



Dedicated to Quality Afterschool Programs



*Building A System of High Quality
Community Partnerships*

According to Making the Connections, a brief published by the Collaborative for Building Afterschool Systems (CBASS), intermediaries serve as the “nucleus and guiding coordinator within a community’s multifaceted network of government, schools, practitioners and front-line OST programs.”

Out-of-school time (OST) programs, including afterschool and summer opportunities, not only ensure the health and safety of the children they serve, they also offer welcoming environments and foster positive youth-to-youth relationships. High quality OST programs expose young people to content-based enrichment in art, health, literacy, math, recreation, science, technology, and much more. These enrichment activities support the learning needs of children by complementing, not duplicating, what they experience during the school day. These activities are engaging and hands-on; they make learning fun, outside the classroom.

Across the nation, OST programs offer enrichment in a variety of ways. In one enrichment delivery model, programs partner with community organizations to offer their children and youth content-based enrichment activities. For those programs, OST intermediaries can be invaluable in brokering relationships between the programs and community partners, providing structure, funding and technical assistance to them to deliver high quality experiences to children and youth in afterschool and summer learning settings.

With the generous support of the Children’s Services Council of Palm Beach County, Prime Time Palm Beach County (Prime Time), an OST intermediary in South Florida, has created a successful system for connecting programs with qualified community partners to deliver content-specific enrichment activities. The system follows a four-step process to engage local community partners to ensure they have the expertise and capacity to provide valuable enrichments to OST programs:



Prime Time refers to the community partners' content-based, enrichment activities as expanded learning opportunities (ELO) because they do just that: they offer creative opportunities to expand upon the traditional learning that takes place in the regular school day. In keeping with the underlying principles of expanded learning, Prime Time expects its partnering community providers to align their enrichment activities' subject matter with school-day curricula.

Prime Time has developed a core group of ELO providers that includes science educators, literacy experts, visual and performing artists, athletic coaches and other content experts who bring enriching activities to more than 250 afterschool programs across Palm Beach County – a vast area covering more square miles than the entire State of Delaware.

1. Potential partner organizations are carefully vetted against a set of established criteria to demonstrate their capacity to provide high quality programming.
2. Once community partners are selected, Prime Time engages partners in quality improvement initiatives, including ongoing training and support to encourage incorporation of best-practice youth development strategies into curricula and to ensure staff understand and implement youth development principles.
3. Prime Time maximizes the expertise and resources of its community partners to supplement content-specific professional development for afterschool and summer OST practitioners, developing sustainable knowledge and skills among program staff.
4. Prime Time works closely with the community partners to monitor and maintain the delivery of comprehensive, high quality enrichment activities.

Step 1:

Carefully select partners

In order to be considered for a partnership, a prospective enrichment provider is evaluated using the following organizational and programmatic criteria. To ensure the prospective partner organization has the capacity to deliver high quality learning opportunities, each provider must be able to

The Center for Creative Education (CCE) utilizes professional, practicing artists who are specially trained in contemporary educational strategies to conduct non-traditional afterschool arts activities. Currently, Prime Time's largest ELO provider, CCE offers more than 12,000 art enrichment opportunities for children and youth in Palm Beach County each year.



In 2011-12, the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County's Afterschool Reads program served 2,500 children and youth through Family Reading Nights and trainings, and offered observations and modeling for almost 300 OST practitioners at 25 sites. More than 17,000 books were distributed to local afterschool programs through the partnership.



Green Mouse Academy is a small, high-quality local organization that provides youth with the opportunity to ignite their imagination. Skilled educators teach robotics, animation, digital video production, and digital art and show youth how to design their own video games.



- Demonstrate strong administrative and fiscal oversight of its organization evidenced by a clean, independent audit;
- Access appropriate materials and equipment needed to deliver the enrichment programming content;
- Engage and foster participation of children, youth, and OST program staff; and
- Deliver challenging, age-appropriate, and skill-level-appropriate programming to children, youth and OST program staff.

These criteria are connected to the Palm Beach County's Quality Standards for Afterschool, which were created by afterschool stakeholders, and the corresponding Palm Beach County Program Quality Assessment (PBC-PQA), the county's tool for measuring afterschool quality. All potential partner organizations must provide documentation to support each of the criteria and be observed delivering proposed enrichment activities prior to selection. Once highly qualified organizations have been selected, the capacity-building work begins.

Step 2:

Engage partners in quality improvement

Prime Time believes that all staff who work with children should use youth development-centered approaches, such as reflection, voice and choice, etc. While Prime Time had offered quality improvement services and professional development opportunities for OST program staff for some time, in 2009, Prime Time recognized the need to extend these supports to its community partners that provide enrichment activities.

Before requiring that all the community partners participate in a quality improvement initiative, Prime Time contracted with the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality to ensure that its efforts would be effective. The Weikart Center examined the baseline quality of these partners' enrichment activities and interviewed them to determine if support services from Prime Time could help them improve the quality of their engagement and interaction with children and youth. The findings showed that while content-specific enrichment curricula were aligned or "alignable" to positive youth development best practices, the understanding of what defines "quality" varied. Weikart concluded that Prime Time's quality improvement work could help provide a unified understanding of quality.

Thus began Prime Time's quality work with its enrichment partners. Participation in the formal quality improvement support system requires community partner organizations to 1) be assessed using the Palm Beach County Program Quality Assessment (PBC-PQA) tool; 2) create improvement plans; and 3) address areas for improvement within their plans with, at a minimum, nine hours of Prime Time's youth development strategies training. The first step for partners participating in the quality improvement initiative

is to have their programming assessed by an external evaluator. Once the assessment is done, the partners are assigned a quality advisor who helps them to develop an improvement plan based on the results of the assessment. The quality advisor works closely with the partners to help them make improvements through ongoing coaching and modeling and recommends appropriate professional development trainings relevant to areas of improvement.

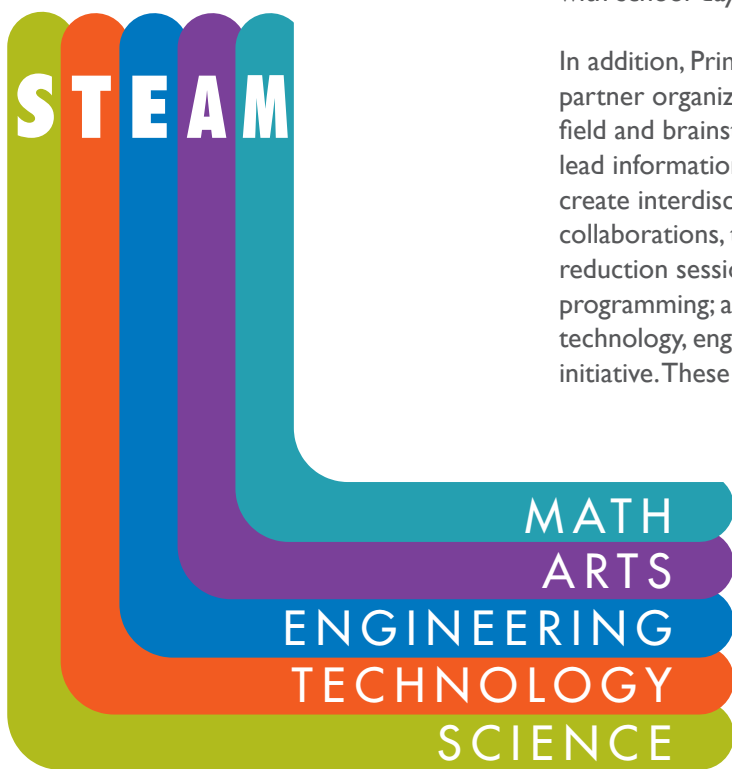
The trainings that Prime Time offers community partners go beyond the basics of youth development. They give the partners tools to develop content-based activities that incorporate key strategies for positive youth development, including, but not limited to, the following elements:

- Reflective practice (how to support, develop, and ultimately evaluate performance through a process of inquiry ... all tied to core competencies);
- Co-inquiry (staff working, learning and discovering alongside youth); and
- Active participatory learning (youth have direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas – stressing that children’s interests and choices are of the utmost importance).

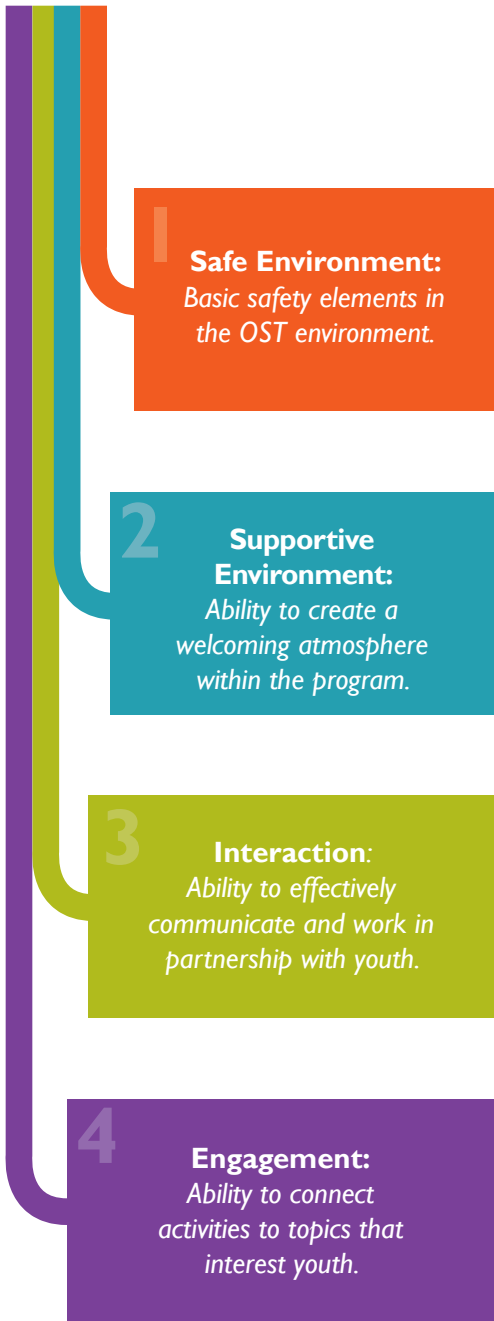
In turn, Prime Time’s Professional Development team reviews its content-specific trainings periodically to ensure they remain timely and are aligned with school-day curricula as well as with any related enrichment activities.

In addition, Prime Time facilitates quarterly meetings, at which the partner organizations share their expertise, discuss successes in the field and brainstorm solutions to challenges. They have joined forces to lead information sessions, facilitate subject area-specific discussions, and create interdisciplinary learning experiences. For example, through these collaborations, they have combined recreation programming with stress-reduction sessions; enhanced bullying prevention efforts with literacy programming; and infused the “A” for arts programming into science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) to produce a new “STEAM” initiative. These projects have been effective in engaging both afterschool participants and staff, and part of their success has been derived from the infrastructure provided by Prime Time.

By combining their own expert content with youth development strategies learned through Prime Time training and new ideas gleaned from networking with peers, community partners are able to provide comprehensive, high quality enrichment activities for children and youth in OST programs.



Prime Time's Palm Beach County Program Quality Program (PBC-PQA) assesses programs in four major areas:



Step 3:

Maximize partnerships to supplement professional development of OST staff

In addition to delivering enrichment activities, the community partners have responded to the system-wide need for increased professional development for OST program staff by showing them how to maintain learning after the enrichment activity is complete. Community partners supplement professional development in three ways:

1. OST staff participate in the enrichment activities along with the children in their programs – thereby learning the content alongside the youth. At the end of each session, the partners' content-experts typically leave behind curricula, materials, and lesson plans that the OST program practitioners can use to replicate or adapt the activity themselves in the future.
2. Prime Time contracts with some partner organizations to offer content-specific trainings directly to OST staff, in addition to offering activities for youth. These trainings, like Prime Time's other trainings, incorporate observations, modeling, and coaching to ensure that the afterschool and summer practitioners are able to put what they learn into practice at their programs. For example, Prime Time contracts with the local Junior Achievement affiliate to present its nationally distributed curricula and with the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County to train OST practitioners to use KidzLit curriculum at their afterschool sites.
3. Community partners' enrichment programming has been used to strengthen content-specific initiatives such as STEM and will be used to complement initiatives in other topic areas as well in the future. While OST practitioners are completing Prime Time's STEM training and coaching sessions, they are required to request a STEM enrichment activity to be conducted at their afterschool site by a local community partner like the local zoo or science museum. The practitioners attend the enrichment activity provided by the community partner and watch closely for the principles taught in training. This approach allows them to see what they heard about in training putting theory into practice. Both the OST practitioners and youth learn from a content expert and benefit from participating in the activities together.

Step 4:

Assess and support delivery of high quality enrichment activities

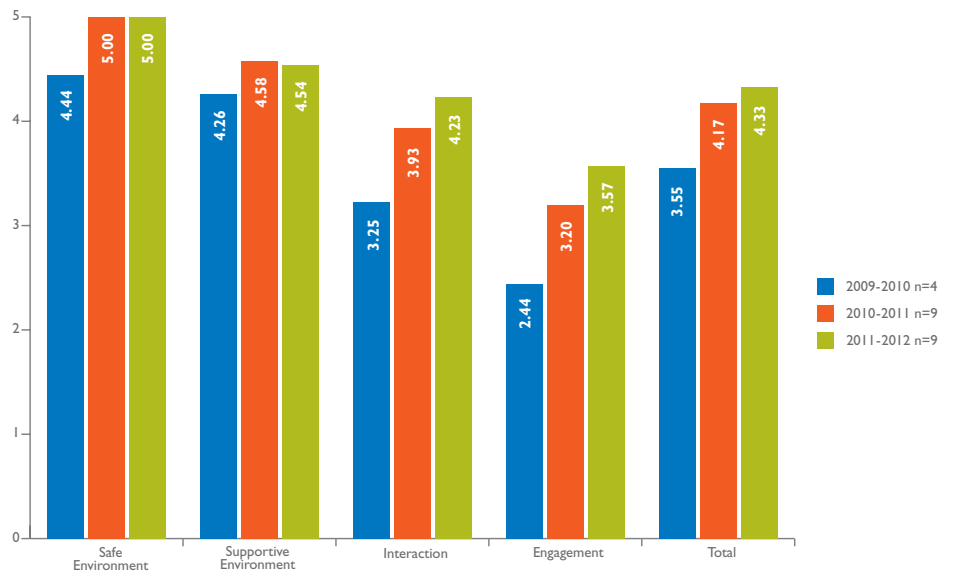
Through training and other supports in positive youth development strategies to complement their content expertise, Prime Time's community partners have developed model programs to deliver high quality content in four major categories: Academics in Afterschool; Health and Wellness; Integrated Arts and Creativity; and Positive Youth Development. With Prime Time's support, the partners have formed a comprehensive system of content-specific enrichments, grounded in youth development best-practices, for Palm Beach County's OST community.

The quality improvement work started with four organizations in the first year and then expanded to five more community partners in the following two years, for a total of nine community partners that provide more than 25,000 enrichment opportunities for youth.

In the Spring of 2011, Prime Time commissioned the Weikart Center to conduct an initial evaluation of the partners' participation in quality improvement efforts. The following graph shows all partners' scores in the four major areas that are measured by Prime Time's quality measurement tool, the PBC-PQA – Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement – as well as the overall scores for the three years.¹

1. Prime Time continues to analyze the data and added the most recent year's scores to Weikart two-year analysis

Community Partners Quality Improvement Efforts





About Prime Time

Prime Time Palm Beach County is a nonprofit intermediary organization dedicated to ensuring that afterschool and summer programs are of high quality in terms of delivery, standards and practice. Prime Time provides a variety of supports through its quality improvement system, professional development opportunities and career advising, and a variety of community engagements and supports including expanded learning opportunities.

Prime Time receives significant funding from the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County.

Expanded Learning & Afterschool Project

This brief was developed with generous support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, in partnership with the Collaborative for Building After School Systems as part of the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project.

The study results show that Prime Time's trainings and supports helped move all the community partners into the high range in their overall scores – with the greatest gains seen in the area of “Engagement.” The end result for children is that they receive content expertise and effective positive youth development for exceptional enrichment learning experiences during the non-school hours.

Conclusion

Prime Time's model demonstrates that quality improvement efforts, which include training and evaluation, can positively impact the quality of enrichment activities that community organizations provide to youth. In addition, the model shows how intermediaries can broker valuable partnerships between community partners and OST programs thereby expanding the opportunities for children to learn outside the classroom, often exposing youth to enrichment activities and experiences they would not otherwise be able to access. Furthermore, community partners with content expertise are a tremendous resource for augmenting OST professional development. By facilitating the training of – and delivered by – community partners, and by connecting them with appropriate afterschool and summer programs, Prime Time is impacting the quality of OST programming that children receive, contributing to positive youth outcomes.

References

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