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Focus on OST High School Programs

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is pleased to present this report on the Out-of-School Time Initiative's High School Programs.

Four years ago, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, DYCD, ten other city agencies and a broad cross-section of leaders from the afterschool, youth development and education fields embarked on an ambitious redesign of the City's OST system. We aimed to improve the delivery and quality of services, establish measurable outcomes and standards for accountability, utilize scarce resources more efficiently, support working families and target programs to underserved communities. Now in its fourth year, OST is the largest municipally-funded afterschool system in the nation, with 644 programs serving more than 80,000 young people throughout the City of New York during the 2007-2008 school year.

Evaluation is central to DYCD's ability to ensure that OST programs are delivering high-quality services to our youth, and to demonstrate the efficient use of taxpayer dollars. DYCD entered into a three-year contract with Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA) to measure the success of the OST initiative.

DYCD has issued three reports on the OST initiative to date. The first year's report, released in 2007, focused on implementation and operational issues. The Year 2 interim report focused on the transition of OST programs into their second year, including summer programming. The full Year 2 evaluation, released earlier this year, examined the quality of OST programming. This year's interim report takes a more in-depth look at a subset of the OST portfolio – programs serving high school youth.

We are pleased that the study identified significant improvements to services for this age group in the first 2 ½ years of the OST initiative, and we look forward to using these findings to continue to enhance programming for older youth.

THE YOUTH WE SERVE

- 122 OST programs serve high school youth
- More than 30,000 high school youth served in first 2.5 years of OST initiative
- 13,097 high school youth participated in the 2006-2007 school year

POSITIVE FINDINGS

OST High School Programs:

- Increased enrollment and attendance from Year 1 to Year 2 and to Year 3.
- Offered career-related programming, including:

- career exploration activities,
- orientation to job search and basic employability skills,
- internships or apprenticeships, and
- field trips to local businesses
- Gave participants opportunities to engage with their community through activities or discussions
- Used varied strategies to attract and retain youth, including:
 - Awarding youth stipends for work, volunteering, and/or meeting attendance thresholds
 - Developing strong, positive relationships between youth and program staff
 - Appealing to youth through youth-friendly outreach methods such as text messages and emails
 - For school-based programs, developing strong working relationships with host schools and becoming fully integrated into the school environment

Staff at OST High School Programs:

- Are highly qualified
 - 70% were professional specialists (e.g., artist or coach), certified teachers or had another type of college degree
- Are supported by younger staff members, including college students (in half the programs) and high school students themselves (in about a third of the programs)

Participants at OST High School Programs:

- Expressed a strong sense of belonging in their OST programs
- Developed positive relationships with peers in their programs.
- Overwhelmingly reported that they had positive relationships with staff
- Had opportunities to take leadership roles or provide input into programming
- Reported that their programs provided exposure to new experiences

CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

Despite the improvement in attracting and retaining participants, some challenges remain. Many programs continued to struggle to meet enrollment and attendance requirements. Also, program directors frequently reported that DYCD OST funding represented only a portion of the resources needed to offer high-quality activities and to hire experienced, qualified staff members.

DYCD plans to address these challenges and others in a forthcoming Request for Proposals (RFP) for OST programs for high school-age youth. The new RFP will integrate the findings of this report, as well as input from the community to create an improved model for serving young people.