



## Agencies Share Lessons in Quest to Build Better Programs

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Partnerships. Data-sharing. Professional development.

These are among the top priorities for program providers within the evolving field of expanded learning.

Implementing a particular practice isn't an end but an ongoing process, youth-development experts say.

"We talk about the idea of continuous improvement processes," said Christina A. Russell, a researcher at the Washington, D.C.-based Policy Studies Associates, Inc. who specializes in youth development.

"It's that ongoing look at the program from either the agency running the program or another intermediary organization to continually reflect on and think about whether the quality elements that they're looking for are present."

With assistance from CBASS, or the Collaborative for Building After School Systems, Youth Today sought out examples of best practices in the area of partnerships, data-sharing and professional development, as well as a few lessons learned.

**Partnership:** PS/MS 188 is a K-8 school located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It serves mostly children from nearby public housing. The school recently teamed up with the Educational Alliance to bring in teaching artists to enhance social studies lessons through creative works such as plays, puppet shows and painting. In one instance, students used World War I history lessons to produce a newspaper from the era.

Monica Ingkavet, director of operations at The After-School Corporation (TASC), said the teaching artists' objective is to have children "really understanding what they're studying and really begin to apply to real-life situations, not just, 'Oh, this happened years ago.'"

The partnership is part of TASC's ExpandedED Schools initiative, which involves 11 elementary and middle schools in New York City, Baltimore and New Orleans. Through the initiative, each school partners with a youth-serving community organization to add three hours of supervised learning to the regular school day.

“Teachers and principals coalesce with their community partners into powerful teams that support students cognitively, physically and emotionally,” states a TASC report titled “MORE AND BETTER LEARNING Year One Report on ExpandedED Schools.”

The report found that math achievement improved in ExpandedED Schools, with math scores increasing from 56 to 61 percent, 65 to 67 percent and 40 to 44 percent of students being proficient at ExpandedED Schools in New York, Baltimore and New Orleans, respectively.

Similarly, the report shows that the partner schools outpaced other schools in math gains, in New York by a ratio of two to one.

The report also found improvements in “school climate” and drops in absenteeism. But it cautions that transforming a school’s culture, schedule and approach to learning does not happen in a year, and that schools and providers must develop ways to get “real-time feedback” for partners. It also asserts community partners need “targeted support to improve instructional strategies and practices.”

**Data-sharing:** Back in 2006, no comprehensive information system existed about the after-school program landscape in Chicago. Enter the Out-School-Time Project, or OST, a Wallace Foundation-funded initiative meant to strengthen the city’s OST system through increased coordination, access and reach of quality programming. Those involved in the project say one of the biggest hurdles to clear was to better understand what was permissible under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Although then-CEO of Chicago Public Schools Arne Duncan strongly supported OST before he went on to become U.S. Secretary of Education in 2009, many more school leaders had to be brought on board, said Jim Chesire, who served as director of the OST Project and later as founding executive director of Chicago Allies for Youth Success, a nonprofit public-private partnership created with the City of Chicago.

“I don’t care what size your district is, it is not sufficient to have a CEO say, ‘Make it so,’” said Chesire, who is now executive director of Bolster Mission consulting firm.

“There are so many levels to be considered, and you will be tripped up by those technicalities if you don’t have a shared common vision, where you have leadership at every level that are committed to that vision to make it happen,” Chesire said. “We had an incredible amount of creativity on part of a lot of people who were six, seven tiers down from the CEO that were instrumental in achieving that objective, and they had a relationship with the providers themselves.”

Chesire said there was never any one person saying not to use student data.

“Everyone was saying, ‘Let’s figure out how to do this,’” Chesire said. “The challenge simply was the focus, the resources, the stick-to-it-tiveness and the clarity on how the information would be used.”

Mary Ellen Caron, CEO of the Chicago-based After School Matters, said the data gleaned from the project yielded important insights.

“The analysis confirmed that retention matters, the more After School Matters program sessions that teens participate in, the greater the positive impact of that participation on their high school attendance, graduation, college enrollment and overall skill development,” Caron said.

**Professional Development:** Alex McCreddin, service coordinator for the Family Resource Center at Valley Palms in San Jose, Calif., said a recent training by the Partnership for Children and Youth has changed the way he teaches and talks to young program participants.

McCreddin said theme-based learning is now a major part of his programming. This past summer, it involved using the theme of insects to build certain skills. As an example, he said program participants created charts and graphs that featured different characteristics of insects, such as whether they have wings.

“It’s a very layered learning activity,” McCreddin said. Participants also went on a scavenger hunt to identify different characteristics of insects.

McCreddin said the training also got him to use different language when engaging young people in taking on responsibilities.

“You can get them more engaged in the program if you say ‘It’s your job to be the snack liaison today,’” McCreddin said.

The Partnership for Children and Youth gave Family Resource Centers two \$1,000 stipends, McCreddin said. One was to pay three staffers to attend a series of workshops on subjects that range from behavioral management to youth development theory. Another was for the staffers to purchase materials to implement what was learned.