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# HOURS OF OPPORTUNITY

VOLUME 3

## Profiles of Five Cities Improving After-School Programs Through a Systems Approach

JENNIFER SLOAN **MCCOMBS** SUSAN J. **BODILLY** NATE **ORR**  
ETHAN **SCHERER** LOUAY **CONSTANT** DANIEL **GERSHWIN**

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## Summary

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High-quality out-of-school-time (OST) programs, which for our purposes include both after-school and summer learning programs, have been shown to positively affect youth development and reduce negative behaviors. At the same time, the provision of OST programming in urban centers has been criticized for poor quality and lack of access for those most in need of services. In response, The Wallace Foundation sponsored an initiative in 2003 to help five cities develop better coordinating mechanisms to reduce OST fragmentation, redundancy, and inefficiency and to increase access and quality. The Wallace Foundation first provided each site with a planning grant to support the development of a business plan. After The Foundation approved a site's plan, the site received its implementation grant. The initiative began with a planning grant to Providence, Rhode Island, in 2003, followed by grants to New York City, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. The Foundation's funds were to be used for cross-agency and within-agency planning and coordination to meet the initiative's goals. In 2008, The Foundation asked RAND to assess the progress of the five sites.

### **Purpose of This Study**

The RAND study, carried out from January 2008 to May 2009, had two interrelated parts. The first, reported in *Hours of Opportunity*, Volume 1: *Lessons from Five Cities on Building Systems to Improve After-School, Summer School, and Other Out-of-School-Time Programs* (Bodilly et al., 2010), was to describe the sites' work under the grant and to analyze the conditions and activities that contributed to their progress in building a coordinated system of services that would meet the initiative's goals: increasing access, improving quality, developing and using information for decisionmaking, and planning for sustainability. The second part of the study, reported in *Hours of Opportunity*, Volume 2: *The Power of Data to Improve After-School Programs Citywide* (McCombs et al., 2010), involved a detailed analysis of the cities' progress in building and implementing management information systems to track student enrollment and attendance, including—but not limited to—The Wallace Foundation grantees. This report supplements the two other publications in the series by providing in-depth case studies of the Wallace-funded cities, including a profile of local context, each city's work under the planning grant, the overall goals of the effort, each city's work in the implementation phase, and enablers and challenges to implementation.

The overall study addressed the following research questions:

1. What decisions did sites make about approaches to improving OST systems during the early phases of the initiative? What drove these decisions?
2. What progress did sites make toward increasing access, improving quality, using data-based decisionmaking, and improving sustainability?
3. How did collaboration and coordination enable progress? What other enablers were important?

## Approach

To answer the research questions, we used a qualitative, replicated case-study approach in which the unit of analysis was the citywide, multiorganizational initiative funded by The Wallace Foundation. The study provided a descriptive analysis of the activities that the sites undertook and the conditions that led to progress toward each city's specific goals (under the broader Wallace initiative goals). The analysis involved examining the data for similarities and differences among the sites and identifying themes concerning the factors that enabled or hindered sites' progress toward their goals.

We conducted a literature review of collaborative interagency reform efforts in the OST and other social service sectors to help us understand the types of mechanisms that the sites might use to promote system building. This review supported the development of interview protocols and guided data analysis. The main themes from the literature were as follows:

- The development of citywide approaches among multiple organizations can be challenging.
- Although coordination is desirable for efficiency and other reasons, it may be difficult to achieve in the absence of political will or sufficient resources.
- Interagency coordination or collaboration to improve systems may be slow to develop, fragile, and difficult to sustain over time.
- Factors known to influence the success of initiatives include leadership capability, sufficient and capable staffing, buy-in from major stakeholders, public support, communication among stakeholders, funding, and city context.
- Success may depend on the emergence of leaders who use unifying techniques to ensure buy-in and coordination among the organizations and key managers involved in the effort.

The literature also revealed a number of activities in which sites might engage to varying degrees: (1) conducting a needs assessment; (2) building shared goals; (3) consolidating or developing more coordinated structures and roles; (4) coordinating among groups; (5) planning for and implementing coordinated activities; (6) developing, analyzing, and sharing information; (7) communicating with the public and stakeholders; and (8) addressing the need for incentives, rules, and supports.

We gathered documentation from each case-study site (e.g., grant proposals, planning documents, and memoranda), interviewed 152 key staff in relevant organizations (e.g., the mayor's office, school district, state and city agencies, providers, funders), and conducted a survey of providers regarding their use of management information (MI) systems.

Our primary goal was to track and describe the sites' activities and the challenges and enablers they faced in the process. To determine where sites started and what their intentions were (research question 1), we reviewed statements made in initial proposals and business plans concerning each of the four expectation categories: improving access and participation, improving quality, developing MI systems, and developing and implementing plans for financial sustainability.

To determine the cities' progress (research question 2) and the factors that enabled progress (question 3), we collected data on activities during the grant and records of accomplishments, examined documents, and conducted interviews. We conducted two rounds of interviews, the first in spring 2008 and the second in spring 2009. To gather information on providers' use of MI systems, we developed and administered a 20-minute survey (final sample = 358 providers) that covered the following topics and constructs drawn from the literature: frequency of data entry, MI system training, technical support, leadership, buy-in, usability of the system, use of data, usefulness of data, and perceived validity of the collected data.

## Findings

### Providence

Prior to the Wallace initiative, no city agency provided or funded OST programs or was dedicated to youth development. Because there was no city agency or organization focused on OST, Rhode Island Kids Count, a statewide nonprofit, helped coordinate the planning process and engaged all stakeholders in significant fact-based review of what existed and what was most needed. The planning year resulted in a decision to focus on middle school programming, and an intermediary agency called Providence After School Alliance (PASA) was formed to lead the system-building effort. Heads of several city agencies, such as the Providence Police Department and the Providence Public Schools, sat in on its steering committee meetings (and later its board meetings), which were chaired by the mayor.

The planning grant promised to create neighborhood campuses, called AfterZones, to provide middle school youth with after-school activities at their schools and other community locations. Each AfterZone was overseen by a coordinator and several site-based staff. The intermediary was to develop a management information system to track students during program hours, develop and implement quality standards and a self-assessment tool for providers, obtain funding to sustain the effort, and ensure access for all middle school children who wanted services.

In Providence, the AfterZones offered after-school opportunities to all middle school students, and approximately 34 percent of the students participated—an increase from about 500 to 1,700 slots. PASA developed and adopted quality standards, which were being used across the entire state, and provided professional development for providers. PASA helped secure federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds to support the AfterZones, and, with direct help from the mayor, had been successful in bringing in many private donations to support system building and programs. Data on participation were used in daily decisionmaking, to inform planning, and to help garner additional funding for the efforts. Building on the success of the AfterZones, PASA was beginning to support system-building efforts at the high school level.

**New York City**

Prior to the Wallace initiative, New York City had a sprawling array of providers under a large number of city agencies that did little to coordinate with each other. Two very active intermediary organizations received city funding: The AfterSchool Corporation and Partnership for After School Education. During the planning grant, a city-led review of city-contracted services for high-need youth led to the consolidation of many programs and funds into the city's Department of Youth and Child Development (DYCD). And to ensure further coordination across the many city agencies, the mayor appointed a special adviser with delegated mayoral power to increase coordination across the agencies. As part of the planning process, the city used market research and data analysis to identify underserved locations, and, subsequently, the implementation grant focused on providing better programs across all age levels in high-need areas of the city. DYCD developed a new contract process for providers and vendors to encourage more programs in high-need areas and promoted quality by providing free professional development to OST providers. It also adopted additional strategies to increase access and enrollment, including improved coordination with the schools and additional information for the public. All interviewees familiar with this initial effort emphasized the important role of the mayor's special adviser in ensuring the cooperation of other agencies, holding regular and productive meetings, and creating specific memoranda of understanding to document agreements among the agencies.

Over the course of the initiative, DYCD moved programming to high-need areas and expanded the number of available slots from 45,000 to more than 80,000. It established quality standards and monitored providers as part of the contract system. In addition, DYCD provided free professional development to all funded providers. It required the providers to enter program and participation data into an MI system. Data from this system were used to hold providers accountable for participation, signal potential quality issues, and help garner additional funding for OST programming. In addition, New York City's sustainment plan aimed to use participation and evaluation data to prove the benefits of OST programming and increase city support in a competitive funding environment.

**Boston**

In the planning year, the OST field in Boston included two intermediary organizations, Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet) and Boston After School and Beyond (Boston Beyond), and the city provided funding primarily through the community centers that operated under the Boston Centers for Youth and Families. Boston Beyond led the planning grant because of its potential for leadership in the sector and the participation of the mayor and other key city leaders on its board. In the planning period, leaders soon focused on using the grant to enhance an existing initiative of the Boston Public Schools called Partners for Student Success (PSS). This initiative focused on a small number of low-performing elementary schools and was intended to offer a full-service model of supports, including significantly increased after-school programming, to turn performance around. The plan called for PSS to be piloted in five schools in the first year, and it expanded to five additional schools in each subsequent year of the Wallace grant (15 schools total). The initiative included school-, program-, and system-level strategies. At the school level, a manager of extended learning services (MELS) would be located in each of the 15 schools to coordinate the school-level effort. The program-level strategy called for offering professional development to providers to strengthen services. At the system level, the goal was to institutionalize the PSS approach across the city and the school

system. A coordinated information system and evaluation were to support the initiative. The implementation grant was given to Boston Beyond, with the mayor's support, to implement the model by helping coordinate the work of the MELS, offering professional development for providers to improve their services, and building a coordinated information system.

During the first two years of the grant, Boston Beyond faced a number of staffing changes, including the resignation of its executive director, which delayed implementation. Further, there were many leadership changes in the various city agencies—the superintendent, the head of the Department of Human Services, and the police commissioner, all of whom were *ex-officio* members of the Boston Beyond board. The PSS demonstration occurred in only ten schools rather than the 15 planned demonstration schools. In spring 2008, The Foundation asked Boston to resubmit an implementation plan, and it developed a new business plan that included the active participation of the mayor's office, the superintendent's office, the Department of Extended Learning Time, Afterschool, and Services (DELTAS, a small agency in the public school system), Boston Beyond, and other key city agencies. The new business plan placed the PSS sites into the DELTAS Triumph Collaborative, a group of Boston public schools that shared an OST model that was similar to that of the PSS schools, including full-time on-site coordinators who were supported by the DELTAS. Thus, in the 2008–2009 school year, work under the grant expanded to include all Triumph Collaborative schools (42 schools in total, including the PSS schools), and the DELTAS office assumed operational responsibility for implementing the initiative.

After-school program participation increased in the PSS schools; five of these schools did not have an OST program prior to the demonstration. In 2008, 927 students were enrolled in after-school programs across the ten PSS sites. In 2009, DELTAS provided professional development and coaching to after-school program staff and principals at all schools in the Triumph Collaborative. It also evaluated quality using a set of standards and rubrics. The MI system was in development, and there were no changes in how OST was funded or how funding could be sustained.

### **Chicago**

Prior to the Wallace initiative, Chicago's OST provision was sponsored by four major city agencies and a highly regarded, nationally recognized high school OST organization, After School Matters. The mayor's wife, the director of After School Matters, led the planning grant process, which used a steering committee structure that included the major OST organizations and was supported by several University of Chicago professors.

In Chicago, the grant was intended to improve coordination across city agencies and, especially, to fund projects that the agencies would not otherwise fund. Five strategies were outlined: build and implement MI systems to track OST programs and participation and provide the systems to all OST partners and providers, develop and implement a communication plan to target teens, disseminate best practices across providers, pilot a consistent way to measure and ensure OST quality, and develop strategies for long-term sustainment. The effort was housed in the Department of Children and Youth Services (which later became Family and Support Services) with a multiagency committee set up to coordinate the grant activities. Early activities focused on developing a management information system for each major OST-funding agency. The hope was that, by working together on this endeavor, the agencies would find ways to cooperate on the other significant improvements needed, especially focusing on

improving programming for teens, who appeared to be underserved compared to elementary-level children.

All the major public agencies in Chicago had a functional MI system, and, in spring 2009, data from all agencies had been merged into a single data set that allowed agencies to look at data across the entire OST system. Chicago had established a quality pilot that was under way in 43 sites, and the Chicago Public Library had led an active teen campaign to improve teen participation. There was no change in how OST was funded or how funding could be sustained.

### **Washington, D.C.**

In Washington, D.C., the D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (the Trust), a public-private venture founded in 1999, acted as an intermediary between the city agencies and community-based organization (CBO) providers and advocated for improved funding and programming. In addition, many city agencies provided services to youth, including the Family Court, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Health, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the D.C. Public Library, and the Metropolitan Police Department. The Trust led the planning process in Washington, D.C.

Market research identified a lack of programming for and participation among middle school youth, which led the Trust to propose the creation of high-quality OST programming in five middle schools, with on-site coordinators to achieve better coordination and alignment. The model would be scaled-up to other middle schools after the demonstration period. The proposed supporting infrastructure for the citywide system had three elements: an MI system to track enrollment and attendance, a system for applying and improving standards through training, and a communication strategy. In the long term, the plan called for sustainment through absorption into the city budget.

At the beginning of the implementation grant, in the early days of a new city administration, the city council passed legislation that brought the schools under mayoral control and established the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (ICSIC). Staff of the Trust and other government agencies were asked to sit on this commission and to collaboratively plan and coordinate OST provision and other youth services for the city. The legislation moved the focus of coordinated activities away from the intermediary and toward more centralized governmental planning through ICSIC.

In the final year of the grant, as a result of ICSIC's decisions, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) undertook a concerted and unprecedented effort to improve OST provision in the city's public schools. Using the model developed by the Trust under the grant, DCPS moved to open the schools to CBOs during after-school hours, began a process to vet CBOs, and placed coordinators in each school to work with the CBOs, principals, teachers, and parents to improve services. The school-based coordinator model developed by the Trust was implemented across the district.

In spring 2009, Washington, D.C., had OST programming in all its public schools, and each school had an on-site OST coordinator, funded by the school system. The Trust and the school system continued to use their own MI systems to track participation. The mayor called on the schools, the Trust, and other agencies to regularly report on programs and participation.