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JEANNE B. MULLGRAV
Commissioner

Update on First Year of Out-of-School Time (OST) Programs

I am pleased to present you with the first year evaluation report for the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) Out-of-School Time (OST) initiative.

Several years ago, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, DYCD, 10 other city agencies and a broad cross-section of leaders from the afterschool and youth development field embarked on an ambitious redesign of the City's OST system. Our goals were to improve the delivery and quality of services, establish measurable outcomes and standards for accountability, use scarce resources more efficiently, support working families and target programs to underserved communities. What resulted from this planning process is the largest municipally-funded afterschool system in the nation: a \$200 million investment over 3 years, with 550 programs serving more than 50,000 throughout the City of New York during the 2005-2006 school year.

As part of the initiative, the City of New York was awarded a 5-year, \$12 million grant from The Wallace Foundation to focus on OST system-building. This multi-faceted effort includes long-term business planning, data collection, evaluation, support for pilot programs, and a communications campaign to build public awareness and understanding of OST. These projects directly support DYCD's three areas of focus, which are to increase the **Quality**, **Reach and Equity**, and the **Sustainability** of NYC's OST system in future years.

First Year Evaluation Findings

Imbedded in these goals is a strong commitment to evaluation and measurement of progress. Evidence of this commitment is DYCD's three year contract with Policy Studies Associates (PSA), the independent organization charged with evaluating the success of the OST initiative.

This evaluation is the key to DYCD's ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of OST programs and the efficient use of taxpayer dollars. By making the case that youth benefit from high-quality OST programming, we hope to strengthen the public's favorable opinion of the program and ensure the sustainability of the OST system. In the short-term, PSA's first-year findings will guide DYCD in its ongoing program and policy developments and help target technical assistance and support services to our portfolio of non-profit contractors.

In any program start-up, much of the focus and work is targeted to operational issues. DYCD's primary task during Year One was to ensure that all programs began operations successfully and enrolled their contracted numbers of participants. DYCD was pleased that the Year One Evaluation captured the importance of this achievement and also reflected many of the findings that we see in our staff's daily site visits to OST programs.

These highlights include the following:

Enrolling High Numbers of Youth

- o Across the board, programs were successful in enrolling participants during the first year of the OST initiative.
- o Programs served more students than were specified in their contracts, with most programs meeting or exceeding enrollment targets.

Demonstrating Program Quality

- o Community-based organizations (CBOs) hired a cadre of diverse, highly-educated and qualified program directors to lead the OST programs. Eighty-six percent of program directors possessed a four-year college degree or higher.
- o Programs offered a variety of rich content-based activities to support multiple domains of youth development. Programs were structured to provide academic, recreational and cultural opportunities to participants.

Meeting the Needs of Parents

- o Parents were satisfied with the quality of the OST program their child attended and almost two-thirds of parents rated the overall quality of their programs as excellent.
- o Two-thirds of parents reported missing less work because their child was in OST.

Meeting the Needs of Youth

- o Programs served a diverse population of young people from throughout the City and in all grade levels.
- o Programs were successful at providing spaces for children to interact with one another, offering opportunities to participate in new and interesting activities, meet new friends and establish positive relationships with adult staff members.
- o Children and families felt that the programs are safe and help support healthy living.

Upcoming Opportunities

While the PSA report identifies many Year One accomplishments, it also presents several opportunities for DYCD to work with its CBO partners to strengthen programming and help enhance the evaluation process in the coming years.

1. Improving Data Collection

Prior to the launch of OST, the City had no mechanism for quantifying the number of youth participating in afterschool programs and the frequency in which they participated. In designing the new OST system, it became clear that this information would be essential to any formal evaluation effort. Hence, DYCD, with support from The Wallace Foundation, created *OST Online*, a new, customized web-based program management and data collection system.

One of the primary challenges the agency encountered during Year One was the implementation of this new system. In order to get 550 programs and their staff members trained in the new technology, the agency offered extensive and targeted technical assistance throughout the year. Nevertheless, there were some delays in transitioning to the new system, which caused some inaccuracies in the data set. DYCD and PSA made a concerted effort to correct any potential errors and both organizations are confident that the data is representative and the findings are accurate. Now that provider organizations have adjusted to the new system,

DYCD anticipates that errors related to data collection will be minimal in the second year of operations. DYCD also will continue to solicit OST providers' feedback and recommendations, which allow the agency to revise and enhance *OST Online* so it is both user-friendly and supportive of the evaluation process.

2. Understanding Participation

Research in the afterschool field shows that consistent program attendance is related to positive youth outcomes. As a result, DYCD set enrollment and attendance targets in its contracts with OST providers. However, the agency recognizes that while many programs exceeded their targets in the implementation year, others have struggled to meet the attendance requirements, a challenge that is seen throughout the afterschool field.

DYCD will continue to study this issue and has already taken several steps to encourage more consistent participation levels. First, DYCD continues to offer targeted technical assistance to all OST programs in order to improve program quality and increase attendance levels. Second, beginning in Year Two, DYCD will adjust reimbursement levels for programs that do not meet participation targets. Third, DYCD will continue to foster partnerships between schools and providers to assist in recruitment and retention efforts. Finally, DYCD's market research project will help the agency and providers better understand the needs and preferences of specific communities and age-groups that may not be regularly attending programs.

3. Supporting Qualified Staff through Professional Development

The Year One evaluation reveals that hiring qualified staff is a challenge for OST providers, and notes that many programs employ high school and college students in line-staff positions. CBOs hire students in order to ensure a higher staff-to-participant ratio and to provide job opportunities for qualified young people. DYCD is committed to strengthening the field of youth workers, whose qualifications, skills and passion for their jobs is directly tied to the positive impact they have on the youth in their OST programs.

In its oversight role, DYCD strongly emphasizes the staffing qualification standards for all programs. All OST providers are required to have a School-Age Child Care (SACC) license, as mandated by New York State. The agency also provides extensive opportunities to CBOs for professional development, including its new *DYCD Scholars* program, which assists OST front-line staff members in securing college credits.

Looking Forward

DYCD embarked on this evaluation because we are committed to learning how OST programs can best serve the children of New York City. In the coming year, DYCD will build on the success of this first year report by improving the data collection system, helping providers achieve their participation targets and providing professional development opportunities. At the same time, PSA will continue to refine survey instruments and will access additional resources, including data from the Department of Education, which we anticipate will help better inform our work.

¹SACC regulations require staff-to-child ratios and prohibit staff members under 18 years of age from supervising groups with children 12 years old or younger, unless another staff member, at least 18 years old, is also present. SACC regulations also require that CBOs screen *all* applicants for staff positions, and hire youth who demonstrate capability and suitability for their designated roles. In addition, CBOs are required to provide appropriate training, supervision, and professional development for all staff.

DYCD also will share this report's findings with our partners and supporters in the corporate,

philanthropic, non-profit and advocacy sectors, both in New York City and across the country. The agency anticipates that other OST stakeholders will take advantage of these data resources and use them in our collective efforts to promote and expand high-quality programming for youth.

This report is merely the first step in our long-term commitment to quantifying and analyzing the positive impact that OST and afterschool programming can have on young people, their families and their futures.

Sincerely,

Jeanne B. Mullgrav