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Speaking in One Voice:
Toward Common Measures for OST Programs & Systems

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In this Issue

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This year, with funding from the William T. Grant Foundation, we are focusing this policy commentary series on recent and emerging research related to out-of-school time, with an emphasis on exploring the many factors that contribute to setting quality and affect youth developmental outcomes. This particular issue was developed in partnership with The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS). Please see *www.forumfyi.org* to review previous commentaries in this series.

With the expansion of out-of-school time (OST) programming for children and youth over the past 10 years has come a respectable array of system-building efforts in communities across the country. These efforts are aimed at moving from loose associations of mostly fledgling programs to bona fide OST "systems" with all of the earmarks of maturity – a network of providers, standards of practice, professional development supports, accountability measures and intermediary organizations that are responsible for building and sustaining this kind of infrastructure.

Increased investments and attention to system-building have come in response to mounting interest from parents, policy makers, educators and the general public in how and how much these kinds of opportunities contribute to young people's learning and development. In addition to this heightened interest, pressure across the social service sectors to maximize return on investments has led to increased scrutiny and calls for accountability.

More than ever, OST programs need to be clear about what types of outcomes they can achieve and the standards and practices necessary to deliver on those outcomes. The good news is there is increasing evidence that effective implementation of quality practices can promote positive developmental gains for youth.[1] The bad news is we have good reason to believe that quality practices are not yet occurring at scale in the field.[2]

From Programs to Systems

Many individual OST programs have conducted evaluations over the years with varying degrees of rigor. Evaluations that are designed to measure quality and outcomes across a network or system of programs, however, remain rare. Evaluations that also assess the system-building work that intermediaries do related to quality and scale are rarer still. As more places develop community-wide OST partnerships and strategies, more sophisticated approaches to assessment will be important to persuade policy makers and funders that investments in both programming and infrastructure are important.

OST system-building work has received an infusion of positive energy over the past few years as major national funders like the Wallace, C.S. Mott, Robert Wood Johnson Foundations, The Atlantic Philanthropies and Open Society Institute have augmented and expanded state and

> In order to have more children and teens benefit from participation in high-quality after-school programs, the field needs standard measures that hold programs accountable for quality, that test the productivity and success of programs, and that have the potential to demonstrate after-school's contribution to the successful development of all children and youth.
>
> Collaborative for Building After-School Systems

local efforts to build OST infrastructure in communities across the country. In return for their support, these and other funders are looking for ways to assess what their investments have netted. In an attempt to respond and to strengthen their collective efforts, several communities are actively grappling with measuring quality and impact at the system level.

Consensus on Outcomes

The Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS) was created with support from the Atlantic Philanthropies to better address this and other system-building challenges facing the OST field. A partnership of mature, city and county-wide nonprofit OST intermediaries (see box below), one of CBASS's priorities over the past year was to identify a small number of broad, research-based outcomes that

relate directly to the goals of OST programs and are easy and cost-effective for local systems to measure. By agreeing to adopt and publicly report against a common set of outcomes, CBASS hopes to spark more efforts to use common measures to assess program productivity and success, hold providers accountable to quality, demonstrate after-school's contribution to the successful development of children and youth, and contribute to system-building and sustainability.

The CBASS effort has the potential to shape and inform the work of OST systems-builders well into the future. By identifying and tracking common measures and investing in the infrastructure and training necessary to help programs use data to inform their work, CBASS partners are increasing the quality and quantity of information available for continuous program improvement, reducing the data collection burden on individual programs, and demonstrating the valuable system-building role that intermediary organizations can play.

This commentary focuses on the work CBASS partners have undertaken to identify and measure common outcomes at the youth, program and system levels. *Research Update* describes the process for arriving at common outcomes and measures and the scope of data collection efforts currently underway across the CBASS cities. *On the Ground* describes how data are collected and used in Providence, RI. In *Voices from the Field* we draw upon conversations with the leaders of CBASS intermediaries to describe specific challenges they have faced and successful strategies for overcoming those challenges.

CBASS Intermediary/City	Number of Youth Served in Programs Supported by Intermediary (annual)	Number of Programs	Ages Served
Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign & The After-School Institute	9,000	100	6-18
Boston After School and Beyond	1,000	10	5-11
After School Matters (Chicago)	21,600+	1000	14-18
DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation	15,000	173	5-24
Prime Time Palm Beach County	10,000	125	5-14
Providence After-School Alliance	1,800+	130	11-14
The After-School Corporation (New York City)	16,300+	95	5-18

Research Update

CBASS leaders began working in summer 2007 to develop a measurement framework for tracking program implementation and outcomes within their systems. Elizabeth Reisner, co-founder and principal of Policy Studies Associates, worked with the group of seven intermediaries to ensure the framework was grounded in shared assumptions and evidence and to identify specific outcomes and measures to include. In July 2008, a small group of researchers was convened to provide further input into the measurement framework.

Identifying Common Outcomes and Measures

Starting with over 70 potential measures, the group refined and narrowed the list, selecting six outcomes and 22 measures (see Figure 1) that fall into one of three categories:

- *Youth-level outcomes:* Personal engagement traits that demonstrate increased likelihood that youth will persist in school, mature into productive citizens, and remain on track toward educational attainment and economic stability, including youth's program engagement and their educational effort, commitment and skills.

- *Program-level outcomes:* Characteristics that describe or demonstrate the value of high-quality after-school programming including activity characteristics and structural features.

- *System-level outcomes:* Characteristics of well-coordinated systems that lead to improved quality, scale and sustainability.

In paring the list down to just 22 measures, the most important criteria for CBASS were strength of the evidence, ease of use, and broad applicability. This meant that some measures, while important, were not included. For example, measures related to individual youths' internal states such as motivation and self-esteem were not prioritized, as they are complex to measure and analyze. Some program-level measures also posed challenges related to ease of use and evidence base. Academic engagement measures, in particular, were selected with an additional criterion in mind: their ability to demonstrate how after-school contributes to student success beyond performance on test scores and grades.

"The measures steer away from the more complicated dimensions that a developmental psychologist would say are important, but that aren't generally understood by the average person. The idea was that they would be easily explainable to stakeholders outside of our field, to the school superintendent [for instance]. I think these do that well," Reisner stated. "The measures were also chosen to be really realistic in terms of data collection," she noted. Specific criteria used to narrow down the original list of measures included:

- *Low measurement burden:* Are the data relatively easy for programs to collect? Does it take minimal time and effort to collect the data?

- *Low inference:* Do the measures require limited background knowledge or judgment? Are two individuals likely to arrive at the same conclusion in rating the measure?

- *Applicability across age groups:* Is the measure applicable to the wide range of ages that programs across a system serve?

- *Field-tested/Research-based:* Is there a research-based rationale for using the measure? Has the measure been used in prior evaluation studies?

- *Strengths-focused:* Are measures focused on strengths and assets rather than risks and deficits?

The selected measures constitute a practical and cost-efficient measurement framework that aims to highlight the unique contributions the OST field makes to the successful development of children and youth. Most important, according to Reisner, the framework "helps make system-wide accountability meaningful," by addressing both the quality of youth's experience and system-level issues. "Discussions about building systems can often be really detached. Using this framework avoids detaching the systems from the reality of the people they serve," said Reisner.

Though not all outcomes will be relevant to each individual OST system, CBASS's goal was to select

FIGURE 1: CBASS MEASURES FOR ASSESSING AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES, PROGRAMS & SYSTEMS[3]			
Measure	**Inference Level***	**Data Collection Burden to Organizations**	**Applicability Across Ages**
YOUTH LEVEL			
Outcome: High Program Engagement			
High sustained daily program attendance	Low	Medium, requires attendance system & daily record keeping	All ages, with higher expected thresholds for younger youth
High year-to-year retention	Low	Medium, requires matching databases across two or more years	All ages
Outcome: High Educational Effort, Commitment & Skills			
High daily school attendance	Low	High, requires coordination with school district	All ages, though average rates differ between groups
On-time grade promotion, leading to high school graduation	Low	High, requires coordination with school district	All age groups
Mastery of academic & non-academic skills	Low to medium, depending on reliability/validity of measures	Medium to high, depending on assessments used, coordination with school system and/or response rates for teacher surveys	All age groups
PROGRAM LEVEL			
Outcome: Structural Features that Promote Youth Success			
Low staff-youth ratio	Low	Low	All ages, lower ratios expected for younger youth
High educational levels of director & staff	Low	Low	All ages
Outreach to parents	Low	Low for director surveys; medium for contact logs	All ages
Youth input into program design	Medium	Low for director surveys, high for youth because of parental consent & survey distribution	Older youth, especially grades 7-12
Outcome: Activity Characteristics that Promote Youth Success			
Positive relationships with adults & peers	Medium	Medium to high, with staff surveys requiring less effort & youth surveys/observational methods requiring more effort	All age groups
Opportunities for activity choice & leadership	Medium	Low to high, with director surveys requiring less effort & youth surveys/observational methods requiring more effort	All age groups, though more important for older ages
Explicit activity sequencing	High	Low to high, with director surveys requiring less effort & youth surveys/observational methods requiring more effort	All age groups
Active, hands on learning opportunities	Medium	Low to high, with director surveys requiring less effort & youth surveys/observational methods requiring more effort	All age groups
Breadth of content & activities	Medium	Low, director surveys & inspection of activity schedules	Older youth, especially grades 7-12
SYSTEM LEVEL			
Outcome: Availability & Use of Tools that Support Programs			
Use of participant tracking system	Low	Medium, requires inspection/sampling of the system	All age groups
Partner agreements & policies in place	Medium	Low to medium, director surveys require low effort while document reviews require moderate effort	All age groups
Adoption & use of quality standards	Low	Low, requires standards review & survey	All age groups
Provision of technical assistance & training	Low	Low to medium, surveys require low effort while document reviews require moderate effort	All age groups
Sustainable financial support	Medium	Low to medium, director surveys require low effort, while budget review across funding streams & system levels requires moderate effort	All age groups
Unified governance structure	Medium	Medium, may require assembling records to review, actual structure may differ from intended structure, different interview questions may be required for each part of the system	All age groups
Outcome: Achievement of Scale in Youth Participation			
Growth in number of program slots	Low	Low, requires only annual review of numbers	All age groups
Engagement of leaders across sectors	Medium	Medium, requires awareness of sectors & leaders within sectors	More important with teens given greater need for diverse programming

measures that most effectively translate into system-level goals, facilitate accountability to stakeholders, and demonstrate the value of high-quality after-school programming at scale. As each intermediary collects data within their jurisdiction, they are learning more about which measures provide the greatest data collection efficiencies, which hold the strongest proxy power (the power to convey a lot within a single measure), which yield data that are most valuable for driving change, and which help communicate what is needed to strengthen OST systems and improve outcomes for youth.

Data Collection Efforts Across CBASS Intermediaries

Having identified the importance of collecting data against a common set of measures in order to achieve their goal of bringing high-quality after-school systems to scale, CBASS analyzed the extent to which each individual intermediary is collecting and using data to strengthen their respective system.

The analysis revealed five findings: 1) scale of data collection is directly related to burden of collection, 2) intermediaries are addressing the challenge of high burden measures by collecting data on a subset or sample of programs, 3) there are commonalities in terms of program-level data collection even though intermediaries may use different instruments, 4) intermediaries are using data to drive continuous improvement and 5) intermediaries are contributing to the growth of citywide systems by implementing the system-level measures.

Scale of data collection tied to burden. At the youth and program level, the two measures consistently collected at scale across all systems are relatively low burden and low inference: daily program attendance and youth-staff ratio. Unlike some of the other program level measures in the framework (e.g., positive relationships with adults and peers), this information can be collected without coordinating with other systems such as schools, and doesn't require surveys or observation. At

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* High-inference measures require judgment on the part of those conducting the measurement (e.g., training to make sure that raters are applying the measures consistently across settings and conditions). Low-inference measures do not require judgment and usually require only counts, calculations, or yes/no response (e.g., high average daily program attendance).

the program level, educational level of program directors and breadth of age appropriate activities are collected fairly consistently across most CBASS intermediaries. Collecting this information requires relatively little staff time and resources and the method, typically reviewing activity reports or requests for proposals, is low inference.

Addressing burden and scale through sampling. For higher burden measures that require coordination with other systems like the schools or more time-intensive and expensive methods such as observation, intermediaries have responded by collecting data on a cohort or sample of programs. Focusing on a sample appears to be a cost-efficient and more feasible strategy for assessing several youth- and program-level outcomes. For example, The After-School Corporation (TASC) and After School Matters (ASM) are assessing the relationship between participation in after-school with school attendance for a subset of participants through either a cohort of 21st Century programs (TASC) or a random sample of 2.5 percent of more than 20,000 participants (ASM).

Common measures don't necessarily require common tools. As shown in Figure 2, while some tools are used across multiple cities, the CBASS intermediaries are utilizing a range of web-based participant tracking and quality assessment tools. This variance in tools still allows for intermediaries to track common measures across their systems. As the intermediaries look toward comparing data across jurisdictions, they will test the effectiveness and feasibility of different tools and will consider the value of aligning scales and indicators more closely.

Use of data to drive improvement. CBASS intermediaries are not just collecting information for the sake of data collection; they are simultaneously building the capacity of their systems to use data to drive program improvement. For example, with providers entering attendance data on a daily or weekly basis, staff from the intermediaries can, in real-time, observe attendance trends and target technical assistance (TA) to programs with low enrollment and attendance rates. They also look to programs with high attendance rates to identify promising practices that can be promoted and shared with other programs. Program level data on activity sequencing and content are used by some CBASS intermediaries to inform targeted professional

Figure 2: Tools Used in CBASS City Systems

CBASS Intermediary	Quality Assessment Tool	Participant Tracking Tool[4]
Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign & The After-School Institute	OST Observation Tool (PSA)	Efforts to Outcomes
Boston After School and Beyond	PQA (High/Scope)	Cayen
After School Matters (Chicago)	CARE-ful Assessment & piloting PQA (High/Scope)	PAM (Program Administration Manager) Implementing Youthservices.net in 2009 (Cityspan)
DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation	Assessing Afterschool Program Practices Tool (NIOST)	Webstars; Youthservices.net (Cityspan)
Prime Time Palm Beach County	Palm Beach County PQA (High/Scope)	N/A
Providence After School Alliance, Inc.	Rhode Island PQA (High/Scope)	Youthservices.net (Cityspan)
The After-School Corporation (New York City)	OST Observation Tool (PSA) & Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool (NYSAN)	Youthservices.net (Cityspan)

development efforts. Cultivating a culture of improvement can be challenging, particularly for intermediaries that also function as funders. However, through TA and a focus on continuous improvement, these intermediaries are demonstrating how data collection can be critical to improving youth outcomes and thereby should benefit from consistent funding.

Contributions to the growth of citywide systems.

All CBASS intermediaries are collecting information about several common system-level outcomes. The data suggest the intermediaries play a critical role in helping bring high-quality OST opportunities to scale in their cities. For example:

- For all CBASS intermediaries that function as funders, agencies are required to use a participant tracking system to collect information about attendance and outcomes.

- Providence After-School Alliance and The After-School Corporation worked with their statewide networks to convene stakeholders and reach consensus on quality standards, resulting in statewide alignment, across funding streams, on program quality.

- Intermediaries facilitate provider access to TA by acting as clearinghouses and directly providing

TA and training. Intermediaries such as The After-School Institute (Baltimore) also evaluate the impact of professional development on staff satisfaction and performance.

- CBASS intermediaries have been able to document successes related to sustainability by leveraging public/private partnerships and diversifying and tapping into underutilized funding streams.[5,6]

On the Ground

In this section, we focus on the efforts of one specific CBASS intermediary – the Providence After-School Alliance – and describe their work to collect and use data to drive improvement system-wide. The infrastructure that has been built over the past several years in Providence, thanks in large part to multi-year support from the Wallace Foundation and Bank of America as well the leadership and support of Mayor David N. Cicilline and the City of Providence, has resulted in an impressive system that integrates information about youth participation with information about program quality, all with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for youth. A three-year evaluation is currently being conducted by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) that will explore the impact of PASA's system building work on program quality and youth outcomes.

PASA has been working since 2004 to build a network of public and private community partners, after-school providers, city departments and neighborhoods to increase and expand quality after-school programming and strengthen the capacity of providers within their network. Their model primarily includes middle school programming, coordinating professional development opportunities, grants for model initiatives, and expertise on best practices. PASA's system-building efforts include a quality improvement system centered around community-developed and adopted quality standards and built in partnership with the Center for Youth Program Quality (CYPQ)[†], and a participant tracking system – Youthservices.net, developed by Cityspan Technologies.

Assessing and Improving Quality

After engaging in a two-year community process to identify and define quality standards, Providence developed a customized assessment tool in partnership with staff from the CYPQ, based on the research-validated Program Quality Assessment. Through partnerships with the Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance and the Rhode Island Department of Education, The Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA) is now used by programs across the city of Providence and the state, including all 21st Century-funded programs in Rhode Island.

A CYPQ trained Quality Advisor supports all programs in their assessment efforts. Quality Advisors jointly observe program offerings with site staff and then work one-on-one with agencies to develop quality improvement plans based on those observations. Aggregated system-wide quality data are used to help PASA design and coordinate its professional development offerings around the needs that get surfaced through assessment. Engaging providers in the observation and reflection process has been well-received across the board. However, offering support through access to a quality advisor and site-based technical assistance and training has been a very important part of the process, especially for those providers with limited capacity.

[†] The Center for Youth Program Quality is a joint venture of the Forum for Youth Investment and the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Tracking Participation

The Youthservices.net information system developed by Cityspan tracks youth enrollment and retention for all PASA programs. Providence has been collecting data on participation since the fall of 2005, including what programs students are enrolled in and the level of participation for all programs system-wide. In 2006-2007, additional information was gathered by an independent research firm about school attendance, grades, demographics and test scores to compare with the larger middle school population in Providence. These data served as a baseline for the three-year external evaluation that P/PV began in January of 2008.

The Youthservices.net reporting system is a management tool that allows partner organizations to centrally enroll participants and track attendance and dropout rates in after school programs across the system. Thirty organizations have licenses to access data. System administrators can access average daily attendance and overall enrollment percentages to observe trends and determine which programs have been best attended.

Using Data to Drive Improvement

PASA uses enrollment and participation data as a first measure of quality. Providers that do not meet a benchmark of 60% of slots filled and 60% average daily attendance within the first two weeks of programming, are contacted for follow-up. Rather than de-funding programs, PASA works with providers on recruitment and strategies to improve attendance. High-performing organizations that meet the 60/60 standard are eligible to apply for "endorsed status." This process includes participation in the quality improvement process described above and access to several professional development opportunities. "Endorsed" status makes programs eligible for a simplified funding application and an additional 5% administrative cost on top of their budget.

According to Elizabeth Devaney, Director of Quality Initiatives, walking the line between a focus on improvement vs. accountability is an ongoing tension. "Our focus is on self-assessment and continuous improvement. The closest we have come is to making quality a condition of funding is that programs that receive a low score on the RIPQA are assigned to work with a Quality Advisor on strategies for improvement." On the other hand, data

about participation and retention is being used for both improvement and accountability purposes. "Funders want to know who we are serving and how often, so the data hold PASA accountable for our system. But we also use that information to encourage providers to do more targeted recruitment or to improve programs where participation is low."

PASA's commitment to data-driven improvement has strengthened its position within the community and state and increased its ability to attract public and private resources to grow the system. While securing sustainable funding to maintain and strengthen the quality improvement infrastructure that has now been built will certainly be a challenge as PASA moves into a second stage of development. PASA's five-year contract with the Rhode Island Department of Education to support continuous improvement with all 21st CCLC-funded programs across the state is an important sustainability strategy going forward.

Voices From the Field

System-wide data collection for quality improvement and accountability is a sophisticated undertaking. To understand the complexities and challenges of building such capacity, we interviewed the leaders of the CBASS intermediaries. These individuals were: Rebkha Atnafou, Executive Director of The After School Institute (Baltimore); Lucy Friedman, President of The After-School Corporation (New York City); Suzette Harvey, Executive Director of Prime Time Palm Beach County; Hillary Salmons, Executive Director of Providence After School Alliance, Inc.; David Sinski, Executive Director of After School Matters (Chicago); Chris Smith, Executive Director of Boston Beyond; and Millicent Williams, President and CEO of the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation. Each of them answered questions (separately) about the progression of their own thinking on common measures; the data collection and data alignment challenges associated with system-wide efforts; and reflections for other cities undertaking similar efforts. Their responses are excerpted below:

Forum: How have CBASS' efforts to establish a core set of measures changed your thinking or advanced your efforts?

Lucy Friedman, President, The After-School Corporation (TASC): Actually, it was the CBASS experience that convinced me of the value of looking at program attendance not as an input, but as an outcome for middle and high school youth. Considering how many different ways we measure in our system—we needed a simpler way. Now that there is some consensus on what quality is, the next steps are finding comparable ways of measuring these indicators of success. Everyone likes their own tools, so comparability and adoption of tools is where the next challenge lies.

David Sinski, Executive Director, After School Matters (ASM): The efforts of CBASS to establish a core set of measures has come at the same time that the youth program providers in Chicago began work on the development of a systemic approach to out-of-school time programming. The simultaneous influences of CBASS and the Chicago OST Project have pushed the main youth program providers to take their existing efforts at cooperation to a new level. As the Chicago OST Project has supported the growth of infrastructure in Chicago, the efforts of CBASS to advance the consistent use of quality measures has supplemented efforts to coordinate the data collection activities of the Chicago OST partners.

Forum: Describe some of the challenges you've experienced related to data collection.

Rebkha Atnafou, Executive Director, The After-School Institute (TASI): We have had limited success getting data from the school system in order to show any link between after-school programs and increased engagement in learning. However, through Safe and Sound's partnership with the school department, this year we will have access to student ID numbers which will allow us to access data in real-time and track student performance longitudinally. A second challenge is after-school providers making full use of the software we've provided. Sometimes individuals are not very savvy around the use of these programs; at other times, data collection on the program end is not very robust. As a compromise, we've encouraged programs to put money for data entry into their budgets. It's not a requirement, but highly encouraged, and we've seen improvement

since we made that recommendation. Retention is a third problem. People are highly mobile and kids are changing after-school programs, some of which are in our system but many of which are not. We do not have a sophisticated enough system to make sure that when they move, the data gathering follows them.

Hillary Salmons, Executive Director, Providence After School Alliance (PASA): We originally had our system set up for multiple users, and we asked that providers offering off-site programs enter the attendance data. We saw this as part of our quality improvement strategy, to build their ability to track and maintain data. In reality, PASA ended up taking that function back. We want data entered in real time, and providers just didn't have the capacity to enter attendance data as quickly as we wanted to use it. In addition, users have varying skill levels. We conduct extensive training, but with a lot of turnover and many users there are challenges to ensuring the data are "clean." Surprisingly, there have been very few challenges in implementing the quality assessment data collection process. All of the feedback we have gotten is positive. The main challenge is how time consuming it can be.

Chris Smith, Executive Director, Boston After School and Beyond: There are a number of challenges common to data collection efforts, including a lack of technology at the site level, varying technology skills among systems users, duplicative efforts, and time constraints. Additionally, there is the challenge of coordinating the various stakeholders when undertaking city-wide efforts. Compromises can result when working with sites to tailor the data collection processes. It is important to offer extensive technical assistance to those needing it.

Suzette Harvey, Executive Director, Prime Time Palm Beach County: Although there are few challenges with the data collection process itself, how data get used by funders can be a challenge. We've had to clearly define our role as an intermediary working with programs using the data to guide improvement. It is a fine balance of maintaining confidentiality. We have agreed that it is the responsibility of the funded program to provide their funder with all documents that show they are working towards improving quality, and

that Prime Time is responsible for reporting on programs' participation in the system.

Forum: What advice would you give other communities undertaking data collection for system-wide improvement?

Millicent Williams, President and CEO, DC Children and Youth Investment Trust (DC Trust): Make sure that if you are starting with a new system, you ask all of the tough questions up front before you settle on a system so that the vendor is clear on the expectations of system capacity. While not always an option – especially when operations are ramping up and there are expectations of immediate outcomes – seek to devote the necessary time, attention and resources to research and development. In many cases, there are systems or processes that already exist and, to a degree, are replicable. Have conversations with other similar entities. Relationship building is critical.

Rebkha, TASI: Work with after-school providers on the importance of data gathering and put a strategy in place to encourage close attention to data. I recommend providing financial support so organizations can assign a dedicated staff person to the task. Streamline the amount of data gathered, and think about how to ask for information in the simplest way possible. Lastly, it is important to communicate the findings back to providers and to help them understand how they can use the information to strengthen their work.

Lucy, TASC: Build in incentives. It is tough in the beginning to build a culture of data collection. The simpler you can make it up front, the better. Otherwise you are constantly revising it downward. When we want to drill deeper, we do it on a sampling basis. In keeping it simple and not overly burdensome to programs, we recommend limiting the data collection timeframe to one week. Also, I suggest intermediaries be very thoughtful about the approach they take to connecting assessment with accountability.

Hillary, PASA: I think the most important thing is to have an individual dedicated to overseeing the data system and any data collection efforts. It has ended up taking a great deal of the Director of Quality Initiatives' time to oversee the system, make sure data are clean, and organize

customization of the tools and training. She has also had to tie data collection (about participation and quality) to the overall goals of the system-building effort.

Forum: How have you tried to align your data collection efforts with the priorities of other networks and systems in your city?

Millicent, DC Trust: We are cultivating a relationship with a city-wide interagency collaboration. Around the table you have the traditional child and family services agencies, for example the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Human Services, DC Public Libraries, and DC Public Schools, but we are also joined by organizations that have not traditionally been viewed as youth-serving agencies, such as the local police department and the city's chief financial officer. Through our convenings and with the input of these agencies, we collectively work to develop solutions that are based on more than the anecdotal, but that are not so data-driven that we lose the child in our decisions.

We have been able to come to agreement about how to count individuals, and we are working together to more effectively pool resources to address specific challenges. This collaboration has helped us shape where the city's resources are being driven from a policy perspective. This success of this collaboration is driven in large part by our relationship to the District's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO). OCTO, which serves as the central coordination point for the city's technology needs, helps us find solutions to our data collection challenges. The agency is making sure that we are not just getting the information, but that we are collectively asking the right questions.

Lucy, TASC: We have the most influence with our own sites, but the goal would be to create instruments that both the city and state would consider adopting. There is progress with the quality self-assessment tool, but usually with adjustments. Everyone likes their own tool, so our focus would definitely be on comparability between tools that have a common framework. That's our current challenge, to get the various entities adopting and adapting tools so that the city, the state and even the other CBASS cities are rowing together in their use of these tools.

> What are the benefits of getting the mayor, the chief of police, the school superintendent, private funders and local providers to agree on common goals? More sustainable funding for OST, clearer accountability, greater linkages between institutions and a sense of common cause that all translates into better outcomes for youth.

Hillary Salmons & Elizabeth Devaney, 2007[7]

Next Steps...for CBASS and Beyond

In late October, the CBASS partners formally adopted a recommendation intended to inform OST system-builders as they identify indicators to track progress at the youth, program and system levels. In developing the recommendation CBASS selected a small number of measures from the Framework (See box on page 11) based on ability to implement at scale, applicability across all ages, and value by stakeholders. Going forward, CBASS partners will track progress against these measures and examine implementation strategies across jurisdictions. By testing the feasibility of collecting comparable information across jurisdictions, CBASS hopes to inform system-building efforts around the country. Throughout the process CBASS will partner with local stakeholders around the country who are tackling this work and disseminate lessons learned.

The work these intermediaries are doing is one of the strongest signs yet that we are entering a new generation of youth work. Collaboration between local OST partners is a critical and much needed step towards the formal establishment of out-of-school time or youth development as a "system" that is distinct from K-12 schooling and early childhood development. The identification of a finite set of youth, program and system-level outcomes that can be tracked consistently and at scale provides an important "floor" for the field. The suggestion related to sampling allows for other key research-based measures to be brought into the mix without holding up progress on building that floor, and gives local intermediaries the flexibility necessary to work with funders to create an atmosphere of trust and accountability among providers.

OST Measures Recommended by CBASS

To track at scale:	*To track with a sub-set or sample of programs:*
Youth level • Daily program attendance	**Youth level** • Daily school attendance
Program level • Youth to staff ratio • Breadth of age-appropriate content & activities	**Program level** • Youth relationships with adults • Youth opportunities for activity choice • Active, hands-on learning opportunities • Educational level of director and staff
System level • Number of program slots • Adoption & use of quality standards • Use of a participant tracking system, with data aggregation & reports • Partner agreements & policies in place • Provision of technical assistance & staff training • Sustainable financial support • Engagement of leaders across youth-serving organizations	

Universal collection of system-level information about things like number of program slots, adoption and use of quality standards and participation tracking represents a major step forward from the old days of "bean counting" and builds on important advances the field has made in each of these areas. Tools now available to map the program landscape[8] allow intermediaries and communities to count overall slots but also map them by geography, age appropriateness, activity/content, and setting. Quality standards, such as those now embedded in a new generation of observational assessment tools, help focus quality assurance at the point of service, where youth and adults interact.[9] Participation tracking has advanced to the point where we can avoid duplication and track participation across settings with real precision. And finally, the potential to link to school attendance and student outcome data means we are truly beginning to blur the lines for learning.

Resources

1. Durlak, J.A., & Weissberg, R.P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills.* Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Retrieved March 29, 2007 from http://www.casel.org.

2. Smith, C., Peck, S., Blazevski, J., Akiva, T. & Denault, A. (Forthcoming). Quality at the point of service: Profiles of practice in after-school settings. American Journal of Community Psychology 42.

3. Figure 1 is excerpted from the full CBASS measurement framework of the same name: Reisner, E. & Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (2007). *Measures for assessing after-school services, programs and systems.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates. Available at www.afterschoolsystems.org.

4. For more information about participation tracking systems, go to the respective websites of the listed tools: for more information on Efforts to Outcomes, go to www.socialsolutions.com; for Cayen, go to www.cayen.net; the final tool can be found at www.youthservices.net (the DC version of this program has been branded as Webstars).

5. Calabrese, T. & Weinstein, M. (2009) *IESP policy brief: Public funding for comprehensive after-school programming, 1998-2008.* New York: The After-School Corporation.

6. Collaborative for Building After-School Systems. (2007) *Shaping the future of after-school: The essential role of intermediaries in bringing quality after-school to scale.* New York: CBASS.

7. Salmons, H., Devaney, E & Angell, J. (2008). *Measuring system-level improvement in out-of-school time: Challenges and responses from the field.* Prepared for the American Educational Research Association Conference.

8. Forum for Youth Investment. (2007). Ready by 21 guide to program landscape mapping. Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

9. Yohalem, N., Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., with Fischer, S., & Shinn, M. (2007, March). *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools.* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

Speaking in One Voice:

Toward Common Measures for OST Programs & Systems

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This commentary highlights the work of the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems, a collaborative of mature, city and county-wide nonprofit OST intermediaries, to develop and adopt common youth-, program- and system-level measures that are easy and cost-effective for local systems to implement. By agreeing to adopt and publicly report against a common set of outcomes, CBASS hopes to spark more efforts to use common measures to assess program productivity and success, hold providers accountable to quality, demonstrate after-school's contribution to the successful development of children and youth and contribute to system-building and sustainability.

What is the role of common measures in helping systems build their capacity for promoting and supporting quality improvement? Which measures appear to provide cost-effective, low-burden ways for systems to track progress? What are cities doing to implement these measures and use them to drive improvement at the youth, program and system levels?