCOMES FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Many afterschool activities focus on or have components where they focus on young people’s physical and/or mental health (see Box 7-10). Most research on young people’s physical health suggests that activities, particularly activities focused on physical activities, are associated with better fitness, body mass indices, and eating habits. Relative to the work on physical health, there is less research testing the associations between young people’s activities and their mental health, including depression and anxiety. Some preliminary findings suggest that participating in OST activities is positively related to young people’s mental health, though more work is needed in this area.

BOX 7-10

Outcomes for Physical and Mental Health: Summary of Studies Reviewed

Physical Health

Children

- Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) conducted with children found mixed but generally modest positive results—programs tended to have a positive impact on a few but not all variables being studied (Beets et al., 2016; de Heer et al., 2011; Dziewaltowski et al., 2010; Landry et al., 2019).
- Several studies of quasi-experimental or other design reported general positive results across variables such as fitness levels, healthy eating choices, motor skills, and body mass index (Davis et al., 2011; Martinen et al., 2020; Matvienko & Ahrabi-Fard, 2010).

Adolescents

- At least three RCTs conducted with adolescents found positive effects of physical health programs (Muzaffar et al., 2019; Staiano et al., 2013; Zarrett et al., 2021b), though others have found only short-term effects or none at all (Robbins et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2011).
- Limitations to current studies have been noted, such as heterogeneity of programming and target audiences, limited detail provided about research design, and developmental propriety of activities (Beets et al., 2009; Lytle et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2011).

Mental Health

- Relatively little evidence exists regarding how out-of-school time programs impact youth mental health, though social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes may point to mental health outcomes indirectly (Agans et al., 2014; D’Agostino et al., 2020; Elswick et al., 2022; Onyeka et al., 2021).
- Some studies focusing on physical activity have also investigated cognitive and psychological outcomes, as well as motor skills (Hillman et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2019).

Physical Health

Only a few systematic literature reviews and/or meta-analyses have been conducted to date to examine the impact of OST programs on physical health outcomes. A review by Pate and O’Neil (2009) reported mixed findings about the effectiveness of OST interventions aimed at increasing physical activity.

Beets et al. (2009) conducted a systematic review of the literature to identify studies focused on promoting physical activity for children and adolescents, either as a stand-alone intervention or as one part of a multicomponent intervention (e.g., nutrition and physical activity) during afterschool hours in the school setting. Program outcomes included physical activity, physical fitness, body composition, blood lipids, psychosocial constructs, and sedentary activities. Beets et al. (2009) concluded that OST programs that include a physical activity component may be effective in improving outcomes of interest for children and youth, including physical activity levels, physical fitness, body composition, and blood lipid profiles with only the psychosocial domain (i.e., self-esteem, depression) demonstrating a nonpositive effect size. However, several limitations were noted.

A more recent systematic review and meta-analysis by Mears and Jago (2016) concluded that, although OST programs provide an excellent place to engage children in physical activity,

the evidence supporting their effectiveness has been inconsistent. The primary goal of this study was to examine the effectiveness of afterschool interventions at increasing participants' moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) levels. Mears and Jago (2016) found considerable variation in the effectiveness of OST physical activity programs and activities based on when data were collected (mid- versus postintervention), and for particular groups (boys and children with obesity). These findings may suggest that programs need to be tailored to suit the needs of particular subgroups.

Children. RCTs conducted with younger children found somewhat mixed but generally modest positive results. For example, Beets et al. (2016) determined the impact of the Strategies-To-Enhance-Practice (STEPS) intervention, focused on incorporating MVPA in the daily schedule of elementary school-aged children, as well as training staff and leaders and providing ongoing technical support and assistance. Using a group RCT, 20 afterschool programs serving about 1,700 children (ages 6–12) per year in one southeastern state were randomized to either an immediate or delayed intervention group. Beets et al. (2016) concluded that STEPs had an impact on children's MVPA and time spent being sedentary but was unable to fully achieve the goal of all children reaching 30 minutes of MVPA per day.

Likewise, Dzewaltowski et al. (2010) implemented and evaluated the HOP'N project for 715 fourth graders and 246 third- and fourth-grade afterschool program participants. Schools and their afterschool programs were randomized to either the control group or the HOP'N program (daily physical activity for 30 minutes following a healthful snack daily, and a weekly nutrition and physical program), and then evaluated for 2 subsequent years. Although no changes in body mass index (BMI) z-scores were seen, children with obesity or overweight attending HOP'N performed more MVPA per day after the intervention than did children with obesity or weight in the control group. The active recreation program time at HOP'N sites was also significantly greater than at control sites (Dzewaltowski et al., 2010).

Similarly, de Heer et al. (2011) examined the effectiveness of a health promotion OST program for Hispanic elementary school-aged children in six schools in El Paso, Texas; the children were randomized to intervention or control classrooms, with intervention classrooms also including a “spillover” group who completed surveys and measurements but did not participate in the intervention. The intervention was a 12-week, culturally tailored afterschool program that included modules on healthy eating, exercise, diabetes, and self-esteem, followed by 45–60 minutes of physical activity. The study found that intervention exposure significantly predicted lower BMI, higher aerobic capacity, and greater intentions to eat healthy (de Heer et al., 2011). In addition, intervention effectiveness increased when there were greater proportions of participants in a classroom. Interestingly, nonparticipants who were in the classroom with program participants also experienced health improvements that could decrease their risk for obesity.

Finally, Landry et al. (2019) studied the association between changes in cooking and gardening behaviors with changes in dietary intake and obesity in participants of an afterschool 12-week, randomized controlled intervention called LA Sprouts that was conducted in four elementary schools in Los Angeles, California, with mostly Latine children. The study found no differences in changes in cooking and gardening psychosocial behaviors, or association of BMI z-score or waist circumference between intervention and control groups (Landry et al., 2019). However, increases in cooking behaviors significantly predicted increased intake of dietary fiber and vegetables.

Additionally, several studies of a quasi-experimental design or another type of pre–post intervention design report generally positive results. Davis et al. (2011), Gatto et al. (2012), Martinen et al. (2020), Matvienko and Ahrabi-Fard (2010), and Perman et al. (2008) all found that the elementary school–aged children who participated in these programs improved in areas such as fitness levels, healthy eating choices, motor skills, and BMI.

Adolescents. At least three RCTs conducted with adolescents found positive results for physical health effects of programs. Specifically, Mabli et al. (2020) conducted an RCT on Healthy Harlem’s Get Fit Program—a 12-week afterschool intervention program in the Harlem Children’s Zone aimed at helping 436 middle and high school students improve physical activity and eating habits to impact BMI and weight status. Participants randomized to receive the Get Fit intervention experienced a significant decrease in BMI z-score, as compared to the control group (Mabli et al., 2020). Similarly, Zarrett et al. (2021b) conducted an RCT to test an innovative 10-week social climate–based intervention called Connect through PLAY to increase MVPA in underserved middle school youth. Controlling for baseline levels of MVPA, school, gender, and weight status, the research team found that participation in the intervention (vs. control) was associated with an increase of daily accelerometry-measured MVPA at postintervention and that the results support social motivationally supportive environments for increasing MVPA in underserved youth (Zarrett et al., 2021b). Finally, in a cluster RCT, Muzaffar et al. (2019) evaluated the afterschool program PAWS (Peer-education About Weight Steadiness) Club, which is delivered by peer or adult educators and seeks to improve physical activity, food choices, and factors related to healthy eating in a 12-session intervention; it seeks to address mediators of behavior change related to cooking skills, food intake, and physical activity. The research team found that adolescents in the peer-led group significantly improved whole grain intake immediately and at 6 months postintervention. Both peer- and adult-led groups had significant reductions in caloric intake at 6 months postintervention. The adult-led group (only) improved self-efficacy and social/family support for healthy eating immediately and at 6 months postintervention (Muzaffar et al., 2019).

Afterschool physical activity programs have also reported positive cognitive changes. For example, Logan et al. (2021) and Staiano et al. (2013) reported improvements in cognitive processing and task performance, as well as greater self-efficacy and peer support, respectively, in their physical activity interventions.

Other RCT studies have had only short-term or no effects. For example, Wilson et al. (2011) conducted the Active by Choice Today school-based RCT for increasing MVPA in over 1,500 adolescents from low-income and marginalized backgrounds in either a 17-week intervention or comparison afterschool program. The study tested the efficacy of a motivational-plus-behavioral skills intervention on increasing MVPA. The youth in the intervention group demonstrated a significant increase in MVPA at midintervention compared with the control group, but the intervention effects were not sustained at 2 weeks postintervention (Wilson et al., 2011). Furthermore, Robbins et al. (2019) evaluated the impact of a 17-week Girls on the Move intervention on increasing MVPA among 1,519 fifth- to eighth-grade girls from racially diverse public schools in urban, underserved areas of the midwestern United States. The research team found no between-group differences for weighted mean minutes of MVPA per week at postintervention or 9-month follow-up. Robbins et al. (2019) concluded that interventions may need to be implemented in multiple contexts, such as school and home environments, to see a synergistic impact on MVPA, and that more research is needed to develop interventions specifically tailored for girls.

A number of quasi-experimental studies have evaluated OST programs focused on physical health. For example, Lightner et al. (2023) found that the OST physical activity intervention they studied, in which underserved youth in the Midwest were able to participate in “equipment-based sports, dance, yoga, and team games,” was associated with participants engaging in more MVPA, gaining improved physical literacy, and decreasing their BMI. Additionally, Rieder et al. (2021) found that among youth who participated in a weight management program involving leadership sessions and physical activity, 44% of participants with a BMI at or over the 85th percentile maintained or decreased their BMI; they also observed that participants generally made healthier eating choices.

Some correlational studies in this area shed light on reasons why youth continue to attend programs. In a study by Whalen et al. (2016) on inner-city students’ motivations for attending physical activity clubs, participants not only reported wanting to look good for events such as prom, but also described family health concerns. One student explained, “The first thing that made me start coming to the club is because obesity runs in my family—everyone in my family is overweight, and I don’t want to be like them” (Whalen et al., 2016, p. 646). Most participants who regularly attended the physical activity clubs described enjoying noncompetitive activities and the judgment-free environment (Whalen et al., 2016). In another study of a peer-to-peer theater-based sexual education program, participants identified social support as important for their engagement (Kim et al., 2019). Youth participating in the program identified the ways in which their relationships with the adults supporting them built morale within the group, deepened their understanding of sexual health, and provided valuable role models and support systems (Kim et al., 2019).

One correlational study reported results of a program being felt beyond the participants to influence their families. A study by Fuller et al. (2013) focused on a fitness and health program for middle school boys; the majority of participants reported applying their healthy eating knowledge at home, both making better choices and encouraging family members to do the same. A few participants were able to report positive changes in their parents’ grocery shopping habits afterwards (Fuller et al., 2013).

Finally, several longitudinal studies have found modest positive associations between OST programs and physical health outcomes longer term. Linver et al. (2009), London and Gurantz (2013), Lytle et al. (2009), and Mahoney et al. (2005) found that children and youth who participated in a physical activity–focused programs modestly improved their likelihood of maintaining their physical activity levels in the future. Lytle et al. (2009) noted, however, that outside relationships and transportation difficulties tended to mediate the levels of physical activity, especially for girls in their study. Linver et al. (2009) found that children and youth who participated in sports alone reported more positive outcomes than those who were not involved in activities, but those who participated in sports and other activities had the best outcomes of all. However, it should be noted that these results may reflect differential selection into participation by young people who have different underlying health trajectories and behaviors.

In conclusion, OST programs that include a physical health component have demonstrated somewhat mixed results, but some studies have demonstrated effectiveness in improving the physical outcomes of interest for children and youth. Several limitations to the current studies have been noted and include the heterogeneity of the programming and target audiences, as well as limited detail provided about the research design and types of intervention activities. Clearly, school-level randomization and multiple assessments are necessary to better understand the effectiveness of OST interventions (Beets et al., 2009). Also, very little

information has been presented in most studies about the developmentally appropriate nature of the activities, the variety of activities, the content and frequency of trainings, and staff perceptions of the programs. Finally, future studies need to provide more comprehensive assessments of physical activity and the utility of a physical activity program to promote activity both within and outside of the program.

Mental Health

Overall, there is relatively little concrete evidence about how OST programs relate to the mental health of children and youth, especially pertaining to internalizing behaviors such as depression and anxiety. Yet, there is some indirect indication that OST programs might impact outcomes that relate to mental health. For example, studies described in other sections of this chapter—Agans et al., 2014; D’Agostino et al., 2020; and Elswick et al., 2022—included social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes, and the programs under study demonstrated favorable effects in the domains of problem behaviors, positive youth development, relationships, and beliefs, which could be correlated with mental health outcomes (Onyeka et al., 2021).

In addition, some physical activity studies have included cognitive and psychological outcomes and found mixed, but positive, associations. For example, Hillman et al. (2014) and Williams et al. (2019) conducted studies on physical activity OST programs and found improvements in cognitive function (inhibition, cognitive flexibility) and mental health (quality of life, depression, and self-worth). Other studies, such as Lee et al. (2020), which focused on motor skills, reported no significant changes in cognitive function but did see changes in fundamental motor skills and MVPA between the intervention and control group over time.

Some qualitative work has been completed in this area, providing researchers with self-report and interview data that hint at mechanisms for change. For example, in a study discussing the Trauma Healing Club, as previously discussed in the report, researchers continued to adapt the intervention as the program continued based on responses from participants, which led to a variety of positive anecdotal responses (Elswick et al., 2022). These responses led the researchers to conclude that the club was successful in developing participants’ healthy coping skills, while also helping to decrease self-reported PTSD symptoms (Elswick et al., 2022). Other programs have received similar positive feedback from participants, such as a Harlem-based mindfulness program with many benefits identified by participants. One student reported, “When I do something bad at school and I come home from school and I get in trouble, I go to my room and instead of punching something I take a deep breath” (Krebs et al., 2022, p. 8). Other participants also shared examples of times they were able to breathe and think before reacting in order to manage stressful situations (Krebs et al., 2022).

In a review of more recent studies, Christensen et al. (2023) examined the overall effects of OST programs on internalizing, externalizing, school-related, social functioning, and self-identity outcomes among children and adolescents in grades K–12 with marginalized identities (including children and youth of color and from underserved backgrounds) across 56 studies. Results indicated that OST programs have a small, yet significant positive overall effect on the outcomes studied (Christensen et al., 2023). Clearly, few individual studies and meta-analyses to date have examined OST program psychosocial outcomes, such as psychological distress and specific internalizing mental health symptoms, including anxiety and depression (Ciocanel et al., 2017). There is a great need for future research in this area.

OUTCOMES FOR FAMILY AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

In order to understand how family members and peers fit into the greater OST ecosystem and affect outcomes for children in OST activities, it is important to consider these influences from a systems perspective. Families are composed of both individual members and multiple interdependent subsystems, such as parent–child, parent–parent, and child–sibling relationships (Bowen, 1978; Simpkins et al., 2019). Applying a systems perspective, children’s activities are shaped by the interactions between these various subsystems. For example, informal interactions—families supporting a local sports team (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007) or participating in an activity together (Simpkins et al., 2011, 2019)—can thus spark children’s interest in entering a formal program. In the context of peer systems, high-quality organized OST activities and supportive relationships with peers support adolescents’ positive development both academically and interpersonally (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013). Youth who are disconnected from OST activities and friendships are at greater risk for delinquency, depression, and substance use (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013; Mahoney et al., 2009; Vitaro et al., 2009). This section of the report examines correlational studies examining how both family and peer relationships affect outcomes of OST programs and activities; see also Box 7-11.

BOX 7-11

Outcomes for Family and Peer Relationships: Summary of Studies Reviewed

- The majority of studies regarding the impacts of parent–child relationships and out-of-school time (OST) programs on families are correlational (Bouffard et al., 2011; Simpkins et al., 2019).
- Few studies have examined the relationships between peers in OST contexts, ; more scholarship is greatly needed in this area, given the influence of peer relationships during adolescent years (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Brown & Larson, 2009; Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013).

Families

According to the Global Family Research Project,

when families are involved, their children are not the only ones who benefit; the benefits extend to other youth in the program, family members, programs, communities, and even schools. Specifically, family engagement can: (1) support increased youth participation in OST programs; (2) benefit youth OST participants; (3) support program quality; and (4) impact family engagement at home and at school. (Bouffard et al., 2011, p. 5)

Other researchers have observed similar benefits. Raffaelli et al. (2018) described “reciprocal pathways” between school and home, allowing young people to improve their sense of responsibility during their OST programs and see similar benefits at home. Siblings also play a role in youth activities. OST programs often include activities that are interests for siblings, and their ability to participate in the same or same kind of programs enables them to influence each other in a way parents cannot. For example, older siblings will typically gain experience with

OST activities before passing that knowledge on to their younger siblings (Simpkins et al., 2019).

Children. Research on the effects of OST activities on family relationships is mixed. Dorsch et al. (2015) found that when their children participated in sports, parents gained something to talk about with their children, spent more time together as a family, and allowed them to interact more with other families in their community. However, Weiss and Fretwell (2005) reported more conflict: they interviewed six fathers who coached their 11- and 12-year-old sons' soccer teams for at least 1 year; they also interviewed the sons and two teammates each. The sons reported a multitude of feelings: they enjoyed receiving special attention, being involved in decision-making, and spending extra time with their fathers, but also felt they were treated unfairly at times and reported feeling additional pressure and conflict. The fathers reported difficulty in separating their role as coach from their role as parent, and the sons' teammates reported that the fathers singled out their children for extra attention, both positive (favoritism) and negative (excessive criticism) (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005).

Parents may experience greater stress when having to manage children's activity schedules, particularly for children who are heavily involved in one OST activity or have a complex schedule with many programs (Simpkins et al., 2019). Parents can struggle to balance busy children's schedules with their own work schedules, causing them significant stress and leaving them with less time to tend to other family or personal matters; athletic programs in particular take up a great deal of time, which can mean that an entire family's schedule begins to revolve around a child's sports season. (Bean et al., 2014).

Adolescents. Observations of the effect of OST activities on family relationships during adolescence have also been mixed. For example, a few researchers claim that closeness and trust can be developed when parents and youth share in a pastime (Larson et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2016). However, some researchers focusing on father–daughter pairs have found that daughters coached by their fathers experienced blurred boundaries, frequent conflict, and disconnects in communication; comments that fathers thought were encouraging were seen by their daughters as insulting, and daughters perceived higher levels of conflict overall compared with their fathers (McCann, 2005; Schmid et al., 2015).

Pearson et al. (2007) examined retention patterns in the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development OST Programs for Youth initiative during 2 school years. They found that family outreach was associated with higher participant retention and that OST programs for high schoolers with higher retention rates were more likely to have a “parent liaison”—a designated person whose job was to serve as the contact point for parents—as a volunteer or staff member. Researchers found that this trend was especially noticeable in programs run through community centers, where 55% of center-based OST programs with high retention rates had a parent liaison. Interestingly, however, they also discovered that the positive association between retention rate and parent liaison was statistically significant only in the case of volunteer parent liaisons (Pearson et al., 2007).

Peers

Peers are a crucial source of emotional and social support for children and adolescents, playing a major role in identity formation (NASEM, 2019). Young people begin to spend more time with their peers as they age, increasingly valuing their opinions and expectations. During

adolescent years, youth are more aware of and strongly motivated by feelings of belonging and positive peer regard (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Brown & Larson, 2009; Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013). In late adolescence, youth may rely on peers less when making self-evaluations; adolescents also have greater capacity for perspective-taking and attunement to others, especially in the context of supportive relationships (NASEM, 2019). *Critical friendships*, or friendships with an individual who is trusted to listen earnestly and provide constructive feedback, is one lens that can be applied to understanding peer relationships in OST programs. Wiggins (2018) studied middle schoolers in an urban OST program, participants with strong relationships and similar goals formed critical friendships marked by an exchange of knowledge, affirmations of one another's academic identities, and established systems of accountability. Despite the importance of peers in the lives of children and youth, this area remains understudied (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2013).

Children. Although the bulk of the limited scholarship in this area tends to focus on adolescents, a few studies discuss the role of peer relationships as children age. A paper by Schaefer et al. (2011) suggests that activity co-participation is less closely associated with friendship for middle schoolers, though this changes as the children grow older. Middle schoolers are typically too young to have much autonomy over various everyday decisions, including those related to their friendships and OST activities; their schools are also likely to be smaller and have fewer extracurricular offerings. As these individuals grow older, they begin to more actively select OST activities based on their friendships and vice versa (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Schaefer et al., 2011).

Adolescents. One study found that having friends participate in the same OST activity increased the odds that an adolescent would participate by 25%–173%, depending on the specific activity; the study results suggested broadly that adolescents were more likely to participate in the same activity as their friends, though the association was stronger for White participants and older adolescents (Simpkins et al., 2012).

Additionally, some researchers have noted that adolescence is a time when young people's identity exploration and development begin to intersect with their understanding of their racial/ethnic background, as well as that of their friends (see, e.g., NASEM, 2019; Williams and Deutsch, 2016). Youth may be more susceptible to influence because understanding who they are and how they fit within society are central developmental tasks of adolescence (Delgado et al., 2016; NASEM, 2019; Schaefer et al., 2018; Simpkins et al., 2012). Organized OST activities can provide a valuable opportunity to promote cross-racial/ethnic friendships, as long as steps are taken to ensure that discrimination is not allowed to incur and harm the process of relationship development between diverse peer groups (Lin et al., 2016; Moody, 2001).

Other work has also been conducted to study the promotion of relationships between youth from different backgrounds. Siperstein et al. (2019) studied the implementation of school-wide extracurricular activities based around the acceptance and integration of youth with intellectual disabilities. In a randomized trial, three out of eight schools adopted the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools (UCS) program “involving inclusive sports, clubs, and schoolwide events” (Siperstein et al., 2019, p. 568). Researchers found significantly positive effects of the UCS program on attitudes toward youth with intellectual disabilities (Siperstein et al., 2019).

To date, no studies separate out the effects of differential selection into participation and the treatment effects of actually participating in OST activities on family and peer relationships; this is an area where high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental evidence is greatly needed.

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

The idea that participation in OST activities during childhood and adolescence might have a lasting impact on the life trajectory of those who receive such exposures is not far fetched. Indeed, the Perry Preschool Study and others have demonstrated effects of high-quality preschool programming on participants well into late adulthood, on dimensions ranging from educational and occupational attainment, criminal involvement, civic engagement, and family stability (Baulos et al., 2024). In this vein, the strongest evidence for the impact of organized OST activities on life outcomes would arise from studies that followed youth who participated in such activities well into adulthood. Effects that persist to a measurable extent in adulthood have withstood the observed tendency toward “fade-out” that plagues so many interventions among children and youth.

That said, several studies use nationally representative, longitudinal datasets of children at various ages to examine the associations—conditioned on observables—between participation in extracurricular programs and longer-term outcomes. These datasets include the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (2 studies), Add Health (2 studies), the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, and the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS, 2 studies).

Using data on high school students from NELS, Gardner et al. (2008) examined the impact of duration of participation in organized OST activities. They found a dose–response association, whereby those who participated in 2 years of school- or community-based OST activities evinced more positive outcomes in young adulthood than their counterparts who participated for only 1 year of their high school tenure. The outcomes they measured 2 and 8 years after high school included educational attainment (total years of schooling completed), occupational attainment (employment status and income), and civic engagement (voting and volunteering). Gardner et al. (2008) found associations for all outcomes (for occupation, however, only for school-based activities), and educational attainment largely mediated the effects on occupation and civic engagement. Lleras (2008) also analyzed NELS data and found positive associations of extracurricular activities in high school on educational attainment and earnings 10 years hence, net of a measure of cognitive skills.

Similarly, a study by Haghighat and Knifsend (2019) using the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 found that the depth and breadth of extracurricular involvement in 10th grade was positively associated with educational attainment 8 years hence. Likewise, using data from Add Health on 12- to 18-year-olds, who were followed up 6 years later, Barber et al. (2013) found that youth who engaged in a “combination of voluntary and required community-based civic activities as an adolescent, and who participated in any of a number of various types of extracurricular activities” displayed greater community involvement during ages 18–24, controlling for a list of observable factors (p. 1). Meanwhile, Kim and Morgül (2017) used the same Add Health data to examine the impact of voluntary and nonvoluntary youth service on outcomes at ages 18–32. They found that voluntary service was associated with more civic participation and better mental health in adulthood, as well as increased educational attainment and earnings; involuntary “volunteering” during adolescence, however, showed positive effects only on educational attainment and earnings. A small (N = 163), urban, school-based sample also

showed that “competence and activity involvement in adolescence predict citizenship and volunteering in adulthood, 10 to 15 years later” (Obradović & Masten 2007, p. 2). Simpkins et al. (2023) analyzed data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development and found that youth participation in specific OST activities during adolescence (e.g., sports, arts, community service) was associated with participation in those very same activities at age 26. Using the same dataset, Vandell et al. (2021) found that increased time in early care and education settings between ages 1 month and 54 months lead to higher rates of problem behaviors in later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; however, when those children participated in more OST activities in grades 1–5, they evinced less police contact by age 26 years.

In all of these studies the authors controlled for a number of variables available that might be associated with both youth people’s participation and adult outcomes; however, no natural experiment sorted participants quasi-randomly to their levels of participation. Thus, selection issues on which children and youth participate (even in “nonvoluntary” activities) mitigate against interpretation of any of the reported effects as causal. More RCTs are needed to study the long-term impact of OST activities, particularly for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds. See Box 7-12 for a summary of these outcomes.

BOX 7-12

Long Term Outcomes: Summary of Studies Reviewed

- Several studies use nationally representative, longitudinal datasets such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, and the National Educational Longitudinal Study to examine observable associations between program participation and longer-term outcomes.
- More randomized trials are needed, particularly for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds, to determine long-term outcomes for young people who participate in OST programs.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the review of studies in this report, the committee found that OST programs and activities are associated with positive youth development, but results vary across outcomes, across studies, programs, contexts, and outcomes. Some studies have reported positive impact of a particular program on a particular outcome, whereas other studies have reported null impact. This variation is due in part to young people’s needs, participation, and unique experiences in programs, which is affected by the programs themselves but also by the sectors and systems within the larger OST ecosystem. Less clear is whether certain activities are more effective, whether activities indeed do have larger effects on certain outcomes, or if the preponderance of evidence varies by the methods used in the research.

As summarized above, OST programs have potential to bring about some positive change across a range of outcome domains, including socioemotional and interpersonal skills; physical, mental, and behavioral health; substance use prevention; school success; and civic engagement. However, studies evaluating the personal and social benefits of OST programs have produced

inconsistent findings. This variation is due in part to young people's needs, participation and unique experiences at activities, which is affected by the programs themselves but is also out of programs' control and could be supported by other sectors and systems (e.g., transportation, health, education; see Chapters 3 and 4). Better understanding of how children and youth spend their time when OST programs are not available or when they choose not to participate could provide insights into these inconsistent results. Additionally, the lack of attention to the differential quality and resources of OST programming available to underserved children and youth relative to their more privileged peers may help to explain some of the mixed effects in the literature. As described in previous chapters, this mix of program characteristics, quality, resources, and youth participation and engagement contributes to the skill development and outcomes reviewed in this chapter; differential opportunities and access to high-quality and well-resourced programs and experiences inhibit the positive results that they might demonstrate.

Findings around effectiveness are further complicated by variations in the research designs, participants, and types of outcomes assessed across studies. Methodological problems in previous studies include (but are not limited to) lack of initial group equivalence (i.e., selection into participation as opposed to random assignment), high attrition among respondents, low levels of attendance, and the possible nonrepresentativeness of evaluated programs. Moreover, many older studies also lack data on the racial/ethnic composition or the socioeconomic status of participants, so it was difficult to relate outcomes to these participant characteristics. Missing statistical data at pre- or posttest also have limited the number of effects that can be directly assessed. OST programs may not be particularly effective at improving any one targeted youth outcome, but they hold some promise for the overall general improvement of children and youth.

One important implication of current findings is that research on OST programs needs to be multifaceted and assess multiple dimensions of young people's personal and social skills development. Overall, findings from this review point to the potential of OST programs, but also to the need for greater specificity in their intentions, goals, methods, and evaluations, including the inputs and moderating processes that are thought to be associated with specific outcomes across OST settings and programs. Also needed are systematic, multisite, and multipopulation studies that are replicated at scale. Chapter 9 lays out the committee's specific recommendations for further research on the effectiveness of OST programs.

CONCLUSION 7-1: OST settings provide a place for the social and emotional development of children and youth, provided they are well designed and offer high-quality experiences that intentionally support these areas of development. OST settings can provide a place that is responsive to young people, where all participants can feel a sense of belonging and be affirmed in their sense of self. Children and youth report that these programs and activities help them develop responsibility, positive work ethic, social skills, and interest in civic activities.

CONCLUSION 7-2: OST programs are not easily poised to affect intransient, hard-to-change outcomes such as test scores and grades, which require continuous and effective teaching and are heavily influenced by schools. Although programs and experiences are offered by dedicated and motivated staff that exhibit effects on some outcomes, these programs vary in access to social and economic resources, including the ability to engage well-trained staff who are sensitive to the culture and backgrounds of the students

they serve. OST staff are often paraprofessionals with varying degrees of educational and professional experience; they are expected to attain some of the outcomes that are difficult for the most expert of educators. Notwithstanding, some OST programs and experiences have been shown to foster interest and engagement in specific academic domains and socioemotional skills that help children and youth succeed at school, which over the long term may lead to better educational outcomes, such as attendance and graduation.

CONCLUSION 7-3: Not all OST programs are expected to demonstrate positive effects on all outcomes. OST programs are most likely to affect outcomes that they intentionally support through the content and provision of developmental opportunities.

CONCLUSION 7-4: Existing literature is unable to delineate whether certain activities are more effective than others, whether activities have larger effects on certain outcomes, or whether the activity effects depend, at least in part, on the alignment of the activity content, quality, and the area of development. More focused systematic, longitudinal rigorous quantitative and qualitative research is needed to understand what specific types of programs, experiences, approaches, and characteristics of OST program quality are linked to positive outcomes across learning, development, and well-being, and for which specific children and youth, families, and communities. Research and evaluation of OST programs need to move beyond comparing those who do and do not attend to understanding which quality features and experiences in which activities are associated with young people's development, and for whom—taking into account both activity-level factors (e.g., the content or quality of the activity) and individual-level factors (e.g., engagement in the activity and the individuals' current functioning and circumstances).

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8

Current OST Funding and Policies

Funding and policy decisions dictate the structural framework of out-of-school-time (OST) programs. Without sufficient funding and pertinent policies, even the most well-designed programs struggle to achieve their goals. In this chapter the committee considers the funding and policy mechanisms behind OST systems, settings, and programs, and what changes can be made in order to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of OST programs serving children and youth from low-income and marginalized¹ backgrounds. The sections that follow provide an overview of the key sources for OST funding: families, the public sector, and the private sector.

The chapter first discusses the role of program fees paid by families in supporting OST programs before moving to federal supports—including key funding streams and illustrative examples, cross-agency efforts, and other roles of government in extending capacity-building, evidence-base, and research to advance the field forward. The committee then examines the role played by state policies and funding in shaping access to and opportunity in OST programs, including state implementation of federal funding streams, dedicated state funds for OST programs, state network efforts in technical assistance, professional development, and evaluation. This is followed by a brief discussion of local funding and support for OST programs.

In addition to a description of the role of public investments, the chapter highlights philanthropy's role in supporting OST programs, including efforts to fund innovation, frameworks and tools, and catalytic investments. Finally, the chapter outlines future directions for public and private investments in OST systems, settings, and programs.

¹ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering,’” where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage” (p.1). The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See Box 1-3 in Chapter 1.

Key Chapter Terms

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs): The only federal funding stream dedicated to OST programs, the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers are a part of Title IV.B., administered through the U.S. Department of Education. It is awarded via funding formulas to state education agencies and then granted to local communities via a competitive process.

American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds: Emergency federal funds made available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Blended funding: When two or more funding streams are merged to support one initiative. Many funders prohibit blending because it makes individual grant-reporting challenging.

Block grant: Federal funding awarded to state and local governments for a specific program (e.g., Child Care and Development Block Grants are awarded from the federal government to the state to support low-income families' access to childcare for children under the age of 13).

Braided funding: When two or more funding streams are coordinated (but separate) to support one initiative (e.g., a program might utilize funding from Title I and their state's afterschool investment to support OST activities).

Discretionary programs: Programs whose levels are appropriated by the legislative branch each year. The federal discretionary programs are competitive (e.g., Full-Service Community Schools represent an example of a discretionary grant by which the federal government reviews and selects applications across the country to fund selected initiatives).

Entitlement programs: Noncompetitive federal funds to support programs that are open to all eligible participants.

Formula grant: Also known as state-administered programs, formula grants are federal non-competitive awarded to states using a predetermined formula. (e.g., 21st CCLCs)

Full-Service Community Schools: Schools that “improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools” (ED, 2024a, para 4).

Local workforce development board: A group of appointed officials who oversee and plan workforce services.

Municipality: A city or town with a local government.

State agencies: State education or childcare agencies.

State formula grants: Federal funds that are allocated to the states or local governments based on formula rather than competition.

PROGRAM FEES

Nationally, in diverse program models (including fee for service), many OST programs require fees for participation to cover operating costs (e.g., staff salaries and benefits, facilities).

An online survey conducted in spring 2023 by Edge Research, involving 1,119 OST providers that represent nearly 10,300 program sites in 50 states, showed that programs rely heavily on nonpublic funding sources, especially parent fees: 41% of providers reported parent fees as a primary funding source, the most common funding source cited (2023). The other primary sources of funding were 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLCs), private donations and fundraisers, foundation and philanthropic grants, and local and state government funds (Afterschool Alliance, 2023c). See Figure 8-1 for details.

What are your program's primary funding sources? Please check all that apply.

Parent fees	41%
21 st Century Community Learning Centers grant (21 st CCLC)	33%
Private donations/fundraisers	29%
Foundation/philanthropic grant	22%
Local government funds	20%
State government funds (not 21 st CCLC)	19%
Public funding for COVID relief, such as American Rescue Plan, Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER), or Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding	17%
Corporations/businesses	13%
Other federal government programmatic funds (not 21 st CCLC or CCDF)	11%
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	9%
AmeriCorps position (funded in part by Corporation for National and Community Service)	3%
Savings	3%
Loans	2%
Other	9%
Not sure	6%

Number of respondents: 1,199

FIGURE 8-1 Respondents' primary funding sources for out-of-school-time programs, 2023. SOURCE: Afterschool Alliance, 2023a, p. 37.

Primarily, this report examines OST programs serving children and youth from low-income households, where a goal is for public and private sources to alleviate the need for families to pay for participation. Still, some programs serving this population may charge fees and others may invite families to donate an amount they can afford—both instances can be a significant source of funding for these programs. Relying on family fees as a primary source of funding for OST participation is a likely contributor to the differential access to programs between families with low and high incomes. As noted in Chapter 4, families with low incomes often cite program costs as a factor in their decision not to enroll their child. Some programs have implemented policies to reduce or eliminate fees for these families, such as sliding pay scales based on family income; scholarships; stipends for older youth to participate; and, where possible, making program participation free.

PUBLIC FUNDING AND POLICIES

It is challenging to quantify all the public funding dedicated for OST systems, settings, and programs because many of the public funding streams have a wide variety of allowable uses and do not report on how much of the funding is directed to OST programs specifically. In addition, nearly all the public funding sources support a combination of OST experiences (e.g., afterschool and summer programs). The total funding across the most commonly reported public funding sources that are directed specifically to OST programs primarily serving children and youth from low-income households is roughly \$6.3 billion annually: \$5 billion from state funding streams and \$1.3 billion from 21st CCLCs. Using a conservative estimate of the cost of providing high-quality programming, at \$2,400 per participant per year, that \$6.3 billion reaches approximately 2.6 million young people (consistent with the most count of 2.7 million children and youth from low-income households who participate in OST programs [Afterschool Alliance, 2020]). This number is far outpaced by demand, as the America After 3pm survey² reports: approximately 24.6 million children and youth would participate if programs were available (Afterschool Alliance, 2020), including more than 11 million from low-income households (Afterschool Alliance, 2024c). Furthermore, because of lack of public data on the overall direct spending on OST across all public funding streams, coupled with a lack of disaggregated data by demographic variables, it is unclear how many eligible students, such as those attending Title I schools, have access to quality OST programs.

Federal Funding for OST

The primary role of the federal government in the youth development field is to provide guidance, funding, and assistance to address national issues, while leaving the majority of funding decisions to the state and local control (Jennings, 2015).³ This section first addresses the federal funding landscape, offering an overview of some of the notable OST-related funding streams under several agencies, including those that are focused on OST or could be used to support OST; it then notes the role of the government as it pertains to research, technical assistance, and emergency relief.

Similar to funding for K–12 education historically, federal funding represents only a small fraction of the overall funding for OST opportunities, with estimates of 10% of all K–12 education funding and 11% of OST funding coming from federal sources (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Children’s Funding Project, 2023b). Yet, those funds play an important role, especially when it comes to reaching children and youth from low-income backgrounds. Issues pertaining to youth development have often been distributed to different areas based on their primary

² The America After 3PM (AA3) survey assesses participation across all OST programs serving all children and youth, not only programs serving those from low-income households. In the most recent AA3 study from 2020, over 30,000 households were surveyed with questions about the ways in which their child or children are cared for in the hours after school, participation in organized activities and summer experiences, and household demographics. Survey results are examined in Chapter 4.

³ For a primer on federal government and the Congressional appropriations process, please visit <https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process>

designation (e.g., health, education, housing, food), leading to a siloed approach to OST funding; this funding is currently spread across 25 federal agencies and departments.⁴

The federal government administers over 280 programs supporting children and youth, the majority designed to support low-income families (Children's Funding Project, 2023b). Of those, 87 are designed to support OST programs in direct or indirect ways (Children's Funding Project, 2023b).⁵ Of note, the American Rescue Plan (ARP); the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020; and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act of 2020 contained provisions that benefited OST providers (this COVID-era relief funding is discussed in detail in Box 8-1 and Appendix B). Although the breadth of funding streams available offers a variety of opportunities for support, each funding stream has limitations in depth of reach. Only a few eligible programs receive funding either directly or through a partnership with a district, city/county, or a university, leaving some children and youth from low-income backgrounds without adequate access to OST opportunities.

The following sections describe the most prevalent funding associated with this committee's task, highlighting nine agencies that administer significant OST programming for children and youth from marginalized backgrounds.⁶ The overview offers an illustration of opportunities for OST program support, but also underscores the fragmented nature of the overall federal funding landscape for youth development.

U.S. Department of Education OST Programs

The U.S. Department of Education (ED), under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA]), administers multiple OST-related grants, including in Titles I, II, and IV.⁷ In addition to CCLCs, it administers the Full-Service Community Schools grant, which incentivizes partnerships between local education agencies and OST providers; and Promise Neighborhoods, which embrace comprehensive, whole-child, whole-community strategies. The sections that follow provide an overview of these investments.

21st Century Community Learning Centers is the only dedicated funding stream for OST programs at the federal level; it grew from \$750,000 in 1995, to \$1 billion in 2001, to \$1.3 billion in 2024 (Afterschool Alliance, 2023b; McCallion, 2003). While \$1.3 billion is a sizeable investment, it represents a fraction of the overall federal funding for education, which totals roughly \$79.1 billion (Committee for Educational Funding, 2024). Moreover, that investment reaches only a small segment of the overall K–12 population in the United States. In 2023, nearly

⁴ The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce and its associated Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education handle legislation on the OST system and programs. The U.S. Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and its subcommittee on Children and Families hears OST-related bills. Committees that deal with OST-related appropriations include the House of Representatives' Labor, Health, Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Committee and the Senate's Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies.

⁵ The Children's Funding Project tracks federal funding investments in child and youth services through an interactive map. For more information see <https://www.childrensfundingproject.org/federal-funding-streams>.

⁶ A full list of OST programming administered by federal agencies can be found at youth.gov.

⁷ The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act) focused attention on ameliorating pernicious gaps in opportunities and learning outcomes for various populations of learners, whether through bilingual education, students with disabilities, or students from low-income backgrounds (Cross, 2014).

1.4 million students benefited from 21st CCLC (Afterschool Alliance, 2023b). However, compared with 49.6 million public school students in the country (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023), this investment reaches only 3% of the total public school student population.

21st CCLC legislation was first introduced in 1994, attached to Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, the ESEA Reauthorization, Title IX, Part I. Authorized through 1999, the program was focused on developing community schools, promoting 21st-century learning, and encouraging school–community partnerships, with school districts being the primary recipients (McCallion, 2003, 2008). The allowable use of funds included activities such as OST programming, extended library services, nutrition and health programs, family engagement, senior citizen programming, and services for individuals with disabilities. With the brokered partnership between ED and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 21st CCLC benefited from strong public and philanthropic partnership, bipartisan support, and the federal budget surplus of late 1990s. The funding stream grew substantially from \$750,000 in 1995 to \$845.6 million by 2001 (Phillips, 2010). By then, there were 308 awardees among 2,850 applicants, signaling an unmet demand for federal support for OST programs (Gayl, 2004).

The ESEA reauthorization, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002, evolved 21st CCLC to an additional \$250 million per year for 6 years, growing the authorized levels between 2002 and 2007 to \$2.5 billion. However, the appropriations allocated approximately \$1 billion per year, leaving a gap between the allowable and authorized amounts. The competitive grants shifted from federal allocation to state formula grants, based on Title I-A funding from the previous year (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2003). This was a significant shift from prior grant administration that shifted control to the states. The grant length was 3–5 years, and eligibility expanded to be inclusive of community- and faith-based organizations (McCallion, 2003). The grant focused on three priorities:

1. provide academic enrichment to meet state and local student achievement standards in core academic subjects;
2. offer a broad array of additional activities designed to reinforce and complement regular academic programming; and,
3. offer families of students with opportunities for literacy and related educational development. (ED, 2024b, para 1)

As a result, 21st CCLC prioritized academic achievement and student support such as tutoring, mentoring, homework assistance, library and counseling services, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs, career readiness, and family engagement, among others (CRS, 2003). In 2002, two-thirds of the awardees served elementary school students primarily and one-third served middle school students primarily; 15% served high school students and 5% targeted secondary education students.

In 2015, the Nita M. Lowey 21st CCLC program was reauthorized through ESSA as part of Title IV, Part B. Its three priorities are:

1. Academic enrichment, including tutoring for students in low-performing schools
2. A broad array of youth development activities
3. Family engagement

The 2015 reauthorization signaled evolution of the program to focus on whole-child supports, family engagement and literacy, and supporting students with disabilities and English-language learners. In addition to reading and math, 21st CCLC centers can offer programming in

STEM, arts, health, and music, and maintain the long-standing drug and violence prevention focus (Afterschool Alliance, 2023b). Students have an opportunity to engage in educational development, mentoring, internship, apprenticeships, and career readiness.

Today, 21st CCLCs are funded at \$1.3 billion, with 85% of the funded programs reported to support academics, STEM, physical activity, and peer-to-peer relationships (Afterschool Alliance, 2023b). The federal funding is administered through states, allowing states to establish funding competitions, professional development and technical assistance, evaluation, and guidance. Each 21st CCLC involves hiring and extensive coordination with schools and partnerships with community-based programs. In summer 2023, ED drafted nonregulatory guidance for the program to align 21st CCLCs with the 2015 legislative language, with attention to blending and braiding of funds⁸; access and equity in underserved areas; investments in research and practice for high-quality programming; and intentional engagement of youth, family, and community voices (Afterschool Alliance, 2023c).

Full-Service Community Schools ED (2024a) also administers the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant, reaching 292 schools and 229,549 students.⁸ The FSCS funding stream “provides support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools” (ED, 2024a, para. 4). In fiscal year 2022, significant investments were made in the FSCS strategy, propelling the funding to \$75 million and doubling to \$150 million in fiscal year 2023 (ED, 2024a). FSCS is guided by four pillars: integrated supports, expanded learning opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership (ED, 2024a). OST programs are an important part of FSCS expanded learning opportunities and can include programs such as homework assistance and tutoring, academic programs, mentoring, youth development programs, community and service learning, and job training (Maddox, 2024).

Promise Neighborhoods were authorized under the ESEA of 1965, which was amended by ESSA in 2015. Their purpose is to “significantly improve the academic and developmental outcomes of children living in the most distressed communities of the United States, including ensuring school readiness, high school graduation, and access to a community-based continuum of high-quality services” (Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2024a, para 1).⁹ Eligible organizations for a Promise Neighborhood grant include higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, and tribal organizations (ED, 2022). Between 2010 and 2023, 39 Promise Neighborhoods worked with 348,474 children in 321 schools in several states, including California, Texas, Minnesota, and New Jersey (ED, 2023a). Between 2010 and 2021, ED (2022) awarded 82 planning, implementation, and extension grants to several nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions (see also Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2023a).

⁸ The historical investment in the community schools strategy by the federal government dates back to the 1974 Community Schools Act and the 1978 Community and Comprehensive Community Education Act (Edelman & Radin, 1991; Fantini, 1983). In fiscal year 2009, roughly \$5 million in FSCS funding was authorized as allowable use of funds under ESEA Title V, Part D, Subpart 1, Fund for Improvement of Education, as a competitive demonstration program. Throughout fiscal years 2010–2015, the program received \$10 million in annual funding (ED, 2024a) and continued to grow modestly from 2015 to 2021, from \$17.5 million to \$30 million, respectively.

⁹ The program builds from the success of the Harlem Children’s Zone, supporting efforts to scale the model to other neighborhoods and localities (Croft & Whitehurst, 2010).

Promise Neighborhoods grantees are required to report 10 outcomes that span a cradle-to-career pipeline: school readiness, academic proficiency, successful transitions, high school graduation, college and career ready, healthy students, safe communities, stable communities, supportive communities, and 21st-century learning tools (ED, 2023b). OST programs are an important component of this holistic strategy.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) administers two key family assistance programs: the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

The Child Care and Development Fund is part of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act enacted in 1990 (and amended in 1996 and 2014) and funded through capped entitlement grants and discretionary funding (CRS, 2003). It offers \$9.5 billion for childcare subsidies to low-income families administered through states, tribes, and territories (HHS, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). OST programs are supported through either direct provider contracts or vouchers to families. The amounts are driven by individual jurisdictions, with each state determining its associated policies, services, and quality improvement of eligible services. (State examples are offered in the following section on state-level policies and funding.) Although 45% of children served by CCDF subsidies are of school age, there is no guarantee of equivalency of the same percentage of funding for OST programs for school-age children, as school-age subsidies are considerably lower than early care subsidies (National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment, 2022).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families provides financial assistance for childcare to low-income families, which, offers \$16.5 billion of annual funding to the states and territories to provide cash assistance for low-income families that can be used toward OST programs fees and family labor market entrance and persistence (HHS, n.d.-b; 2018). TANF can be used for OST programs directly, and their use offers a wide range of services. Thirty percent of these TANF funds can also be transferred to CCDF to expand OST programming. The most recent Notice of Proposed Rulemaking will further adjust costs for inflation, define the term *needy*, and ensure use of funds as intended by the law, including for OST programs and childcare services (Children and Families Administration, 2023).

U.S. Department of Justice

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) supports mentoring programs in OST through competitive discretionary grants focused on supporting youth at risk of being court involved as well as court-involved youth (ages 12–21, with some transition-age programs supporting youth through age 24). Its Multistate Mentoring Program Initiative is one illustrative example of multiyear investment in nationwide mentoring efforts to promote career exploration, workforce development, and employment through mentoring in OST (OJJDP, 2021). OJJDP (2023) also administers the Youth Violence Prevention Program with a focus on gang/group violence prevention through referrals to service systems and youth programming.

In addition to the programs focused on youth who face risks for engaging with the justice system, OJJDP also administers programs for youth through the Juvenile Justice Delinquency

Prevention Act (JJDP, 2018), which addresses juvenile delinquency through evidence-based prevention programs and practices, mental and behavioral health supports, and positive youth development for youth within the juvenile justice system. JJDP (2018) supports state, local, and tribal government programs for youth within restrictive settings (Snodgrass Rangel et al., 2020); it offers technical assistance, training, evidence-based research and evaluation, and broad dissemination of evidence-based research to improve outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. To receive funding, each state must submit a plan, which in part details positive youth development programs.⁹ OJJDP compliance measures are focused primarily on factors such as deinstitutionalization, separating adults and juveniles in facilities, and racial/ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Division of Youth & 4-H administers the 4-H program. 4-H “serves as a model program for the practice of positive youth development by creating positive learning experiences; positive relationships for and between youth and adults; positive, safe environments; and opportunities for positive risk taking” and is conducted through the land-grant university extension 4-H offices (NIFA, n.d., para 3). 4-H serves 6 million children and youth ages 9–17 annually, through STEM, agricultural sciences, leadership, and career development programming. The National 4-H Council supports programming of 4-H sites.

In addition to youth programming through 4-H, USDA plays a critical role in supporting conditions for child and youth development in the form of food security benefits that support families at school, in OST spaces, and during the summer. Child nutrition programs support both in and out-of-school child nutrition and include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Summer Food Service Program. SBP reimburses states that operate nonprofit breakfast programs, including before-school OST programs, serving 15 million students (USDA, n.d.).

According to USDA (2024), only one in six eligible students access summer meal programs. To increase participation, the Summer Nutrition Programs for Kids now offers rural community delivery, group meal sites, and food benefits at local grocery stores. The meals can also be administered in partnership with summer OST programs for eligible students. The Summer EBT program (SUN Bucks) is federally funded and supports OST programs; in 2024, this program is administered by 36 state agencies and nine territories and tribal nations and their local partners to reach families (USDA, 2024).

U.S. Department of Labor

Through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL, n.d.) administers three long-standing OST-connected programs: Job Corps, Youth Activities, and YouthBuild.

Job Corps, founded in 1964, helps young people ages 16–24 connect to workforce opportunities through job training, service learning, career and technical education, and academic supports in

⁹ Within the legislation, *positive youth development programs* are defined as “programs [that] assist delinquent and other at-risk youth in obtaining— (i) a sense of safety and structure; (ii) a sense of belonging and membership; (iii) a sense of self-worth and social contribution; (iv) a sense of independence and control over one’s life; and (v) a sense of closeness in interpersonal relationships” (JJDP, 34 U.S.C. § 1133[a][9][4]).

123 centers (CRS, 2020, 2022). Its programs expose youth to over 70 careers as they work toward secondary and postsecondary credentials. With around 50,000 participants, Job Corps enables federal, state, local agencies, and nonprofit organization to contract with DOL to run these learning opportunities (CRS, 2020, 2022).

Youth Activities, a formula grant program within WIOA, supports OST learning for youth ages 14–24) with particular attention to youth from low-income backgrounds (CRS, 2022). The funding serves up to 15 statewide efforts; remaining funds go to local workforce development board activities designed to support local partnerships with community-based organizations and community colleges (Collins & Edgerton, 2022). The OST programs served through Youth Activities include 14 program elements, such as tutoring, internships, preapprenticeships, and summer employment. In 2020–2021, this program served 123,000 youth (CRS, 2022).

YouthBuild is a competitive award program, funded through WIOA, that is designed to support annually approximately 6,000 youth ages 16–24 in on-the-job skill training and leadership skills (CRS, 2020). Youth who can be served through this program include those who come from low-income backgrounds, are in foster care, have been formerly incarcerated, are from migrant families, or have disabilities. YouthBuild focuses on three elements—construction, education, and leadership training. Research shows that participants are more likely than their peers to obtain GEDs, enroll in college, and increase earnings (CRS, 2020).

U.S. Department of Defense

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) administers education programs for military families on bases across the country and the globe. In fact, “DoD operates one of the largest employer-sponsored child care programs in the U.S., serving more than 160,000 children every year” (Clark, 2024, para. 12). DoD’s (n.d.) School Age Centers (SACs) are OST programs that serve children ages 6–12 and can partner with such entities as 4-H and Boys & Girls Clubs of America. They include full-day, before-school, afterschool, and seasonal programs, guided by the National AfterSchool Association framework. SACs focus on “leisure, recreation, and the arts; sports and fitness; life skills, citizenship, and leadership; and mentoring and supporting services” (U.S. Army, n.d., para 1). To support low-income families, the SAC rate schedule is determined based on total family income, ranging from \$54 to \$138 for a basic weekly rate (Clark, 2024). Additionally, a cooperative agreement established the Defense Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Consortium to provide STEM programming supporting workforce development needs through hands-on and side-by-side learning opportunities for students over the upcoming decade (DoD, 2024).

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (n.d.) administers the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for states, counties (under population of 200,000), and cities (under population of 50,000), focusing on housing, economic development, and support of low-income families and individuals. Started in 1974 under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act, the CDBG supports cross-governmental partnerships, including enabling local governments to revitalize community centers and OST programs.

AmeriCorps VISTA

As mentioned in Chapter 3, AmeriCorps (n.d.-b) is the federal agency focused on national service and volunteerism. About 7,000 AmeriCorps members participate in the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, which supports OST programs annually (AmeriCorps, n.d.-a). They are categorized as members, leaders, and summer associates. In exchange for service, AmeriCorps offers support for housing, money for postsecondary education, and ongoing training. Those who serve through AmeriCorps (n.d.-a) are eligible for loan deferment and interest forbearance. VISTA volunteers offer an important source of staff in OST programs.

National Science Foundation

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has a long-standing commitment to building the evidence base in STEM programming, helping build the future STEM workforce, and creating opportunities in STEM learning for students from low-income backgrounds. Two funding streams offer opportunities for programmatic evaluation and knowledge development and sharing to advance the scientific and OST communities. (1) Advancing Informal STEM Learning funds OST STEM programs and advances research and assessment of such programs (NSF, n.d.-b). And (2) the Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) supports young people in Grades K–12 in STEM learning about information and communications technology. ITEST is designed to support STEM career pathways through interdisciplinary work, including mentorship, career exploration, and preparation programs (NSF, n.d.-a).

Other Roles of the Federal Government

In addition to providing funding to support OST programs, the federal government plays other important roles, such as coordinating cross-agency efforts, providing technical assistance, funding research and clearinghouses, issuing timed initiatives on cross-cutting issues central to an administration, and supporting state and local governments in critical situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

A number of efforts exist across federal agencies and through public–private partnerships to coordinate across the various funding streams described below. For example, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP) was formed in 2008 and comprises 12 federal agencies and 13 federal departments (see youth.gov, n.d.). IWGYP runs the youth.gov website that lists federal funding streams available for OST programs, alongside seminal toolkits, guides, frameworks, and analyses that inform the field. IWGYP also manages a youth-focused leadership effort, Youth Engaged 4 Change (n.d.), a program geared toward 16- to 24-year-old youth who are leading change in their communities, regionally, and/or nationally.

ED and the Johns Hopkins Everyone Graduates Center collaborate to support the National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS), a cross-government and cross-sector collaboration to support student learning through wraparound supports, coaches, mentors, tutors, and postsecondary transition coaches. NPSS (n.d.) offers technical assistance, resources, convenings for districts, states, and OST providers; develops and disseminates quality standards;

conducts research; disseminates information; and collaborates with AmeriCorps for volunteer placement.¹⁰

The federal government also funds technical assistance through awards and contracts to entities such as intermediaries, research institutions, higher education institutions, small businesses, and others, to offer capacity building and support to grantees and the broader field. For instance, the IES National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance funds ten Regional Educational Laboratory Programs (RELs) that work with local and state entities (e.g., school districts, state education agencies) to inform policy, research, and practice (IES, n.d.-a). RELs broadly offer support on a range of education issues, and they can provide support to the OST field through evaluation toolkits, research guidance, and related assistance. HHS's Office of Child Care, Child Care Technical Assistance Network offers training and technical assistance under the National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment to Child Care and Development Fund lead agencies, supporting areas such as coordination of early child care and OST, and quality school-age child care (NCASE, n.d.).

Funding research is critically important to advancing the youth development field and a key role for the federal government. The federal government can support research in various ways, such as continued funding of agencies and associated clearinghouses, authorized use of funds toward evidence-generating activities, and set-aside allocations that require federal grantees to budget for internal and/or external evaluations (Executive Office of the President Council of Economic Advisers, 2014). For example, designated funding has allowed the Institute of Education Sciences (IES, n.d.-b) to run an ongoing evaluation of 21st CCLC. In addition, grantees are required to set aside funds for ongoing program monitoring and evaluation to assess progress and report on government performance indicators. The 21st CCLC evaluation requirement, "has created incentives for evaluating afterschool programs and has therefore shaped afterschool evaluation in a number of ways" (Weiss, 2013, p. 3). In addition, IES (2009) published a guide to help schools, districts, and OST programs increase student learning. The guide, which informs research and evaluation in the youth development field, recommends that "OST programs design features that ultimately strengthen academic progress while fulfilling the needs of parents and students" and "deliver academic instruction in a way that responds to each student's needs and engages them in learning" (IES, 2009, pp. 8–9). The evaluation guidance does not offer direct caps on evaluation costs but offers parameters for the allowable use of funds.

Federal clearinghouses are another access point to OST research. The Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse offers evidence on academic excellence, improved learning conditions, and pathways for global engagement (ED, 2024c). It offers resources, technical assistance, illustrative examples, and learning events. Additionally, the Youth.gov Evidence of Program Improvement (EPI) offers an approach to evidence-based OST practices. EPI is organized across three main domains: eternalizing behavior, social competence, and self-regulation, each with areas of inquiry (e.g., academic-educational, relational, and skill-building interventions). EPI offers a clearinghouse of evidence-based programs and core components approaches. Other agencies have their own evidence-base clearinghouses for youth programs: the

¹⁰ NPSS closed in January 2025 and will continue as the Partnership for Student Success. For more information see <https://www.partnershipstudentsuccess.org>

AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange,¹¹ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide,¹² and Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research.¹³

The federal government also engages in special initiatives, such as public–private partnerships to provide schools and communities the connections and assistance they may need to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs.

And finally, the federal government at times provides special funding opportunities in emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Enacted in March 2021, the ARP provided a total of nearly \$122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to states and school districts to address the impact of the pandemic on schools and students. ARP outlined specific ways in which state and local education agencies should use their ARP ESSER funds to provide OST opportunities for young people. Of the roughly \$12.2 billion in ARP ESSER funds available at the state education agency level, states were directed to reserve the following to support OST programs:

- \$1.22 billion for summer enrichment (1%)
- \$1.22 billion for evidence-based comprehensive afterschool programs (1%)
- \$6.1 billion, for learning recovery, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs (5%)

Of the \$109 billion in ARP ESSER available at the local education agency level, districts were required to reserve 20% (\$22 billion) for learning recovery strategies, including afterschool and summer enrichment. If a district decided their OST funding needs were greater than their learning recovery set-aside, there was nothing in the legislation that prohibited a district from spending more than 20%; however, given the wide range of needs at the district level, that is widely seen as an unlikely.

BOX 8-1

Federal Pandemic-Related Relief Funds Supporting OST Programs

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) was the third and final in a series of COVID-19 relief packages intended to spur recovery from the devastating effects of the pandemic. While the two previous relief packages, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act of 2020 contained provisions that benefited out-of-school-time (OST) providers, ARP offered the greatest funding opportunity and most explicit language regarding use of funds for afterschool and summer opportunities.

In total, the ARP provided up to \$500 billion that could be used to support young people during the hours they are out of school. Estimates suggest that at least \$10 billion of that supported afterschool and summer opportunities (Afterschool Alliance, 2023a). It is important to note, however, that all of the ARP funds were time limited. States, schools, and communities that directed ARP funds to support OST opportunities must find alternate funding streams to support their initiatives. These changes may happen as early as September 2024 and no later than March 2026. (Roza & Silberstein, 2023). Throughout 2023 and 2024, numerous states initiated new or increased existing state funding streams for OST in an effort to help minimize

¹¹ <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/evidence-exchange>

¹² <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov>

¹³ <https://clear.dol.gov>

the impact of expiring ARP funds on families and youth. (See Appendix B for more detail on ARP investments.)

SOURCE: Generated by the committee, with excerpts from Afterschool Alliance, 2023a; Roza & Silberstein, 2023.

State-Level Funding and Policies Shaping OST

Since 2000, state-level investment in OST programming has grown more than 20-fold, from a total of \$264 million in 15 states in 2020 to \$5 billion in 26 states in 2024 (Afterschool Alliance, 2024b). California has consistently topped the list of state investments and currently accounts for more than \$4 billion of the total investment by states. In 2024, five new states (Colorado, Hawaii, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) began investing in afterschool and summer, totaling \$47 million (Neitzey, 2025). The importance of state policy in closing opportunity gaps in access to OST opportunities for youth cannot be overstated.

As mentioned in Box 8-1, the expiration of COVID-19 relief funds for OST programs presents states with an urgent reason to dedicate funds in this area. One way that states are approaching funding for OST programs is using dedicated line items in state budgets. A number of states have amplified their efforts to secure new funding streams or maximize existing funding streams to support afterschool, and often summer, opportunities for youth. In 2023 and 2024 alone, 10 states offered new funding to support OST programs, many of which were specifically cited as intended to help sustain ARP ESSER-funded programs (see Table 8-1). Box 8-2 details examples of how states are securing dedicated funding for OST programs.

TABLE 8-1 Examples of Recent Dedicated State-Level Funding for Out-of-School-Time (OST) Programs and Activities in 2023 and 2024

State	Year	Funding Amount	Description
Hawaii	2024	\$20 million	State funding for summer learning and enrichment programs for summer 2025 to help sustain programs supported through the ARP ESSER funds.
Minnesota	2023	\$30 million	\$7.5 million annually over 4 years (totally \$30 million) for the Afterschool Community Learning Grant to help sustain programs supported through the ARP ESSER funds.
Michigan	2023	\$50 million, increased to \$75 million in 2024	Funding for comprehensive afterschool and summer programs, with 60% of funding dedicated to community-based organizations (CBOs) to help sustain programs supported through the ARP ESSER funds.
Missouri	2024	\$7.4 million	New investment in comprehensive afterschool programs.
New Mexico	2023	\$20 million in 2023, \$15 million in 2024	\$20 million in 2023–2024 to help sustain programs supported through ARP ESSER funds. \$15 million in 2024–2025 for afterschool programs, of which \$8.5 million is designated for tutoring.
Oregon	2024	\$30 million	New state funding for summer learning and enrichment programs offered by school districts in partnership with CBOs.
Pennsylvania	2024	\$11.5 million	Funding for afterschool programs and summer enrichment with a focus on reducing community violence.
Texas	2023	\$5 million	\$5 million over 2 years for CBOs to offer OST programs with a focus on supporting youth mental well-being.

Vermont	2024	\$4 million	\$4 million per year for afterschool and summer programs (funded in part by cannabis sales tax revenue).
Virginia	2024	\$5 million	\$5 million over the next 2 years for afterschool and summer enrichment programs to help sustain programs supported by ARP ESSER funds.

NOTE: ARP ESSER = American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief.

SOURCE: Data from Afterschool Alliance, 2024b.

States also fund OST through state revenues. One recent approach is using tax revenue from adult-use cannabis sales to support OST. As of early 2024, eight states that have legalized adult use of cannabis are directing some tax revenues from those sales to youth development, including OST programs. There is no documented tracking of how much cannabis tax revenue is directed to OST programs, but some estimate as much as \$500 million per year (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-e).

BOX 8-2
Examples of Securing Dedicated State-Level Funding for OST

Securing dedicated state funding for out-of-school-time (OST) opportunities often takes a number of years and the express support of governors and state legislatures, as evidenced by Vermont’s journey toward state funding for afterschool programming. In 2016, after years of administering 21st Century Community Learning Center grants in the state and building an infrastructure to support quality OST programs, the Vermont Child Poverty Council, a subcommittee of the Vermont state legislature, recommended funding for afterschool and summer learning as a top priority. Shortly after, in 2018, \$600,000 in state tobacco settlement funds were directed to OST programs—the first state investment in programs (Vermont Afterschool, 2019; 2020). In 2020, Vermont’s governor pledged to provide universal afterschool programming for Vermont’s students. Since that time, the state leveraged federal COVID-19 relief funds to expand afterschool and summer programming, and in 2024, the state announced the availability of \$3.5 million in afterschool grants (State of Vermont Agency of Education, n.d.).

Similarly, California’s Proposition 49 is the most well-known ballot initiative supporting expansion of OST programs (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-c), leading to the first statewide investment in afterschool in 2002, and the funding has grown and expanded over time. Additionally, in 2023, even as the state faced a projected budget deficit, it proposed continued funding for the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program at \$4.4 billion and outlined a goal of growing the state funding stream to \$5 billion in the coming years (California Afterschool Network, 2024).

In Virginia, an amendment to the state budget was introduced in 2023 directing the state education agency to study the availability of OST programs, identify gaps in access, and develop recommendations to help more families access programs. The study would also include identifying the benefits provided by OST programs and potential funding sources (Virginia General Assembly, 2023).

The Council of the District of Columbia (2023) introduced the Out of School Time Special Education Inclusion and Standards Amendment Act of 2023. It directed the Office of Out of School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes, in coordination with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, to develop standards for training and recruiting OST providers for

students with individualized education programs (IEPs). The agencies are also directed to undertake a study to determine the financing needed for attracting and retaining OST practitioners who are qualified to provide OST programming for students with IEPs.

In 2021, Oklahoma House Bill 1882 created The Out-of-School Time Oklahoma Task Force (2022) to study the return on investments of OST programs across the state, resulting in recommendations for the establishment of a sustainable OST funding source, including equitable access to funding for community-based organization providers, standardized outcomes and reporting, and training and technical assistance related to data collection.

In addition to cannabis tax revenue, states fund OST programs using other revenue sources, such as lotteries, license plate fees, public settlements, and taxes on sports betting and digital advertising (Illinois Secretary of State, n.d.; see Table 8-2).

TABLE 8-2 State Revenue Sources Directed to Out-of-School-Time (OST) Programs

Adult-Use Cannabis Tax Revenue	
Alaska	The state legislature created the Marijuana Education and Treatment Fund in 2018. The legislation mandated that 25% of all cannabis tax revenue be deposited into the Fund and then split between the Positive Youth Development Afterschool Program—which supports afterschool, evening, and weekend programs that serve children in grades 5–8—and the Department of Health & Social Services for education, treatment, surveillance, and monitoring of marijuana. The legislation also explicitly mentions professional development, which allows for supporting and training OST staff on quality practices. As of 2024, the funding totals \$2 million, and nine OST providers in Alaska received funding in 2023 (Alaska Afterschool Network, n.d.).
Illinois	The Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act of 2019 created the Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) grant program, which targets areas with high economic disinvestment, gun violence, unemployment, child poverty, and rates of incarceration, as well as those disproportionately impacted by previous drug convictions. It calls for using 25% of all cannabis tax revenue to help tackle some of the challenges in these targeted communities. In 2021, the first grants totaled \$31.5 million, half of which funded youth development initiatives. In 2022, \$45 million in grants were awarded (Office of the LT. Governor, 2023).
New York	The Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act of March 2021 dedicated 40% of all cannabis tax revenue to community reinvestment, with a focus on communities disproportionately impacted by previous cannabis-related convictions. The Community Grants Reinvestment Fund provides grants to nonprofits and local governments and includes OST programs as an allowable use of funds (Afterschool Alliance, 2022a).
Unclaimed Lottery Funds	
Nebraska	Nebraska has been directing a portion of unclaimed lottery funds to OST since 2016.
Tennessee	Tennessee’s Lottery for Education: Afterschool Programs was created in 2002 to direct unclaimed lottery funds for public and nonprofit OST programs

	serving participants aged 5–18, with priority for programs enrolling 80% high-need students (Tennessee Lottery for Education Amendment, Tenn. Const. art. XI, § 5 [2002]).
Settlement Funds	
Colorado	The Colorado Opioid Abatement Council provided \$500,000 infrastructure grants to the Boys & Girls Clubs in Fremont County and Chaffee County to support facilities expansion and development, which enabled them to expand their OST offerings (Colorado Office of Attorney General, n.d.).
Vermont	The earliest example of settlement funds for OST comes from Vermont’s use of funds from the tobacco industry’s Master Settlement Agreement. Vermont’s Afterschool for All Grants started with a one-time tobacco settlement funds allocation of \$600,000 by the Vermont Legislature to Vermont’s Child Development Division in 2018 to increase access to OST learning programs. Twelve OST efforts received funding for 2 years (Vermont Afterschool, 2020).
Wisconsin	In 2023, Wisconsin dedicated \$750,000 of its \$31 million in opioid settlement funding to the Boys & Girls Club of Fox Valley to partner with the Wisconsin Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs and 25 other Boys & Girls Clubs organizations to serve children and youth at 199 sites in 73 communities across the state. Its SMART Moves Program provides children and youth with the information and skills to make healthy decisions (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 2024).
License Plate Fees	
Illinois	Illinois’s Park District Youth Program directs license plate fees to OST programs offered by recreation agencies (Illinois Secretary of State, n.d.).
Sports Betting Revenue	
Massachusetts	Massachusetts directs 1% of its sports betting revenue to the Youth Development Achievement Fund. This fund, created in 2022, offers financial assistance for higher education programs and OST programs (Bill H.5164, 191st General Court, 2020 [Mass.]).
Digital Advertising Tax	
Maryland	Maryland instituted a tax on digital advertising revenue in 2020, with potential for funding to support OST programs via the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (Maryland General Assembly, 2020).

State-Level Administration of Federal Funds

States exert influence on how federal dollars that flow through the state are spent, with most of the decision-making and oversight in the hands of agencies such as state education and childcare agencies, often working in tandem with governor’s offices and in some cases state legislatures. State agencies generally have a great deal of discretion in administering federally funded programs in their states. While the agencies must follow the requirements of the legislation and take into consideration any nonregulatory guidance from federal agencies, much of the decision-making about how to use the federal funds is up to agency leaders who interpret the legislation and guidance and administer the funds.

The discretion of state agencies is most obvious when it comes to administering the two primary federal funding streams that all states receive a portion of and are administered at the state agency level: 21st CCLC funds and CCDF. The former are typically overseen by state education agencies, while the latter is administered by a range of agencies depending on the state (e.g., agencies pertaining to economic security, education, human and social services, early childhood) (Office of Child Care, 2019).

In the case of 21st CCLC funds, state education agencies write the requests for proposals (RFPs), manage the competitions, determine how to measure success, and apply their own interpretation of federal requirements and guidance. State education agencies set priorities for funding, which historically have included age groups to be served, specific types of activities to offer, and geographic regions of the state. They determine grant funding amounts; number of years of funding; minimum hours of operation; and requirements for professional development, measures of success, and more. This translates to tremendous variability in what organizations receive funding, what activities are offered, what the state evaluations include, which communities benefit, and how much staff can be paid. For example, in Vermont, nearly all 21st CCLC funding goes to schools, while in Georgia, the list of grantees is much more diverse. A recent scan of available 21st CCLC RFPs by the Afterschool Alliance (n.d.-d) highlights the array of state-level decisions that shape 21st CCLC implementation in each state.

In contrast with 21st CCLC funding using RFPs as the primary vehicle for state flexibility, state CCDF plans are updated every 2 years, allowing state childcare agencies to shape the implementation in their states. State CCDF plans allow states to demonstrate a commitment to quality care for school-age children and youth by articulating the role of this care in an overall continuum of care, addressing specific licensing requirements for caregivers for school-age children and youth, identifying quality standards and assessment tools, and providing training and technical assistance (Afterschool Alliance, 2022b).

In recent years, there has been some movement to establish new state agencies that bring together early childhood and OST funding streams, such as the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (2024), a proposed new Office of Youth Development in Washington, and a new Department of Children Youth and Families as of July 2024 in Minnesota (Minnesota Management and Budget, n.d.).

Coordination and Alignment of Federal and State Funding Streams

Federal and state agencies can make braiding of funds—coordinating funding streams while keeping them separate to support one initiative—easier, by taking a careful look at how their requirements might restrict which funds can be used for what purposes (Children’s Funding Project, 2023a). One such example is between 21st CCLC funding and the CCDF. Programs that have CCDF funding are expected to charge a copayment to families who are accessing CCDF subsidies. In contrast, 21st CCLC programs are discouraged from charging fees for participation. State agencies administering 21st CCLC and CCDF funds can help programs overcome this hurdle by exploring waivers and other flexibilities in state implementation of these federal funding streams (National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment, 2024). Missouri’s approach illustrates how these discrepancies can be addressed effectively. Starting in the 1990s, a memorandum of understanding between the Missouri CCDF Lead Agency and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education brought administration of 21st CCLC and school-age CCDF grants under the same office. In 2021, that ongoing memorandum resulted in a new Office of Childhood that includes CCDF and 21st CCLCs, along with early childhood

programs and services. This allows for greater coordination of resources and grants and ensures that research-based quality practices are implemented across funding streams (Afterschool Alliance, 2024a).

Similarly, the alignment of federal dollars at the state level are illustrative of one way in which state agencies can work together to increase access to programs and reduce barriers to participation by ensuring funds are used in complementary ways and systems are easy to navigate for providers and for families. For example, Georgia, like Utah and other states, has an approach that aligns its CCDF funds with its TANF funds. The Afterschool Care Program, managed by the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, focuses on ensuring that every child and young person has access to high-quality youth development programming within their community. Roughly \$15 million in TANF funding is provided to organizations that offer project-based learning activities and/or apprenticeship experiences during the OST hours (National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment, 2019).

Other states have consolidated the administration of funding streams for OST programs under one agency, office, or division, which then acts as an intermediary. In 2011, California formed the California Department of Education Afterschool Division, which has since evolved to the Expanded Learning Division (California Afterschool Network, 2016; n.d.). This centralized approach is essential to ensure that the administration of the state funding streams and 21st CCLC are well aligned and complementary. With the addition of the newest state funding stream, the Expanded Learning Division of the California Department of Education currently oversees three ongoing funding streams for expanded learning programs, including the After School Education and Safety (ASES) program (originally established by the Proposition 49 ballot initiative), the 21st CCLC program, and the more recently established Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P).

However, even with a centralized office administering funds, external partners are often essential for highlighting gaps in services and needs for additional funds and supports. In California, a central access to data for all the major funding streams facilitated the examination of how the three major funding streams in the state are complementing one another and where gaps remain. In particular, state OST leaders have been using data to make the case for more investment in programs for older youth. ASSET's funding, which is the portion of 21st CCLC funds directed to high school youth in California, totaled \$70 million and reached 306 high school OST programs in the 2022–2023 school year, while ASES and the remaining portion of 21st CCLC provided approximately \$222 million to 1,125 middle and junior high school programs. In comparison, ELO-P, which reaches only children in Grades K–6, is funded at \$4 billion annually. Looking at all of California's OST funding combined, less than 2% supports high school students and less than 5% supports middle school students (Partnership for Children & Youth, n.d.).

In addition to implementing policies that support braiding of funds, state agencies also implement approaches to address the unique needs of communities. For example, given transportation challenges in rural communities, the California Department of Education administers the ASES Frontier Transportation Grant, which is intended to provide supplemental funding for ASES grantees that have transportation needs due to their program site being located in Frontier Areas. Funding began in the 2017–2018 school year, and all programs with this classification are eligible for funding of up to \$15,000 per site (California Department of Education, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

Local Funding and Support for OST

Similar to state policymakers and agencies, local leaders—including mayors, city council members, and county leaders—are critical partners in supporting OST programs. They drive investments, facilitate partnerships, and advocate for OST initiatives, and they can play an important role in increasing access to OST programs in their communities. Local leaders can leverage influence and position to bring together stakeholders from various sectors to collaborate on developing and implementing effective OST initiatives. This can involve organizing meetings, task forces, and networking opportunities to exchange ideas, share best practices, and coordinate efforts (Afterschool Alliance. (n.d.-b). For example, mayors can:

- Lead or contribute to a landscape analysis and identify high-needs communities and “service deserts”
- Convene a broad set of potential partners, such as community-based organizations, school districts, and city departments
- Act as a funding entity
- Provide access to community spaces, including recreation centers and libraries
- Facilitate data-sharing agreements between cities, community-based organizations, and school districts
- Assist with transportation needs for expanded access to OST programs
- Increase public awareness and sustain public attention through initiating media coverage, facilitating awards programs for OST program youth and/or staff, issuing proclamations, and visiting programs
- Align programs with key public priorities (Stockman, 2024, p. 1)

Through a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Wallace Foundation (2011), the National League of Cities (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education, and Families selected nine states to host “mayoral summits” to focus on OST programs in 2011. In 2022, more than 40 mayors from the National League of Cities gathered to discuss how to use their office to support learning both during and after school (Pitts & Bartlett, 2022). In 2009, the U.S. Conference of Mayors also included OST as a priority for its action guide for success.

Cities and counties often facilitate OST programs through their established parks and recreation and/or library departments, a preferred mode of service delivery for smaller-sized municipalities with limited resources. Many cities and counties are expanding and enhancing their more traditional forms of OST programs, building on conventional sports-centric models to include more holistic programming frameworks. Collaborations with intermediaries such as Statewide Afterschool Networks have further enriched these endeavors, facilitating the establishment of program quality standards, robust monitoring mechanisms, professional development initiatives, and access to increased funding opportunities. (Discussion on how cities and counties are developing and implementing quality standards can be found in Chapter 6; discussion on addressing barriers to participation can be found in Chapter 4.)

According to the NLC, cities have invested over \$3 billion in OST programs and related infrastructure (Afterschool Alliance & National League of Cities, n.d.; Stockman, 2024). Mayoral support for funding OST programs is apparent in cities such as Washington, DC, and Chicago, Illinois. Washington, DC, made a \$22 million-dollar investment in OST organizations in August 2023 through the Office of OST Grants for Youth Outcomes. In Chicago, the 2023 mayor’s proposed budget included \$76 million for youth jobs and programs (City of Chicago, 2023.).

Many cities also play the role of direct-service provider through a comprehensive OST-specific department. For example, the City of Roanoke, Virginia, facilitates OST programs through its Parks and Recreation Department and local libraries. The city leveraged \$400,000 of its ARP State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to expand existing OST initiatives, specifically targeting underserved communities. Through community-based partnerships, the city provides mental health support, tutoring, and mentoring services for young people enrolled in OST programs. The remainder of the program cost has been funded by city general funds.

In rural communities, many OST programs build off existing structures, including county-level parks and recreation programs, school district-level or county office of education initiatives, and 4-H programs. Much less is known about the role of local leaders in rural communities. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, smaller tax bases limit the ability of local governments to fund OST programs, and the lack of a community partners and funders makes it even more difficult for rural OST programs to diversify their funding (Fischer, 2019). However, as discussed in Chapter 5, there is significant need for more OST programming in rural communities, and rural communities face unique challenges. More research is needed on rural OST systems, settings, and programs.

BOX 8-3 **Governance Models for Local OST Intermediaries**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, three governance models are commonly used for out-of-school-time (OST) systems, settings, and programs at the local level, according to a 2018 report titled *Governance of City Afterschool Systems: A Review and Analysis*, which reviewed governing structures for OST programs across 15 U.S. cities (Deich et al., 2018).

Public Agency Model

Under the *public agency* model, the managerial, fiscal, or administrative support for OST programs is housed in one public entity or through a partnership between two or more public entities. The leader for an OST system under this model can be a mayor, superintendent, or a city agency. Examples include the following:

- In New York City, the OST program is housed in the Department of Youth and Community Development, which, in turn, works with a nonprofit organization to serve young people in more than 800 schools.
- In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a department of recreation was established in 1911 by the Wisconsin Legislature to assign the responsibility of recreation activities for children and youth to school districts. The department of recreation has since undergone several name changes but remains focused on using OST programs to improve the health, educational, and social well-being of Milwaukee children and youth.
- In Oakland, California, the Office of Afterschool Programs is housed in the Oakland Unified School District and coordinates with several nonprofit organizations to support students and families.
- In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Office of Children and Families operates several education programs that include preK, summer employment for teens, and the preK–12 OST office.

Advantages of the public agency model include access to key local policymakers, buy-in from local stakeholders, and the ability to partner with private groups interested in improving economic or social well-being of the city. Challenges include constraints on how much advocacy an elected or public official can use to drive the initiative, turnover of elected officials and

agency staff, and laws that prohibit private funding for government work (Deich et al., 2018, p. 15).

Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations, the second model, are funded by private and public sources and can be either single purpose or multiservice. The Family League of Baltimore (Maryland) is one example. As a 501(c)(3), the Family League is a quasi-governmental agency with its own board of directors, half of them appointed by a mayor; it uses its authority to support city- and community-based OST programs. In Omaha, Nebraska, the Collective for Youth works with more than 60 OST providers that reach 7,000 elementary- and middle school-aged youth in 42 Omaha Public Schools. They focus on advocacy, offering resources, and providing quality training for OST providers (Collective for Youth Development, n.d.). Advantages of the nonprofit organization model include more stable leadership than in the public agency model, more flexibility to advocate for policy, and the ability to raise funds from private donors. Challenges include competing with existing nonprofits, lack of direct access to local officials, and uncertainty around funding (Deich et al., 2018).

Networked Home

A networked home, the third model, relies on several organizations for managerial and resource support for OST programs. In 2023, Indianapolis, Indiana, launched an initiative to provide afterschool programs for children in grades preK–5. Partners in this work include the Indianapolis Public Schools, the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis, and community stakeholders. Advantages of this model include strong links to grassroots organizations and a diversified leadership model. Its challenges include the need to involve multiple stakeholders in decision-making (Deich et al., 2018).

SOURCE: Generated by the committee, with data from Deich et al., 2018.

THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES IN SUPPORTING FUNDING AND POLICY

At both the state and local levels, intermediaries can play key roles in helping communities maximize the funding available for OST programs, including working with public agencies to develop requests for proposals, distributing funds to local OST providers, building capacity of local OST providers to access funds, and offering technical assistance and professional development to OST providers to help them ensure quality programming while meeting grant requirements. For example, a number of statewide OST networks were instrumental in helping their state education agencies distribute the ARP state set-asides for afterschool and summer programming (see Appendix B for more detail). At the local level, intermediaries such as Prime Time Palm Beach County (n.d.) distribute funds to local programs to implement innovative programming; develop and help programs utilize quality improvement systems; offer professional development and training, including scholarships for staff who participate; and conduct research to document the impact of programs.

PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Philanthropy plays a critical role in the youth development field. Foundations—national, regional, community, and corporate (defined in Chapter 3)—have invested in child and youth development, school–community partnerships, and field building. In the past 2 decades alone, funders supporting OST programs have granted funds to direct-service and intermediary organizations, universities and research institutions, and advocacy and coalition-building entities, and have partnered with businesses and government agencies at all levels on various initiatives. Philanthropic investments have helped develop program evaluations, quality tools, theoretical frameworks, national surveys, data dashboard, and rigorous research that advance and inform the field (Traphagen & Goldberg, 2024).

Philanthropy serves three primary roles: promoting innovation in programming, partnering on public efforts, and advancing the field through investments in research and practice. This section shares examples of roles philanthropy plays in advancing the field; it also highlights ways the philanthropic sector is evolving to deepen its support for children and youth from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds.

Investing in Innovation

Philanthropies' seed and catalytic dollars play an essential role in launching new areas of inquiry, innovations, and pilot projects, and they draw attention to areas of OST programming that may be under resourced. For example, the Noyce Foundation, operating from 1990 to 2015, invested in what it called “informal science,” supporting STEM OST programs in the No Child Left Behind era. This investment promoted the growth and evidence base of learning labs, maker spaces, and coding camps, and helped provide college preparation for middle and high school youth from low-income backgrounds (National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2016). The Noyce Foundation invested in tools, evaluations, and professional development for youth-serving practitioners and became a catalyst in the STEM Next Opportunity Fund, designed to encourage a learning exchange of funders for continued STEM investments in OST programs. After its closure, its legacy initiative, STEM Next Opportunity Fund, became a stand-alone organization and now helps advance the growth and sustainability of the OST STEM field.

Investing in Public–Private Partnerships

Public–private partnerships are critical for supporting the youth development field, especially for providing larger, transformational funding opportunities. Leveraging opportunities and resources of both sectors, public–private partnerships can both accelerate and sustain movements and fields. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, for example, has invested in a “big bet” strategy for a century, starting with community schools investments in 1920s, expanding to community education in 1950s, and including OST programming for much of the 20th century and onward (Young & Quinn, 1963). In the 1990s, the Mott Foundation partnered with ED in support of 21st CCLCs (Phillips, 2010). The Mott Foundation (2014) also hosted bidder conferences to raise visibility of the opportunity to promote high-quality program design and implementation. And it invested in technical assistance for new federal grantees, leading to the development of the 50 State Afterschool Network, supporting intermediaries and research institutions that continue to grow the shared knowledge base.

Investing in Field Advancement

The third primary role is funding intended for field advancement—creating projects and products in the youth development field to inform policy, research, and practice. For example, the Wallace Foundation has made significant investments in developing research and tools. In the 1980s and 1990s, the then Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund invested in innovative afterschool, community school, and summer programming. Since then, the Wallace Foundation has continued its commitment to the youth development field—partnering with RAND, a national research institution, to conduct longitudinal studies on the effects of summer programs, the National Summer Learning Project. The first report from this effort, *Making Summer Count*, offered evidence-based recommendations on how school districts can support voluntary, mandatory, and reading-at-home summer programs (McCombs et al., 2011). The second study, *Ready for Fall?*, offered initial results in five school districts including 5,600 elementary school-aged students, finding positive improvements in mathematics and offering insights into factors that lead to program improvement in reading and mathematics (McCombs et al., 2014). Six subsequent reports further investigated quality summer learning, examining instructional practices, program quality components, capacity-building, network coordination, and city-level system change (see Wallace Foundation, n.d.).

Future Directions in Philanthropy for OST Programs

The role of philanthropy in innovation, public–private partnerships, and field advancement remains critical for the future. Additionally, there are emerging areas that could further advance the field, particularly pertaining to access to sustainable funding in support of low-income and marginalized communities that are addressing persistent gaps in access and opportunity, and ensuring compliance, transparency, and sustainability beyond initial investments. According to the Grantmakers for Education report *Grantmaking Practices to Support Equity and Sustainability in Out-of-School Time* (Traphagen & Goldberg, 2022—informed by eight national nonprofits with vast local and state reach—there are six opportunities for grantmaking evolution to meet the needs of the nonprofit and public sectors seeking philanthropic funds (Traphagen & Goldberg, 2022):

1. Leveraging relationships to open doors and opportunities.
2. Prioritizing flexible and general operating grants over short-term, restricted giving.
3. Longer-term funding grants preferred over shorter terms.
4. Centering racial equity as a driver of grantmaking.
5. Investing in what works and not only in what is new, while also ensuring that when traditionally marginalized communities inform the grantmaking process, they are compensated for their expertise.
6. Deepening intentional partnerships across philanthropy.

Traphagen & Goldberg (2022) also offers three core areas of consideration: advancing more community-centric research agenda, investing in OST workforce, and sustaining advocacy efforts. First, the report calls attention to the relationship between the funders and grantees. It suggests that grantees have lived experiences and important perspectives to share; it points out that grantees are close to the children and communities that the funders intend to impact positively. Thus, history, expertise, wisdom, and various approaches from grantees and their stakeholders play a role in evolving philanthropic investments in OST programs. The report also calls for allowable use of funds to invest in living-wage and growth opportunities for youth

development professionals, young people, and organization leaders, as well as to cover administrative and operational costs of program. And, finally, the report encourages philanthropic investment in advocacy capacity-building and policy work, lifting up voices of those most impacted by policies, and further informing and shaping policy (Traphagen & Goldberg, 2022).

WHAT DOES THE CURRENT FUNDING AND POLICY LANDSCAPE MEAN AT THE PROGRAM LEVEL?

As described in this chapter, the universe of funding for OST programs is varied. Different funding sources have different applications, reporting requirements, and restrictions, which can be a drain on staff, directing their energy and time away from developing and implementing high-quality programming, and ultimately limiting the capacity of OST providers to effectively serve participants (see Figure 8-2). For programs limited in financial resources or staffing the burden of accomplishing the tasks associated with different funding streams can further exacerbate resource gaps and divert attention from program quality, which limits delivery of programs and services.

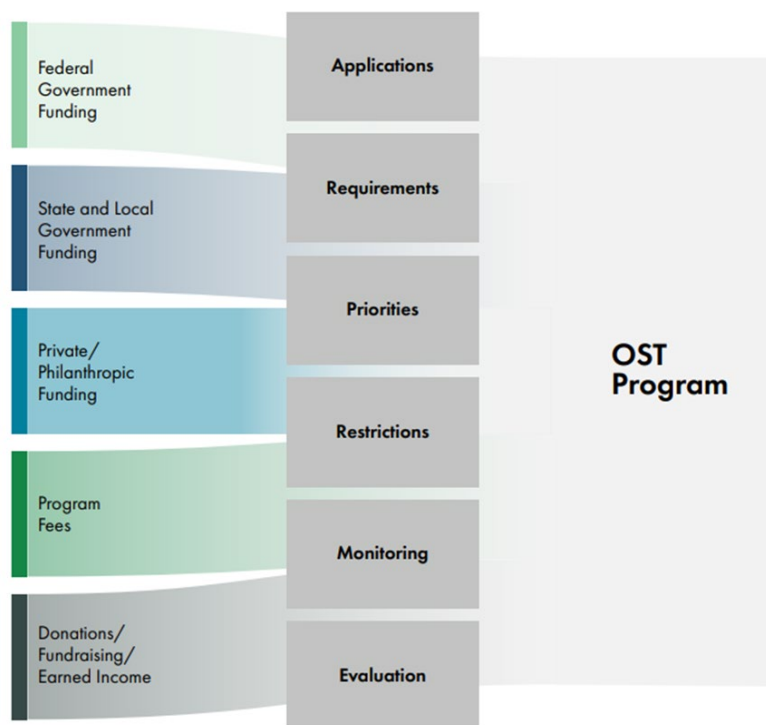


FIGURE 8-2 Complexity and considerations of out-of-school-time (OST) program funding.
SOURCE: Generated by the committee.

Figure 8-3 shares budget details gathered by the committee from OST programs in different settings in the United States to depict the level of variation that exists from program to program in terms of funding.

Funding goes to support programs' capacity to serve children and youth, often including staffing and training, facilities, supplies, meals, and transportation. These components are known—what may be less apparent is what these components can encompass and what it costs for programs to provide high-quality experiences. For example, Program 1 in Figure 8-3 conducts extensive family engagement outreach to recruit participants, owns vehicles and employs drivers to provide door-to-door transportation, provides competitive stipends to program alumnae to serve as mentors to participants, and offers monthly professional development trainings for staff, among many other activities, all of which require resources, as reflected in the higher average participant cost per year.

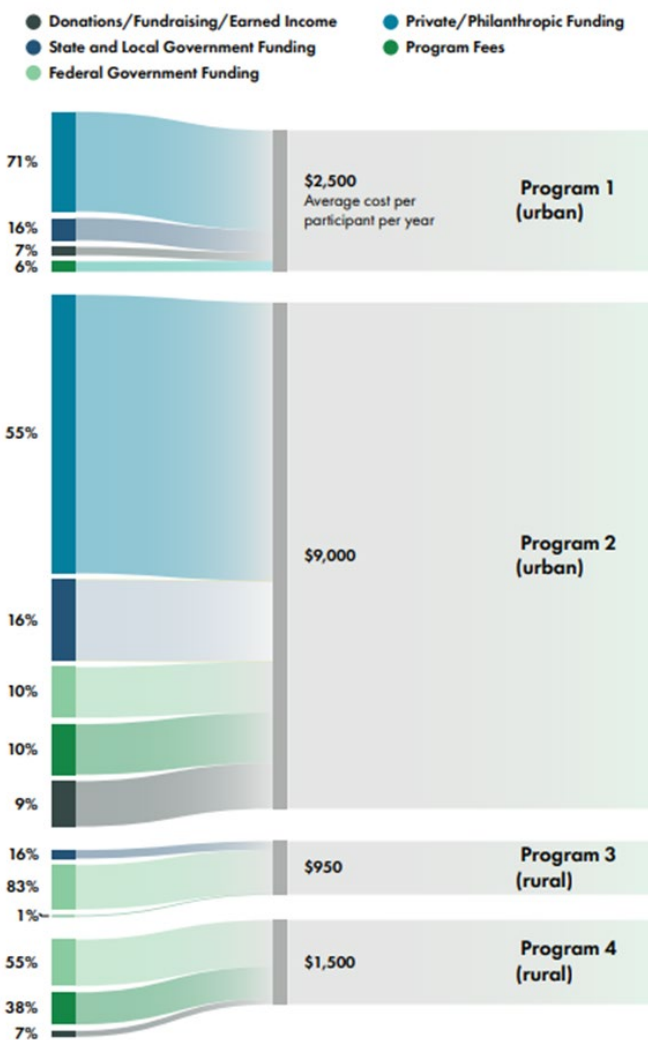


FIGURE 8- 3 Examples of out-of-school-time (OST) program budgets for programs serving primarily children and youth from low-income households.
SOURCE: Generated by the committee.

Note that funding comes with complexity. In the committee's public sessions,¹⁴ OST program leaders shared their challenges with funding, and their comments illustrate key issues around funding variety, sustainability, and priorities:

We're very responsive to funding resources. And when the funding resources go away unfortunately, program services and activities go away with that staff. So, I think that's also a problem. I think there is the credibility of and sustainability of, well how long am I going to have this job for, if it's something I'm really going to put my time and effort into. And how dependent is it on that one funding source that just goes away one year because it just goes away for no other reason. And I think that we're very reactionary to funding obviously as a majority of us are non-profits raising our own dollars to survive and create good in our community. So, I think sustainable funding is an issue with staff turnover. I think compensation is a major issue, and I'm going to say training and professional development is a hardship as well.

We've talked about the space that we have to promote creativity, to promote soft skills, personal growth, things like that, but we are also all super beholden to the grant requirements. We have to pull funding from a wide variety, because if 21st Century [21st CCLC] goes away, for example, my whole program will be defunded. But you have private funders, you have all of these different types of funders, and they all have different requirements. It's very hard to create a space to allow youth . . . to develop in the direction that they want to, and also still make sure that they can come on Fridays because they're working, or they're involved in karate . . . which is, in our book, a success, but in the funders book, it's not. So, that's like a pull and push that I think that those of us that are at the level that we are, we see that because we are doing both the asking for money, and on the ground, seeing the impact on youth. And so, I think that's something that's really difficult.

In terms of most of our contributed funding, it's always a challenge, we really want it to be balanced. We love general operating funding, which can be sometimes very difficult to find, but we have a number of funders who really believe in trust-based philanthropy, which has worked extraordinarily well. And so, it always is a challenge. Our programs are entirely free, we provide stipends to our junior mentors. There are a lot of funders who love our organization but won't fund stipends. We provide meals in our program; they love to fund the organization but won't provide funding for meals. So, there is definitely a lot of work that has to go into funding our organization.

CONCLUSION

In the United States, the landscape of funding for OST programs is fragmented. Programs are paid for through a number of financing mechanisms, including program fees paid by families (fee-for-service), public funding (federal, state, and local), and private funding

¹⁴ Public information gathering sessions were held by the committee on February 8 and April 18, 2024.

(philanthropic and other investments). For children and youth from low-income households, public and philanthropic assistance are vital to their participation in these programs, given that household income limits what families can afford.

A number of federal programs are designed to support OST programs in direct or indirect ways; however, this funding is siloed—spread across multiple federal agencies and departments based on their primary designation (e.g., programs intending to increase food security and child nutrition sit within USDA). Furthermore, this funding is largely targeted, meaning funds are available to be applied toward an eligible population for a specific purpose and time frame. While the breadth of funding available offers a broad range of opportunities for support, each funding stream has limitations—whether in the populations it can reach and or the ability to provide all eligible children and youth access to opportunities.

States have significant influence on how federal dollars are spent and thus how federal programs are implemented. Much of the decision-making about how to use the federal funds is up to leaders of state education and childcare agencies, who interpret the legislation and guidance and administer the funds. For example, for 21st CCLC funds, state education agencies write the RFPs, manage the competitions, determine how to measure success, and apply their own interpretation of federal requirements and guidance. This translates to tremendous variability for programs, including who receives funding, what activities are offered, how programs are evaluated, which communities benefit, how much staff can be paid, whether they receive access to technical assistance or professional development for staff, and much more.

Despite resources from federal and state governments, many OST programs face gaps in their budgets. These programs are left to search for other sources of support, resulting in increased burden on OST providers in researching, competing for, and complying with onerous accountability measures across their funding portfolio, which can at times demand contrary requirements. The processes involved in complex grant applications (e.g., grant-writing, award compliance, reporting) make it challenging for OST programs to develop a sustained funding portfolio, with particular hardship for smaller, rural, and underresourced programs. This increased burden may widen the funding gap between small, grassroots organizations that may serve children and youth from marginalized backgrounds and well-established organizations with greater capacity to apply and adhere to grant requirements.

The public and private systems of variable eligibility and competitive nature of grants has further led to sustainability issues, with OST providers often operating from a scarcity mindset because even the most successful programs could struggle to continue if their funding source(s) discontinue (e.g., a federal discretionary grant is cut by Congress for the next fiscal year, a state changes its funding formula for its grant, a philanthropic funder changes its strategy and focus). In response, OST providers may shape their programs in response to available funding opportunities, rather than in response to strategic implementation of their organization's mission.

Sustainability of OST programs is a function of not only funding programs but the overall quality of children, youth, families, and staff's experiences, which entails support in the form of technical assistance and professional development. In this regard, intermediaries play a critical role in providing timely supports so programs can continuously improve, implement innovative practices, utilize data-informed systems, and better compete for funding. However, public and private funding streams can restrict use of funds for such activities leaving at times intermediaries underfunded and overstretched and/or OST programs without access to such supports. While some states and local governments have improved coordination and increased alignment across funding streams by blending or braiding funds to increase sustainability, the

capacity and opportunity for such practices to take place at the program or organizational level are limited.

The issues discussed here illustrate how current OST funding structures, systems, and policies impact the accessibility, availability, and quality of OST opportunities for children and youth, disadvantaging programs with fewer resources and increasing disparities in program participation for children and youth from low-income households who rely on free or low-cost OST programs.

Connected to these overarching issues are emerging conversations around the imbalance of voice and power in funding access and decisions between the funder and the potential grantee, and the need for OST programs and communities to own the funding process, as they know most closely the local context, histories, and needs of the children, youth, and families they serve. Just as discourse and practice on participatory action research has taken shape in the field to further authentic co-design, engagement, and ownership of research among young people, families, and community members, so too have the discussions about the importance of participatory engaging in grant-review processes, participatory budgeting, and community-driven funding decisions that elevate the local voice, engage community constituents into identifying needs and priorities, and grassroots support (see, e.g., Murphy & Casanova, 2023; Skelton-Wilson et al., 2021; Su, 2022).

In Chapter 9, the committee outlines a path forward that addresses many challenges—the unmet need to support children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds, the daily struggle of OST programs to stay open and meet growing demand—and details how funders have both an opportunity and a responsibility to evolve the support structures for the youth development field.

CONCLUSION 8-1: While public investment in children and youth from low-income households has grown over the past 2 decades, these investments are often designed for a specific purpose (e.g., health, education, housing, food security, workforce development) and administered through a designated agency. This has created both a fragmented and incremental portfolio of funding for children, youth, and families. With federal dollars often distributed using a formula across all 50 states, territories, and tribal communities, the dollars rarely stretch to meet the needs of children and youth, and many eligible families remain unserved.

CONCLUSION 8-2: The siloed, short-term, and restrictive nature of funding leads to increased administrative burdens and concerns around sustainability for programs. Whereby OST providers constantly research, compete for, and comply with onerous accountability measures across their funding portfolio, as well as respond to funding priorities over strategic implementation of the program's mission, instead of focusing on delivering high-quality programming that responds to the needs of children, youth, and families.

CONCLUSION 8-3: Greater access to consistent technical assistance and professional development resources can support programs in their capacity and skills to fundraise, implement programs, comply with grant requirements, and sustain funding at the program level. When grants permit access to technical assistance and professional development, OST programs benefit.

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Ensuring High-Quality OST Opportunities for All Children and Youth

In this report, the committee reviewed the evidence on out-of-school-time (OST) programs across settings for children and youth from low-income households, while considering other factors that may intersect with economic stress to marginalize¹ young people. The committee reported findings across four key areas: (1) characterizing the array of OST programs; (2) evaluating the strength and limitations of the evidence on the effectiveness of OST programs in promoting learning, development, and well-being; (3) outlining improvements to existing policies and regulations to increase program access and quality; and (4) laying out a research agenda that would strengthen the OST evidence base. In addressing these areas, the report compiles information surrounding OST settings—what programs and experiences look like, what shapes and supports programs, and in what ways programs affect young people.

Whether OST programs positively impact the outcomes of children and youth from low-income households is an important consideration that researchers in the youth development field continue to examine. In the previous chapters the committee’s goal was to capture the breadth of evidence around this question based on a variety of research methods to identify links between OST settings and a range of developmental outcomes. The committee found that OST programs and activities are effective in supporting positive youth development, but effects vary. This variation is due in part to young people’s needs, participation, and unique experiences in programs, which are affected by the programs themselves but also by the sectors and systems within the larger OST ecosystem. Less clear is whether certain activities are more effective, whether activities indeed do have larger effects on certain outcomes, or whether the preponderance of evidence varies by the methods used in the research.

While additional research is needed to fully appraise when OST activities matter, how they matter, for whom, and under what conditions, decades of research and practice point to OST programs playing a critical role in child and youth development as a bridge between school, home, and community and a place for personal growth, relationship-building, learning, skill-building, and career exploration. For children and youth from affluent families, these experiences

¹ In a scoping review of 50 years of research, Fluit et al. (2024) synthesized an integrated definition of *marginalization* as “a multifaceted concept referring to a context-dependent social process of ‘othering,’ where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values, as well as the resulting experiences of disadvantage” (p.1). The authors note that both the process and outcomes of marginalization can vary significantly across contexts (Fluit et al., 2024). See Box 1-3 in Chapter 1.

are part of their normal life course, and children and youth from low-income households are eager for these opportunities—data show that 11 million children and youth from low-income households would enroll in a program if one were available.

Importantly, public interest and investment in OST programs arose in large part from a historical need for structured safe spaces for children and youth after the school day that would allow parents and caregivers to work and for young people to have productive spaces to form meaningful relationships. OST programs continue to meet this need today. Research shows that parents overwhelmingly view OST programs as helping working families keep their jobs or work more hours, a view that may be more prominent among low-income families, where parents are more likely to be in service occupations with less flexible schedules.² There is also a general consensus that OST opportunities for adolescents are preferable to other less-productive or unsafe and unstructured activities teens have access to, and that OST programs remain a critical, ongoing connector to school participation.

In its review of the evidence, the committee found that effectiveness of programs is linked to youth participation and engagement and the quality of programming. Providing high-quality OST experiences for all children and youth requires strong OST systems and organizational capacity, a stable and well-trained workforce, and high-quality programming that is responsive to the needs of the populations being served. Current funding levels and support structures are insufficient for meeting these requirements and for meeting the demand for OST programs.

The committee's conclusions pave the way for a blueprint for efforts to better ensure high-quality OST opportunities for all children and youth, recognizing (1) the role OST programs play in supporting parental and caregiver work, (2) the gap in access between affluent and low-income families, and (3) the overall positive association of high-quality programs on youth development. The committee's recommendations—presented below—are based in the goal of improving OST opportunities for children and youth, specifically improving the availability, accessibility, and quality of OST experiences for children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds. Research on program effects can support these efforts, building an understanding of what, when, and for whom programs work effectively, ultimately maximizing programs' positive impact by tailoring them to meet the needs of participants. The committee's recommendations are organized across six goals: (1) support the funding stability of OST programs; (2) increase support for intermediary organizations to strengthen the organizational capacity of OST programs; (3) advance program quality efforts to foster enriching, safe, and supportive OST settings; (4) build stable, supportive environments and career pathways for youth development practitioners; (5) improve understanding of the landscape of OST programs and participation, OST staff development, program quality efforts, and OST systems; and (6) improve understanding of OST program effectiveness and outcomes.

² Afterschool Alliance. *Access to afterschool programs remains a challenge for many families*. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Afterschool-COVID-19-Parent-Survey-2022-Brief.pdf>; Harknett, K., Schneider, D., & Luhr, S. (2020). Who cares if parents have unpredictable work schedules? The association between just-in-time work schedules and child care arrangements. *Social Problems*, 69(1), 164–183; Douglas-Hall, A., & Chau, M. (2007). *Most low-income parents are employed*. Fact sheet. <https://www.nccp.org/publication/most-low-income-parents-are-employed>

GOAL 1: Support the funding stability of OST programs.

As discussed in Chapter 8, funding for OST programs comes from many sources, including families, private philanthropic foundations, and the government. Programs serving children and youth from low-income households are more likely than those from higher-income households to be funded through federal, state, and local grants. The federal government alone oversees 87 programs that support OST in direct and indirect ways. These investments are often designed for a specific purpose aligned with health, education, housing, food security, or workforce development and administered through a designated agency. However, with one in three requests for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) funds declined because of lack of funding, state, local, philanthropic, and individual families are left to cover a significant portion of costs associated with OST programs.

At the same time, unmet demand for OST programs continues to grow—approximately 24.6 million children and youth would participate if programs were available,³ including more than 11 million from low-income households.⁴ A number of reasons may explain why demand for programs is not being met, including limited number of programs in a given area or available spots in existing programs, program costs exceeding what families can afford to pay, or lack of awareness about the programs available to them.

As summarized in Chapter 8, while public investment in children and youth from low-income households has grown over the past 2 decades, these investments are often designed for a specific purpose (e.g., health, education, housing, food security, workforce development) and administered through a designated agency. This has created both a fragmented and incremental portfolio of funding for children, youth, and families. With federal dollars often distributed using a formula across all 50 states, territories, and tribal communities, the dollars rarely stretch to meet the needs of children and youth, and many eligible families remain unserved (Conclusion 8-1).

The public and private systems of variable eligibility and the competitive nature of grants have led to issues of sustainability. For instance, in philanthropy the design of funding terms has increasingly favored shorter funding cycles of 1–3 years, alignment with foundation’s strategic directions, emphasis on innovation over sustainability, and foci on specific populations. Additionally, funders commonly set restrictions on indirect costs (e.g., administrative or operating costs), often below the grantees’ actual indirect rates, which can hinder the organization’s sustainability in the long run (McCray & Enright, 2016). Even the most successful programs could struggle to sustain their work if one of their funding sources discontinues (e.g., a federal discretionary grant is cut by Congress for the next fiscal year, a state changes its funding formula for its grant, a philanthropic funder changes its strategy and focus).

To fill gaps in their budgets, OST programs are left to piece together other sources of support that require more staff time and resources, challenging underresourced programs to do more with less and further widening the funding gap between smaller, grassroots organizations that may serve children and youth from low-income and marginalized backgrounds and well-established organizations with greater capacity to apply and adhere to complex grant applications and requirements.

³ Afterschool Alliance. (2020). *America after 3PM: Demand grows, opportunity shrinks*. <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2020/AA3PM-National-Report.pdf>

⁴ Afterschool Alliance. (2024). *Afterschool WORKS!* https://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AfterschoolWorks_PolicyAsks%202024FINAL.pdf

The siloed, short-term, and restrictive nature of funding leads to increased administrative burdens and concerns around sustainability for programs. This means OST providers must constantly research, compete for, and comply with onerous accountability measures across their funding portfolio, as well as respond to funding priorities over strategic implementation of the program's mission, instead of focusing on delivering high-quality programming that responds to the needs of children, youth, and families (Conclusion 8-2). Greater access to consistent technical assistance and professional development resources can support programs in their capacity and skills to fundraise, implement, comply with, and sustain funding at the program level. When grants do permit access to technical assistance and professional development, OST programs benefit (Conclusion 8-3).

RECOMMENDATION 1-1: Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should support the funding stability of OST programs, by providing long-term, flexible funding that allows for general program support, as well as funding for staff compensation, indirect costs (i.e., administrative or operating costs), and robust evaluation. Longer-term, more flexible funding allows programs to be responsive to and best elevate the assets and meet the needs of children and youth by reducing concerns around program sustainability. Allowing the use of funds for building program capacity, such as staff compensation and professional development, which supports the growth and retention of talent to design, run, and sustain high-quality programs.

In contending with restrictive funding, some programs blend and braid funds—a practice in which two or more funding streams are used in a coordinated fashion to support a single initiative—to provide comprehensive support for children and youth in their communities.⁵ For example, Washington's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction allocated \$500,000 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) III funds to Altera, a nonprofit that runs OST programs for low-income, Hispanic and Native American students, and those from rural or low-income backgrounds, in grades preK–12 across Washington State. Altera used these funds to develop a curriculum grounded in place-based, asset-based, student-centered learning to increase students' kindergarten and high school readiness; improve school-day attendance; and boost participants' English, math, and science scores. The organization also used ESSER funds to run afterschool and summer programming in the Soap Lake and Hoquiam school districts with this curriculum. It included learning support, such as tutoring and mentoring, enrichment, and social and emotional learning programs. In September 2023, Altera received a 21st CCLC grant to continue programming at the Hoquiam School District. Through their work made possible by ESSER funds, Altera developed a strong partnership with the Education Department of the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN), as Hoquiam School District boundaries overlap QIN reservation lands, and will use Quinault's tribe-specific curricula, collaborating with the tribe to add new lessons over time. Federal and state agencies can make braiding of funds easier by reviewing and adjusting how their requirements might restrict which funds can be used for what purposes.

Another approach that is gaining traction is the centralization and administration of federal funding streams with one state agency, office, or division. For example, in New York State, various afterschool programs were aligned under the state's Office of Children and Family

⁵ Children's Funding Project. (2023). *Blending and braiding: Funding our kids 101*. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b75d96ccc8fedfce4d3c5a8/t/65c38ed081e0b06ad99b85ec/1707314896475/FOK101+Blending+and+Braiding-FINAL.pdf>

Services (OCFS) in 2023. Regulatory changes moved the Empire State After-School⁶ program administration from the State Education Department to OCFS to allow for stronger coordination and alignment with the Advantage After School Program⁷ and the Learning and Enrichment After-school Program Supports program.⁸

To promote solutions such as these, the committee offers a number of implementation considerations in the recommendations that follow.

RECOMMENDATION 1-2: Federal, state, local funders should increase coordination across funding streams and implement greater cross-sector and interagency partnership to alleviate the administrative burden on OST programs in researching and competing for grants, and in complying with grant requirements. Reducing administrative burden on program staff can enable them to focus efforts on growing programs and improving program impact.

Specific actions could include:

- Federal agencies funding OST programming—such as the Department of Education (ED), Department of Labor (DOL), and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—could change, update, and/or better align the rules and nonregulatory guidance related to braiding of funding to facilitate utilization of funding sources in tandem with one another. For example, programs funded with Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds, under HHS, are currently required to charge a fee to parents, while 21st CCLC discourages and, in some states prohibits, fees—making it impossible for programs to accept both types of funding.
- State agencies that administer formula and block grants (e.g., HHS, ED, Department of Housing and Urban Development) and/or state funding streams could adopt policies that permit and support braiding of funding for OST programs.
- State and local organizations (e.g., municipalities, state and local intermediaries, state affiliates of national youth-serving organizations) could collaborate to alleviate the burden on programs to apply for and receive funding by utilizing common monitoring metrics, quality improvement systems, and funding applications. At minimum, these organizations could utilize a common core of questions for funding applications across funding streams (e.g., CCDBG, Youth Build, 21st CCLC, and state funding streams).
- State agencies could consolidate the administration of funding streams for OST programs and activities under one agency, office, or division. For example, the California Office of Expanded Learning currently oversees three ongoing funding streams for Expanded Learning programs in the state, including the After School Education and Safety (ASES) program (originally established by the Proposition 49 ballot initiative), 21st CCLC, and the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program. Moving the administration of all funding streams that support OST programming under the umbrella of a single state agency would allow for coordination of funding that would optimize efficient use of funds.
- Federal agencies (e.g., ED, DOL, HHS, and Department of Justice) could expand public-private partnerships that bolster and inform federal efforts in OST.

In Chapters 4, 6, and 7, the committee highlights ways in which youth, families, and communities are being involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of OST programs

⁶ <https://www.newburghschools.org/page.php?page=127>

⁷ https://data.ny.gov/Human-Services/Advantage-After-School-Program/ae9a-zs4q/about_data

⁸ <https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/childcare/leaps-after-school.php>

(e.g., youth–adult partnerships, participatory action research). Program providers and the communities they serve know the local context, histories, and strengths of participants. The committee encourages extending meaningful collaboration with these groups to include the sphere of funding.

RECOMMENDATION 1-3: Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should define funding priorities that align with priorities in the youth development field and are responsive to the needs and interests of participants, families, communities, and youth development practitioners; funders should engage these groups in designing funding opportunities and application requirements.

Children and youth cannot benefit from OST programs if they do not participate. As discussed in Chapter 4, a number of factors affect participation, including barriers to access. Parents consistently name safe and reliable transportation to and from OST programs as a key barrier to OST involvement. Another challenge to participation is the competition that OST programs face against paid jobs as youth age. This is particularly salient for youth from low-income households, where compensation from OST programs can mean they do not have to choose between supporting household income and participating in enriching OST experiences. Other important factors that can facilitate engagement in programs are increasing awareness of programs and including activities that are both responsive and linked to participants' cultural backgrounds, identities, and personal interests. Funding that allows programs to address these issues can increase OST participation.

RECOMMENDATION 1-4: Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should reduce access and opportunity gaps for all children and youth by providing dedicated funding, including funding for cross-sector partnerships, to help providers address common barriers to participation in out-of-school-time programs. Funding can be used to provide transportation, offer financial incentives (e.g., stipends, gift cards, transit cards), provide culturally relevant offerings, and conduct intense and focused outreach to support participation

Specific actions could include:

- Federal and state agencies could establish grant programs dedicated to supporting transportation and reducing program fees for OST providers serving low-income families. For example, the ASES Frontier Transportation Grant, offered through California's Department of Education provides supplemental funding for existing grantees that have transportation needs due to their OST program site being located in hard-to-reach rural areas.
- State-level transportation departments could partner with OST programs to develop affordable transit options, such as shuttle services or subsidized fares.
- Local governments and community organizations could conduct needs assessments to identify specific barriers and implement tailored solutions, such as sliding scale fees or outreach campaigns to raise program awareness.

GOAL 2: Increase support for intermediary organizations to strengthen the organizational capacity of OST programs.

As discussed in Chapter 3, OST programs exist in a complex ecosystem. Rather than having one clear anchor institution or delivery mechanism, city and state intermediaries⁹ have emerged to act as coordinating bodies across systems, to work with and shape OST ecosystems. Intermediaries serve as a practical connection between the overall aims of the funding and policy systems and the technical and operational abilities of individual service providers.¹⁰ Intermediaries, such as state afterschool networks, local OST intermediaries, and children's cabinets, serve a critical function in coordinating, funding, and collecting data on OST systems, and in providing technical assistance to local OST programs, activities, and related services (Conclusion 2-1). Specifically, the work of an intermediary includes increasing quality, sustainability, and availability of OST programs; providing governance support to OST programs; convening local organizations and brokering relationships; enlisting funding support; serving as professional development coordinator or provider; providing data analysis and evaluation frameworks; and acting as an advocate. Intermediaries often desire to establish partnerships with school districts and other municipal agencies to strengthen this work; however, lack of interest or awareness from government partners can hinder this effort.

Ultimately, the work of intermediaries and other coordinating entities is vital not only in reducing the burdens OST programs face, but also in providing the resources for programs to strengthen their capacity to serve youth fully. However, OST programs do not have a uniform federal, state, or local organizing structure to ensure funding, standards for quality practice, or a prepared workforce with pipelines for growth. In many ways, the early funding for intermediaries and other coordinating entities enabled an organizing framework for OST systems. But this funding remains precarious because of the lack of legislated resources for intermediaries and other cross-sector efforts. The committee offers recommendations to formalize support for intermediaries, acknowledging that while intermediary organizations are a promising approach for facilitating coordination and bolstering organizational capacity, more research is needed on the tangible effects of intermediary supports on OST outcomes (Conclusion 2-1, continued).

RECOMMENDATION 2-1: The federal government and state agencies should provide dedicated, sustained support for entities that coordinate and support out-of-school-time (OST) programs, including city- and state-level intermediaries to improve infrastructure for program availability, accessibility, and quality. Philanthropic funders should coordinate and collaborate to direct investments to grow and sustain local and regional OST intermediaries to fill any gaps left by federal and state funding.

Greater investments, including resources, would allow intermediaries, or other coordinating entities:

- to identify unmet community needs impacting the availability and accessibility of OST programs and strategize to address those needs;

⁹ An *OST intermediary* is an organization or agency that oversees the OST system policies and strategies, and coordinates resources, money, and expertise.

¹⁰ Collaborative for Building After-School Systems. (2007). *Shaping the future of after-school: The essential role of intermediaries in bringing quality after-school systems to scale*. <https://www.expandinglearning.org/sites/default/files/Shaping%20the%20Future%20of%20After-School.pdf>

- to work with funders to ensure they are providing sufficient funding and minimizing onerous grant application and reporting requirements;
- to assist community-based organizations in accessing funding and complying with funder proposal and reporting requirements;
- to assist community-based organizations in accessing or offering professional development opportunities for their program staff;
- to enable programs to collect and use data for quality improvement and evaluation by establishing data systems and accountability measures; and
- to facilitate partnerships (e.g., to strengthen access, program offerings, staff capacity building opportunities, funding) between OST programs with other programs, individuals, and entities across sectors, including but not limited to schools, municipal agencies, local businesses, workforce programs, and initiatives. Facilitating a partnership among stakeholders includes identifying roles, staffing the network, and establishing communication and decision-making protocols.

RECOMMENDATION 2-3: When allocating formula or grant dollars for out-of-school-time (OST) programs to state or local education agencies, public funders should prioritize or incentivize partnerships with local intermediaries who can provide OST system-level supports, such as grant allocation and monitoring, and the integration of quality improvement systems.

RECOMMENDATION 2-4: In states or locales where no coordinating body currently exists, government offices or jurisdictions should form or support coordinating bodies, such as intermediaries or children’s cabinets or their equivalent, which would work across youth-serving entities.

RECOMMENDATION 2-5: Local intermediaries should continually identify gaps in access to out-of-school-time programs and related barriers at the neighborhood level (e.g., through needs-based assessments and mapping tools) to increase program participation. Specifically, local intermediaries should:

- Identify reasons behind noted access gaps and barriers—whether they are due to program availability, affordability, staffing, transportation, participants’ health-related needs, or other issues.
- Provide guidance to OST programs on strategies for increasing program participation. For example, offer guidance on implementing program fee structures (e.g., sliding scale payment structures) to address cost barriers.
- Establish cross-sector partnerships that promote engagement within communities to address barriers to participation. For example, intermediaries can establish partnerships between school districts and transportation departments to decrease transportation-related barriers by providing youth with free or reduced-price transit fares that extend beyond the school day and allow them to attend OST programs. Cross-sector partnerships are typically enacted with larger, well-funded organizations and agencies. The youth development field can support and create mechanisms for smaller local entities to partner with or be part of broad cross-sector partnerships to fulfill promise of broader uptake of universal participation in OST programs.

- **Facilitate connections between youth and families and supportive community services. For example, intermediaries could connect families with counseling services, legal assistance for immigration or refugee status, nutrition education, or parenting classes.**

GOAL 3: Advance program quality efforts to foster enriching, safe, and supportive OST settings.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the quality of OST programs, regardless of their subject or type, affects youth motivation to attend, engage in, and learn in OST programs. Program quality has been defined in multiple ways but generally includes aspects of the physical space, psychological safety, structure, adult–youth interaction, and the provision of optimal learning opportunities that support growth and development. Program quality is operationalized in various ways, reflecting differences in practices and desired outcomes among OST programs; this variation also reflects evolutions in prioritizing specific themes of quality.

Most current quality approaches take a universal standard approach that assumes that a practice affects all youth in similar ways. However, individual youth may experience programs in ways that differ from other youth or the average, and, in most cases. In many cases, these approaches are not explicit about barriers that drive gaps in access and opportunity. Future research will need to integrate these principles into definitions and measurement of quality.

Since publication of the Blue Book,¹¹ a growing body of qualitative and quantitative research has shown that adopting culturally sustaining practices and critical pedagogies, building supportive relationships with program peers and staff, honoring youth–adult partnership, and intentionally cultivating a positive and inclusive program climate are key features of positive developmental settings and contribute to program quality (Conclusion 6-1).

While higher program quality is associated with better child and youth outcomes, more research is needed to explore associations between specific indicators of quality and outcomes, and to provide additional guidance for focusing on or prioritizing elements of quality to improve outcomes for all children and youth (Conclusion 6-2).

Program quality initiatives are now common and often led by OST intermediaries. They collect a variety of data to evaluate and improve program quality and overall OST system health. Data collected and analyzed provide agencies with information to make informed policy and practice decisions to support high-quality programming. More advanced data systems have allowed for data to be used beyond basic accountability to support continuous improvement or program quality. Municipalities and programs encounter challenges to collecting data, in particular accessing school-related data.¹² However, local intermediaries can enter into agreements with OST providers, school districts, and other community partners to share data. These agreements are central to a robust data system, specifying who is formally part of the OST system and who can access and use the data.

Still important gaps remain in the adoption of program quality initiatives at the state and local levels. Processes are needed for reviewing and updating program quality initiatives that

¹¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. 2002. *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/10022>.

¹² The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) requires programs to obtain parental consent to access data. FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable U.S. Department of Education program.

reflect evidence-based practices and evolving community strengths and needs, in order to continually adjust and thereby better meet the needs of children and youth. The youth development field is underresourced in data use and analysis, with organizations often lacking staff capacity, infrastructure, and knowledge to do this work well. Evidence-based approaches to use data for continuous improvement can include emerging strategies derived from the field based on peer learning, which at times may be more feasible and appropriate. The committee encourages dedicated support to advance program quality efforts, as well as actions intermediaries can take to improve their work.

RECOMMENDATION 3-1: Public and private funders should support the development and implementation of quality improvement initiatives and that provide ongoing technical assistance to advance program quality efforts, including supporting efforts for intermediaries to build capacity for program providers to collect, analyze, and use data for continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 3-2: Local intermediaries should set a schedule and process for reviewing and updating program quality initiatives, associated assessment tool(s), and aligned supports (e.g., data systems, professional development opportunities) for out-of-school time programs, reflective of evidence-based practices and research, as well as evolving community strengths and needs.

RECOMMENDATION 3-3: Intermediaries should support cross-sector collaboration with school districts, local universities, and municipal agencies to share and analyze data to support continuous improvement of program quality. This collaboration should include clearly articulated data-sharing agreements that allow for bidirectional data-sharing; public reporting of nonsensitive, deidentified data; and data systems that include information on youth development measures.

GOAL 4: Build stable, supportive environments and career pathways for youth development practitioners.

As discussed in Chapter 5, youth development practitioners are adult educators, mentors, and advocates who support young people's social, academic, and personal development. Within OST programs, they are critical for both maintaining the structure of the program and fostering positive outcomes for children and youth. However, as described above, the youth development field is both reliant on and susceptible to changes in funders' priorities and trends—this impacts wages, professional advancement, and sustained employability. Youth development practitioners thus face challenges in their professional and personal lives, including low pay, promotion ceilings, housing and food insecurity, and inadequate benefits. Youth development practitioners often hold multiple roles, such as event planning, meal preparation, and grant writing, and some may absorb family-like responsibility for their youth participants, such as being as first responders in emergencies or advocates at school and court. Rarely do they have adequate training or support in these areas. These challenges can make it difficult to recruit and retain staff and lead to exits from the field entirely. This in turn creates a void in staffing and increases program waiting lists, leaving young people without access to OST programs.

Youth development practitioners face a number of challenges that can influence retention, such as lack of recognition and respect, low wages, job stress, and limited training and

professional development). Addressing the challenges contributing to staff attrition in OST programs requires organizational commitment and capacity. Especially for programs serving primarily children and youth from low-income households that rely on public funding, commitment and capacity often depend on system-level support structures and funding (Conclusion 5-1).

Some youth development practitioners receive opportunities for professional development through organizational training or intermediary organizations. However, staff members are often limited to what their organizations can afford, so for staff working with lower-resourced community organizations accessing educational opportunities can be difficult. More professional development opportunities through education and training (e.g., through postsecondary degrees, certificates, and organization-led trainings) for individuals interested in or currently serving in youth development can help build the OST workforce pipeline and strengthen career trajectories, which ultimately strengthens program quality (Conclusion 5-3).

RECOMMENDATION 4-1: State entities, agencies, and other regional funders, including philanthropic funders, should strengthen support for youth development practitioners in out-of-school-time (OST) settings so OST intermediaries and providers can create opportunities to prepare and increase professional pathways for the OST workforce.

Specific actions could include:

- Leveraging existing federal, state, local training programs to train youth development practitioners.
- Employing innovative models, such as apprenticeship programs and service corps, to prepare youth development practitioners and serve as a recruitment pipeline.
- Incentivizing or strongly encouraging the use of grant dollars to provide livable wages and benefits for youth development practitioners.
- Allocating funding and providing technical assistance to support evidence-informed models of professional development.

In building pipelines for the OST workforce, higher education is a key sector within the OST ecosystem, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. Higher education offers formal degree and certification programs that can build the capacity of youth development practitioners. Higher education can also partner with other organizations to expose college students to OST experiences through internships or summer jobs. While the committee did not identify a need for youth development practitioners to complete formal education requirements to effectively support children and youth in OST settings, it recognizes that individuals are seeking opportunities and pathways that would support their preparation and advancement. Providing these kinds of opportunities can improve staff recruitment and retention in OST programs.

RECOMMENDATION 4-2: Colleges and universities should provide more opportunities for students to pursue their interests in the youth development field, including exposure to practical experiences and relevant coursework.

Despite the reliance on the capabilities, talents, and supervision provided by youth development practitioners in OST programming, unified public codification, external recognition, or consistent structural support for this workforce has not occurred. While national and local efforts to elevate the status of youth development practitioners have increased in recent years, recognizing and improving job quality for this workforce is essential to advancing youth development practitioners, and for program quality and access overall. Formalizing national

population-level data collection of youth development practitioners can provide a more accurate number and understanding of these staff, which can support policy-level improvements for the OST workforce (Conclusion 5-4).

RECOMMENDATION 4-3: The Office of Management and Budget should establish and maintain a standard occupational classification for youth development practitioners to build evidence on the workforce supporting out-of-school-time programs.

A federal standard occupational classification would allow for accurate and comprehensive collection, calculation, and dissemination of data on OST practitioners, including working conditions, salary ranges, qualifications, employment, and paid hours. These data would increase understanding of the state of the OST workforce, including how many OST staff receive benefits, are supported by organized labor, and earn a living wage. Greater understanding would, for example, allow federal, state, local actors to advocate for livable wages to attract and retain staff and make a stronger case for full-time positions.

GOAL 5: Improve understanding of the landscape of OST programs and participation, OST staff development, program quality efforts, and OST systems.

As discussed in Chapter 4, a review of the landscape of OST programs showed their multiplicity across multiple dimensions—who offers programs, the kinds of activities offered, their geographic location, among others—reflecting the range of participant, family, and community needs. However, existing data do not provide an accurate map of programs serving children and youth from low-income households; systematic information of OST programming at the national level, including the type of programming, location, populations served, is needed to offer a clearer understanding of the availability and accessibility of programs for children and youth (Conclusion 4-1).

The committee also found that overall, comprehensive demographic data on OST participation among all youth are limited. First, there are no population-level data on OST participation for some groups of children and youth, such as those with chronic health conditions, disabilities, and special needs, and those experiencing homelessness, involved with the juvenile justice system, or from immigrant families. Second, children and youth do not exist within one demographic category but there are few to no data offering a picture of OST participation across intersections of race/ethnicity, disability, income, community type, etc. (Conclusion 4-2). Understanding trends in OST program participation among children and youth in the United States necessitates examining participation at the intersections of multiple demographics (e.g., income and race). The limited available data indicate that, despite steady increases in participation among children and youth in the early 2000s, participation rates declined between 2014 and 2020, especially among Black, Hispanic, and Asian young people. While participation has declined, unmet demand has continued to rise (growing to roughly 24.6 million young people in 2020). Population-level or nationally representative data that report on participation at intersecting demographics, although not currently available, are critical to document and explore reasons for these trends (Conclusion 4-3). The lack of data limited the committee's ability to precisely grasp participation rates among children and youth from marginalized backgrounds.

The lack of extensive data collection in the field of OST impacts researchers' and program leaders' ability to better understand a variety of OST learner-centered objectives (e.g., gaining greater information regarding program quality, program measures, program attendance¹³). Moreover, it hampers understanding of the reach of progress or breadth of access and opportunity gaps for all children and youth. The committee encourages new and continued support for national level data collection efforts on OST programs and the workforce, akin to federal support for data collection on early childhood programs, to inform future research, policy, and practice.

RECOMMENDATION 5-1: Federal agencies should utilize existing research or support new or existing research and/or survey efforts to continually monitor supply of and demand for OST programs and the experiences of the out-of-school-time (OST) workforce, and to identify which young people are and are not being served in OST programs, in order to inform future federal policy and funding to meet the needs of children and youth from marginalized backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATION 5-2: Federal, state, and local government agencies that sponsor surveys and collect data on children and youth should, intentionally and explicitly, collect data on participation in out-of-school-time programs, including data that allow for examination of intersecting demographics. Agencies should engage with youth development experts and youth-serving organizations to consider how best to collect data and shape survey questions. Data collected should be made publicly available.

The following are examples where such improved data collection could occur at the federal level:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) could include a question about OST participation in the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS). State administrators of YRBS could opt to include the existing afterschool question that was added to the CDC's optional questions list in 2024.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) could conduct a national longitudinal study akin to the Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies Program, with an open dataset, and collect OST workforce data, including turnover and mobility.
- Federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Education (ED), HHS, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, could collaborate to make data on federally funded OST programs publicly available (e.g., 4-H participation data, 21 Annual Performance Reporting System) to populate a national, interagency database.
- Federal agencies could create additional core longitudinal survey questions on OST data (e.g., National Longitudinal Transition Study; ED's Civil Rights Data Collection) to capture more information on program providers; community-based organization participation; participants' race/ethnicity, disability, income level, and disability classification status; dosage of participation; and the existence of fee-free or sliding scale programs and Title I school eligibility.

¹³ Russell, L. & Little, P. (2011). *Collecting and Using Information to Strengthen Citywide Out-of-School Time Systems: Strategy Guide*. National League of Cities, Harvard Family Research Project, & The Wallace Foundation. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED536881.pdf>

Furthermore, in its examination of the evidence, the committee identified gaps and needs for future research to improve understanding of the landscape of OST programs and participation, OST staff development, program quality efforts, and OST systems. These research needs are outlined in Table 9-1.

TABLE 9-1 Selected Research Needs in the Youth Development Field

Access and Engagement	- identifying best practices and programs for effectively reaching and engaging children and families in out-of-school-time (OST) programming - identifying the features children and families find most engaging and helpful
Program Quality	- examining how universal standards approaches can be adapted to integrate the unique strengths of communities and explicitly account for barriers that drive gaps in access and opportunity - examining specific indicators of quality in relationship to outcomes, such as program activities and planning; staff qualifications; staff–student ratios; staff retention, turnover, and burnout; cultural congruence of staff to children and youth served; supportive environments; and positive relationships between program staff and youth
Staff Development	- creating and evaluating effective staff development and training programs - gathering data on program implementation
Intermediaries	investigating the role, function, and impact of intermediaries on child and youth outcomes, OST systems, programs, and youth development practitioners
System-Level Interactions	improving understanding of how OST programs connect to each other and other systems and sectors within the OST ecosystem
Understudied Populations	- understanding the role of OST settings in the lives of understudied populations, including, among others, children and youth who: - are involved in the child welfare system, - are involved in the juvenile justice system, - are from immigrant and refugee families, - are experiencing homelessness, - have disabilities, - have chronic health conditions, and - live in rural areas.

GOAL 6: Improve understanding of OST program effectiveness and outcomes.

Policymakers at all levels—federal, state, and local—rely on a body of evidence to inform their decisions on both new programs and funding levels of existing investments. Although policymakers consider a range of evidence, longitudinal studies, as well as randomized control trials, can carry more weight in determining the need and/or effectiveness of an intervention considered for funding. Funding research is critically important to advancing the

youth development field. The federal government can support research in various ways, including by (1) continuing to fund the Interagency Working Group on Youth programs to set priorities on youth research and offer shared metrics and/or roadmaps (2) continuing to fund agencies and associated clearinghouses, (2) authorizing use of funds for evidence-generating activities, and (3) set-aside allocations that require federal grantees to budget for internal and/or external evaluations.

While the OST evidence base remains young, it has grown over the past 2 decades, thanks to both public and private investments in research and evaluation. As discussed in Chapter 7 and mentioned above, OST programs can support positive youth development, but existing literature is unable to delineate whether certain activities are more effective, whether activities have larger effects on certain outcomes, or whether the activity effects depend, at least in part, on the alignment of the activity content and the area of development (Conclusion 7-4).

The committee also found that:

- OST settings provide a place for the social and emotional development of children and youth, provided they are well designed and offer high-quality experiences that intentionally support these areas of development. OST settings can provide a place that is responsive to youth where all participants feel a sense of belonging and affirms their sense of self. Children and youth report that these programs and activities help them develop responsibility, positive work ethics, social skills, and interest in civic activities (Conclusion 7-1).
- OST programs are not easily poised to affect intransient, hard-to-change outcomes such as test scores and grades, which require continuous and effective teaching and are heavily influenced by schools. Though there are programs and experiences offered by dedicated and motivated staff that exhibit effects on some outcomes, these programs vary in access to social and economic resources, including the ability to engage well-trained staff, sensitive to the culture and backgrounds of the students they serve.
- OST staff are often paraprofessionals with varying degrees of educational and professional experience, who are expected to attain some of the outcomes that are difficult for the most expert of educators.
- Some OST programs and experiences have been shown to foster interest and engagement in specific academic domains and socioemotional skills that help youth succeed at school, which over the long term may lead to better educational outcomes, such as attendance and graduation (Conclusion 7-2); not all OST programs are expected to demonstrate positive effects on all outcomes.
- OST programs are most likely to affect outcomes that they intentionally support through the content and provision of developmental opportunities (Conclusion 7-3).

Given the multiplicity of OST programming, the field relies on a robust evidence base of quantitative and qualitative measures and meaning-making to advance the field. However, significant gaps in the evidence base remain that, if addressed, could progress understanding of the effectiveness and outcomes of OST programming for all children and youth (see Box 9-1). More focused systematic longitudinal rigorous quantitative and qualitative research is needed to understand what specific types of programs, experiences, approaches, and characteristics of OST programs are linked to positive outcomes across learning, development, and well-being for which specific children and youth, families, and communities (Conclusion 7-4, continued). Research and evaluation of OST programs need to move beyond comparing those who do and do not attend to understanding which quality features and experiences in which activities are

associated with youth development for whom, taking into account both activity-level factors (e.g., the content or quality of the activity) and youth-level factors (e.g., engagement in the activity and youth's current functioning and circumstances) (Conclusion 7-5).

RECOMMENDATION 6-1: Federal, state, local, and philanthropic funders should support research that examines a wide variety of outcomes based on the goals of out-of-school-time programs. Funders should support large-scale, systematic experiments (i.e., randomized controlled trials) to assess the efficacy of specific program designs and of specific program quality features, examining a wide range of short- and long-term outcomes, and other rigorous quantitative (e.g., matched longitudinal quasi-experimental designs, natural experimental approaches, alternative designs) and rigorous qualitative research (e.g., case studies, ethnographies, mixed methods) that include measures of participation, program duration, program quality, and implementation.

BOX 9-1

Research Needs for Building Evidence on OST Program Effectiveness and Outcomes

- Conduct rigorous research to examine how participation in out-of-school time (OST) programs over multiple years affects outcomes.
- Conduct randomized controlled trials that are more systematic, across multiple sites and populations, are replicated, and are performed at large scale.
- Conduct rigorous qualitative research that centers the voices of children, families, staff, and providers to better understand the uptake and experiences in OST programs.
- Conduct research to understand what specific types of programs, experiences, approaches, and characteristics of OST programs are linked to positive outcomes across learning, development, and well-being for which specific children and youth, families, and communities.
- Conduct youth-specific research that integrate both variable-focused and person-specific OST research and evaluations.
- Conduct research to explore the range of potential interventions in the child's environment, such as tutoring, psychotherapy, mentoring, neighborhood support, and other OST activities, in terms of efficacy, cost, and possible moderating factors.
- Collect data using multiple methodologies (e.g., from school records, questionnaires, and behavioral observation).
- Consider analytic procedures that are appropriate for nested designs. That is, when an intervention is conducted in a group context or setting such as in an OST program, individuals' participant data cannot be treated as independent.
- Collect data related to staff demographics, education, training, and supervision.
- Document and account for possible moderating factors, including other interventions in the child's environment, such as tutoring, psychotherapy, mentoring, neighborhood support, and other OST activities.
- Conduct research on understudied outcomes, such as mental health, and understudied populations, including among others, children and youth who:
 - are involved in the child welfare system,
 - are involved in the juvenile justice system,
 - are from immigrant and refugee families,
 - are experiencing homelessness,
 - have disabilities,
 - have chronic health conditions, and

-are living in rural areas.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

In public information-gathering sessions, the committee heard the challenges that OST program providers face in providing optimal experiences for the children and youth they serve. Paramount to these challenges is insufficient funding and the siloed, short-term, and restrictive nature of existing funding, as discussed above. These issues place heavy administrative burdens on OST providers—significant time, energy, and resources are spent researching and competing for funding to build funding portfolios and comply with varying accountability measures. Given these challenges, the committee purposefully avoided directing recommendations to programs themselves and directed them instead to the federal, state, and local actors, including philanthropies, that scaffold programs. The committee hopes the recommendations it has offered will provide programs with sufficient support and resources, so program leaders are able to ensure high-quality programming for all children and youth. The committee offers program leaders guidance based on its review of the evidence. These considerations are outlined below and are predicated on the assumption that sufficient support is available.

Staff Development

Well-funded and supported programs could provide staff and managers with paid professional development opportunities that span all levels (beginner to advanced professionals) to ensure program quality, including but not limited to compliance training, training in programmatic approaches (e.g., arts, advancing youth development), and opportunities to build new knowledge and skills in both introductory and advanced topics. Skills training important for OST staff may include trainers' interpersonal skills, sensitivity to students' developmental abilities and cultural backgrounds, and the importance of helping children and youth translate their newly developed skills to daily routines.

Data Collection and Evaluation

Well-funded and supported programs could collect and utilize data to support research, evaluation, and quality improvement, such as:

- data on who they are serving, attendance, issues of access, youth adjustment, program quality;
- data on the range of outcomes that goes beyond academic achievement, such as program attendance, school engagement, and mental well-being; and
- data to support evaluation of program components (e.g., what experiences, what aspects of quality) that are associated with immediate and long-term outcomes.

Program Quality and Program Practices

Well-funded and supported programs could adopt and reflect program quality measures that are aligned with the latest research and reflect the variety of programmatic goals and outcomes, as well as support ongoing development and innovation in understanding and improving program quality through continuous improvement processes.

Well-funded and supported programs could increase implementation of linguistically and culturally relevant learning practices and strengths-based approaches that are responsive to the needs of children, youth, families, and communities, such as recognizing participants' language and heritage in ways that foster positive youth identities, and revise programming based on these practices, inclusive of participants' voices.

Well-funded and supported programs could provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for youth to continue to participate and grow by taking on new responsibilities and roles over years. To support program attendance, youth development, program engagement, and program quality, programs could foster intentional and sustained collaboration with families and with other programs, schools, and other community groups that are central to children's, youth's, and families' lives.

Appendix A

Detailed Study Tables Supporting Chapter 7

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Academic Outcomes									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status [SES], gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Herrera et al., 2013	Higher Achievement, an academic enrichment program	59% female; 75% African American, 13% Latino	60% free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL)	Grades 5–8	Washington, DC; Alexandria, VA	RCT	Program youth performed better on math and reading tests after 2 years and retained higher math scores after 4 years; program appeared to expand high school options for students via greater number of applications to private high schools.	Academic performance, attitudes and behaviors, high school enrollment	Students participated in up to 650 hours of instruction per year
Garcia et al., 2020	Higher Achievement, an academic enrichment program	Varied	Schools were located in low-income neighborhoods	Grades 5–8	Washington, DC; Alexandria, VA; Baltimore, MD; Richmond, VA; Pittsburgh, PA	RCT	Program students earned better grades than control students after 2 years in English, math, and science; the program appeared to be more effective for students who entered with higher grades (As and Bs); the program appeared to work particularly well for male students.	Grades, test scores	Students participated for 25 weeks during the school year and 6 weeks during the summer
James-Burdumy et al., 2007	All students participated in various 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) afterschool programs	61% African American, 21% White, 16% Hispanic	71% of centers studied had at least 75% FRPL	Grades K–6	Southern, Midwestern, Western, and Northeastern USA	RCT	The findings indicate that the programs affected the type of care and supervision students received after school, with parents less likely to be caring for their child and other adults more likely, but there was no statistically significant effect on the incidence of self-care. Students in the program reported feeling safer after school, but their academic outcomes were not affected, and they had more incidents of negative behavior.	Various: homework completion, academic outcomes, behavioral problems, etc.	Students attended centers or remained in the control group for up to 2 years
Roberts et al., 2018	Afterschool reading intervention	Varied	99% FRPL	Grades 3–5	Southwestern USA	RCT	No statistically significant reading comprehension posttest group differences were identified ($p > .05$). The limitations of this study included high attrition and absenteeism.	Various measures of reading comprehension	Students received up to 89 lessons
Gottfredson et al., 2010	All Stars curriculum, an enhancement to afterschool programs that focuses on building protective attitudes and beliefs for future risky behaviors, teaching skills for healthy decision making, and more	54% male; 70% African American	59% FRPL	Grades 6–8	Baltimore, MD	RCT	The findings suggest that it is difficult to achieve high fidelity in the implementation of research-based practices in the typical afterschool program (ASP) setting.	Various outcomes, including academic performance, school attendance, conduct problems, and related beliefs	Students participated in program or control group for 30 weeks
Gottfredson et al., 2010	All Stars curriculum, an enhancement to afterschool programs that focuses on building protective attitudes and beliefs for future risky behaviors, teaching skills for healthy decision-making, and more	54% male; 70% African American	59% FRPL	Middle school students	Baltimore, MD	RCT	Results showed no differences between the treatment and control students at post-test on any of the outcomes or mediators. Furthermore, no positive effects were found for youths receiving higher dosage, higher quality program delivery, or both.	Various outcomes, including academic performance, school attendance, conduct problems, and related beliefs	Students participated for 96 days

(All text derived from studies)

APPENDIX A

A-3

Modestino & Paulsen, 2023	Boston Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), an early work experience program	54.6% female; 52.8% Black, 7.5% Asian, 6.5% White, 33.1% mixed race/other	18.3% received public assistance	Grades 8–11	Boston, MA	RCT	Better attendance and course performance in the year after being selected for the program, with the program's impact on attendance persisting into the second year. Survey data suggest that the Boston SYEP may affect academic outcomes by increasing aspirations to attend college, gaining basic work habits, and improving social skills during the summer.	Variety of academic outcomes, aspiration to attend college, basic work habits, social skills	Students participated for 6 weeks
Avery, 2013	College Possible, an afterschool program focused on college preparation	91% students of color	Average family income was \$25,000	Grades 11–12	Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN	RCT	The results indicate that the College Possible program significantly increased both applications and enrollment to both 4-year colleges and selective 4-year colleges; we estimate that initial enrollment at 4-year colleges increased by more than 15 percentage points for program participants but find little evidence of any effect of the program on ACT performance or college enrollment overall.	ACT score, college application, college enrollment	Students participated in the program for 2 years
Provenzano et al., 2020	Afterschool music education program	Varied; school described as "racially and ethnically diverse"	Program took place at a low-income school	Grade 5	Ann Arbor, MI	Quasi-experimental/mixed methods	From pretest to posttest, we found significant changes in students' perception of their music-making ability and in their connection to other students. Participants also noted an enhanced sense of school pride and broader community recognition.	Various outcomes including school pride, connection to other students, self-perception, and more	Students participated for 68 days
Naftzger et al., 2015	Variety of 21st CCLC afterschool programs	42–43% Hispanic, 34–33% White	68–74% FRPL	Elementary, middle, and high school students	Washington	Case study	The study found significant, positive program impacts for a number of key outcomes such as GPA and number of unexcused absences; many of these effects were also replicated in the second year of the study.	Variety of youth outcomes, including both social emotional learning (SEL) and noncognitive areas	Students already attended programs at the centers
Komisarow, 2022	StudentU, a program providing education, nutrition, and social support services	Varied; StudentU applicants were more likely to be female and Hispanic when compared to other students in their county	All applicants either qualify for FRPL or are a potential first-generation college student	Middle and high school students	Durham, NC	Quasi-experimental	The sub-group of lottery winners who entered the comprehensive program with low baseline achievement earned more course credits, achieved higher grade point averages, and were less likely to be suspended during ninth grade than their lottery loser counterparts.	Variety of outcomes: high school credits earned, GPA, probability of suspension	Students participate for 6 weeks during the summer and 30 weeks during the school year
Hirsch et al., 2011	After School Matters (ASM), a program offering paid apprenticeships in a variety of areas	77% African American	92% FRPL	High school students	Chicago, IL	RCT	ASM was able to obtain significant positive results on important outcome variables despite several factors that worked against doing so (e.g., an alternative treatment control group, lack of substantial extra support for implementation) and that these impacts can be meaningfully related to ASM vs control experiences in their respective activities. A skeptical view of the findings emphasizes that few significant effects were found, effect sizes were generally small, and that testing a more representative sample of ASM instructors may well eliminate the few positive impacts that were found.	Variety of outcomes related to positive youth development (PYD), job skills, academic performance, and problem behavior	Students participate for 180 hours in 1 year
Theodos et al., 2017	Urban Alliance High School Internship Program providing training, mentoring, and work experience	89% non-Hispanic African American; 65% female	Applicants "typically" came from economically distressed neighborhoods	High school students	Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD	RCT	Results were mixed; in some areas there were significant, positive impacts on youth at the 1-year mark although they faded by the 2-year mark. In particular, there appeared to be large impacts on the probability of attending college for male students.	Variety of outcomes related to college readiness, school achievement, skill development, educational attainment, and employment, wages, and savings	Students participated for 1 year

Jenson et al., 2018	Community-based afterschool program located in public housing complexes that includes literacy instruction, tutoring, and SEL skill development	52% female; 89% youth of color	All students lived in public housing neighborhoods	Grades K–12	Denver, CO	Quasi-experimental	Youth who participated in the ASP had significantly higher levels of school attendance, a greater increase in independent reading level over the academic year, and lower odds of incurring a suspension or expulsion from school than youth in a comparison group. Participation in the ASP was also significantly related to classroom teacher ratings of proficiency in the subject areas of math and science.	Academic performance and school behavior problems	Students participated for 1 school year
Springer & Diffily, 2012	Students participated in Boys and Girls Clubs	387 male, 332 female; 388 African American, 88 White, 243 Hispanic	67.03% of elementary school and 60.69% of middle school neighborhoods above poverty line	Grades 2–8	Dallas, TX	Longitudinal	With respect to intensity, extent of club participation was positively related to increases in GPA from the first week to the last 6-week grading period. This relationship was stronger for elementary students. In addition, intensity was negatively related to changes in school absences from the first week to the last 6 weeks for both grade levels. With respect to breadth, participation in greater numbers of programs was related to greater improvement in GPA, but only among elementary students, and only when program participation was substantial.	Changes in grades and attendance	Students participated for 1 school year
Kim et al., 2010	READ 180, a literacy intervention	Over 70% Black and Latino	81% FRPL	Grades 4–6	Southeastern Massachusetts	RCT	There was no significant difference between children in READ 180 and the district afterschool program on norm-referenced measures of word reading efficiency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Although READ 180 had a positive impact on oral reading fluency and attendance, these effects were restricted to children in grade 4.	Word reading efficiency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, posttest reading scores	Students participate for 23 weeks
Shackelford, 2019	Baltimore Urban Debate League (BUDL), a debate program	40.3% male; 91.5% Black, 6% White, 1.7% Hispanic, 0.6% Asian, 0.2% American Indian	95.8% FRPL	Elementary and middle school students	Baltimore, MD	Longitudinal	The effect of preadolescent Baltimore Urban Debate League participation for debaters was associated with increases in standardized test scores, a decreased likelihood of chronic absenteeism, and an increased likelihood of attending a selective entrance criteria high school.	Standardized test scores, absenteeism, high school selection	Students participated in at least 1 BUDL tournament
Kelepolo, 2011	Variety of afterschool programs	Varied	Varied	Grade 10	Suburban Utah	Correlational	The results of this study indicated that students who participated in extracurricular activities scored higher in attendance, grade point average, and the Utah Criterion Reference Test than students who did not participate in extracurricular activities. A moderately strong correlation was also found in the grade point average and the Utah Criterion Reference Test.	State proficiency test scores, GPA	Students already participated in extracurricular activities
Nelson-Johnson, 2007	Express to Success, an afterschool math program			Grade 7		Mixed methods	Experimental group increased school attendance and improved math scores; experimental group expressed more positive attitudes toward math.	Math achievement, attendance	
Holloway, 2017	Variety of afterschool programs		Students described as "low-income"	Grade 10	Southeastern USA	Correlational	The students who participated in the extracurricular activities had significantly higher cumulative academic averages, average daily attendance, and resiliency levels.	Cumulative academic averages, average daily attendance, resiliency levels	Students already participated in activities
Lanford, 2019	21st CCLC afterschool enrichment program	27.7% African American	54.4% FRPL	High school students	Rural South Carolina	Correlational	Analysis found there was no statistically significant differences in academic credits earned, attendance, or disciplinary incidents between the 2 groups of students.	Academic credits earned, attendance, disciplinary incidents	Students already attended the program
Mahoney & Vest, 2012	Variety of afterschool programs	49% male; 45% White, 43% Black, 7% Hispanic, 5% other	Average household income was \$66,543	Ages 12–18	USA	Longitudinal	Results showed that, controlling for demographic factors and baseline adjustment, intensity was a significant predictor of positive outcomes and unrelated to indicators of problematic adjustment at young adulthood.	Variety of positive developmental outcomes and indicators of problematic adjustment	Students were already participating in programs

Martin et al., 2015	Variety of afterschool programs	53% White, 36% African American, 6% Hispanic, 5% biracial	Participants described as economically disadvantaged	Ages 10–20	USA	Longitudinal	A positive family environment during adolescence predicted educational involvements that promoted educational attainment in early adulthood.	Variety of indicators for educational involvement and attainment, substance use	Students were already participating in programs
Lleras, 2008	Variety of afterschool activities	Varied	Varied	Grade 10	USA	Longitudinal	The results indicate that students with better social skills, work habits, and who participated in extracurricular activities in high school had higher educational attainment and earnings, even after controlling for cognitive skills.	Educational attainment and earnings	Students were already participating in programs
Haghighat & Knifsend, 2019	Variety of afterschool programs	59.2% female; 59.2% White, 12.4% Black, 9.5% AAPI, 13.6% Hispanic, 4.5% mixed race, 0.8% AIAN	Varied	Grade 10	USA	Longitudinal	Both breadth and intensity of extracurricular activity involvement in grade 10 were linked with educational attainment 8 years after high school.	Education attainment and various academic outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
Palmer et al., 2017	Variety of afterschool programs	Varied; all individuals received special education services	Varied	Grade 10	USA	Longitudinal	Findings show a statistically significant association between postsecondary degree completion for students with disabilities and extracurricular activity participation, including extent and type.	Postsecondary degree completion	Students were already participating in programs
Clement & Freeman, 2023	Team Prime Time, an afterschool inclusive sports program	Varied	Participating schools varied from 34–92% FRPL	High school students	USA, urban area	Mixed methods	Quantitative results indicated that the neurotypical adolescents felt they had an impact on improving the responsibility of their peer athlete, and they felt they had better perspective-taking after participating. Descriptive comments indicated that the children with disabilities enjoyed participation and that this inclusive program may have provided an additional avenue for a subset of the population to engage more in the activities of their school.	Variety of outcomes related to self-perceived impact and personal self-perceptions	Students participated for at least 1 sport season
Hicks et al., 2022	Afterschool computing program	19 boys, 26 girls	Unmentioned but school is described as belonging to an inner-city school system	Middle school students	Southeastern USA	Mixed methods	Results indicate that hands-on support from mentors, peer collaboration, and options for customizing work and creating unique projects contributed positively to the student experience in the program. This study suggests giving students more creative freedom, adequate scaffolding and the option for peer collaboration when working in informal learning environments.	Support from learning environment, peer relationships, sense of authorship, purpose, and agency	Students attended for at least 1 semester
Cavendish, 2016	Afterschool program focused on creative expression	67.8% female; 71% African American, 12% Hispanic, 12% White, 2% Asian, 3% other	94% FRPL	Grades 3–5	Southeastern USA	Mixed methods	Program had minimal impact on attitudes toward creative writing, but qualitative evidence suggests the program had a strong positive impact on students regardless.	Program experience, student writing identity	Students participated in 4 sessions
Sheltzer & Consoli, 2019	Notes for Notes, an afterschool music program	2 female, 9 male; 8 Latinx, 1 Caucasian, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 Asian/Caucasian	Programming takes place through Boys and Girls Clubs, which report 60% FRPL	Varied (respondents were program alumni)	USA	Correlational	Alumni identified several positive program characteristics as most influential, such as consistency, opportunity, and exposure.	Variety of outcomes related to identity development, music knowledge and performance development, social skill development	Students participated regularly for at least 2 years

Ngo, 2017	Afterschool theater program	All youth were Hmong-American; 7 female, 2 male	All youth described as low-income	Ages 16–19	Midwestern USA	Case study	Youth “named” struggles with stereotypes and acculturation expectations and constructed positive ethnic identities as Hmong-Americans in the theatre program.	Variety of outcomes related to agency and identity development	Youth were already participating in the club
Johnson, 2017	Afterschool writing club	All participants were Black; many participants self-identified as Queer and/or as having a diverse gender identity	Over 95% FRPL	High school students	Southern USA college town	Case study	Findings suggested that through writing, participants were able to “navigate and disrupt” heteronormativity and traditional writing practices.	Variety of outcomes related to identity development, knowledge development, writing ability, and more	Students were already participating in the club
Wozniak et al., 2023	Two STEM-based programs for early and late high schoolers	Early high school: Majority of participants female and Black; Late high school: Close to 50% female, majority Black and Hispanic	Not mentioned	High school students	USA	Correlational	Early and late high school students reported increased scientific identity and comfort with scientific tasks compared pre- to post-program in several domains. Desire to pursue biomedical careers was maintained pre- to post-program for both groups.	Variety of outcomes related to identity, STEM knowledge and skill development, career knowledge, and more	Early high school students participated for 1 school year; Late high school students worked over the summer and received mentorship and other help during the school year
Yu et al., 2021b	Afterschool math program	All students were Latinx; 50% male	100% FRPL	Middle school students	Southern CA	Correlational	Culturally responsive practices helped youth feel more connected to the program, peers and staff; facilitated learning opportunities; and promoted math and SEL skills.	Culturally responsive practices, math ability	Students had already been participating in the program for at least 2 quarters
Thompson & Diaz, 2012	Hopeworks, program focused on technology and mentorship, job skills	Program demographics said to mirror those of Camden: about 50% Black, about 34% Hispanic	57% of Camden children are described as living in poverty	Ages 14–18	Camden, NJ	Case study	Youth in the program begin to identify as experts as they gain skills and work with clients, allowing them to develop in both expertise and identity.	Program engagement, identity development, job skill development	Student participation measured by project completion
Pinkard et al., 2017		One school 91% Latino, one 85% Black; all participants female	Over 89%	Middle school students	Chicago, IL	Correlational	Students reported exhibiting agency as co-designers and makers, experiencing situational interest in STEM learning activities, and developing positive STEM-related interests and identities.	Variety of outcomes related to SEL, PYD, learning, and motivation	Students participated in 16 sessions
Vickery, 2014	Afterschool digital media club	9 male students (6 Latino, 2 White, 1 Black), 9 female students (4 Latina, 2 Black, 3 multiracial)	School described as low-income	High school students	USA	Correlational	The afterschool clubs provided students with opportunities to develop digital literacies that could be leveraged for the acquisition of cultural and social capital. Although participation in the clubs expanded students’ offline social networks, restrictive school policies blocked access to social media and video sharing sites. Students were unlikely to share their work online and missed opportunities to develop network literacies that are crucial to more equitable modes of online participation.	Access to technology, interest-driven learning/participation, offline networking, network literacy	Students were already participating in the clubs
Abzacinkas & Zarrett, 2020	Afterschool program with youth participatory action research (YPAR) and/or physical activity (PA) components	94% African American; 41 female, 23 male	75% FRPL	Middle school students	USA	Mixed methods	Findings indicated feasibility of YPAR with systems supports (i.e., support from school administrations.) Changes occurred at the individual and systems level in the YPAR and PA program.	Sociopolitical skills, participatory behavior, perceived control empowerment	Students participated for 4 or 7 weeks depending on assignment
Fuller et al., 2013	Sports-based afterschool program	100% male; 59.4% Black, 38.7% Hispanic, 1.7% White, 0.2% Asian	Over 95% FRPL	Grades 6–8	Hartford, CT	Correlational	Findings related to the youths’ continued involvement revealed their value for the (Sport Hartford Boys) program as a safe place that kept them out of trouble and provided experiences that led to positive personal development. Furthermore, results indicated that participation in the program facilitated the development of each “C” of youth development.	5 and 6 Cs of youth development	Students participated for 24 weeks

Merenda, 2021	Adventure-based program	Varied	100% FRPL	Grades 6–8	USA	Correlational	Results indicate favorable views of the activities within the program, in particular related to themes of self-confidence, school attachment attitudes, and resiliency toward challenges.	Variety of outcomes related to youth self and school perceptions and attitudes	Students participate 15 times during 1 school year

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Civic Engagement									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Wray-Lake & Abrams, 2020	Variety of programs involving civic engagement	All participants described as youth of color	Study describes areas as "high-poverty urban neighborhoods"	Ages 12–19	Rochester, NY	Case study	Local, informal community helping was an especially common form of civic engagement. The authors identified four pathways of civic engagement, distinguished by feelings of civic empowerment and support from adults.	Variety of outcomes related to civic development	Students were already participating in organizations
Monkman & Proweller, 2016	Civic Engagement Program (CEP), a civic leadership program	All students described as Black or Latino	All students described as low income	High school students	Midwestern USA	Correlational/case study	Across the interviews, the youth talk about their experience in CEP program and the larger Futures program as life-altering, in large part responsible for imparting a range of skills and attitudes conducive to redefining their sense of purpose and promise now and into the future.	Variety of outcomes related to civic development, PYD, and SEL	Students were already participating in the program
Zarrett et al., 2021	Connect through PLAY, an afterschool physical activity program	Participating students were "underserved," at least 50% of low income (FRPL) and "minority status"	At least 50% of students qualified for FRPL	Middle school students	Southeastern USA	RCT	Regression analysis demonstrated that participation in the intervention (vs. control) was associated with an increase of 8.17 min of daily accelerometry-measured moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA), equaling 56 min of additional weekly MVPA at post-intervention, controlling for baseline MVPA, school, gender, and weight status.	MVPA	Participation in program or control for 10 weeks
Kim and Morgül, 2017	Variety of volunteering opportunities	Varied	Varied	Grades 7–12 onward	USA	Longitudinal/correlational	Regarding personal outcomes, our findings indicate that the psychological benefits of youth volunteering accrue only to voluntary participants, whereas both voluntary and involuntary youth service are positively associated with educational attainment and earnings in young adulthood.	Variety of civic and personal outcomes	Students were already volunteering
Obradović & Masten, 2007	Variety of afterschool activities	91 boys, 114 girls; 29% "minority" (18% African American, 7% Native American, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian)	Varied	Ages 8–12 onward	Minneapolis, MN	Longitudinal/correlational	Results indicate that competence and activity involvement in adolescence predict citizenship and volunteering in adulthood, 10–15 years later. As hypothesized, however, the level of competence in developmentally salient domains in adolescence and emerging adulthood fully mediate the predictive significance of concurrent activity involvement for civic engagement outcomes in adulthood.	Citizenship and volunteering	Students were already participating in activities
Smith, 1999	Variety of afterschool activities	Varied	Not mentioned	Grade 8 onward	USA	Longitudinal/correlational	Multiple significant predictors of greater political and civic behavior in adulthood found, one of which was participation in extracurriculars.	Political and civic behavior in young adulthood	Students were already participating in activities
Braddock et al., 2007	Variety of afterschool activities	All students sampled were Black	Not mentioned	Middle and high school students onward	USA	Correlational/longitudinal	Analyses revealed that participation in varsity individual sports and participation in nonsport extracurricular activities have significant net effects on political participation. Furthermore, the effects of participation in these school engagement activities are mediated by educational attainment.	Political engagement in young adulthood	Students were already participating in activities

Gardner et al., 2008	Variety of afterschool activities	49.3% male; 10.2% Black, 12.3% Hispanic, 7.6% AAPI, 1% Native American, 68.8% White	Not mentioned	Grade 8 onward	USA	Longitudinal/correlational	Youths who participated in organized activities for 2 years demonstrated more favorable educational and civic outcomes in young adulthood than those who participated for 1 year. More intensive participation was also associated with greater educational, civic, and occupational success in young adulthood.	Educational, civic, and occupational success	Students were already participating in activities
Mahoney & Vest, 2012	Mixed variety of organized activities	45% White, 43% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 5% other; 49% boys	Average annual household income around \$66,000	Ages 12–18	USA	Correlational	The findings suggest that young adults who were activity participants during adolescence experience levels of psychological distress and engage in risky behaviors at about the same level as everyone else.	Organized activity participation, young adult outcomes	Time diaries required adolescents to document the time spent on every activity in which they were involved during the course of a 24-hour period during a randomly sampled weekday and weekend day
Metz & Youniss, 2005	Students completed a public service requirement	78% White	Community described as middle to upper-middle class	High school students	Boston, MA	Longitudinal	Students already inclined to serve scored high on all measures throughout and showed no advantage after meeting the requirement. However, students who were less inclined to serve showed marked gains on 3 of 4 civic measures after completing their community service requirement.	Various civic attitudes and behaviors	Students completed 40 hours of community service
Brown et al., 2018	Variety of community-based organizations focusing on Afro-centric sociopolitical development	All participants described as Black youth	Youth described as being impacted by poverty	Ages 5–18	Atlanta, GA; Harlem, NY; Dallas, TX	Case study	Results identify sociopolitical development (SPD) as a critical component of these recreational programs’ theoretical approaches, leadership structure, staff selection and training, and curriculum design.	Sociopolitical development	Students were already participating in programs
Park, 2016	Afterschool program focused on critical multicultural citizenship	6 girls, different ethnic backgrounds but all identify as refugees	89% of school receives FRPL	Grades 7–12	Northeastern USA	Case study	The study’s findings challenge deficit perspectives that immigrant youth, who are learning English, are not ready to engage in deliberative discourse around social and global issues.	Various outcomes related to civic and personal identity and development	Students participated once a week for the school year
McFarland & Thomas, 2006	Variety of afterschool activities	Varied	Not mentioned	Grades 7–12 onward	USA	Correlational/longitudinal	General involvement in extracurricular activities is important, but in particular, involvement in youth voluntary associations concerning community service, representation, speaking in public forums, and generating a communal identity most encourage future political participation.	Political activity in adulthood	Students were already participating in programs
Frisco et al., 2004	Variety of afterschool activities	Varied	Not mentioned	Grade 8 onward	USA	Correlational/longitudinal	Our findings suggest that a large proportion of U.S. teenagers still participate in community-based programs, many of which foster later civic participation, but that all youth do not equally benefit from participation.	Early adult voting behavior	Students were already participating in programs
Carey et al., 2021	Variety of community-based youth activism organizations	64% female, 16% male, 15% other(s); 54% African American, 30% White, 7% multiracial, 3% AIAN, 3% AAPI, 2% other	Not mentioned directly, though youth described as economically marginalized	Ages 11–19	Pittsburgh, PA	Correlational	The findings suggest that youth activism programs contributed to youth gaining critical consciousness and additional skills.	Development of critical consciousness and other civic and developmental outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
Kennedy et al., 2020	YELL, a youth participatory action research program	59% Black or African refugees, 16% Asian, 16% Latinx, 5% White, 1% Alaskan Native, 1%	Program took place in public housing neighborhoods	Middle school students	Urban environment	Case study	The data revealed that young people’s critical consciousness development ranged from basic to advanced levels.	Development of critical consciousness and other civic and developmental outcomes	Students participated in at least 1 session

		multiracial, 1% other							

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Family and Peer Relationships									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Raffaelli et al., 2018	Variety of afterschool programs	55.9% female; 37.1% Latino, 30.2% African American, 27% White; 5.7% other	Not mentioned	Ages 11–20	USA	Longitudinal	Experiences in the contexts of home and afterschool programs lead to interindividual differences in the development of self-reported responsibility.	Adolescent responsibility	Students were already participating in the programs
Larson & Brown., 2007	High school theater program	All students were White; 50% male	Not mentioned	Ages 14–17	Midwestern USA	Case study	Participants’ accounts of experiences in this setting demonstrated their capacity to actively extract emotional knowledge and to develop strategies for managing emotions.	Emotional development	Students were already participating in the program
Lin et al., 2016	Variety of afterschool programs	All students were of Mexican origin	Varied	Grade 7	Phoenix, AZ	Correlational	A number of adolescents reported encounters with ethnic/racial microaggressions (ERMs) in their organized activities, though they did not represent the majority of our sample. Adolescents brought up their concerns during the interviews even when unprompted, which reflects deep concerns and, therefore, compelling evidence that ERMs are present and hindered their experiences.	Occurrence of ethnic/racial microaggressions	Students were already participating in afterschool programs
Schaefer et al., 2011	Variety of afterschool programs	Varied	Varied	Grades 7–12	USA	Correlational	Results provide strong evidence that activities were associated with current friendships and promoted the formation of new friendships.	Adolescent school-based friendships	Students were already participating in afterschool programs
Schaefer et al., 2018	Variety of afterschool programs	Varied	Varied	Grades 7–12	USA	Correlational	Extracurriculars were associated with lower friendship segregation; contact sports in particular seemed to promote cross-racial/ethnic friendships.	Adolescent friendship segregation	Students were already participating in afterschool programs
Siperstein et al., 2019	Unified Champion School program, including inclusive sports and other activities	Varied	Varied	High school students	USA	Quasi-experimental	Lagged dependent variable modeling revealed that participation significantly predicted improved attitudes toward peers with intellectual disability and perceptions of school social inclusion, as well as increased social interactions with peers with intellectual disability.	Peer social inclusion	Students participated in program or control for 1 school year

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Long Term Outcomes									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Gardner et al., 2008	Variety of afterschool activities	49.3% male; 10.2% Black, 12.3% Hispanic, 7.6% AAPI, 1% Native	Not mentioned	Grade 8 onward	USA	Longitudinal/correlational	Youths who participated in organized activities for 2 years demonstrated more favorable educational and civic outcomes in young adulthood than those who participated for 1 year. More intensive participation was also associated with greater	Educational, civic, and occupational success	Students were already participating in activities

		American, 68.8% White					educational, civic, and occupational success in young adulthood.		
Lleras, 2008	Variety of afterschool activities	Varied	Varied	Grade 10	USA	Longitudinal	The results indicate that students with better social skills, work habits, and who participated in extracurricular activities in high school had higher educational attainment and earnings, even after controlling for cognitive skills.	Educational attainment and earnings	Students were already participating in programs
Haghighat & Knifsend, 2019	Variety of afterschool programs	59.2% female; 59.2% White, 12.4% Black, 9.5% AAPI, 13.6% Hispanic, 4.5% mixed race, 0.8% AIAN	Varied	Grade 10	USA	Longitudinal	Both breadth and intensity of extracurricular activity involvement in grade 10 were linked with educational attainment 8 years after high school.	Education attainment and various academic outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
Kim & Morgül, 2017	Variety of volunteering programs	Varied	Varied	Grades 7–12	USA	Longitudinal	Results suggest that youth volunteering has a positive return on adult volunteering only when it is voluntary, and that neither voluntary nor involuntary youth service has a significant effect on adult voting after accounting for contextual factors. Findings indicate that the psychological benefits of youth volunteering accrue only to voluntary participants, whereas both voluntary and involuntary youth service are positively associated with educational attainment and earnings in young adulthood.	Variety of civic and personal outcomes	Students already participated in volunteering programs
Obradović & Masten, 2007	Variety of afterschool activities	91 boys, 114 girls; 18% African American, 7% Native American, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian	Breakdowns not provided but a "diverse" range of socioeconomic backgrounds are mentioned	Grades 3–6; participants were followed for 20 years	Minneapolis, MN	Longitudinal	Results indicate that competence and activity involvement in adolescence predict citizenship and volunteering in adulthood, 10–15 years later. As hypothesized, however, the level of competence in developmentally salient domains in adolescence and emerging adulthood fully mediate the predictive significance of concurrent activity involvement for civic engagement outcomes in adulthood.	Civic engagement (citizenship, volunteering)	Subjects were selected and followed for 20 years
Vandell et al., 2020	Variety of afterschool activities	22% of mothers recruited were non-White	21% had incomes no greater than 200% of the poverty level	Infants recruited and followed until age 15	USA	Longitudinal	Both higher quality early childcare and more epochs of organized activities (afterschool programs and extracurricular activities) during middle childhood were linked to higher academic achievement at age 15. More epochs of organized activities were associated with greater social confidence.	Various developmental outcomes (academic achievement, impulsivity, etc.)	Subjects were selected and followed for 15 years

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Mental Health									
Author(s)/year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they

									measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Agans et al., 2014	Youth participated in a variety of programs	63% female, 65% European American	Unmentioned	Grades 7–12	USA	Longitudinal	The results indicated that high likelihood of participation in activities was consistently associated with fewer negative outcomes and higher scores on PYD and contribution, as compared to low likelihood of participation in activities. Changes in the breadth of participation (in particular, moving from a high to a low likelihood of participation) were associated with increased substance use, depressive symptoms, and risk behaviors.	Relationship between breadth of participation and scores on associated outcomes	Data taken from 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development
D'Agostino et al., 2020	Fit2Lead, a park-based violence prevention and mental health promotion afterschool program	48% male, 60% Hispanic, 29% non-Hispanic Black	33% low-income	Ages 12–17	Miami-Dade County, FL	Differences in differences	This prospective cohort study found that adjusted youth arrest rate estimates were lower in areas where a park-based violence prevention and mental health promotion afterschool program was offered compared with areas hosting other afterschool programs.	Youth arrest rates	Students enroll within the first month of the school year, attendance recorded by program
Elswick et al., 2022	Trauma Healing Club, a trauma responsive and culturally competent afterschool program for African refugees	51 male students, 37 female students; all students were African refugees	Unmentioned; West Tennessee is the poorest metropolitan area in the state with a population over 1,000,000	Ages 12–18	West Tennessee	Mixed methods	Results indicated that the adaptation of the trauma-responsive intervention was effective and supportive of the child-participant and his/her family needs—both culturally and as it relates to improved participant functioning postintervention.	Participant behaviors/symptoms/outcomes	Students participate in 12-week program; families incentivized 3 times to support participation
Hillman et al., 2014	FITKids, a 9-month afterschool physical activity intervention	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Ages 8–9	East Central Illinois	RCT	The intervention enhanced cognitive performance and brain function during tasks requiring greater executive control.	Behavioral measures of executive control	Students randomly assigned to control waitlist or 9-month physical activity program
Lee et al., 2020	A fundamental motor skills-based afterschool program	19 girls, 12 boys	Not mentioned	Grades K–2	Southwestern USA	RCT	The 8-week fundamental motor skills (FMS)-based afterschool program showed significant improvements in FMS competence and MVPA compared to a traditional afterschool program.	Basic motor skills and cognitive functioning	Students randomly assigned to 8-week program or traditional afterschool program (control)
Christensen et al., 2023	Students already participated in programs	Varied; study mentions youth of color	Varied; study mentions youth from low-income backgrounds	Varied	USA	Meta-analysis	Results indicated afterschool programs to have a small yet significant positive overall effect on youth outcomes.	Variety of developmental outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
Ciocanel et al., 2017	Students already participated in programs	Varied	Varied	Ages 10–19	USA	Meta-analysis	Positive youth development interventions had a small but significant effect on academic achievement and psychological adjustment. No significant effects were found for sexual risk behaviors, problem behavior or positive social behaviors.	Variety of developmental outcomes	Students were already participating in programs

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Physical Health

Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Beets et al., 2009	Various afterschool programs	Varied	Varied	Varied	USA	Meta-analysis	Evidence is limited but suggests afterschool programs can improve physical activity levels and other health-related outcomes.	Variety of outcomes related to physical health and activity	Students were already participating in programs
Beets et al., 2016	Afterschool physical activity program	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Ages 6–12	California	RCT	Results suggest that the Strategies-To-Enhance-Practice (STEPS) approach can assist ASPs toward meeting PA policy goals. However, work is required to identify additional ways to increase the amount of MVPA children attending ASPs accumulate, with a concerted focus on the identification of effective strategies to use for girls.	MVPA	Participation in the program or control group for 1 year
Dzewaltowski et al., 2010	HOP’N, a physical activity and healthy eating program	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Grades 3–4	Lawrence, KS	RCT	The HOP’N program had a positive impact on overweight/obese children’s PA and afterschool active recreation time.	Physical activity and healthy eating	Participation in program or control group for 3 years
de Heer et al., 2011	Afterschool health education and physical activity program	Participants were Hispanic	Not mentioned	Grades 3–5	El Paso, TX	RCT	Intervention exposure predicted lower BMI, higher aerobic capacity, and greater intentions to eat healthy for the classroom at follow-up. Intervention effectiveness increased with increasing proportions of intervention participants in a classroom. Nonparticipants who had classroom contact with program participants experienced health improvements that could reduce their risk of obesity.	BMI and intention to eat healthy	Participation in program or control group twice a week for 12 weeks
Landry et al., 2019	LA Sprouts, an afterschool cooking and gardening program	87% Hispanic/Latino, 49% male	Participants described as "low-income"	Grades 3–5	Los Angeles, CA	RCT	Increases in cooking behaviors significantly predicted increases in dietary fiber intake and increases in vegetable intake. Increases in gardening behaviors significantly predicted increased intake of dietary fiber. Changes in CG (cooking and gardening) behaviors were not associated with changes in BMI z-score or waist circumference.	Psychosocial behaviors related to cooking and gardening, dietary intake, obesity parameters	Participation in program or control group for 12 weeks
Davis et al., 2011	LA Sprouts, an afterschool cooking and gardening program	87% Hispanic/Latino, 49% male	Participants described as "low-income"	Grades 3–5	Los Angeles, CA	RCT	Participants had increased dietary fiber intake and decreased diastolic blood pressure compared to control group. For the overweight subsample, increased dietary fiber intake, reduction in BMI, and less weight gain were reported compared to those in the control group.	Psychosocial behaviors related to cooking and gardening, dietary intake, obesity parameters	Participation in program or control group for 12 weeks
Gatto et al., 2012	LA Sprouts, an afterschool cooking and gardening program	87% Hispanic/Latino, 49% male	Participants described as "low-income"	Grades 3–5	Los Angeles, CA	RCT	Participants had an increased preference for vegetables overall, increased preferences for three target fruits and vegetables, as well as improved perceptions that “vegetables from the garden taste better than vegetables from the store.” In the overweight/obese subgroup, participants had a 16% greater increase in their preference for vegetables compared with control subjects.	Psychosocial behaviors related to cooking and gardening, dietary intake, obesity parameters	Participation in program or control group for 12 weeks
Martinen et al., 2020	Afterschool physical activity and literacy program	Participants were all female and Latina	Participants described as "low-income"	Grades 5–6	California	Case study	Girls participated in leisure-time physical activities with family in community spaces, in spite of social and cultural barriers. Female coaches facilitated girls’ increased engagement by acting as strong role models and fostering caring relationships.	Engagement in physical activity	Participation in program for 1 year
Matvienko & Ahrabi-Fard, 2010	NutriActive, an afterschool physical activity lesson paired with a morning walk	50% boys, 82% Caucasian	Not mentioned	Grades K–1	USA	Quasi-experimental	The intervention group scored significantly better on some fitness and all motor skill tests at 4 weeks. At 4 months, differences between the groups diminished but remained significant, with better scores for the intervention group on some tests.	BMI, waist circumference, fitness and motor skill levels	Participation in program or control for 4 weeks

							Skill levels emerged as predictors of cardiovascular fitness at 4 months.		
Perman et al., 2008	Afterschool program involving physical activity, family education, and nutrition education	67% African American, 13% Hispanic	57% low-income households; 93% FRPL	Elementary school students	Lexington, KY	Quasi-experimental	Initial findings after the first year of the program indicated a slowing in the average rate of weight gain by the targeted population. While the results did not reach statistical significance compared to accessible data in a school population with similar demographics, the trends were in the desired direction.	BMI	Participation in program twice a week for 6 months
Mabli et al., 2020	Get Fit, an afterschool program involving improving eating, physical activity habits, and health	"Most" students were Black	"Most" students came from low-income households	Grades 6–11	Harlem, New York City	RCT	Relative to the control group, students randomized to Get Fit experienced a decrease in BMI z-score. The percentage of students who were overweight or obese was also lower, but there was no effect on the percentage of students with obesity. Get Fit had an impact on BMI for girls, but not boys	BMI	Participation in program or control for 12 weeks
Zarrett et al., 2021	Connect through PLAY, an afterschool physical activity program	Participating students were "underserved" and "minority status"	At least 50% of students qualified for FRPL	Middle school students	Southeastern USA	RCT	Regression analysis demonstrated that participation in the intervention (vs. control) was associated with an increase of 8.17 min of daily accelerometry-measured MVPA (56 min of additional weekly MVPA) at post-intervention controlling for baseline MVPA, school, gender, and weight status.	MVPA	Participation in program or control for 10 weeks
Logan et al., 2021	Physical activity intervention	Not mentioned	Variety of backgrounds	Ages 8–10	USA	RCT	Results suggest that a 9-month PA intervention may be particularly beneficial to the cognitive and brain health of children with obesity. These results are important to consider given the public health concerns associated with childhood obesity.	Neurological indices of executive function	Participation in program or control for 9 months
Staiano et al., 2013	Physical activity intervention	Participants were African American	Not mentioned	High school students	USA	RCT	Cooperative exergame players lost significantly more weight than the control group, which did not lose weight. Cooperative exergame players also significantly increased in self-efficacy compared to the control group, and both exergame conditions significantly increased in peer support more than the control group.	Weight, various SEL outcomes	Participation in program or control for 20 weeks
Wilson et al., 2011	Afterschool physical activity program	73% African American, 55% female	71% FRPL	Middle school students	South Carolina	RCT	At mid-intervention, students in the intervention condition engaged in 4.87 greater minutes of MVPA per day than control students. Students in intervention schools engaged in 9.11 min more of MVPA per day than those in control schools during the program time periods, indicating a 27 min per week increase in MVPA.	MVPA	Participation in program or control for 17 weeks
Robbins et al., 2019	Afterschool physical activity club with supplementary activities	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Grades 5–8	Midwestern USA	RCT	No between-group differences occurred for weighted mean minutes of MVPA per week at post-intervention or 9-month follow-up while controlling for baseline MVPA.	MVPA	Participation in program or control for 17 weeks
Lightner et al., 2023	Afterschool physical activity program	Students came from schools that primarily serve low-income and minority populations	Students were "primarily" low income	Grades 6–8	Missouri	Posttest only	The intervention group had significantly better physical literacy and engaged in more moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity minutes per week and steps per day.	MVPA, BMI, physical literacy	Participation in program for 8 months
Rieder et al., 2021	Afterschool obesity prevention programming spanning 3 consecutive school years	62% Hispanic, 46% girls	21% of children below age 6 live in deep poverty in the Bronx	Ages 11–14	The Bronx, NY	Longitudinal	Of students with BMI > 85 th percentile, 44% maintained or decreased BMI z-score. There were improvements (non-significant) in BMI z-score and the adoption of four healthy eating behaviors. Students with higher afterschool attendance had greater improvements (non-significant) in composite behavior scores, BMI z-score, and in most target behaviors than students with lower afterschool attendance. Sleep improvements were significantly associated with BMI z-score decrease.	Various target behaviors related to sleep, food habits, and physical activity	Participation in program for 1 year

Linver et al., 2009	Various afterschool programs	50% girls; 63% European American, 17% African American, 13% Latino, 7% of other ethnic origin	Varied	Ages 5–18 onward	USA	Longitudinal /correlational	Results showed that those who participated only in sports had more positive outcomes compared with those who had little or no involvement in organized activities, but less positive outcomes compared with those who participated in sports plus other activities.	Variety of PYD outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
London & Gurantz, 2013	Various afterschool programs	26.7% White, 48.6% female	61.8% FRPL	Grades 5–9	California	Longitudinal	Controlling for baseline fitness status, participating in fitness-focused afterschool programs was associated with a 10% increase in the probability of being physically fit after 2 years.	Physical activity level	Participation in program from 2006–2009
Lytle et al., 2009	TAAG, an afterschool program focusing on physical activity	All participants are girls	Variety of backgrounds	Middle school students	USA	RCT	The TAAG intervention had a statistically significant and positive effect on out-of-school activity in the 2006 cohort. Self-efficacy, friends’ social support, total social support, and difficulty getting to and from community activities mediated the level of moderate to vigorous physical activity in girls.	MVPA, potential mediators/predictors	Participation in program at points between Fall 2003 to Spring 2005
Mahoney et al., 2005	Various afterschool programs	Majority of participants were Hispanic or African American; 210 girls and 229 boys	Majority of participants described as living in poverty	Grades 1–3	Northeastern USA	Longitudinal	Peer acceptance was significantly lower for obese children than nonobese children. Those who became involved in ASPs were significantly less likely to be obese at follow-up than nonparticipants. Both obese and nonobese ASP participants showed significant increases in peer acceptance over time.	Obesity status, peer acceptance	Students were already participating in programs and did so for 2 years.

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Racial-Ethnic Identity and Cultural Values									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Oyserman et al., 2002	Afterschool program focused on enhancing school involvement	All students were African American	Over 90% FRPL	Middle school students	USA	Quasi-experimental	By the end of the school year, intervention youth reported more bonding to school, concern about doing well in school, “balanced” possible selves, plausible strategies to attain these possible selves, better school attendance, and for boys, less trouble at school.	School involvement, attendance, various SEL variables	Students participated in the program or control for 9 weeks
Yu et al., 2021	Afterschool math program	All students were Latinx; 50% male	100% FRPL	Middle school students	Southern California	Correlational	Culturally responsive practices helped youth feel more connected to the program, peers, and staff; program facilitated learning opportunities and promoted math and SEL skills.	Culturally responsive practices, math ability	Students had already been participating in the program for at least 2 quarters
Cherry et al., 1998	NTU, an afterschool program that aimed to reduce risk factors and increase protective behaviors	All students were African American	"Majority" of participants came from low-income neighborhoods	Grades 5–6	Washington, DC	Quasi-experimental	The results indicated significant program effects for protective factors including racial identity, knowledge of African culture, self-esteem, and school behaviors.	Various risk and protective factors	Students participated for up to 5 years
Smith et al., 2018	Variety of afterschool programs	Varied	Varied	Grades K–5	USA	RCT	Experimental programs evidencing higher implementation fidelity demonstrated better program quality than controls, as well as reduced child-reported hyperactivity and intent-to-treat effects on prosocial behavior.	Problem and prosocial behavior	Students were already participating in afterschool programs
Yu et al., 2022	Afterschool program focusing on math	All students were Latinx; 53% female	96% FRPL	Middle school students	Southern California	Mixed methods	The support adolescents received in the program for their competence needs positively predicted changes in their math motivational beliefs over 1 academic year.	Math ability and motivational beliefs	Students participated for 1 academic year

Augustine et al., 2022	Variety of afterschool programs	All students were African American; 50.5% male	Varied	Ages 7–11	Central Pennsylvania	Correlational	Results indicated that positive racial–ethnic affirmation mediated the association between afterschool connectedness and problem behaviors, such that child-report of connectedness was directly related to positive racial–ethnic identity and indirectly to reduced problem behaviors.	Racial-ethnic identity, problem behaviors	Students were already participating in various programs
Belgrave et al., 2004	Sisters of Nia, an afterschool program focusing on cultural identity	All students were African American girls	Not mentioned	Middle school students	Southeastern USA	RCT	There were significant increases in androgynous gender roles for girls in the intervention group but not the comparison group. Findings also revealed that the intervention decreased relational aggression.	Ethnic identity, gender roles, relational aggression development & SEL factors	Students participated in the program or a control group for 15 sessions
Riggs & Greenberg, 2004	Afterschool program focusing on academic outcomes	All students were Latino; 41 male students and 53 female students	All immigrant parents described as "seriously economically depressed"	Elementary school students	Rural Pennsylvania	Quasi-experimental	Hierarchical linear regression analyses indicated that children who made the greatest academic gains were acculturated in English, were from poorly functioning families, and had families with fewer parent–teacher contacts and less engagement with children’s school activities.	Academic achievement	Students participated in program for up to 7 months
Riggs et al., 2010	Afterschool programs focusing on SEL and ethnic identity	All but one student were Latino	Students had to be low-income to participate	Ages 12–18	USA	Quasi-experimental	Higher ratings of the ASP’s emphasis on ethnic socialization were associated with a more developed ethnic identity, while greater intensity of ASP participation and perceptions of ASP quality were associated with higher levels of self-worth; youth who regularly attended the ASP demonstrated significantly better concentration and regulation skills than those who did not regularly attend, if they exhibited preexisting concentration and regulation problems.	Ethnic identity development & SEL factors	Students participated in program throughout the school year
Whaley & McQueen, 2020	Imani Rites of Passage, a program designed to help Black male students develop coping mechanisms for negative situations	60 male students, 93% African ancestry	All students described as living in low-income neighborhoods	High school students	New York City	Quasi-experimental	The findings of the evaluation indicated an Afrocentric socialization effect on some predictor variables associated with posttest reductions in violence risk for the intervention group.	Factors related to coping skills such as social competence as well as stronger racial and individual identities	Students participate in program or control group for 15 weeks
Elswick et al., 2022	Trauma Healing Club, a trauma responsive and culturally competent afterschool program for African refugees	51 male students, 37 female students; all students were African refugees	Unmentioned; West Tennessee is the poorest TN metropolitan area with a population over 1,000,000	Ages 12–18	West Tennessee	Mixed methods	Results indicated that the adaptation of the trauma-responsive intervention was effective and supportive of the child-participant and his/her family needs—both culturally and as it relates to improved participant functioning post intervention.	Participant behaviors/symptoms/outcomes	Students participate in 12-week program; families incentivized 3 times to support participation

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Social and Emotional Learning									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Dworkin et al., 2003	Mixed variety of organized activities	23 boys, 32 girls; 56% White, 22% African American,	Not mentioned	Ages 14–18	American Midwest	Focus groups	The youth reported both personal and interpersonal processes of development.	Personal and interpersonal growth	Youth selected by their school counselors

		4% Asian, 18% biracial							
Hansen et al., 2003	Variety of school- and community-based extracurriculars	55% female; 60% white, 26% African American, 4% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% Native American, 6% other; largely working class/low SES	Majority low SES	9th, 11th, and 12th graders	Central Illinois	Correlational	Activities were associated with experiences related to a variety of PYD outcomes. The findings also suggest that different youth activities offer distinct patterns of learning experiences. Service, faith-based, community, and vocational activities were reported to be frequent contexts for experiences related to identity, prosocial norms, and links to adults. Sports were a frequent context for those related to identity work and emotional development.	Personal development, interpersonal development	Questionnaire
Larson & Brown, 2007	Afterschool theater program	5 girls, 5 boys; all non-Hispanic European-American	Not mentioned	Ages 14–17	Midwestern US	Correlational/case study	These accounts suggested that youth’s repeated “hot” experience of unfolding emotional episodes in the setting provided material for this active process of learning. Youth also learned by drawing on and internalizing the emotion culture of the setting, which provided concepts, strategies, and tools for managing emotional episodes	Emotional development and regulation	Students were already participating in the theater program
Ciocanel et al., 2017	Students already participated in programs	Varied	Varied	Ages 10–19	USA	Meta-analysis	PYD interventions had a small but significant effect on academic achievement and psychological adjustment. No significant effects were found for sexual risk behaviors, problem behavior or positive social behaviors	Variety of developmental outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
Fuller et al., 2013	Sports-based afterschool program	100% male; 59.4% Black, 38.7% Hispanic, 1.7% White, 0.2% Asian	Over 95% FRPL	Grades 6–8	Hartford, Connecticut	Correlational	Findings related to the youths’ continued involvement revealed their value for the SHB program as a safe place that kept them out of trouble and provided experiences that led to positive personal development. Furthermore, results indicated that participation in the program facilitated the development of each “C” of youth development.	Five and Sixth Cs of youth development	Students participated for 24 weeks
Gordon et al., 2016	Afterschool leadership program	61% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, 13% African American, 4% multiracial, 2% Asian; all students male	48%	Grades 6–8	Midwestern US	Correlational	School administrators and students responded positively to the program	Variety of outcomes related to positive youth development	Students participated biweekly for 2 years
Soto-Lara et al., 2022	Afterschool math program	90% of students were Latinx; 50% female	98% FRPL	Middle school students	Southern California	Correlational	Findings suggest that Latinx adolescents perceived changes in their math-specific outcomes, future STEM pathways, and social-emotional skills as a result of participating in the activity.	Variety of outcomes related to SEL, academic achievement, and math skill	Students participated for 1 school year
Yu et al., 2021	Afterschool math program	All students were Latinx; 50% male	100% FRPL	Middle school students	Southern California	Correlational	Culturally responsive practices helped youth feel more connected to the program, peers and staff; facilitated learning opportunities; and promoted math and SEL skills	Culturally responsive practices, math ability	Students had already been participating in the program for at least 2 quarters
Graham et al., 2015	Afterschool psychoeducational group intervention for students living without their fathers	African American boys, largely low SES	Majority low SES	Grades 3–5	Los Angeles	RCT	Boys in the intervention group showed an increase in social skills and academic motivation skills and were rated by their teachers as more cooperative and academically persistent.	Social skills	Full program participation based on teacher and peer reports
Vandell et al., 2022	Afterschool programs and other organized activities	77% Latino/a, 8% Black, 12% White, 3% Asian; largely low SES; 47% male, 53% female	Majority low SES	3rd and 4th graders	Multiple states across the US, largely CA and East Coast	Correlational	Children who regularly attended a high-quality afterschool program alone or combined with extracurricular activities were reported by teachers to have higher academic performance, work habits, and task persistence, and less aggression toward peers compared to children whose afterschool hours combined unsupervised time with extracurricular activities. Attending high-quality afterschool programs alone and in	Academic performance, behavior, approach to learning	Participation self-reports, teacher reports

							combination with extracurricular activities also were associated with child self-reports of less misconduct compared to unsupervised time combined with extracurricular activities.		
Fredericks & Eccles, 2008	Variety of activities: sports, clubs, prosocial activities, other out of school recreation	67% African American; 33% European American; 51% female; 49% male	Sample contains a range of SES backgrounds	Middle school & high school	Maryland	Correlational	Organized activity participation was associated with higher than expected grades, school value (i.e. perception of importance of school for the future), self-esteem, resiliency, and prosocial peers, and lower than expected risky behavior, though the pattern of findings differed by activity context, outcome, and time point. In a few of the models, the relation between activity participation and adjustment varied by gender, race, and socioeconomic status.	Psychological adjustment	Yes/no questions asked about club participation
Kataoka & Vandell, 2013	Afterschool programs and other organized activities	48% male, 74% non-White, 78% FRPL-qualifying	78% low SES	6th and 7th graders	California, Colorado, Michigan, Oregon	Correlational	Youth reports of more positive experiences were associated with relative gains in work habits, task persistence, and prosocial behavior with peers as reported by classroom teachers.	Prosocial behavior, positive habits, relationships	Youth were already participating in afterschool activities of some kind
Hemphill & Richards, 2016	Urban Squash: provides youth with 90 minutes of squash instruction and other physical activity followed by 90 minutes of academic enrichment in a classroom	98% African American & low SES	98% "are AfAm and qualify for FRPL"	6th–8th graders	Not mentioned	Mixed methods	Transfer from the program to the school was evident with academic enrichment and personal and social responsibility.	Personal and social responsibility	Most youth were already participating in the program
Whitson et al., 2020	Music Haven, an afterschool music program	2 Latino, 2 White, 4 multiracial	Unmentioned; program "primarily" serves low income students	Ages 13–16	New Haven, Connecticut	Mixed methods	Lower-income students were rated higher on responsibility/discipline than higher-income students and that those children who attended the program more than 3 times per week were rated higher on responsibility/discipline than those who attended less.	Variety of outcomes related to music skill and personal development	Youth participated for 2-9 years
Wood et al., 2009	Variety of afterschool programs	59 girls, 49 boys; roughly equal #s of white, African American, and Latino youth, 6 biracial youth, 2 Asian youth	Not mentioned	High schoolers	Urban and rural areas	Correlational	A total of 108 high-school-aged youth from 11 programs were interviewed about their experiences within the program, and 24 reported becoming more responsible through their participation. The youth's accounts suggested that this process was driven largely by successfully fulfilling program expectations. This process was driven by youth's adherence to their commitments and their consideration of the consequences of their actions on others.	Responsibility	Interviews every 2 weeks
Walsh et al, 2010	Coaching Club: program teaching leadership and self-sufficiency, teaches kids to coach both themselves and their peers through team sports	11 boys, 2 girls; 13 African American & Pacific Islander youth; underserved area	Not mentioned but school described as "underserved"	Ages 9–11	Urban area	Correlational/qualitative program evaluation	This study provided sufficient evidence from both youth participants and adult participants to support transference of the four primary TPSR goals to the school environment	Personal responsibility, social responsibility	Youth had already participated in program for at least 1 year
Salusky et al., 2014	Various afterschool programs	53% female; 68% Latino, 16% African American, 16% White	All programs described as serving low to middle income households	Ages 13–18	USA	Correlational	Youth described a 4-step process of learning and developing responsibility; they frequently discussed social roles and the importance of peers	Responsibility	Youth were already participating in the programs
Raffaelli et al., 2018	Various afterschool programs	55.9% female	Not mentioned	Ages 11–20	Not mentioned	Longitudinal	Taken as a whole, results indicate that experiences in the 2 contexts of home and program lead to interindividual differences in the development of	Responsibility	Youth were already participated in activities and responded to the survey

							youth self-reported responsibility, but that affordances for responsibility development across contexts change over time.		
Simpkins et al., 2020	Various afterschool programs	49% female; 77% White	28% average income no greater than 200% above poverty level	Grades 1–6	USA	Longitudinal	Models used to examine the developmental cascades of work habits suggest that children's work habits at first grade and the growth in children's work habits from first to sixth grade (a) directly predicted their academic outcomes at the beginning and the end of high school, and (b) indirectly predicted their educational attainment at age 26 through their academic outcomes during adolescence.	Variety of outcomes related to work habits and academic performance	Youth were already participating in the programs
Covay & Carbonaro, 2010	Various afterschool programs	49.6% female; 10.6% Black, 14.8% Hispanic, 5.2% Asian, 5.3% other	27.9% FRPL	Grade 3	USA	Longitudinal	Extracurricular participation explains a modest portion of the SES advantage in non-cognitive and cognitive skills. In addition, the influence of extracurricular participation on both noncognitive and cognitive skills varies by children's SES	Classroom behavior, academic achievement	Youth were already participating in the programs
Morris, 2016	Variety of extracurricular activities, specifics not mentioned	Not mentioned; variety of SES	Mixed SES backgrounds	10th and 12th grade	Across the US	Correlational	The current study makes an important addition to the body of literature on EAP by demonstrating why various forms of participation are positively related to two critical educational outcomes: high school math achievement gains and 4-year college attendance—a connection that is not necessarily intuitive.	Educational outlook, communication, school attachment, academic self-concept	Data taken from Education Longitudinal Study of 2002
Carolan, 2018	Various afterschool programs	52% White, 14% Black, 25% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 6% other	Varied	Grades K–1	USA	Longitudinal	Results indicated that increased EA participation was associated with gains in reading and math achievement; little support for the claim that these associations are mediated by non-cognitive skills	Reading and math achievement	Youth were already participating in the programs
Liu et al., 2021	Variety of organized afterschool activities	51% female	Not mentioned explicitly	6th and 9th graders	Across the US	Correlational	Findings suggest that organized afterschool activities in middle school may prepare adolescents for academic success in high school via their participation in activities in 9th grade as well as a stronger work orientation in 9th grade.	Work orientation, academic performance	Data taken from Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development
Feinberg et al., 2013	Siblings Are Special, an afterschool program for siblings	Participants were "mostly" White, 10% Black	Median income \$63,750	Elementary school students	Mixed rural and urban settings	RCT	The program enhanced positive sibling relationships, appropriate strategies for parenting siblings, and child self-control, social competence, and academic performance; program exposure was also associated with reduced maternal depression and child internalizing problems.	Variety of developmental, mental health, and behavioral outcomes	Students participated in 12 sessions and 3 Family Nights
Bohnert & Ward, 2013	Girls in the Game: teaches girls about sports/physical activity, health, and leadership	African Am=36%, Latina=60%, Caucasian=4%; school low-income status ranging from 72.3% to 98.1%	72.3-98.1% low SES	Elementary school	Chicago	Nonrandomized trial	Repeated-measures ANOVAs (analyses of variance) revealed small but significant improvements in body image, nutrition knowledge, and behavior for GIG participants. These findings were not moderated by initial levels of self-esteem or BMI. Analyses suggested that program effectiveness varied depending on process variables.	Self-esteem	Specific program evaluation, all participants enrolled
Riggs et al., 2010	Afterschool programs focusing on SEL and ethnic identity	All but one student were Latino	Students had to be low-income to participate	Ages 12–18	USA	Quasi-experimental	Higher ratings of the ASP's emphasis on ethnic socialization were associated with a more developed ethnic identity, while greater intensity of ASP participation and perceptions of ASP quality were associated with higher levels of self-worth; youth who regularly attended the ASP demonstrated significantly better concentration and regulation skills than those who did not regularly attend, if they exhibited preexisting concentration and regulation problems.	Ethnic identity development & SEL factors	Students participated in program throughout the school year
Morrison et al., 2000	Afterschool program for children at risk of substance abuse:	Participant group was 98.1% Latino; comparison group	87.30%	Grades 5–6	Central coast, California	Quasi-experimental	The afterschool program played a "protective function" for those students who participated; they showed a maintenance of key resilience variables	Individual resilience and self-control, academic	Students participated for 1 school year

	academic achievement and prosocial skill development	was 82.4% Latino, 9.2% White, 8.5% other					such as bonding to school, perception of parent supervision, and teacher-rated behavior. In addition, student and parent participation were positively related to changes in school bonding, perceived parental supervision, and teacher ratings of behavior.	self-concept, social problem-solving, school bonding, classroom participation, perceived parental supervision	
Liu et al., 2020	Variety of afterschool programs, specifics not mentioned	52% male	Not mentioned explicitly	Grades 1–2	Across USA	Correlational	More conflict with afterschool staff in 1st grade was associated with lower social self-control and more externalizing behaviors at school in 2nd grade.	Work habits, self-control, externalizing behaviors	Data taken from Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development
Wade, 2015	Variety of afterschool programs	53% female; 36.99% White, 29.68% Black, 24.8% Hispanic	Varied	Grades 1–5	Multiple cities, USA	Longitudinal	On average, ASP experiences negatively predicted externalizing problems and positively predicted social self-control and assertion. Positive ASP experiences did not predict decreased externalizing behaviors, but instead children with negative experiences had higher levels of externalizing behavior problems. Changes in ASP experiences positively predicted changes in self-control scores, but only for boys.	Social-emotional development	Youth were already participating in the programs
Hirsch et al., 2011	After School Matters (ASM), a program offering paid apprenticeships in a variety of areas	77% African American	92% FRPL	High school students	Chicago, IL	RCT	ASM was able to obtain significant positive results on important outcome variables despite several factors that worked against doing so. A skeptical view of the findings emphasizes that few significant effects were found, effect sizes were generally small, and that testing a more representative sample of ASM instructors may well eliminate the few positive impacts that were found.	Variety of outcomes related to PYD, job skills, academic performance, and problem behavior	Students participate for 180 hours in 1 year
Zebehazy & Smith, 2011	Variety of afterschool programs	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Ages 13–16	USA	Correlational	Participation in extracurricular activities and paid work experience, as well as age of visual impairment onset, were significantly related to scores of social skills.	Social skills	Youth were already participating in the programs
McMahon et al., 2021	Y.O.G.A for Youth (Y4Y): yoga for middle schoolers	46.6% male; 52.5% female; 42.5% African American; 24.2% Latino; 15% White; 10% Asian; 5.8% multiracial	Not mentioned	Middle school (Ages 11–14)	North Carolina	Nonrandomized trial	Results from this study suggest that the students who participated in the Y4Y program reported significant decreases in emotion dysregulation over the 6-week program. They also reported significant decreases in anger, depression and fatigue over 1 yoga session. Students in the comparison condition only reported significant decreases in fatigue over 1 session of the program but reported no significant changes in any of the other outcomes. Results also suggested that the Y4Y program's impact on depression, stress and anxiety depended on the school setting in which they were implemented.	Emotion regulation	Students were already enrolled in afterschool programs but had to be recommended to participate in this program during data collection
Monkman & Proweller, 2016	Civic Engagement Program (CEP), a civic leadership program	All students described as Black or Latino	All students described as low income	High school students	Midwestern USA	Correlational/case study	Across the interviews, the youth talk about their experience in Futures and CEP as life altering, in large part responsible for imparting a range of skills and attitudes conducive to redefining their sense of purpose and promise now and into the future.	Variety of outcomes related to civic development, PYD, and SEL	Students were already participating in the program
Zarrett et al., 2021	Connect through PLAY, an afterschool physical activity program	Participating students were "underserved," at least 50% were low income (FRPL) and "minority status"	At least 50% of students qualified for FRPL	Middle school students	Southeastern USA	RCT	Regression analysis demonstrated that participation in the intervention (vs. control) was associated with an increase of 8.17 min of daily accelerometry-measured MVPA (56 min of additional weekly MVPA) at post-intervention controlling for baseline MVPA, school, gender, and weight status.	MVPA	Participation in program or control for 10 weeks
Smith et al., 2017	Variety of afterschool programs	49% White, 27% African American, 7% Latino, 17% mixed race/other	45% FRPL	Grades 2–5	USA	Mixed methods	Quality across time positively impacted a number of PYD-related outcomes for racial-ethnic minority youth.	Variety of PYD outcomes	Students were already participating in programs

Champine et al., 2016	Boy Scouts of America and other afterschool programs	All students were male; 73.6% White	63.7% of mothers had at least a college degree	Elementary school students	Philadelphia, PA	Mixed methods	In general, character virtues did not vary in relation to breadth or intensity of participation in various afterschool activities.	Variety of PYD outcomes	Students were already participating in programs
Lynch et al., 2016	Boy Scouts of America	All students were male; 85.94% White	87% of mothers had at least a college degree	Elementary school students	Philadelphia, PA	Correlational	Results indicated engagement was the strongest, most frequent predictor of increases in both moral and performance character.	"Character" development	Students were already participating in Scouts
Muscott & O'Brien, 1999	Inclusive afterschool program focused on "character" development	12 male, 7 female; 18 Caucasian, 1 African American; all students reported some disability status	Majority of students at school described as low to middle SES	Elementary school students	New England	Correlational	Students with disabilities expressed responsibility for their actions; responded to ideas taught regarding diversity, cooperation, teamwork, and respect; learned to make new friends; found learning about character to be fun and rewarding.	"Character" development	Students participated in 9 sessions
Kauh, 2011	AfterZone, a city-wide program with a variety of activity offerings	52% male; 4% White, 56% Hispanic/Latino, 13% Black/African American, 2% Native American, 5% AAPI, 18% multiracial, 3% other	Over 90% FRPL	Grades 6–8	Providence, RI	Case study	Many of the benefits youth experience are not long-lasting which may be due in part to the short periods of time youth typically participate and to their limited overall exposure to programming. The AfterZone seems most effective at yielding benefits that are related to school.	Variety of school and health-related outcomes, community engagement, SEL development	Students participate in at least 1 session during the school year
Helseth & Frazier, 2018	Peer-assisted social learning program	63% male; 63% African American, 16% multiracial, 10% Haitian, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 3% White	67% reported annual income less than \$25,000	Elementary school students	Southeastern USA	Quasi-experimental	Findings were mixed, including strong evidence for fidelity (adherence) and feasibility (attendance, participation, enthusiasm) of implementation.	Variety of SEL outcomes	Students participated in 21 sessions
Vandell et al., 2020	Variety of afterschool programs	22% of mothers recruited were of minority race or ethnicity	21% reported incomes no greater than 200% of poverty level	Middle childhood	USA	Longitudinal	Both higher quality early childcare and more epochs of organized activities (afterschool programs and extracurricular activities) during middle childhood were linked to higher academic achievement at age 15. More epochs of organized activities were associated with greater social confidence.	Variety of outcomes related to adolescent functioning	Students were already participating in programs
Villareal & Gonzalez, 2016	Variety of afterschool programs	All students Hispanic, 52.7% male	79.6% FRPL	Middle school students	Texas	Longitudinal	Results of hierarchical linear regressions based on longitudinal data indicated that participation in sports-related activities was associated with increased feelings of school membership and peer prosocial orientation.	Variety of social and behavioral outcomes	Students were already participating in programs

Studies Discussed Under Domain of Violence Prevention, Substance Use Prevention, and Other Risk Behaviors									
Author(s) /year	Program name/type	Participant demographics (race, ethnicity, SES, gender)	% of low SES participants	Participant age/grade separately	Location e.g. city, state, region	Design	Findings	Variables studied	Indicator of participation/program—such as yes/no, time in the program, the indicators of quality that they measured as predictors of the outcomes, etc.
Staecker et al., 2015	Afterschool program focusing on aggression management	All students were White	Over 55% FRPL	Grades 3–5	Rural Missouri	Quasi-experimental	In this study, self-reported physical and psychological aggression scores became more prosocial. Although the pre/post differences were not statistically significant, several conditions may help to explain the results and lead to future program improvements.	Physical and psychological aggression	Students participated in the program for 9 weeks

APPENDIX A

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James-Burdumy et al., 2008	All students participated in various 21st CCLC afterschool programs	61% African American, 21% White, 16% Hispanic	71% of centers studied had at least 75% FRPL	Grades K–6	Southern, Midwest, Western, and Northeastern USA	RCT	The findings indicate that the programs affected the type of care and supervision students received after school, with parents less likely to be caring for their child and other adults more likely, but there was no statistically significant effect on the incidence of self-care. Students in the program reported feeling safer after school, but their academic outcomes were not affected, and they had more incidents of negative behavior.	Various: homework completion, academic outcomes, behavioral problems, etc.	Students attended centers or remained in the control group for up to 2 years
Morrison et al., 2000	Afterschool program for children at risk of substance abuse: academic achievement and prosocial skill development	Participant group was 98.1% Latino; comparison group was 82.4% Latino, 9.2% White, 8.5% other	87.30%	Grades 5–6	Central coast, California	Quasi-experimental	The after-school program played a "protective function" for those students who participated; they showed a maintenance of key resilience variables such as bonding to school, perception of parent supervision, and teacher-rated behavior. In addition, student and parent participation was positively related to changes in school bonding, perceived parental supervision, and teacher ratings of behavior.	Individual resilience and self-control, academic self-concept, social problem-solving, school bonding, classroom participation, perceived parental supervision	Students participated for 1 school year
Ross et al., 1992	Afterschool program for children at risk of substance abuse: variety of activities including homework help, free play, drama, and more	Group was "primarily" African American	Students described as "at-risk" and attending low-income public schools	Grades K–6	New Orleans, LA	Quasi-experimental	As a whole, the program was effective in improving academic performance, although there were no positive measurable effects on other variables such as self-esteem or depression.	Academic performance, in-school behavior, self-esteem, risk-taking behavior, depression prevalence	Students participated for 7 weeks
St. Pierre et al., 2001	Students participated in a substance abuse prevention program through Boys and Girls Clubs	63% Black, 35% Hispanic, 2% White; 47% female	All clubs and schools located in "economically distressed" neighborhoods	Elementary school students	Eastern and Southern USA	RCT, longitudinal	Results showed positive effects on children's personal competency skills, both internally and at school.	Various risk and protective factors related to future substance abuse	Students participated for 2 years
Gottfredson et al., 2010	All Stars curriculum, an enhancement to afterschool programs that focuses on building protective attitudes and beliefs for future risky behaviors, teaching skills for healthy decision making, and more	54% male; 70% African American	59% FRPL	Grades 6–8	Baltimore, MD	RCT	The findings suggest that it is difficult to achieve high fidelity in the implementation of research-based practices in the typical ASP setting. Results showed no differences between the treatment and control students at post-test on any of the outcomes or mediators. Furthermore, no positive effects were found for youths receiving higher dosage, higher quality program delivery, or both.	Various outcomes, including academic performance, school attendance, conduct problems, and related beliefs	Students participated in program or control group for 96 days
Rorie et al., 2011	All Stars curriculum, an enhancement to afterschool programs that focuses on building protective attitudes and beliefs for future risky behaviors, teaching skills for healthy decision making, and more	54% male; 69% African American	59% FRPL	Middle school students	USA	Quasi-experimental	Multi-level analyses of the association between activity structure and deviant behavior indicate that higher levels of structure in the activity as a whole decrease levels of violence and counter-normative behavior. As the level of structure in 5-minute intervals within the activity increases, the level of violent behavior declines, but violent talk (e.g., threats to commit violence) increases.	"Deviant" behaviors and attitudes	Students participated for 96 days
Hirsch et al., 2011	After School Matters, a program offering paid apprenticeships in a variety of areas	77% African American	92% FRPL	High school students	Chicago, IL	RCT	Significant positive results were obtained on important outcome variables despite several factors that worked against doing so. A skeptical view of the findings emphasizes that few significant effects were found, effect sizes were generally small, and that testing a more representative sample of ASM instructors may	Variety of outcomes related to PYD, job skills, academic performance, and problem behavior	Students participate for 180 hours in 1 year

							well eliminate the few positive impacts that were found.		
D'Agostino et al., 2019	Fit2Lead, a park-based violence prevention and mental health promotion afterschool program	48% male, 60% Hispanic, 29% non-Hispanic Black	33% low-income	Ages 12–17	Miami-Dade County, FL	Longitudinal; difference s-in-differences	Key findings showed that after 2 years of program implementation, juvenile arrest rates declined by 166 arrests per 10,000 population over the 2-year study period in zip codes where Fit2Lead was offered compared with zip codes where it was not offered, matched by baseline sociodemographic and youth arrest rates.	Youth arrest rates and mental health	Students enroll within the first month of the school year, attendance recorded by program
D'Agostino et al., 2020	Fit2Lead, a park-based violence prevention and mental health promotion afterschool program	48% male, 60% Hispanic, 29% non-Hispanic Black	33% low-income	Ages 12–17	Miami-Dade County, FL	Differences-in-differences	This prospective cohort study found that adjusted youth arrest rate estimates were lower in areas where a park-based violence prevention and mental health promotion after-school program was offered compared with areas hosting other afterschool programs.	Youth arrest rates	Students enroll within the first month of the school year, attendance recorded by program
Crean, 2012	Variety of afterschool activities	51% female; 70% African American, 15% Hispanic, 12% Caucasian, 3% Asian	"Substantial" FRPL percentage	Middle school students	Upstate New York	Correlational	Results indicate extracurricular activity participation had both direct and indirect associations with delinquent behavior. Breadth, but not intensity, of activity participation had a positive association with neighborhood adult support and higher levels of adult support were associated with higher levels of youth decision-making skills. Higher levels of decision-making skills were, in turn, associated with lower levels of delinquent behavior. A direct positive association between intensity of activity participation and delinquent behavior was noted, after accounting for other effects in the model.	Decision-making skills and "delinquent" behavior	Youth were already participating in activities
Jiang & Peterson, 2012	Variety of afterschool activities	51.8% female; 9.3% first generation immigrants, 15.7% second generation immigrants	Not mentioned	High school students	USA	Correlational	The results reveal that adolescents from the third-plus generation who participate in non-sports alone or sports plus non-sports have lower odds of involvement in violence than adolescents from the same generation who do not participate in extracurricular activities. However, for first- and second-generation adolescents, participation in extracurricular activities is associated with higher rather than lower odds of violence compared to their non-participating counterparts.	Involvement in violence	Youth were already participating in activities
Agans et al., 2014	Variety of afterschool activities	65.4% female; 74% White	Study used maternal education as proxy for SES; mothers had an average of 14.36 years of education	Grades 7–12	USA	Correlational	The results indicated that high likelihood of participation in activities was consistently associated with fewer negative outcomes and higher scores on PYD and Contribution (to self and community from the Five Cs model of PYD), as compared to low likelihood of participation in activities. Changes in the breadth of participation (in particular, moving from a high to a low likelihood of participation) were associated with increased substance use, depressive symptoms, and risk behaviors.	PYD, risk behaviors, depressive symptoms, involvement in community	Youth were already participating in activities
D'Amico et al., 2012	CHOICE, an alcohol abuse prevention program	51% female; 54% Hispanic, 17% Asian, 15% white, 9% multiethnic, 3% African American	Varied	Middle school students	Southern California	Cluster RCT	Lifetime alcohol use in the ITT analysis (i.e., school level) achieved statistical significance. The NNT suggests that in a school where CHOICE was offered, 1 adolescent out of 15 was prevented from initiating alcohol use during this time period. Although not statistically significant, results indicate that past month alcohol use was also lower in CHOICE schools	Alcohol beliefs and use	Youth participated for 5 sessions
Tebes et al., 2007	Positive Youth Development Collaborative, a program targeting substance use attitudes and behaviors	53% male; 75.7% African American, 19.7% Hispanic, 3.9% White, <1%	Varied	Middle and high school students	Northeastern USA	Quasi-experimental	The results demonstrate that adolescents receiving the intervention were significantly more likely to view drugs as harmful at program exit and exhibited significantly lower increases in alcohol, marijuana,	Substance use attitudes and behaviors	Youth participated for 18 sessions

		Asian and American Indian					other drug use, and any drug use 1 year after beginning the program.		
Hsieh et al., 2023	Variety of afterschool activities	50% female; 77% White, 12% Black, 6% Latino	21% low-income	High school students	USA	Longitudinal	Adolescents' time in OST settings during high school predicted age 26 substance use over and above family and adolescent factors. Adolescents' unsupervised time with peers increased the odds and frequency of binge drinking and regular marijuana use at age 26. Time in high school organized sports increased the odds of binge drinking at age 26, but not marijuana or illicit drug use. Time spent in other organized activities lowered the odds of illicit drug use whereas paid employment in high school was not related to age 26 substance use.	Binge drinking, marijuana use, illicit drug use	Youth were already participating in activities
Lee & Vandell, 2015	Variety of afterschool activities	22% people of color	20% incomes no greater than 200% of poverty line	High school students	Pittsburgh, PA; Seattle, WA; Philadelphia, PA; Little Rock, AR; Boston, MA; Lawrence, KS; Chapel Hill, NC; Charlottesville, VA; Madison, WI; and Irvine, CA	Longitudinal	Unsupervised time with peers increased the odds of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use, whereas sports increased the odds of alcohol use and decreased the odds of marijuana use. Paid employment increased the odds of tobacco and alcohol use. Unsupervised time with peers predicted increased amounts of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use, whereas sports predicted decreased amounts of tobacco and marijuana use and increased amounts of alcohol use at the end of high school.	Tobacco use, alcohol use, marijuana use	Youth were already participating in activities
Metzger et al., 2011	Variety of afterschool activities	"Roughly equal" percentage male and female; "just over" 50% White	Varied	High school students	Chicago, IL	Longitudinal	Boys' baseline team sports and religious involvement predicted lower levels of smoking at 24 months via continued activity involvement at 15 months. Girls' involvement in school clubs and activities and religious activities indirectly predicted lower levels of smoking at 24 months via reduced exposure to problem peers at 15 months.	"Problem" peer association, cigarette smoking behavior	Youth were already participating in activities
Kaufman et al., 2018	Circle of Life, a sexual risk reduction intervention	Majority of youth were American Indian and Alaskan Native	Majority of students came from reservations that contain some of the nation's poorest areas	Ages 10–12	Rural North and South Dakota	RCT	Youth scored significantly higher on HIV/sexually transmitted infection (STI) knowledge questions at both follow-ups; self-efficacy to avoid peer pressure and self-efficacy to avoid sex were significantly higher at posttest; self-perceived volition was significantly higher at 9-month follow-up; no differences were found for behavioral precursors to sex. Program had modest effects on precursors to sexual behavior, which may lead to less risky sexual behavior in later years.	Various precursors to sexual activity in preteens	Youth participated in 7 "chapters"

Appendix B

American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds

Enacted in March 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) provided a total of nearly \$122 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds to states and school districts to address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on schools and students, especially those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).¹

ARP ESSER includes language directing both state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to prioritize “underrepresented student subgroups, including each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

In terms of support for afterschool and summer, ARP outlined specific ways in which both SEAs and LEAs should use their ARP ESSER funds to provide those opportunities for young people. Of the roughly \$12.2 billion in ARP ESSER funds available at the state education agency level, states were directed to reserve the following to support afterschool and summer:

- \$1.22 billion for summer enrichment (1% of ARP ESSER)
- \$1.22 billion for evidence-based comprehensive afterschool programs (1% of ARP ESSER)
- \$6.1 billion, for learning recovery, such as summer learning or summer enrichment, extended day, comprehensive afterschool programs, or extended school year programs (5% of ARP ESSER)

Of the \$109 billion in ARP ESSER available at the LEA level, districts were required to reserve twenty percent (\$22 billion) for learning recovery strategies, including afterschool and summer enrichment. If a district decided their afterschool and summer funding needs were greater than their learning recovery set-aside, there was nothing in the legislation that prohibited a district from spending more than twenty percent, however given the wide range of needs at the district level, that is widely seen as an unlikely scenario.

In addition to the ARP ESSER funds, ARP included other funding streams that could be used to support afterschool and summer opportunities, with the largest of those being the \$39 billion in Child Care Development Funds, which could be used for afterschool and summer programs for school-age children and \$350 billion in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds for state and local governments, which could be used in part for child care and other purposes.

¹ ARP ESSER is also sometimes referred to as ESSER III, since the CARES Act and the CRRSA also included ESSER funding, making ARP ESSER the third round of ESSER. However, ARP ESSER is the only one of the three rounds that mandates funding for afterschool and summer programs.

ARP ESSER funds were required to be obligated by September 30, 2024. States and districts could request a 14-month extension for liquidation of those funds, shifting the liquidation deadline to late March 2026, if approved.² For afterschool and summer programs operated by community partners, an approved extension means that a district could enter into a contract with a partner by September 30, 2024, and could pay that partner through March 2026 or until all funds are expended. Similarly, states and cities were required to obligate their state and local fiscal recovery funds by December 31, 2024, and they had until September 30, 2026, for liquidation of those funds (Gleeson, 2023).

Education finance experts did not anticipate that the extensions would play much of a role in extending afterschool programs funded by ARP ESSER. For example, the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University anticipated that very little in ESSER III funding, likely less than 5%, would be left to expend beyond September 2024 (Edunomics Lab, n.d.) Similarly, AASA anticipated that districts would obligate the bulk of their funding by the deadline and CCSSO estimated that 98% of ARP ESSER state set-aside funds were planned, budgeted, or committed as of November 2023 (Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d.; AASA The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

ARP ESSER SPENDING AT THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY LEVEL FOR AFTERSCHOOL

Limited information is available as to how states spent their ARP ESSER funds. In fact, twenty states report no details on how their ARP ESSER funds were spent (Silberstein & Roza, 2023). The Council of Chief State School Officers maintains a dashboard of state ESSER set-aside spending, based on their own analysis. As of March 2024, the dashboard indicated \$3 billion in ESSER funding has been spent on afterschool, summer, and extended day or year initiatives. Of that nearly \$2.5 billion came from ARP ESSER. Similarly, the Afterschool Alliance estimates \$2.7 billion in ARP ESSER state set-asides has been directed to afterschool and summer based on their work with statewide afterschool networks (Afterschool Alliance, 2024).

While the top-level spending numbers are insightful, they don't offer much detail on the type of OST activities supported. For that, reviews of individual SEA's ESSER plans, and their afterschool and summer requests for proposals (RFPs) and/or grant award announcements are necessary. A national study conducted by Westat offers a picture of how states invested their one-percent set-asides for summer. Researchers conducted interviews with individuals at 37 different SEAs and reviewed all 51 SEA ARP spending plans, finding that a majority of SEAs (71%) used grant programs to disburse their summer learning set-asides. Of the states with grant programs, the grant programs were mostly a mix of competitive awards (44%) and formula based awards (22%). Nearly half (46%) of states gave funding to districts, almost one-third (32%) awarded funds to both districts and community-based organizations (CBOs), and 22% distributed funds to CBOs only (Westat, 2023).

Unfortunately, a similar study does not exist to offer a national picture of how states invested their one-percent set-asides for afterschool, but an analysis of 39 SEA ESSER III plans found that:

² The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's September 18, 2023, letter can be found here: [https://www.aasa.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/arp-liquidation-extension-request-letter-\(9.18.23\).pdf?sfvrsn=c15fbb0b_3](https://www.aasa.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/arp-liquidation-extension-request-letter-(9.18.23).pdf?sfvrsn=c15fbb0b_3)

- Nine states planned to combine the comprehensive afterschool and summer enrichment set asides into one combined funding stream. Those included Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New York, Utah, and Wyoming
- 19 states planned a grant competition for comprehensive afterschool programs which include partnerships between community-based organizations and nonprofits. Those include Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming
- Eight states planned to provide the afterschool set aside funding directly by formula to school districts. Those include Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, and West Virginia.
- 13 states planned a grant competition for summer enrichment programs, which include partnerships between community-based organizations and nonprofits. Those include Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Georgia, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.
- 12 states planned to disburse the summer enrichment set aside funding directly by formula to school districts. Those include Alabama, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, and West Virginia (Peterson, 2021)

The real richness of how SEA afterschool and summer set-asides were used to support opportunities for young people during the out of school time hours comes from reviewing individual state RFPs for funding. While the approaches to distributing the state set-asides varied, it is clear that those states that ran competitions for funds, especially when the SEA partnered with the state afterschool network, focused on closing opportunity gaps in their grant making. Box B-1 describes examples from a number of states.

BOX B-1

SEA AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER SET-ASIDE SPENDING

The Georgia Department of Education Partnered with the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network to offer the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grants program using the state's one percent set aside for summer and one percent set aside for afterschool, a total of \$85 million in APR ESSER funds. The grant program provided funds to Georgia communities for three years, beginning in 2021, to expand access to, reduce barriers, and strengthen summer enrichment and comprehensive afterschool programs for K–12 youth statewide. The most recent data from year 2 of implementation show that 97 grants were awarded to support programs serving students most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including “priority youth populations” as defined by ARP ESSER (Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network, 2024, p. 15). The grants supported 1,416 afterschool sites serving 79,911 youth during the ‘22–‘23 school year and 639 summer program sites serving 86,924 youth during the 2023 summer (Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network, 2024).

The Minnesota Department of Education partnered with Ignite Afterschool and Youthprise to offer \$12.5 million in funding through Believe & Build Afterschool grants to

community-based organizations. The grants were centered around Believe It. Build It., a hands-on guidebook to help programs implement evidence-based practices to increase positive outcomes for young people. Twenty-one organizations received funding, with grants ranging from \$125,000 to 1,250,00 over 30 months. Nearly 60% of funds supported culturally specific, community-based organizations. Consistent with other funding opportunities for afterschool and summer, Minnesota experienced high levels of demand for the Believe & Build grants with 75 organizations requesting \$46 million in funding (Ignite Afterschool, n.d.).

The Arkansas Department of Education and the Arkansas Out of School Network (a sponsored initiative of Arkansas State University's Childhood Services) awarded \$5.2 million in ARP ESSER III grant funding to 44 afterschool, summer, and extended-year learning programs across the state. The grant funding covered July 2021 through December 2024 and could be used to support afterschool and summer activities, including academic support, skill building, social emotional learning, health and wellness, enrichment, and workforce development services for students in grades K–12 (Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

The Connecticut State Department of Education moved quickly to get \$8.6 million in ARP ESSER funds into communities with its Summer Enrichment Initiative, launched in Spring 2021 to help students re-engage with peers, accelerate learning, and prepare for returning to school. (Cobb et al., 2022). The Connecticut State Department of Education followed up with two additional rounds of ARP ESSER funding in spring of 2022 and spring of 2023, with both modeled after the initial round of funding. The 2022 round awarded more than \$12 million to 200 summer programs. All rounds of funding focused on partnerships, helping to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of youth, and reaching marginalized student populations (Connecticut State Department of Education, n.d.).

In the spring of 2021, the state launched its inaugural Summer Enrichment Grant Program. Using funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, Connecticut granted over \$8 million to 235 summer camps, child care centers, and other innovative programs that offered impactful out-of-school learning and enrichment opportunities for students. The CSDE continued the program in 2022, awarding over \$12 million in ARPA funding to 200 high-quality programs.

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare worked in partnership with the Idaho Out of School Network on two complementary grant programs supporting afterschool and summer providers funded by ARP. A total of 50 afterschool and summer programs were provided funds through the combination of the Out-of-School Time Enrichment and Idaho Community Program grants for the 2022–2023 school year. The OST Enrichment Grant funded 21 OST programs, totaling \$1,529,000 and the Idaho Community Program grants supported 29 OST programs with a total of \$12,780,000. An evaluation of the out of school time programming made possible by the grants found that gaps in access to programs were addressed, with several grantees intentionally increasing access for students and families in rural areas and others targeting services to students with specific needs, including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students with mental health needs (Utah Education Policy Center, n.d.).

ARP ESSER SPENDING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL TO SUPPORT AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER

Local ARP ESSER, which flowed to school districts via formula funding, represented the largest portion of ARP ESSER funds available for afterschool at summer, with the twenty percent learning recovery set-aside totaling \$22 billion.

However, getting a national picture of how the local ARP ESSER funds have been spent is challenging. In the school district portion of the *National Call for Summer Learning Report Series*, researchers at Westat used data collected via surveys and web scraping to learn about summer learning programs offered by districts in 2021. They found that 76% of districts used one of the three COVID-19 relief funding packages to support their summer programs. Given the summer 2021 focus, CARES funding was the most common, which is unsurprising given that much of the ARP funding was not available during the planning and implementation of summer 2021 programs. In terms of types of programs, they found that academic programming was nearly universal among districts (94%) and social and emotional learning was a big focus (57%). They also found relatively few districts (41%) worked with partners to plan or offer summer programming (Westat, 2023).

The Westat findings on use of ARP ESSER funds for academics and social-emotional learning align with a survey of 650 superintendents with ARP ESSER oversight, conducted by AASA, the School Superintendent's Association. AASA found the top short-term priority for superintendents was increasing instructional time and opportunities (tied with investing in high-quality curriculum) and the number one long-term priority for superintendents was expanding whole child supports, services and programs (AASA The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

Given limited reporting requirements, it is not possible to determine the total spending on ARP ESSER on afterschool and summer at the local level, but a Fall 2023 Afterschool Alliance report estimates at total of \$5.4 billion in local level ARP ESSER funds has been used to support afterschool and summer. "Investments in Student Recovery: A Review of School Districts' Use of American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Afterschool and Summer Opportunities" is based on a review of 6,315 school districts' ARP ESSER spending plans across all 50 states, finding that 8 in 10 districts reported investments in afterschool and summer programs, totaling more than \$5.4 billion. While that top-level figure is encouraging, the more detailed review of district plans found that the funds were primarily invested in academic-only programming, and summer programming, with a focus on academic remediation or recovery was the most popular strategy. Despite the ARP legislation's call to use the funds to address educational inequities and support students' social, emotional, mental health and academic needs, only 1 in 5 school districts invested in afterschool programming with academic and enrichment components, totaling roughly \$544 million (Afterschool Alliance, 2023a).

The data suggest that the opportunity to invest \$22 billion of ARP funding into comprehensive afterschool and summer programs that offer an array of enrichment activities and academic supports was largely missed, but there many examples of communities across the nation that prioritized afterschool and summer opportunities and directed their ARP funds to these critical supports.³ Among the numerous local examples of ARP ESSER investments are:

³ A map detailing state and local investments is available at <https://engageeverystudent.org/interactive-map/>

- Utah’s Carbon School District directed roughly 20% of the district ESSER III funds to restart a successful afterschool program, serving a community that ranks among the highest in intergenerational poverty in the state, that had been forced to close due to lack of funding. With ARP funds, the program is once again able to offer academic support, transportation, meals, and additional wraparound supports (Afterschool Alliance, 2023b).
- In Alaska, the Kuspuk School District, which spans 12,000 square miles, nine schools and seven villages, dedicated more than \$1.2 million toward summer opportunities for K–12 youth. Activities ranged from wilderness exploration to engaging in STEM learning opportunities to collaboration and teamwork skill building. Members of the local communities led culturally relevant activities, including drumming, beading, fishing, fish printing, fish preservation, berry picking and preservation, and skin sewing.
- Through ESSER III funds, Tuba City Unified School District, located on the Navajo Reservation, was able to dedicate more than \$900,000 toward its summer school programming, doubling the number of K–12 students served during the 2022 and 2023 summers, as well as expanding and enhancing summer offerings. In addition to increasing the number of students served during the summer from approximately 245 to 500, Tuba City Unified School District was able to provide students with both academics and enrichment (Afterschool Alliance, 2024). The district is pursuing alternative funding sources to maintain its robust summer programming, however when its ESSER III funds expire, the district will most likely have to return to a scaled back version of its summer programming, serving a smaller number of students.
- The Belcourt School District 7, located on the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indian Reservation, dedicated a portion of its ESSER III funds toward comprehensive afterschool programs. In addition to reinforcing learning in core subjects such as reading and math, the afterschool program provided STEM learning, sports and other physical activities, leadership opportunities, and career readiness programming that is culturally relevant to their Native students (Engage Every Student, n.d.).

Of course, sustaining the education funding beyond ARP investments will be challenging in many communities. When asked to look ahead to the fiscal cliff, AASA found that “summer learning and enrichment” were a very close second in terms of areas that superintendents anticipate needing to cut. Fifty-three percent of AASA survey respondents said they would decrease “staffing for specialist staff such as behavioral health personnel, tutors, reading specialists and other key personnel hired to address the social and emotional and academic needs of students resulting from the pandemic” followed by 51% who said they would cut resources, “on their summer learning and enrichment opportunities.” Alongside those cuts, respondents indicated they would be forced to reduce spending on staff compensation for additional learning time (42%). Compared to a previous survey in 2022, AASA finds that, “the only major shift is that staffing has shifted to the top cut while summer learning is now the second largest funding cut.”

Furthermore, some district leaders responding to the survey reported: “A third of superintendents responding believe that all students will be impacted equally in their communities by the discontinuation of ARP funded instructional programs and supports while a little more than a quarter said that students who are struggling academically will be impacted the most. A fifth of respondents highlighted how economically disadvantaged students will be most impacted by the cuts in programming and staffing while 14% said students with mental health

needs will experience these funding cuts most acutely” (AASA The School Superintendents Association, 2023).

ARP STATE AND LOCAL FISCAL RECOVERY FUNDS

The State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, part of the American Rescue Plan, provided \$350 billion to state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments to help them respond to the COVID-19 emergency and its economic impacts. The funding came with tremendous flexibility, enabling recipients to use the funds to meet local needs, including providing supports for households, small businesses, impacted industries, essential workers, and the communities hardest-hit by the crisis. Among the categories of allowable uses of funding were “efforts to address educational disparities” and “promoting healthy childhood environments.” Afterschool programs were specifically cited under efforts to address educational disparities and new or expanded high quality childcare was included under promoting healthy childhood environments (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021). These specific mentions gave cities and other local leaders the flexibility they needed to invest these funds in afterschool and summer opportunities, which mayors and local leaders are increasingly linking to a wide range of priorities, including public safety, workforce development, and child care access (Stockman, 2024).

In the Fall of 2021, National League of Cities (NLC) surveyed 115 cities in 33 states to explore how they were using funds to support afterschool and summer programs during the pandemic. They found that more cities invested in afterschool and summer learning during the pandemic and that they planned to continue those investments post-pandemic. While the amount of funding invested initially decreased at the height of the pandemic, as the country moved into pandemic recovery the funding increased above pre-pandemic levels and city leaders expected funding levels to continue to increase post-pandemic (Spooner et al., 2022).

A subsequent 2022 report from National League of Cities reviewed ARP investments across 80 cities and documented city level investments in strategies to support youth into eight categories: afterschool and summer programs, parks and recreation infrastructure, workforce training opportunities and support services for postsecondary students, youth employment programs, youth support services such as mental health counselors, library programs and infrastructure, city partnerships with K–12 schools or districts, and youth reengagement programs. They found that on average, cities invested 12% of their total ARP funds—an average of \$12.8 million—in strategies to support young people. Among the categories of supports for youth, the most popular among cities was investments in afterschool and summer programming, with 72.5% of cities saying ARP funds went to that category. Across the sampled cities, \$1 billion dollars in ARP funds was invested in afterschool and summer learning programs and opportunities (Young & Spooner, 2022).

Beyond these NLC survey findings, there is no source that tracks how local leaders invested their State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds from ARP in afterschool and summer programs. However, there are a number of promising local examples that illustrate how these funds are helping expand afterschool and summer opportunities for children and youth.

- The Hillsboro city government and the Hillsboro School District in Oregon directed a combination of ARP Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and ARP ESSER funds, alongside the state’s Student Investment Account, to expand access to afterschool programs at 10 schools, eight of which were Title I schools. This expanded participation from 320

K–6 students to more than 1,000 students over the course of three school years (Afterschool Alliance, 2023b).

- In Memphis, Tennessee \$604,980 is supporting the I Am Included program. The program serves youth ages 14–18 with disabilities and provides them with bi-weekly programming during the school year and a three-week Summer Leadership Academy. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or have specific learning disabilities or intellectual disorders participate in the program and work with employers in every Memphis council district. Participants receive a stipend and, upon graduation, often receive internships with city agencies (Engage Every Student, n.d.).

The total amount of State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds invested in afterschool and summer is unknown, but it's clear that some local communities prioritized out of school time opportunities for youth, especially youth historically marginalized and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. With the requirement to obligate all the State and Local Fiscal Recovery funds in 2024 and liquidate the funds by 2026, local leaders will face tough choices about how to sustain these opportunities going forward.

ARP CHILD CARE FUNDS

The American Rescue Plan provided a total of \$39 billion for child care providers, including those offering afterschool and summer programs for school-age children, through the Child Care Development Fund. \$24 billion came in the form of Child Care Stabilization funds, which were intended to help stabilize the child care community during the pandemic and to address ongoing challenges faced by child care providers. These funds, which had to be liquidated by September 2023, were largely used by child care providers for personnel and facilities costs. The Office of Child Care at the US Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the Stabilization funds reached more than 220,000 providers and as many as 9.6 million children (Office of Child Care, 2023).

In addition to the Stabilization funds, ARP offered \$15 billion in Child Care Supplemental Funds, which are more flexible in terms of allowable uses and have a longer timeframe for spending, with a liquidation deadline of September 2024. These funds, which can help programs serve more children and families and offer services at a lower cost to families, can also be used to waive licensing and background check fees for providers, help new programs meet the eligibility criteria for CCDF funds, provide staff with enhanced benefits, and more (The White House, 2021).

Given that there were no reporting requirements to indicate how much of the ARP child care funds were used to support programs serving school age youth or to help school age families with the cost of care, there are no national estimates of how much this historic investment helped more young people access quality afterschool and summer programs. However, there are a few states that have highlighted how the ARP child care funds helped school age youth and school age providers:

- In Utah, the CCDF ARP funds were used to offer a non-competitive School-Age Summer Quality Expansion Grant. The grant funds were available to licensed or license-exempt summer programs designed specifically for school age youth to help enhance the quality of their summer programs.

- The Vermont Department for Children and Families’ partnered with Vermont Afterschool to offer Room For Me grants to afterschool and summer programs serving school-age youth and meeting the Vermont Child Care Licensing regulations. Since school year ’22/’23, Room For Me funding has supported more than 400 slots for school-age children (5–12) in afterschool and summer learning programs across Vermont. The funding is intended to help programs maintain or reach more children and make quality improvements (Vermont Afterschool, n.d.).
- In Michigan, Child Care Stabilization Funds were used to support local programs, like GOAL in Detroit, which provides afterschool opportunities for 350 youth and has a waiting list of 400 youth (Huffman, 2022).
- In Illinois, the Child Care Restoration Grants helped license exempt afterschool and summer programs pay for staff salaries, facilities costs, and other supplies and services needed by programs that were operating full-time during the pandemic (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2021).

In addition to the examples above, numerous states used their ARP CCDF funds to help support the overall quality of afterschool and summer opportunities in their state by offering new opportunities to programs and staff at low to no cost. For example, Missouri offered free access to their school-age credential, New Jersey offered free special education trainings for school-age providers to help them better serve special needs students, Missouri provided free access to their school-age credential so that staff could more easily demonstrate their qualifications, and Georgia piloted a new technical assistance and professional development system that offered micro-credentialing and bonuses for trainers working in the school-age child care field.

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Appendix C

Committee and Staff Biosketches

COMMITTEE BIOSKETCHES

DEBORAH A. MORONEY (*Committee Chair*), is vice president at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), where she leads AIR’s work in the area of Youth, Family, and Community Development. She is a methodological expert in implementation science—in the context of both rigorous research and program evaluation. Moroney serves as a reviewer or editorial board member on multiple peer-reviewed journals and has authored practitioner and organizational guides using both research findings and practitioner input. She co-authored the fourth edition of the seminal resource *Beyond the Bell: A Toolkit for Creating Effective Afterschool and Expanded Learning Programs*. Moroney has authored numerous works on the implementation and assessment of social and emotional development, including the first edition of the *Ready to Assess* toolkit, and co-chaired the social and emotional learning National Practitioner Advisory Group. She has also edited two volumes: *Creating Safe, Equitable, Engaging Schools: A Comprehensive, Evidence-Based Approach to Supporting Students*, and *Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Time: Foundations and Futures*. At AIR, Moroney has been a PI or co-PI on several large studies of youth development organizations. She has served on the advisory boards of several organizations, including YMCA of the USA, BellXcel, and Information Age Publishing. Moroney is also a longstanding member of the C.S. Mott Foundation Afterschool Technical Assistance Collaborative serving the 50 State Afterschool Network. Prior to joining AIR, she was a clinical faculty member in educational psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the Youth Development Graduate Program. She has served on a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine committee on Summertime Experiences and Child and Adolescent Education, Health, and Safety; Moroney also contributed a keynote paper to a National Academies workshop on character development. She holds a Ph.D. and M.Ed. from The University of Illinois at Chicago.

THOMAS AKIVA is associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and director of the schoolwide Ed.D. program. His research focuses on understanding and improving out-of-school learning program experiences for children and youth. Akiva’s team increasingly focuses on citywide approaches and, in 2022, he co-edited the book *It Takes an Ecosystem: Understanding the People, Places, and Possibilities of Learning and Development Across Settings*. He publishes research about equity in out-of-school learning, continuous improvement and professional learning, youth program features, and social and emotional skills. Akiva received the Scholar Award in 2016 from the out-of-school-time special interest group of

the American Educational Research Association. He received his Ph.D. in 2012 in education and psychology from the University of Michigan.

JULIE A. BALDWIN is regents' professor in the Department of Health Sciences and director of the Center for Health Equity Research at Northern Arizona University. She served as a tenured faculty member at Northern Arizona University before joining the faculty at the University of South Florida College of Public Health in the Department of Community and Family Health; following this, Baldwin returned to Northern Arizona University to be the founding director of the Center for Health Equity Research. Her research over the years has focused on both infectious and chronic disease prevention, and she has had a consistent program of applied research addressing HIV/AIDS and substance abuse prevention in youth, with special emphasis on working with Native American youth and their families. Baldwin is also the principal investigator of the Southwest Health Equity Research Collaborative, a U54 National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities–funded research center for minority institutions. As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, she has made a lifelong commitment to serving diverse communities and to advocating for health promotion programs for children, adolescents, and families. Baldwin was recently elected to the National Academy of Medicine and was previously a member of the Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice and the Roundtable on the Promotion of Health Equity of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She earned her doctorate in behavioral sciences and health education from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

HORATIO BLACKMAN is vice president for education policy, advocacy, and engagement at the National Urban League. He joined the League after serving as assistant professor in the College of Education and Human Development and a research associate with the Center for Research in Education and Social Policy at the University of Delaware. Blackman's work has focused on educational improvement, access, and opportunity for Black and other marginalized communities. He utilizes expertise in qualitative and mixed-methods research, community-based research, and translating research to policy and practice to support change efforts at the local, state, and national levels. Blackman is a member of the American Educational Research Association. He also serves as a board member for the Current Issues in Out-of-School Time book series publication. Blackman earned his B.S. in policy analysis and management, his M.S.Ed. in educational theory and policy, and his Ph.D. in education policy from The University of Pennsylvania, where he was also an Institute of Educational Sciences predoctoral fellow.

DALTON CONLEY is Henry Putnam University professor in sociology and a faculty affiliate at the Office of Population Research and the Center for Health and Wellbeing at Princeton University. He is also a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and he serves in a pro bono capacity as dean of health sciences for the University of the People, a tuition-free, accredited, online college committed to expanding access to higher education. Conley's scholarship has primarily dealt with the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic and health status from parents to children. This focus has led him to study (among other topics) the impact of parental wealth in explaining racial attainment gaps; the causal impact of birthweight (as a heuristic for the literal overlap of the generations) on later health and educational outcomes; sibling differences that appear to reflect the triumph of

achievement over ascription (but which may, in fact, merely reflect within-family stratification processes); and, finally, genetics as a driver of both social mobility and reproduction. His books include *Being Black, Living in the Red*; *The Starting Gate*; *Honky*; *The Pecking Order*; *You May Ask Yourself, Elsewhere, USA*; *Parentology*; and *The Genome Factor*. Conley has been the recipient of Guggenheim, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Russell Sage Foundation fellowships as well as a CAREER Award and the Alan T. Waterman Award from the National Science Foundation. He is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and he is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences. Conley earned an M.P.A. in public policy and a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University, and a Ph.D. in biology from New York University.

RYAN J. GAGNON is assistant professor in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at Clemson University, where he teaches undergraduate courses in recreation program administration, program design, and evaluation and graduate courses in both applied and advanced statistical analyses. His research focuses on the factors that inhibit or promote out-of-school-time program success; methodological innovation in sport, recreation, and youth program assessment; the development of evaluation capacity in programs that serve marginalized and/or underrepresented youth; youth with disabilities and/or chronic illness, and youth thriving. In these areas, Gagnon focuses on the implementation of innovative statistical and methodological approaches (e.g., planned missing data designs, confirmatory factor analyses, structural equation modeling, geospatial data analyses) to tell the often-complex story of the programs and people served by out-of-school-time programs. While he has a heavy focus on the use of contemporary statistical techniques, his parallel focus is on the translation of findings to ensure they are useful to practitioners and the communities they serve. Prior to joining the faculty at Clemson, Gagnon worked in outdoor education programs at Washington State University serving youth and young adults and with the U.S. Air Force Youth and Teen Programs division.

SUSANNA LOEB is professor of education at Stanford University and director of National Student Support Accelerator, which aims to expand access to relationship-based, high-impact tutoring. Before her recent move back to Stanford, Loeb was director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and professor of education and of international and public affairs at Brown University. Her research focuses broadly on education policy and its role in improving educational opportunities for students. Loeb's work has addressed educator career choices and professional development, school finance and governance, and early childhood systems. She was founding director of the Center for Education Policy at Stanford and co-director of Policy Analysis for California Education. Loeb led the research for both Getting Down to Facts projects for California schools. She is also an affiliate at the National Bureau of Economic Research and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, and she is a member of the National Academy of Education and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

HELEN J. MALONE is the chief strategy and innovation officer at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL). She is Advisory Board Co-Chair for the Global Extended Learning and Youth Development Association (GELYDA), and is also the series editor for the Information Age Publishing's book series, Current Issues in Out-of-School Time. She is also a part of the 2024 cohort of the American Express Leadership Academy. Dr. Malone brings over

two decades of experience focused on out-of-school time learning, school-family-community partnerships, and education system change. She is a founding member of the AERA Out-of-School Time Special Interest Group and one of its former chairs. She has chaired two other SIGs and remains a long-standing AERA member. Her service includes multiple posts as a peer-reviewer and editorial board member for various journals and academic publishers. Dr. Malone has served as an advisor on research studies, and as a thought partner to nonprofits, philanthropy, and government entities. Dr. Malone holds a doctorate degree from Harvard University.

FE MONCLOA is emerita at the University of California, Cooperative Extension. Her research and extension expertise is on intercultural communication, culturally relevant social justice youth development, and access to high-quality youth-serving organizations for marginalized youth, families, and communities. She is a 2022–2024 research fellow at the Western Center for Metropolitan Extension and Research at Washington State University.

JENNIFER M. RINEHART is senior vice president for strategy and programs at the Afterschool Alliance. She takes a primary role in the organization's coalition-building, policy, and research efforts. Rinehart oversees major initiatives, including the Afterschool for All Challenge, an annual afterschool advocacy day, and she works closely with the vice presidents of policy and research on the overall policy and research strategies, including the landmark survey *America After 3 PM*. In addition, Rinehart provides technical assistance and support to the statewide afterschool networks to help them use research to advance their goals. Prior to joining the Afterschool Alliance, she served for more than 5 years on the staff of the U.S. Department of Education, primarily as a project officer for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, the principal federal program supporting out-of-school-time programs. Rinehart works closely with several national organizations and initiatives that share the Afterschool Alliance's vision of afterschool for all. She has a B.A. in psychology with a minor in elementary education from Gettysburg College and a M.Ed. in human development from the University of Maryland at College Park.

GERARD ROBINSON is professor of practice at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia. His areas of expertise are K–12 education, higher education, afterschool programs, criminal justice reform, race in American institutions, and the role of nonprofit organizations in civil society. Robinson's scholarship includes two coedited books: *Education for Liberation: The Politics of Promise and Reform Inside and Beyond America's Prisons* and *Education Savings Accounts: The New Frontier in School Choice*, as well as an essay about prisons and education published in the *University of Virginia Law Review* and *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law & Social Change*. Robinson earned his A.A. from El Camino Community College, B.A. from Howard University, and M.Ed. from Harvard University.

SANDRA SIMPKINS is professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine and director of the Center for Afterschool and Summer Excellence, which has a certificate program that trains undergraduates to work in out-of-school-time (OST) programs. Over the last 20 years, Simpkins has addressed several key issues in a variety of OST settings, (e.g., programs, extracurricular activities, unsupervised time), including promoting diversity, barriers to participation, youth motivational processes, and program impacts. She has been one of

the leading voices on diversity and equity in OST. Simpkins has led an interdisciplinary team to create a framework for culturally responsive programs. Through qualitative and quantitative methods, she has examined how various social position factors, including race, ethnicity, immigration status, and socioeconomic status, interact to affect youth's OST experiences. Simpkins has served as an advisor to several national OST organizations (e.g., American Camp Association, Girls Inc.) on their programming related to diversity and equity and has collaborated with local programs serving low-income families. She is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Association for Psychological Science. Simpkins has received several accolades for her work, including the William T. Grant Foundation Young Scholar award and the Mavis Hetherington Award for Excellence in Applied Developmental Science.

EMILIE P. SMITH is professor of human development and family studies and inaugural College of Social Science distinguished senior scholar at Michigan State University. With training in ecological approaches and prevention science, Smith has been funded to conduct multilevel, multimethod cluster randomized trials to strengthen youth-serving afterschool programs. Her work at the local and national levels has demonstrated effective approaches to engaging often lower-income ethnic minority families in prevention research using group-based family and community culturally informed approaches. Smith's work on racial/ethnic identity and socialization among marginalized youth and social justice approaches to positive youth development is highly cited in the field. She has received millions of dollars in national and foundation funding for her research. Smith is currently on the elected governing council of the Society for Research on Child Development. She is a fellow of division 27 (on community) of the American Psychological Association and the Society for Prevention Research. Smith is editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Community Psychology*.

NATASHA STRASSFELD is associate professor in the Department of Special Education at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research examines (1) the ways in which caregivers, particularly minoritized, racialized, and low-socioeconomic status caregivers, navigate special education and accommodations processes via legal and policy mechanisms; (2) racial/ethnic disparities in how students are (mis)identified for special education placements and related services; and (3) special education and related transition service delivery for youth transitioning from the juvenile justice system back to K–12 public school contexts. Strassfeld's work has appeared in leading education journals, including *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *Exceptional Children*, *Behavioral Disorders*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, and *AERA Open*. Her work has been supported by a range of federal and foundation grant sources, including the U.S. Department of Education, the Spencer Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In addition, Strassfeld served as a committee member for a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in 2022. She obtained her J.D. from the University of Wisconsin School of Law and her Ph.D. in special education from The Pennsylvania State University.

MAYUMI A. WILLGERODT is endowed professor at the University of Washington (UW) School of Nursing and interim director of the UW Center for Health Sciences Interprofessional Education, Research, and Practice. Her career has improved the health and educational success of vulnerable youth through school health policy, research, and practice. Willgerodt's research on school health workforce capacity has strengthened the contributions of

nurses and interprofessional school health teams. Her landmark national studies of the school nurse workforce have impacted policy and practice, serving as a model for other school health workforce studies. Willgerodt's research is informed by extensive experience with communities, resulting in an emphasis on interprofessional care coordination and maximizing community systems of care efficiencies. She has been recognized as Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation Faculty Scholar, fellow of the American Academy of Nursing and National Academy of School Nurses, and UW Distinguished Nurse Researcher. Willgerodt earned her B.S.N. from Georgetown University and her M.P.H./M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois Chicago. She recently cochaired Sharing and Exchanging Ideas and Global Experiences on Community-Engaged Approaches to Oral Health: A Workshop of the Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

STAFF BIOSKETCHES

EMILY BACKES is deputy board director for the Committee on Law and Justice and Board on Children, Youth, and Families in the Division of Behavioral, Social Sciences, and Education at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She also serves as director of the Societal Experts Action Network, a network of leading individuals and institutions in social science fields that provides actionable responses to urgent policy questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In her time at the National Academies, Backes has served as study director for the reports *Decarcerating Correctional Facilities during COVID-19: Advancing Health, Equity, and Safety*; *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*; *Birth Settings in America: Outcomes, Quality, Access, and Choice*; and *Transforming the Financing of Early Care and Education*. She has also provided analytical and editorial assistance to National Academies projects on juvenile justice reform, policing, forensic science, illicit markets, science literacy, science communication, and science and human rights. Backes received an M.A. and B.A. in history from the University of Missouri, specializing in U.S. human rights policy and international law, and a J.D. from the University of the District of Columbia, where she represented clients as a student attorney with the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic and the Juvenile and Special Education Law Clinic.

NATACHA BLAIN serves as senior board director of the Board on Children, Youth, and Families and the Committee on Law and Justice at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She has served as a supreme court fellow and chief counsel to senator Dick Durbin on the Senate Judiciary Committee, as well as lead strategic advisor for the Children's Defense Fund's Cradle to Prison Pipeline campaign. Prior to joining the National Academies, Blain served as associate director/acting executive director of Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families. There she played a critical role in helping convene and engage diverse constituencies, fostering leadership, collaboration, and innovation-sharing through a network of funders committed to the enduring well-being of children, youth, and families. Blain earned her M.S. and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Allegheny University of Health Sciences and MCP Hahnemann University (now Drexel University), respectively, and she received a J.D. from Villanova School of Law.

REBEKAH HUTTON is senior program officer for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She is currently the study director of the Committee on

Exploring the Opportunity Gap for Young Children from Birth to Age Eight and the Committee on Addressing the Underrepresentation of Women of Color in Tech. Hutton was previously the study director of the Committee on Summertime Experiences and Child and Adolescent Education, Health, and Safety. Prior to joining the National Academies, she was an education management and information technology consultant working on projects in the United States as well as Haiti, Equatorial Guinea, and Djibouti. Hutton has also worked as a program manager and researcher at the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University, studying whether teacher pay for performance has measurable impact on student outcomes, and as an English-language lecturer in Tourcoing, France. During her time with the Board on Children, Youth, and Families, she has worked on projects focused on fostering the educational success of children and youth learning English; reducing child poverty; and promoting the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of children and youth. She received her M.Ed. degree from Vanderbilt University in international education policy and management.

ELONAY KEFLEZGHI is senior program assistant with the Board on Children, Youth, and Families at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She currently supports the Committee on Out-of-School Time Settings and the Committee on an Independent Analysis of the Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration program. Keflezghi's areas of interest include health policy, maternal–child health, and international health. She received her B.S. from Towson University in health education and promotion.

PRIYANKA NALAMADA (*study director*) is program officer at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She primarily supports the work of the Board on Children, Youth, and Families within the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Nalamada's work involves providing critical project management support for National Academies activities, including consensus studies and convenings focused on the health and well-being of children and families. She currently directs the consensus study Promoting Learning and Development in K-12 Out-of-School Time Settings for Low Income and Marginalized Children and Youth and supports the cross-divisional Standing Committee on Reproductive Health, Equity, and Society. Most recently, Nalamada staffed the Committee on Policies and Programs to Reduce Intergenerational Poverty and served as acting director for the Forum for Children's Well-Being. She previously worked for a number of years in the Health and Medicine and the Policy and Global Affairs divisions of the National Academies, developing and supporting activities for the Board on Global Health and the Board on Higher Education and Workforce, including the Committee on Defense Research at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Other Minority Institutions; Minority Serving Institutions: America's Underutilized Resource for Strengthening the STEM Workforce; and the Forum on Public–Private Partnerships for Global Health and Safety. Nalamada holds a B.A. in political science from Bryn Mawr College.

MAYA REDDI is research associate with the Board on Children, Youth, and Families at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She currently supports the Committee on Promoting Learning and Development in K-12 Out-of-School Time Settings for Low Income and Marginalized Children and Youth and the Committee on Federal Policy Impacts on Child Poverty. Reddi's areas of interest include mental health and well-being, reproductive health, and child development. She received her B.B.A. in marketing with a minor

in digital media from The University of Texas at Austin and an M.A. in psychology from American University.

MEREDITH YOUNG is a program officer on the Board on Children, Youth, and Families at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. In her time at the National Academies, she has supported projects evaluating dietary reference intakes, federal feeding guidelines, obesity prevention and treatment initiatives, preschool curriculum, and the racial and economic opportunity gap in child outcomes. Young has supported evaluation and strategic planning efforts at the National Academies, and she serves as a volunteer staff reader for other divisions. She received a B.S. in human nutrition, foods, and exercise with a concentration in dietetics from Virginia Tech and an M.N.S.P. in nutrition science and policy from Tufts University.