

# *AfterZones:* Creating a Citywide System to Support and Sustain High-Quality After-School Programs

Lauren J. Kotloff





***AfterZones:***

Creating a Citywide System  
to Support and Sustain  
High-Quality After-School  
Programs

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# Executive Summary

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**I**ncreasingly, research has shown that participation in out-of-school-time (OST) programs can lead to improvements in youth's educational outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, school behavior, attitudes toward school, attendance and educational expectations); enhance social and emotional development (e.g., self-esteem, positive social behavior); and reduce the likelihood that they will engage in risk-taking behavior.<sup>1</sup> However, two conditions must exist for these benefits to accrue: The programs must be high quality and youth must participate over a sustained period of time.<sup>2</sup>

There is compelling evidence that participation in structured organized activities dramatically falls when youth enter middle school. For example, an evaluation of after-school programs that were part of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative found the average attendance rate for youth in grades 6 through 8 was 1.6 days per week compared with 1.9 days per week for youth in grades 4 and 5 and 2.2 days per week for youth in grades 1 through 3.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, during the middle school years, youth face many new challenges and need the support that high-quality OST programs can provide. Self-esteem tends to drop as youth enter middle school, and they begin to feel less confident in their ability to master academic subjects, at the very time when pressures to achieve are increasing. School-day curricula become more rigorous and demanding, and many youth begin to experience academic failure.<sup>4</sup> Their desire to assert their independence and make their own decisions increases, but so does their potential to engage in risky behavior, especially during unsupervised time after school.<sup>5</sup> Low-income youth may be particularly vulnerable because their families and communities lack the resources needed to provide quality structured activities during the after-school hours.

Within cities, the rapid growth in OST programs over the past two decades has often resulted in a fragmented landscape of independent efforts with precarious funding and uneven quality.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the need for an efficient and

effective way to sustain and improve OST programs and make them available to more low-income youth, a growing number of cities have begun building systems to support after-school initiatives.

Building on a long history of investments in OST learning, The Wallace Foundation launched an out-of-school learning initiative in 2003. The initiative was created to support citywide system-building efforts that could advance three interrelated goals for the OST field: improving program quality, making programs accessible to youth who need them most, and improving youth participation so more children can realize benefits. The Foundation granted funds to five cities to support their after-school system-building initiatives: Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Providence, RI; and Washington, DC.

One of the cities, Providence, RI, developed a citywide after-school initiative for middle school youth called the AfterZone initiative, to be led by the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), a local intermediary. The following pages summarize a report by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) that documents AfterZone's implementation. P/PV carried out data collection for this study from February 2008 through March 2009. A second P/PV report that focuses on how youth participated in AfterZone programs, and the relationship of various patterns of participation to youth outcomes, will be published in 2011.

### **The AfterZone Model**

The AfterZone model has two features that distinguish it from other citywide after-school initiatives. First, in contrast to traditional after-school models in which programs are offered in a single school or center, the AfterZone model is based on a neighborhood "campus" structure where services are offered at multiple sites in a geographically clustered area. This provides youth with the opportunity to travel to programs located outside of the main facility—the "anchor" middle school—to local libraries, recreational and art centers, and other community facilities. Second, while many citywide initiatives address program quality, the AfterZone model places a particularly strong focus on continuous quality improvement. In planning the initiative, PASA set out to establish a single set of standards that would define

high-quality programming and then incorporate these standards in all AfterZone offerings.

PASA's mission is to utilize, coordinate and strengthen existing youth programs and community resources across the city to provide middle school youth with easily accessible, high-quality after-school programs. PASA is also responsible for putting mechanisms in place for training and supporting local programs and providers citywide. To carry out this mission and to sustain broad-based support throughout the initiative, PASA has worked closely with the mayor and leaders of the city's public and private youth-serving agencies.

During the school year, the AfterZones offer two-and-a-half hours of programming four days a week in three sessions that run from September through May. Programs offered in the fall and winter sessions are 11 weeks long; programs offered in the spring session last 6 weeks. In 2008, the AfterZones began offering a four-week summer program, drawing youth from across the city. There are three distinct AfterZone campuses, each with a different menu of specific programs; while the particulars vary, all the campuses offer programs in the arts, life skills/leadership, sports and academic enrichment. Seven middle schools participate in the initiative, providing space for AfterZone programs and support for recruiting students.

## The Study Design

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study examines the implementation of the AfterZones' unique features and documents the strategies used to: engage and retain the city's middle school youth, ensure AfterZone programs are high quality and sustain the AfterZones beyond the start-up grant period. The study also examines the extent to which AfterZone programs incorporated practices associated with positive youth development.

The research methods were selected to document the early history of PASA and the AfterZone initiative as well as the mechanisms PASA put in place to manage, coordinate, strengthen and sustain the citywide network of AfterZone providers and to improve the quality of AfterZone programs. P/PV researchers aimed to include the perspectives of

all key stakeholders, and data analysis was oriented toward identifying the challenges and successes of the citywide system-building effort. Data was also collected to provide a snapshot of the quality of AfterZone programs during the study. Primary sources of data were:

- Site visits—Site visits were conducted in May 2008, December 2008 and March 2009. During each three- to four-day visit, P/PV researchers interviewed AfterZone staff, program providers, representatives of governance groups and other key stakeholders to learn about the initiative's structure and operations and its implementation accomplishments and challenges.
- Program observations—Observational assessments of a sample of AfterZone programs were conducted over two years by on-site consultants using a quality assessment tool known as the RIPQA.<sup>7</sup> The tool provides ratings of a range of youth development practices in such categories as Supportive Environment and Youth Engagement.
- Youth feedback surveys—Surveys asked youth about their experiences in AfterZone programs.
- Surveys of instructors—Surveys of AfterZone program instructors gathered information about the training they received through PASA.
- AfterZone program documents—Researchers reviewed documents generated by AfterZone leaders, such as business plans, annual reports, program brochures, the AfterZone website, and earlier evaluations.

## Summary of Findings

*In the five years since its inception, PASA has built an accessible citywide system of after-school programs and installed a number of mechanisms to coordinate, manage and support this system.*

The AfterZone initiative integrates as many as 100 of Providence's OST providers into a network with a coordinated schedule and a centralized registration process. To support this network, PASA established a grant application system for distributing funds and built a system for transporting youth to programs outside of the middle schools and then to their homes at the end of the day. Through

consistent data collection and an effective use of a web-based data tracking tool, [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net), PASA keeps close watch over enrollment and attendance—in individual programs, in local AfterZones and at the citywide level—and uses these data to inform planning and decision-making. AfterZone stakeholders adopted a single set of program quality standards as well, and PASA uses an observation and feedback process to assess the implementation of these standards and help providers incorporate them into their programs. Finally, PASA offers a menu of professional development and training opportunities for AfterZone providers.

*Effective leadership was important to building a citywide OST system. Active support from the mayor and PASA's strong leadership shaped the initiative and propelled it forward.*

Providence's mayor, David Cicilline, was able to bring key city players together to plan the initiative, and he leveraged commitments from city departments and the school district to redirect their resources (staff, facilities, funds) to help support the AfterZones. As an advocate and champion of the AfterZones both within Providence and beyond, he expanded available resources and brought the initiative to the attention of national foundations and elected officials. He worked closely with PASA throughout, making sure it had the support and cooperation from the city to carry out its mission; he is continuing efforts to secure the initiative's long-term survival.

PASA's focused, skillful and strategic leadership has also been vital to the AfterZone initiative's progress. By carefully cultivating relationships with providers and focusing on capacity-building and collaboration, PASA established itself as a resource for the city's after-school providers and maintained broad-based support. PASA has augmented its in-house talent by seeking opinions from outside authorities and reviewing relevant research; it hired various experts to help develop a three-year business plan and a quality improvement strategy and to conduct studies of early implementation. Finally, PASA's approach to project management and decision-making is data-driven, and the intermediary makes good use of its data-tracking tool to monitor progress and determine what works and what does not.

*An effort to transition from PASA's direct management of local AfterZones to management by community-based organizations (CBOs) was intended to embed the AfterZones more deeply into the fabric of the city, but this effort did not progress as smoothly as was hoped.*

PASA's leadership was crucial to building the infrastructure needed to support a citywide system of high-quality programs. To keep the system going, however, PASA believes that the city's public and private stakeholders, including its youth-serving CBOs, will need to increase their ownership of and investment in the AfterZone initiative. PASA pursued this goal by contracting with four local CBOs that had experience running programs for children to serve as "site management agencies." Supported by 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grants, each agency was responsible for managing a single AfterZone middle school, which entailed hiring and supervising school-based AfterZone staff and managing all the logistical, coordination and supervisory tasks that are part of the daily operations of the school program.

However, the transition to CBO management of local AfterZones was problematic. PASA wanted to see the site management agencies play a more active role in tracking attendance, developing relationships with the school-day faculty and staff, fundraising and other management tasks. It was not clear, however, that the agencies had the organizational capacity to carry out an expanded role. Recent and severe cuts in their own budgets, staff and services made it difficult for them to commit more staff time and resources to managing the AfterZone programs without additional compensation.

Because PASA believes that CBO management of the local AfterZones is necessary for the long-term sustainability of the initiative, it plans to continue searching for funding and technical assistance providers to help strengthen the infrastructures of the agencies that were weakened in the economic downturn. PASA hopes that this type of support will enable the agencies to play the site management role more effectively, while simultaneously strengthening their own organizational capacity and long-term financial viability.

*The AfterZone multisite service delivery model, in which programs are offered in middle schools as well as in the community, presents unique opportunities and challenges. Off-site programming is costly but has the potential to provide youth with enriching learning experiences.*

To access off-site programs, youth have to be shuttled from the middle school to the off-site location at the start of the afternoon and then back to the school in time to get picked up by parents or board a school bus home. The fleet of vans and shuttle buses that PASA and its partners have patched together is both expensive and logistically complex to run. Despite these difficulties in reaching programs offered outside the middle school, the off-site programs provide youth enriching learning experiences—in, for example, an art center or a marina—that are simply not possible in a school setting. Consequently, PASA believes that the potential benefits to youth of offering these unique experiences outweigh the cost of transportation and additional time required from staff to carry them out.

*The challenge of integrating and supporting program providers operating in multiple locations is being met through an effective use of staff and open channels of communication between the field and PASA.*

The AfterZone multisite service delivery model presents more oversight and management challenges than the typical school-based after-school program. Assigning a school-based site coordinator to manage operations in each middle school and an AfterZone manager to each local AfterZone appears to provide enough field staff to enable daily operations to run smoothly. The AfterZone managers play a particularly crucial role: In addition to overseeing the off-site providers in their local AfterZone and supporting the school-based site coordinators, they make sure PASA is kept abreast of developments on the ground. PASA senior staff's supervision and guidance of AfterZone managers' work in the field helps ensure successful and consistent implementation of citywide strategies.

*PASA designed the AfterZone model with a keen sensitivity to the developmental needs of middle school youth.*

Based on extensive upfront research, PASA identified program qualities critical to promoting participation among this age group—such as autonomy

and choice—and tailored the AfterZones' programming and recruitment and retention strategies to middle school youth's social, emotional and academic needs. PASA worked to incorporate aspects of youth culture into the style and content of programming, which also helped set the AfterZones apart from programs for younger children.

PASA and the program providers recognized middle school youth's ongoing need for adult support and designed recruitment and retention practices accordingly. PASA strived to hire young assistant staff the youth could relate to, look up to and look forward to seeing when they came to the program. Such practices were designed to help youth develop personal relationships with staff and activity leaders, which is important for engaging and retaining youth and well recognized as a crucial aspect of effective youth development programs.

*The AfterZones succeeded in enrolling nearly half the students who attended the seven participating middle schools. Involving older middle school youth, especially eighth graders, proved more difficult than expected.*

Attendance data indicate that over the two years of the study, the proportion of students from the seven participating middle schools remained at 44 percent of the total student enrollment, ranging from roughly one third to one half of the students in each school. However, most participants were sixth and seventh graders. Some schools saw enrollment numbers begin to decrease when youth reached seventh grade, but in all schools there was a sizable drop in enrollment among eighth graders.

The difficulties the AfterZones experienced attracting eighth graders highlights how programming for middle school youth needs to be finely attuned to the rapid developmental changes occurring during these years. To curb program attrition as youth move into the higher middle school grades, PASA and AfterZone providers will need to learn more about the interests and concerns of youth in this age group as well as the barriers that may prevent them from enrolling (such as increased responsibilities at home).

PASA relies on several recruitment strategies, all of which are based on making direct personal contact with youth. Recruitment fairs designed to allow



youth to meet AfterZone instructors and see examples of each program's materials and projects are the most successful strategy. Staff also engage in targeted phone outreach to recruit students and place reminder phone calls to all enrolled youth at the beginning of each session. If youth do not attend programs for which they signed up, or are absent from the program, a staff member will call to find out why they are not attending and try to reengage them. PASA sets targets for enrollment and attendance levels and closely monitors enrollment and retention data, intensifying outreach as necessary.

*PASA implements comprehensive quality improvement and professional development strategies and activities; however, the lack of timely follow-up decreases the power of these strategies to improve program quality.*

The main quality improvement strategies used by PASA with AfterZone providers include: an agreed-upon set of dimensions or standards that define high-quality programming; a research-validated observation tool, the RIPQA, used to gauge program quality along each of these dimensions; a feedback mechanism to discuss the findings from a one-time quality assessment using the RIPQA; and professional development opportunities designed to build the capacity of activity instructors to incorporate best practices into their programs. Putting these strategies in place citywide by the third year of the initiative represents a considerable achievement.

However, the power of these systems to effect change is limited by the lack of regular follow-up. While thorough and systematic, the use of the RIPQA-based observation and feedback process is costly and time-consuming. A team of trained observers conducts a 40–50 minute observation using the RIPQA tool. After the observation, team members compare scores, write up an action plan based on their findings and provide feedback to the program's instructors. Because of the large number of programs to observe and the limited number of staff to complete the observations and feedback, little time is left to return to the program for follow-up observations.

Follow-up observations could ensure that the program provider has made suggested changes or, in cases where program quality is quite high (as it

generally was in AfterZones), that the strong practices previously observed are being maintained. This would create a true system of continuous program improvement, which would be more effective in raising program quality. In the coming year, PASA plans to focus on a small group of providers whose RIPQA scores indicated a need for improvement and provide this group with more intensive coaching and frequent follow-up.

*Most AfterZone programs, especially those focused on arts, provide youth with high levels of adult support and opportunities to learn and interact with peers in positive ways.*

Systematic observations of 76 AfterZone programs measured four dimensions of quality: adult support, the physical and emotional safety of the environment, the quality of adult and peer interactions, and opportunities for youth to plan and make choices. The highest scores were on scales measuring positive adult support and emotional safety. Opportunities for youth to plan and make choices received relatively lower scores, suggesting that despite the AfterZone initiative's consistent emphasis on the importance of choice, program instructors are still not fully engaging youth in making plans and decisions during activities.

In surveys, youth participants reported that they enjoy AfterZone programs and find them to be supportive learning environments. Youth reported relatively high levels of adult support and lower levels of youth choice, mirroring the RIQPA data.

*Ensuring long-term sustainability for the AfterZones is a challenge.*

The short-term financial outlook for PASA and the AfterZones is good, thanks in large measure to an extension grant from The Wallace Foundation; a one-time federal appropriation; and continuing support from the city, the school district and the police department. Finding renewable funding to sustain PASA and the local AfterZones over the long term, however, presents a major challenge.

The flow of public funding sources, such as the 21st CCLC grant program and state subsidies for child-care, has slowed as a result of the current recession. Similarly, the recession has decreased private foundation endowments, which has slowed private giving.

Believing that public funds will only become available to support high-quality after-school programs if they are seen as an integral part of a child's education and not as something "extra," part of PASA's long-term strategy for sustaining the AfterZones is to integrate after-school programming into the fabric of the student's school day, creating a seamless transition from one to the other. This strategy is based on an "extended-day learning" model, in which students apply the academic concepts and skills they learn in their classrooms in experience-based after-school activities. PASA recently received a three-year grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation that will enable it, in conjunction with the mayor's office and the school district, to develop plans for more closely linking AfterZone programming and school-day learning.

Although the extended-day learning model has received increasing attention from policymakers and funders and has been endorsed by the Obama administration as a promising approach for enhancing student learning, it is still too new to predict whether it will help foster a financially viable future for the AfterZones. Over the next several years, at least, making sure the AfterZones are securely financed is likely to be an uphill battle.

### **A Final Thought**

Building on its existing, but largely independent, provider community and galvanized by committed and effective leadership, PASA has made enormous progress toward reaching its goal of making high-quality after-school programs accessible to low-income middle school youth in a relatively short period of time. It has shown that a campus model is feasible and indeed attracts youth in this age group. It has also demonstrated that, with a concerted effort to track program quality and provide professional development, programs of solid quality can be put in place within a four- or five-year time horizon. In all, the AfterZone experience provides useful insights for the many cities across the country seeking to build systems to expand and support their after-school offerings.





# Introduction

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**Chapter I**



**D**uring the past two decades, out-of-school-time (OST) programs have become a regular feature of the American landscape. Each year, 6.5 million children and youth participate in some type of program during the out-of-school hours.<sup>8</sup>

Accompanying the growth in after-school programs, there is accumulating evidence of the developmental and educational benefits that can accrue to youth who participate. These benefits include improvements in youth's educational outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, school behavior, attitudes toward school, attendance and educational expectations); enhanced social and emotional development (e.g., self-esteem, positive social behavior); and less risk-taking behavior.<sup>9</sup> In one study, sustained participation in after-school programs appeared to protect middle school students from the decline in self-efficacy and school effort that was found among youth who participated less often or not at all.<sup>10</sup>

However, not all programs are effective. A consistent finding from OST evaluations is that two conditions must exist for youth to benefit: The programs must be high quality, and youth must participate over a sustained period.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, program quality is strongly related to participation rates.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, in many programs, and for certain subgroups of youth, these conditions are not consistently met.

### **Middle School Youth Are Underserved**

As the numbers above suggest, while many youth attend OST programs and have access to these benefits, even more do not. There is compelling evidence that participation in structured organized activities dramatically declines in middle school. For example, an evaluation of after-school programs that were part of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative found that the average attendance rate, as measured by the proportion of days present to days scheduled, was 54 percent (or 1.6 days per week)

for youth in sixth through eighth grades. By contrast, the rate was 67 percent (1.9 days per week) for youth in fourth and fifth grades and 73 percent (2.2 days per week) for youth in first through third grades.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) reported that middle school youth attended the centers an average of 0.9 days a week, whereas for elementary school children the average weekly attendance was 1.9 days.<sup>14</sup>

For OST programs, middle school youth present unique programming and staffing needs because of their growing independence and ability to choose whether or not to attend.<sup>15</sup> Yet, youth at this age are experiencing many new challenges and need the supportive services that high-quality OST programs can provide.

The middle school years are a time of rapid physical, social, emotional and intellectual change. The transition from childhood to adolescence can be stressful. Self-esteem tends to drop as youth enter the middle school years; they begin to feel less confident in their ability to master academic subjects at the very time when pressures to achieve are increasing. School-day curricula become more rigorous and demanding, and many youth begin to experience academic failure.<sup>16</sup> Their desire to assert their independence and make their own decisions increases, but so does their potential to engage in risky behavior, especially during unsupervised time after school.<sup>17</sup> Low-income youth may be particularly vulnerable because their families and communities lack the resources needed to provide quality structured activities during the after-school hours.

To attract middle school youth, OST programs need to distinguish themselves from those serving younger children since middle school youth want recognition that they are no longer "young." Middle school programs need to be designed so that youth are provided with opportunities to choose what they do and articulate their opinions and perspectives. Such programs need to allow young people to assert their emerging independence in a safe environment, and to enable youth to broaden their horizons and envision their futures.<sup>18</sup>

## The Need for Coordinated Citywide Strategies

Within cities, the rapid growth in OST programs over the past two decades has often resulted in a fragmented landscape of independent efforts with precarious funding and uneven quality.<sup>19</sup> Acknowledging the need for an efficient and effective way to increase OST providers' capacity to sustain, improve and expand their programs—and make them available to more low-income youth—a growing number of cities are investing in systems to support after-school initiatives. In his seminal paper on citywide after-school system building, Halpern writes that such systems could improve after-school programs by: linking existing city resources and institutions (in arts, culture, sports, etc.) to after-school efforts; strengthening the funding base for after-school programming; developing capacity to collect and analyze information that will guide citywide planning, priority-setting and decision-making; and formulating a broad, coordinated strategy for strengthening program quality.<sup>20</sup>

Building on a long history of investments in OST learning, The Wallace Foundation launched an out-of-school learning initiative in 2003. The initiative was created to support citywide system-building efforts that could advance three interrelated goals: improving program quality, making programs accessible to youth who need them most and increasing youth participation so more children realize benefits. The Foundation granted funds to five cities to support their after-school system-building initiatives: Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Providence, RI; and Washington, DC.

## The Current Study

This report presents our analysis of the implementation of the AfterZone initiative, the system-building effort in Providence, RI (one of the five cities supported by The Wallace Foundation). The AfterZone initiative aims to provide high-quality, accessible OST services to the city's middle school youth.

Although several other cities across America are developing after-school programming for middle school youth (including several of The Wallace Foundation's OST learning initiative cities), the AfterZone model is unique in that it is built on

a network of “neighborhood campuses” (each campus includes multiple sites in a geographically clustered area), providing participants with the opportunity to travel to programs located outside of the main program facility, the middle school. We know of no other citywide system that offers middle school students this opportunity. In addition, while many citywide initiatives aim to address quality, the AfterZone model has a particularly strong focus on continuous quality improvement. This report adds to the growing body of knowledge on how programs can improve quality.

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, we examine the implementation of these unique features and document the initiative's operations more generally. (A subsequent report will investigate the program's effects.)

This report addresses the following research questions:

- What are the key structural and operational features of the AfterZone model?
- What strategies were effective in engaging and retaining middle school youth?
- What mechanisms were put into place to ensure that AfterZone programs will be high quality?
- What is the quality of AfterZone programs, and to what extent do programs incorporate practices associated with positive youth development?
- What strategies are being considered to sustain the AfterZones beyond the start-up grant period?

The report will explore the degree to which Providence's system-building strategy was ultimately able to provide middle school youth with easily accessible, high-quality after-school programs.

## Research Methods and Study Design

The study was conducted between February 2008 and March 2009 and utilized the following data collection methods:

- Site visits—Site visits were conducted in May 2008, December 2008 and March 2009. During each three- to four-day visit, P/PV researchers interviewed AfterZone staff, program providers, representatives of governance groups and other

key stakeholders to learn about the structure and operations of the initiative and its accomplishments and challenges.

- Program observations—Observational assessments of 76 AfterZone programs were conducted over two years. (Forty-one programs were observed in 2007–08; thirty-five programs were observed in 2008–09.) These observational assessments were conducted by on-site consultants using an assessment tool called the RIPQA, which provides ratings of youth development practices.<sup>21</sup>
- Youth feedback surveys—Surveys that asked youth about their experiences in the AfterZones were administered to participants in the 35 programs observed in 2008–09.
- Surveys of instructors—Surveys of the 60 instructors of those 35 programs gathered information about the training instructors received through PASA.
- AfterZone program documents—Researchers reviewed documents generated by AfterZone leaders, such as business plans, annual reports, program brochures, the AfterZone website, and earlier evaluations.

### Providence and the History of the AfterZone Initiative

Providence is a mid-sized New England city with a fast-growing, rapidly diversifying population of over 170,000—more than three quarters of whom are members of minority groups. Among the city’s children under age 18, 45 percent are Latino, 24 percent are white, 17 percent are African American, and 7 percent are Asian.<sup>22</sup>

In 2000, Providence had the third highest rate of poverty in the nation among cities with populations greater than 100,000. In fact, 45 percent of Rhode Island’s poor children live in Providence.<sup>23</sup> In 2006, 74 percent of Providence’s public school students were eligible for free and reduced lunch.<sup>24</sup> Like many urban areas, Providence is struggling to find ways to improve students’ academic achievement and school success. In the 2000–01 school year, the city’s dropout rate was 36 percent.<sup>25</sup>

### Launching the AfterZone Initiative

In 2002, the city elected a new mayor, David Cicilline, who pledged that his administration would give top priority to improving the educational and developmental outcomes of Providence’s youth. Once elected, the mayor focused on improving OST support for youth, and he became the force behind the creation of what would become the AfterZone initiative. In May 2003, The Wallace Foundation awarded a grant to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to lead Providence in developing a multi-year strategic plan for building a citywide system to support high-quality OST activities.

In order to win broad-based support for the plan, the mayor convened a planning group composed of leaders from both public and private youth-serving agencies, including the city’s departments of recreation and parks, the public library system, the public school district and the police department.

A 2003 report on the status of OST programs in Providence revealed that, with more than 150 agencies offering roughly 300 programs to children in both school and community settings, the city had the potential to provide supportive services to youth during the after-school hours. However, the report concluded, the city lacked the infrastructure to do so. There were “great disparities” between neighborhoods in terms of the availability and affordability of programs, and the lack of transportation made it difficult for youth in some neighborhoods to access programs. Program quality was uneven, and there was little information sharing or professional development activity that could help more programs adopt best practices. Finally, the programs did not have sufficient or stable funds to make needed improvements.<sup>26</sup>

Programs for middle school youth appeared to be especially scarce. While reliable information about the proportion of the city’s youth who participated in OST programs was not available, neighborhood scans conducted in 2004 found that most school-based programs were focused on academic remedial and homework help, and the majority of programs were aimed at elementary school youth. Only two of the seven public middle schools hosted after-school programs that offered a full range of enrichment, art and recreational activities, and three other middle schools partnered with external

community organizations to provide a more limited menu of programs.<sup>27</sup>

A survey conducted in 2004 of youth and parents from 6 of Providence's public middle schools found that almost half (48 percent) of the 400 youth surveyed did not participate in any structured OST activities on weekdays. Those students who were involved in OST activities attended, on average, 1.4 days a week, roughly consistent with low participation rates for this age group noted in other studies.<sup>28</sup> The lack of engaging OST activities and a concern for youth's safety were two of the most frequently cited barriers to greater participation among both the parents and youth who took the survey.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, parents and youth indicated their interest in safe and accessible high-quality after-school programs, were they to become available.

The 2004 survey findings, coupled with an awareness of the developmental vulnerabilities that characterize middle school youth, led the planning group to decide that Providence's citywide OST initiative would begin with a focus on middle school youth.<sup>30</sup>

The group developed a three-year business plan for the initiative and created an intermediary, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), to lead it. In 2004, The Wallace Foundation awarded Providence a five-year, \$5 million grant to implement the plan.<sup>31</sup> The overarching goal of the plan was to utilize, coordinate and strengthen existing youth programs and community resources across the city to provide middle school youth with easily accessible, high-quality after-school programs.

PASA and the planning group divided the city into five local after-school zones, or AfterZones, based on community demographics (large concentrations of low-income youth), the location of at least one public middle school that could host most of the local AfterZone's programs, and the presence of youth-serving facilities that could offer programs outside of the middle schools. The first two local AfterZones were launched in January 2006; three more began serving youth in January 2007. In 2008, PASA and its board decided to consolidate the resources of adjoining local AfterZones, and the five AfterZones were merged into three.

PASA's mission was to develop citywide strategies for improving the quality of after-school programs, leverage resources to expand and grow the initiative and coordinate and manage the citywide network of local AfterZones. To carry out this mission, and to sustain broad-based support, PASA worked closely with the mayor and leaders of the city's public and private youth-serving agencies.

### The AfterZone Model

Two features of the AfterZone service delivery model distinguish it from many other after-school initiatives. First, in contrast to traditional models in which programs are offered in a single school or center, each of the three local AfterZones is a neighborhood campus where services are offered in multiple sites, including middle schools, local libraries, recreational and art centers, and other community facilities. Second, PASA set out to establish a single set of standards that would define high-quality programming and incorporate these standards in all AfterZone programs.

Although they differ in terms of geography, population and proximity to participating facilities, the three AfterZones share similar service delivery models and core elements (e.g., programming, staffing and management structure). Notwithstanding these similarities, the AfterZone initiative is complex, with many interlocking parts; understanding its basic structural and operational features is essential to understanding the challenges and successes discussed throughout this report.

### AfterZone's Neighborhood Campus Service Delivery Model

Each local AfterZone is a neighborhood campus, offering programs in multiple locations, including the two or three middle schools within its borders as well as other community facilities, such as museums, recreation centers, libraries and art centers. In theory, youth can enroll in programs offered in any of the middle schools in their local AfterZone. For logistical reasons (e.g., lack of transportation)—and, in one case, a principal who was reluctant to have students from another school come into his school—not all AfterZone middle schools share programs and students.



Six of Providence's seven public middle schools and one charter school are part of the citywide initiative. Within each local AfterZone, the middle schools play an important role, serving to "anchor" the program. Citywide, approximately 80 percent of AfterZone programs are located in the schools. The schools provide space (in classrooms, cafeterias, assembly halls and gyms) for use by community-based providers. The schools also open their doors to AfterZone program providers during the school day for recruitment events.

### AfterZone Programming

During the school year, the AfterZones offer programs in three sessions that run from September through May. Programs offered in the fall and winter sessions are 11 weeks long; programs offered in the spring session last 6 weeks. In 2008, the AfterZones began offering a four-week summer program, drawing youth from across the city.

The school-year programs begin immediately after youth are dismissed from school (2:30 p.m.) and end at 5:15 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Although there are differences in the specific menu of programs each local AfterZone offers, all AfterZones have programs in the arts, life skills, sports and academic enrichment. Since September 2008, all youth who sign up for school-based programs have been required to spend one hour each afternoon in Club AfterZone, an intentional "learning time," in which they can do homework, play literacy or math games, or work on academic enrichment projects.<sup>32</sup> The ratio of students to staff in most AfterZone programs is 13 to 1.

Using a request for proposal (RFP) process, PASA contracts with local after-school providers (individual or agencies) to deliver programming for the AfterZones. Any after-school provider in the city can submit a grant proposal to PASA to apply for inclusion in the initiative's menu of offerings. Providers can apply to deliver programs in up to three AfterZones or in specific schools. Selected providers receive grants of up to \$5,000 per year to cover the operating costs of the program in a single AfterZone. (Providers offering programs in two AfterZones may receive up to \$10,000, etc.)

### Staffing and Governance Structure

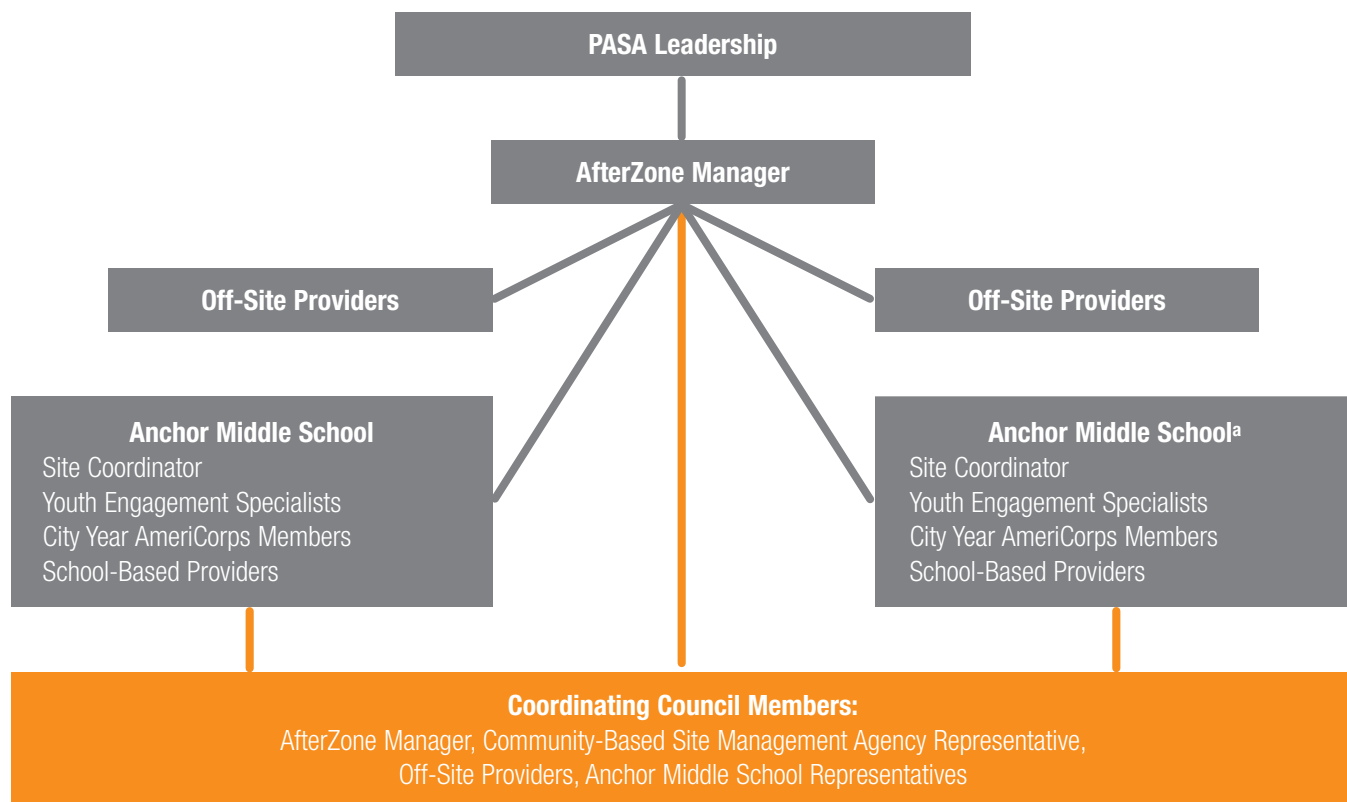
Each local AfterZone includes the following staff or governance group (see Figure 1):

- A site coordinator and assistant program staff, who are housed in each middle school. The staff coordinate and manage the daily after-school operations in the school and interface with the principal and teachers.
- An AfterZone manager, who is based in PASA's office. Each of the three AfterZone managers is responsible for the oversight, coordination and support of a single AfterZone, including school-based and off-site staff and programs. Managers also assist with professional development and quality improvement activities.
- A local governance group, known as the AfterZone Coordinating Council, which has responsibility for overseeing the budget; reviewing provider grant applications; selecting the menu of program offerings; and providing guidance on the support of community partners and general oversight of the local AfterZone.<sup>33</sup>
- Volunteer staff, including teams of between five and seven members of AmeriCorps City Year (a national service program for youth ages 17–24)<sup>34</sup> and students from local higher education institutions, who help provide or support programs.

### Youthservices.net Data Tracking Tool

Creating a mechanism for tracking youth participation was part of the original AfterZone business plan. Soon after its creation, PASA worked with CitySpan Technologies to customize its Internet-based data tracking system, [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net). The primary purpose of the system is to allow PASA to track daily attendance of youth across all AfterZone programs and share this information with AfterZone partners, providers, governance groups and funders. Attendance data are entered daily into a central database by staff at the middle school,<sup>35</sup> and PASA maintains the database, closely monitoring its accuracy and completeness. The system can generate information on attendance in individual programs, local AfterZones and the citywide initiative.

**Figure 1**  
**The Management Structure of a Local AfterZone**



<sup>a</sup> In 2007, local community-based organizations took responsibility for managing the programs and staff in four of the seven AfterZone middle schools. This transition is described more fully in Chapter III.

As implementation progressed, PASA also used the system as a management tool—for example, to organize its end-of-day transportation and monitor its RFP grant process. Enrollment and participation data were used on an ongoing basis to identify which programs were under-enrolled or under-attended and thus needed additional recruitment or assistance with retention or other supports to help them engage participants. Data were also shared and reviewed with the local AfterZone Coordinating Councils.

### Cost

In the 2008–09 school year, the citywide AfterZone budget was \$1,580,000, and its cost per student was \$929 (based on 1,700 participants). If in-kind contributions are monetarized, the cost per student becomes \$1,162. A large-scale study of the cost of quality OST programs found that the majority

of programs providing services similar to the AfterZones would cost between \$444 and \$903 per youth per school year, including monetarized in-kind resources. Unlike the AfterZones, however, the study programs rarely provided transportation.<sup>36</sup>

### PASA'S System-Building Efforts

PASA put mechanisms in place for coordinating, managing, training and supporting local programs and providers citywide. In addition to [youthservices.net](#), these systems included:

- A common, centrally managed youth registration process;
- A standard application process for selecting local programs;
- A universal schedule of all AfterZone programs to facilitate the coordination of logistics, communication and planning;

- A bus and shuttle system for transporting youth to and from off-site activities and to their homes at the end of the day;
- Adoption of a set of quality standards for AfterZone programming;
- Selection of a research-based tool to assess the implementation of these standards, and a process for helping program providers incorporate the standards into their programs; and
- A menu of professional development and training opportunities for AfterZone providers.

## Organization of the Report

Providence sought to engage the city's middle school youth in high-quality programs after school and keep them participating at levels that would foster positive development. To succeed, the AfterZone initiative had to appeal to an age group that has traditionally been underserved, reduce barriers to participation such as lack of transportation and uneven quality, and successfully implement a service delivery model that was untested and complex. This report documents the accomplishments and challenges the initiative encountered along the way.

Chapters II and III of the report describe PASA's strategies to attract and retain large numbers of middle school youth and keep them engaged: Chapter II explores the benefits and costs of the AfterZone multisite service delivery model, which was adopted in part to appeal to middle school youth's developmental need for choice and independence. Chapter III describes how youth were recruited and PASA's attempts to brand the AfterZones to appeal to older youth. Chapter IV examines the initiative's focus on quality and continual improvement, including its quality improvement strategy, professional development opportunities and assessment outcomes. Chapter V covers PASA's fundraising during the initiative's first five years and efforts to sustain it beyond the initial start-up grant period. Chapter VI summarizes the initiative's major successes and ongoing challenges.



# The AfterZone Neighborhood Campus Service Delivery Model

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**Chapter II**



**A** major challenge confronting the OST field is how to design developmentally appropriate programs that can attract and retain middle school youth. At this age, youth are changing rapidly and their needs and desires are quite different from elementary school children. They want and need more autonomy than ever before and thus don't want to attend programs that feel like child-care centers. Youth seek a richer variety of experiences in a greater number of settings to help them discover who they are and where their interests and talents lie. They need opportunities to envision their future through experiences that broaden their horizons. As part of their growing autonomy, youth want to make choices regarding what to do after school, and about whether they attend OST programs. Unless programming is interesting, developmentally appropriate and reasonably well run, middle schoolers are very likely to leave, especially because their parents will generally allow them to take care of themselves for at least a portion of their time spent outside of school.

One of the ways the AfterZone planners chose to appeal to youth's desire for more autonomy and choice was to design each local AfterZone as a multi-site neighborhood campus. In this campus model, after-school programs are offered not only in the school building, as many elementary school programs are, but in other locations in the community, such as museums, community centers, libraries and art centers—all of which constitute an integrated campus of after-school offerings. This multisite service delivery model has the potential to attract youth who do not want to stay in their school for after-school activities and offers programming in unique and interesting settings. This is the type of diversity many middle class parents can offer their children, but poor families often struggle to provide. At the same time, the campus approach utilizes and introduces youth to existing neighborhood resources.

Despite these advantages, the model created certain logistical and management challenges. This chapter describes how the AfterZone neighborhood campus model works in practice and

discusses, in detail, its benefits and drawbacks, including relationship-building with the “anchor” middle schools, transportation issues, and management challenges—particularly ones that arose during a transition to new management of the AfterZone programs.

### The Neighborhood Campus Model

AfterZone programming begins immediately after school ends at 2:30 p.m. All youth attending AfterZone programs on a given day congregate with staff in the cafeteria or other large meeting area for a brief snack; attendance is taken at this time. Following their snack, most youth stay in the school for two hours of programming, but a portion of the youth (roughly one quarter) board shuttle buses that take them to a program at another location. At 5:15 p.m., all of the youth return to their “home” middle school, and those who need transportation board school buses that take them to a corner near their home.

Although off-site programming is an important part of the AfterZone ethos, during the study period most AfterZone programming was located in the seven participating middle schools. For example, during the 2009 winter session, between 13 and 18 different programs were offered at each of the three middle schools in the West End/South Side AfterZone. The same AfterZone offered a total of eight off-site programs.

Program providers, including individuals operating independently as well as staff from youth-serving organizations, use classrooms and other school space (e.g., the gym) to deliver their programs. Off-site programs are typically housed at facilities that have unique characteristics or special equipment, or attractions that cannot be transported to the school (e.g., a museum, boxing ring or marina). These facilities are located not only within the boundaries of the AfterZone but also in other parts of the city. In one or two AfterZones, youth can also enroll in programs offered in another middle school in their AfterZone. PASA estimates that, on average, roughly 25 percent of students sign up for off-site programs.

Off-site programs increase the choices available to youth and provide the freedom to explore new environments and experiences. One PASA staff

member commented that even if participants choose not to go off site, simply knowing that they could—because program staff felt they were mature enough—is meaningful to an age group beginning to assert its independence. In addition, offering programs at multiple sites gives youth opportunities to travel outside of familiar neighborhoods: Off-site programs can be located anywhere in the city and are not limited to the boundaries of the immediate neighborhood or the AfterZone. More than one provider pointed out that low-income children in Providence (and elsewhere) have few opportunities to explore other parts of their city and, over time, can become reluctant to leave the familiarity of their known world. These off-site programs can help youth cross neighborhood boundaries and broaden their horizons.

Off-site programs offer other advantages. Programs like Save the Bay, in which youth explore the city's Narragansett Bay, are taught by instructors who are experts in their fields and provide youth with a unique experience they might not otherwise have. An off-site program at a visual arts center teaches youth to experience and appreciate art in a unique setting, totally different from their school-day environments. They have the opportunity to observe artists working with different techniques and materials and can walk through the center's sun-lit galleries to view the finished projects. Offering programs in outside facilities also helps youth appreciate the community resources available to them, and gives the off-site providers the opportunity to reach a new audience. An administrator from the public library explained that bringing youth to the library for literacy-based programs like Anime (Japanese-style graphic art or comics) helps youth see the library as a fun place where they can explore and develop their interests.

### Challenges of the Campus Model

The campus structure of the AfterZones—encompassing both school-based and non-school-based services—creates some programmatic challenges similar to those of school-based programs and others that are unique to a campus model. Like more traditional community-run school-based programs, for example, the local AfterZones need to develop and maintain good relationships with the middle schools, and a system of transportation is required to get youth

home at the end of the day. However, with the campus model, youth also need to be transported to and from off-site activities. Further, the model presents additional management demands, such as how to oversee and support program providers in multiple locations, and how to integrate them into a cohesive network. In this section, we discuss the nature of the challenges and PASA's response.

### Maintaining Good Relationships With the Anchor Middle Schools

Within each local AfterZone, the middle schools anchor the program. Most AfterZone programming occurs in the school's classrooms, gym and other spaces. In addition, the AfterZone's major recruitment strategies rely on schools allowing providers and AfterZone staff to conduct outreach to students during the school day. For these reasons, maintaining open communication and good relationships with the schools is critical to the success of each local AfterZone.

By P/PV's second visit in 2009, all of the principals of the anchor middle schools were supportive of the AfterZones. Some principals took longer to embrace the program than others, however, depending on how they viewed its benefits to students and their own experience hosting after-school programs.

Two staff positions help facilitate good program-school relationships: the AfterZone site coordinator and the school liaison. Each anchor school has a site coordinator who is based in the school. In addition to managing the day-to-day operations of the after-school program (which includes making sure space is available for AfterZone's programs and recruitment events), the site coordinators are charged with meeting with the school principal, assistant principal and teachers to build support for the program and quickly resolve problems as they arise.

Having a member of the school staff serve as a contact person for or liaison to AfterZone staff is another way to facilitate good relationships between the school and the initiative. During the study period, all but one of the seven middle schools assigned a staff member (typically a teacher or guidance counselor) to act as a liaison; four schools paid for this position out of their Title I funds. Not all liaisons were equally involved in supporting the

after-school programs, but those who were highly involved played an important role. Three site coordinators described how their liaisons helped them secure space for activities, collect forms from teachers, help load youth onto buses and encourage students to enroll.

PASA wants to engage the schools more actively, however; for example, it wants school staff to participate as program providers, to help recruit youth and to work with AfterZone staff to integrate in-school and after-school learning. In 2008–09, PASA was successful in developing in-school/after-school ventures with two middle schools, whose teachers partnered with PASA to implement innovative programs—one in science, the other in social studies. The collaboration involved coordinating school-day lessons with after-school enrichment and hands-on learning activities. By contrast, PASA’s efforts to enlist teachers as AfterZone providers for the school-year program did not produce more than “a few” teacher-providers. (Efforts to bring teachers into the AfterZones were more successful during the summer programs, for which PASA recruited 10 middle school teachers to partner with AfterZone program providers. Whether this experience with co-teaching will encourage more teachers to become active in the AfterZones during the academic year remains to be seen.)

Thus, as with all after-school programs located in school buildings, maintaining good relationships with the anchor middle schools is an important challenge to which PASA devotes considerable time and resources.

### Transportation Challenges

By all accounts, the largest challenge to a neighborhood campus model is the cost and complexity of transporting youth to and from off-site activities and from the anchor school to their homes. Because most of the students who attend Providence’s middle schools take a bus to school, they can only stay after school if they have transportation home. Early in the initiative, school district leaders agreed to allow AfterZones to use the district’s existing late buses to transport participants home the end of the day. This contribution has been crucial to meeting the city’s goal of making programs accessible to all of Providence’s middle school youth.

A bigger transportation challenge involves shuttling youth from the anchor middle school to the off-site programs and back again in time to take the late bus home. This challenge centers mainly around cost. While the late bus is paid for by the school district, the AfterZones—including PASA and the providers—must pay for the shuttle service. During the study period, with no single cost-efficient option, PASA had to piece together a patchwork of buses and vans from private companies and AfterZone partners. Although PASA worked with local AfterZones to reduce costs, the expense was substantial: One community-based organization (CBO) management agency estimated that renting a bus or van could cost as much as \$300 a day.

Coordinating this system is complicated and requires careful planning and close communication between the AfterZone manager, who maps out the system for his or her AfterZone; the site coordinator, who makes sure youth get to where they need to go from each anchor school; and the off-site providers. The natural variation in travel time—particularly during rush hour—adds further challenges. If the shuttles are running late, staff at the site of origin have to notify staff at the destination site.

The data tracking tool PASA uses, [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net), plays an essential role in helping staff coordinate the shuttle bus system. At PASA’s request, CitySpan Technologies (the organization that designed the tool) developed a program that allows AfterZone staff at the anchor schools to generate a list of students, their off-site destinations and their buses. Although the system seemed to be working more efficiently during the second year of the study, program personnel agreed that coordinating the shuttle bus system posed major issues.

### Management Challenges

To understand the management challenges involved with implementing the AfterZone initiative, one must first grasp its basic management structure.

In the neighborhood campus model, each local AfterZone includes two or three middle schools—each of which hosts at least a dozen different programs—as well as a scattering of programs located in separate facilities around the community or, in some cases, across the city. While the school-based

site coordinators manage daily operations in their schools, a mechanism is needed to integrate the various school-based and off-site programs into a cohesive network. The principal integration mechanism PASA put in place to was to assign one manager for each AfterZone.

The AfterZone manager is the only PASA staff member who is in constant contact with all of the players in the local AfterZone. The manager thus plays a vital role in facilitating communication flow, informing the appropriate people in one school or organization about any issues that emerge in another, and maintaining consistency across program sites.

The AfterZone manager is also the go-to person for the site coordinators of each middle school. Managers provide intensive daily guidance and support to the site coordinators on issues ranging from logistics (e.g., the bus schedule) to problems with individual students' behavior. They also support providers in the off-site programs and are expected to check in with each one at least twice a month. In addition to supporting AfterZone staff, managers coordinate each session's program schedule for the whole AfterZone, making sure there are no gaps or redundancies. They also develop the complex transportation plans for both the shuttle buses and the late bus.

Another important role the AfterZone managers play is to serve as a link between PASA's senior managers and the local AfterZones. During the study period, for instance, the AfterZone managers met biweekly with their supervisor, PASA's deputy director of operations, and generally touched base with him every day. AfterZone managers also provide PASA with information about how various components of the model are working, enabling PASA's leaders to refine operations. They are, in essence, PASA's eyes, ears and hands on the ground—an essential conduit of information between PASA and the local AfterZone network.

### **The Transition to CBO Management of the Middle School Programs**

Once the local AfterZones were up and running, PASA wanted to concentrate more on its intermediary responsibilities for system-building, quality improvement and resource development, and less on

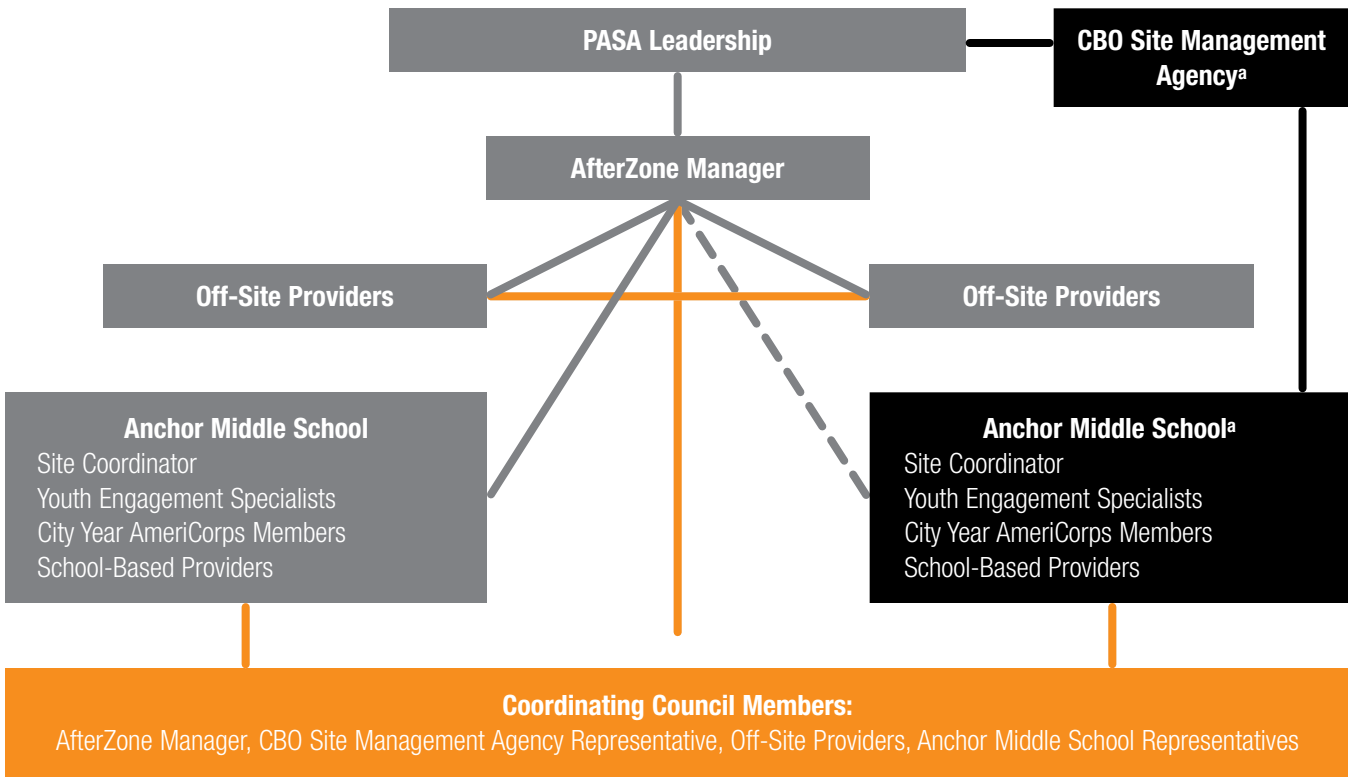
managing daily operations at the local level. Equally important, PASA wanted to embed the AfterZones within organizations that provided direct services to the Providence community to create a stronger and more sustainable foundation for the initiative. Consequently, during the 2007–08 and 2008–09 school years, PASA contracted with four local CBOs, each with experience running programs for children, to serve as site management agencies.

Each agency was responsible for managing AfterZone operations at a single middle school.<sup>37</sup> These responsibilities included hiring and supervising school site staff (i.e., the site coordinator and assistant staff) and managing all the logistical, coordination and supervisory tasks integral to daily program operations. By June 2009, four of the seven anchor middle schools were overseen by site management agencies; the remaining three were still managed by PASA.

In partnership with the site management agencies, PASA applied for and won three 21st CCLC grants. (PASA had “inherited” a fourth 21st CCLC grant from its original parent organization, the Education Partnership.) Each site management agency was responsible for managing one of the grants. The funds from the grant paid for the full-time site coordinator and assistant staff positions at the school. A portion of the grant went into the budget of the local AfterZone to be added to the pool reserved for program funds, which are awarded to community providers through the AfterZone grant process. Yet another portion of each grant came back to PASA to support its intermediary functions (such as the professional development agenda). And a roughly equal percentage was allocated to the site management agency to cover operating and administrative costs.

The transition to CBO management of the school programs was more difficult than expected. Because the school coordinators' responsibilities were limited to the anchor school, the AfterZone manager had to oversee off-site programs while providing support and guidance to the site coordinator. Putting a site management agency in charge of the school and school staff added another agency to the already complex management structure (see Figure 2 on the following page).

**Figure 2**  
**Local AfterZone Management Structure With a CBO Site Management Agency**



<sup>a</sup> The CBO site management agency functioned as a partner to PASA. PASA staff, such as the AfterZone Manager, provided technical assistance and support to the CBO when needed. The CBO site management agency supervised middle school program staff.

During the first year of the transition, the overlapping hierarchies created by this new structure proved quite challenging for everyone involved. PASA and the site management agencies worked to redefine roles and responsibilities, especially around decision-making authority and control over the 21st CCLC budget and school site staff, but tensions persisted. These tensions were most acutely felt by the site coordinators. While they were employees of the site management agency, they were also answerable to the school principal and to PASA, and they worked most closely with the AfterZone manager, a PASA staff member. They felt frustrated by the conflicting demands that resulted from having to answer to too many “bosses.” Consequently, three of the four site coordinators had left their positions by the end of the school year.

By the second P/PV visit almost a year later, the situation had vastly improved. With a better

understanding of the demands of the site coordinator position, PASA and the site management agencies were able to clarify lines of authority and better prepare the new site coordinators. The site coordinators interviewed during the second visit did not indicate that they experienced their job as a tangle of conflicting and competing demands, as had the coordinators interviewed during the previous year.

Despite these improvements, differences in expectations and priorities have continued to cause tension between PASA and the site management agencies. Broadly speaking, PASA believes strongly that the long-term financial viability of the AfterZones will depend on local organizations’ ownership of and investment in the citywide system. More specifically, PASA would like the CBOs to take on more responsibility for management tasks such as fundraising, tracking attendance and developing relationships with the school-day faculty and staff.



It is not clear, however, whether these agencies have the organizational capacity to do this. Recent and severe cuts in their own budgets, staff and services have made it difficult for the agencies to commit more resources to their AfterZone management role. Representatives from three of the CBOs said that they receive too little compensation from the 21st CCLC grant for the time and cost associated with their site management duties. The two representatives who were most critical of the arrangement questioned the nature of their involvement and whether their organization benefited from its role as a site management agency.

In contrast, the fourth site management agency, as well as a fifth CBO scheduled to become a site management agency in 2009–10, were more positive about their management role (or potential role) in the local AfterZone. Both agencies believed their participation supported their own organization's goals (one agency is a community center that runs programs for youth and the other is a Boys and Girls Club). The director of the Boys and Girls Club was particularly enthusiastic about the chance for her organization to become a site management agency. She described her agency's relationship with PASA, which has existed since the beginning of the initiative, in terms of a true partnership. She and her staff had worked closely with PASA to develop and colead some of the AfterZone summer programs. In addition, she had worked out an arrangement with PASA whereby youth attending the summer program would be given Club memberships. This enabled her to increase the number of programs the Club offered to middle school youth as well as the number of youth on the Club's roster—both of which helped the Club continue to provide services despite recent cutbacks in its staff and programs.

Because PASA believes that CBO management of the local AfterZones is necessary for the long-term sustainability of the initiative, it plans to continue searching for funding and technical assistance providers to help strengthen the internal infrastructures of the agencies that were weakened in the economic downturn. PASA hopes that this type of support will enable the organizations to play the site management role effectively, while simultaneously strengthening their own internal capacity and long-term financial viability.

## Summary

PASA and its partners developed a multisite service delivery model that appeals to middle school youth's growing need for autonomy, variety and exploration. Participating youth have opportunities to not only stay at their own schools, but also to make choices and exercise independence by traveling to other venues that can expose them to new experiences and help them build new relationships with adults and other youth.

One major challenge involved in implementing the AfterZone campus model is the cost and logistical complexity of transporting youth to and from off-site programs. PASA and its partners have been able to cobble together enough buses and vans to do the job, and a redesign of their data tracking tool, [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net), has helped AfterZone staff monitor which children need to board which buses. Although the shuttle system is expensive, PASA believes the benefits of providing youth with unique and enriching learning experiences in these community-based facilities outweigh the costs and hassle of providing transportation.

A second major challenge of the campus model is providing adequate operational oversight and management of programs offered in various locations. The campus approach requires a more complicated management structure than does the typical single-site after-school program. PASA successfully addressed this challenge by hiring a coordinator and support staff to oversee each school and an AfterZone manager to supervise each AfterZone, including the off-site providers. AfterZone managers play a crucial role in integrating the school-based and off-site programs and keeping information flowing to and from PASA and the field.

PASA's decision to contract with CBOs to manage the school-based programs has not yet achieved its intended goals. In the last year of the study (2009), PASA staff (AfterZone managers) still needed to spend a great deal of their time supporting daily operations in the local middle schools, and many of the site management agencies expressed ambivalence about their role.

PASA has utilized multiple approaches to distinguish the AfterZones from programs for younger children. Among these are continually referring

to the local AfterZone as a “campus” and allowing youth to travel away from the school grounds to attend programs in unique and interesting settings. These efforts have created a buzz about the AfterZones that piques the interest of middle school youth. The next chapter expands on this theme and presents the various strategies PASA has developed to recruit and retain youth.



# Engaging Middle School Youth

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**Chapter III**



# W

hen children are in elementary school, their parents usually decide whether they will attend an after-school program. Middle school youth, on the other hand, are given more freedom to determine how they will spend their out-of-school time, and will “vote with their feet” by choosing not to participate in activities they find boring or babyish. Unless programming is interesting, age appropriate and reasonably well run, middle schoolers typically will leave. In many programs that serve this age group, attendance is low and short lived. In order to reach large numbers of middle school youth, PASA believed that the AfterZones would have to be perceived as a “cool” place to go after school.

Before implementation began, PASA worked with a social marketing consultant (the Rescue Social Change Group) to learn how Providence’s middle school youth viewed after-school programs and what the AfterZones would have to do to attract and retain participants. According to PASA, focus groups revealed that Providence middle schoolers viewed after-school programs as “dorky” (i.e., “nerdy”) and too much like school. To counter this perception, PASA believed they needed to make sure that the AfterZones valued youth culture and offered opportunities for youth to gain new skills and experiences through activities that were interesting and fun. At the same time, in order to engage a diverse group, the local AfterZones had to offer a menu of programs varied enough to appeal to a wide range of interests.

Youth participation rates are extremely important to PASA. PASA expects program providers to fill and retain at least 60 percent of their AfterZone enrollment slots and maintain a 60 percent average daily attendance rate for the first four weeks of the session. If a program consistently fails to meet these goals, the local AfterZone Coordinating Council may decide not to fund the program in future sessions. PASA also views high levels of participation as one measure of a program’s quality. Further, because the AfterZone initiative’s mission is to provide after-school programs to middle school youth

throughout Providence, PASA views enrollment and attendance numbers as the way of holding itself and the local AfterZones accountable to the city, youth, parents and AfterZone funders.

This chapter presents youth enrollment figures for the two most recent years of AfterZone programming; it then describes the strategies PASA used to recruit youth and keep them involved.<sup>38</sup>

## Youth Enrollment

Table 1 shows AfterZone enrollment figures for the fall, winter and spring sessions of the 2007–08 and 2008–09 school years. The total number of students enrolled fell from the first year to the second. However, the proportion of students from the seven anchor middle schools who participated in the AfterZones remained at 44 percent of the total student enrollment, ranging from roughly one third to one half of the students in each school. PASA estimates that the AfterZones filled about 90 percent of the total number of available program slots during these two years, and a few of the popular programs had waiting lists.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of enrolled students by grade for the fall and winter sessions of the 2008–09 school year. The figures show that most participants were sixth and seventh graders. Certain schools saw enrollment numbers begin to decrease for seventh graders, but in all schools there was a sizable drop in enrollment among eighth graders.

It is difficult to compare AfterZone enrollment numbers with those of other after-school programs for middle school youth because studies rarely report enrollment in terms of the proportion of students from a school who choose to participate in the program. One exception is the study of the San Francisco Beacon Initiative, which found that 47 percent of sixth and seventh graders attending the three middle schools that hosted a Beacon Center participated in Center activities.<sup>39</sup> This figure is less than the 53 percent of sixth and seventh grade students from the seven middle schools who attended the AfterZones.

**Table 1**  
**AfterZone Enrollment, 2007–08 and 2008–09 School Years**

Anchor School	2007–08 School Year			2008–09 School Year		
	Total Student Enrollment	AfterZone Enrollment	Percentage Served	Total Student Enrollment	AfterZone Enrollment	Percentage Served
DelSesto	392	158	40%	389	182	47%
Esek Hopkins	489	223	46%	421	182	43%
Gilbert Stuart	794	277	35%	672	280	42%
Oliver H. Perry	725	369	51%	599	320	53%
Roger Williams	801	409	51%	724	303	42%
Samuel Bridgham	601	243	40%	597	209	35%
Times 2 Academy	213	85	40%	197	105	53%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,015</b>	<b>1,764</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>3,599</b>	<b>1,581</b>	<b>44%</b>

Source: PASA

**Table 2**  
**AfterZone Enrollment by Grade, 2008–09 School Year**

Anchor School	Sixth Grade		Seventh Grade		Eighth Grade	
	Total Student Enrollment	AfterZone Enrollment	Total Student Enrollment	AfterZone Enrollment	Total Student Enrollment	AfterZone Enrollment
DelSesto <sup>a</sup>	33	22	171	100	185	60
Esek Hopkins	106	72	154	59	161	51
Gilbert Stuart	201	115	238	105	233	60
Oliver H. Perry	172	106	205	119	222	95
Roger Williams	210	114	270	124	244	65
Samuel Bridgham	172	93	204	68	221	48
Times 2 Academy	72	51	65	37	60	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>966</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>1,307</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>1,326</b>	<b>396</b>
<b>Total Percentage Served</b>	<b>59%</b>		<b>47%</b>		<b>30%</b>	

Source: PASA

<sup>a</sup> DelSesto Middle School consists of only grades 7 and 8. The sixth graders who participated came from the elementary school, which operates on the same grounds as the middle school.

### The Challenge of Attracting Eighth Graders

The decrease in participation rates among eighth graders highlights the difficulty of crafting a program that is developmentally appropriate for this age group. Even within the relatively narrow age range of middle school youth, there are differences in the extent to which youth are attracted to the AfterZones. Youth at this age are changing rapidly, and what is appropriate and appealing to a sixth grader is not necessarily appealing to an eighth grader. Older middle school youth may also have additional options and/or responsibilities that compete for their time, such as participating in organized sports leagues and taking care of younger siblings.

During the study period, PASA staff were aware that they were having trouble recruiting and retaining eighth graders, but they had not developed any specific strategies for targeted recruitment or programming for this age group. Our impression was that, in the effort to get this ambitious and complex initiative up and running and make it attractive to sizable numbers of youth, the issue of the relative lack of eighth graders was just beginning to appear on PASA's radar. By the end of the 2008–09 school year, plans were underway to expand the after-school initiative to Providence's high schools, which made the need to engage older youth more pressing. At the close of data collection, PASA staff reported that they had begun to have conversations about how they could attract more eighth graders.

As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, PASA and AfterZone staff used several different strategies to attract middle school youth and keep them involved. Given the negative perception of after-school programs Providence's middle school youth had when the initiative began, it was clear that getting and keeping their attention would require persistence, accurate data, incorporation of youth culture, effective use of enrollment and attendance data, and consistent follow-through.

### Youth Recruitment Strategies

PASA and AfterZone staff launched an intensive recruitment effort prior to each of the three school-year program cycles, using both face-to-face and phone-based strategies. In addition, to make the AfterZones attractive to youth, PASA and the

program providers worked to infuse elements of youth culture into all promotional materials and program offerings.

### Recruitment Fairs

The primary recruitment strategy in each local AfterZone is a recruitment fair. The fair is held in each anchor middle school a few weeks prior to the beginning of each session. Working closely with the school, AfterZone staff arrange a time and place during the school day, invite all providers to set up a booth or table, and have the students file into the cafeteria or gym to learn about the programs.

The recruitment fairs allow the youth to view program materials and talk to instructors, while giving providers an opportunity to market their programs directly to the youth. PASA stresses the importance of providers attending the recruitment fair and gives them tips (during a provider orientation) about how to showcase their program. During P/PV interviews, providers, PASA and AfterZone staff all indicated that the fair is an effective recruitment event. PASA believes that programs whose instructors don't attend the fair are less likely to fill their enrollment slots.

PASA staff and providers believe that making a good first impression with youth is crucial. In their experience, a provider who does not make a good presentation is not likely to get many youth to sign up for their session. They identified two elements of a successful presentation. First, youth have to feel a personal connection to the program's instructor. Consequently, as one provider noted, it is essential that the program's instructor—and not a substitute—attends the fair, because youth are less likely to sign up for programs whose instructor they have not met. As one provider noted, "Kids need to know they can relate to the instructor."

Second, presentations must concretely convey what youth will do during the activity. Providers reported that displays of finished products, videotapes showing youth engaged in the activity and samples of the materials used during activities are essential to giving youth a clear picture of what they will be doing. This is especially important if the program introduces activities or materials that are outside of the youth's personal experience. For example, at one

recruitment fair, the provider for Ultimate Frisbee did not demonstrate all of the different throws and moves involved in the sport, and few youth signed up for what the instructor and PASA thought would be a popular program. Staff later realized that many of the AfterZone youth had little experience with Frisbees and no familiarity with Ultimate Frisbee. Without a demonstration, the youth could not appreciate the high level of skill and athleticism the game requires or judge whether they would enjoy playing it.

### **Lunchtime and Classroom Recruitment**

AfterZone staff also secured permission from the schools for providers to meet with students during lunchtime—an ideal recruitment opportunity for providers who do not attend the recruitment fair or who have not yet filled all their slots. In addition, if there is a thematic connection between the AfterZone program and the school-day curriculum, the site coordinator will contact a teacher to see if an in-class presentation is possible. Three providers we spoke with who had done the additional lunchtime or classroom recruitment found it useful; in fact, one provider preferred doing recruitment in the lunchroom because it allowed him to interact more intensively with the students than he could in the fair, where many providers vie for the students' attention.

The fairs, lunchtime and classroom recruitment all involve face-to-face interactions between the program instructors and the students. They are carried out in a context in which all the middle school students can attend—a situation that would be extremely difficult to arrange outside of the school building and the school day. PASA and AfterZone anchor school staff coordinate these recruitment events, which is enormously helpful to the providers, for whom gaining access to the schools and recruiting youth on their own would be extremely challenging. PASA expressed frustration at the difficulty of getting all of the providers to attend the recruitment fairs, but interviews suggest that those who do attend find it to be extremely effective for recruiting youth.

### **Personal Phone Calls and Targeted Outreach**

PASA strongly believes that if staff or providers make personal contact with youth, they are more likely to enroll and come to programs. Thus, PASA encourages phone calls at many stages.

If enrollment in individual programs is still low after the strategies described above have been tried, AfterZone staff and providers start recruiting over the phone. They use reports generated by [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net) to identify youth whose interests, as indicated on a form completed at the recruitment fair, match the focus of the under-enrolled program. Staff will also call youth who participated in an AfterZone program during the previous session but did not re-enroll. The 21st CCLC grant stipulates that to be counted as a regular participant, youth must attend the program at least 30 days during the program year. Thus, PASA is particularly interested in bringing back youth whose attendance is close to the 30-day level, as this can help the local AfterZone meet the attendance requirement of the 21st CCLC grant. Finally, prior to the start of the session, providers are expected to call each enrolled youth to reintroduce themselves and remind youth to attend. They are also expected to call youth who enroll but do not show up at the start of the session.

### **Outreach to Parents**

PASA acknowledged that they have not done much outreach or targeted recruitment to parents. Rather, they have chosen to direct their recruitment efforts at youth themselves. PASA gave two reasons for this decision: First, it is very difficult to contact parents because most are not home during the day. Second, going through parents to reach youth conflicts with the initiative's emphasis on treating youth more like young adults who can make their own decisions.

However, there is evidence that enrollment and attendance rates could improve if parents knew more about the AfterZones and how their child could benefit from attending. One provider we spoke with, whose agency had been serving the children in that particular AfterZone community for years, recounted how a parent had come to her to ask her to vouch for PASA. The provider felt the parent's request indicated that because PASA was not a familiar entity to parents in the community, they were reluctant to send their children to the AfterZones without an endorsement from someone they trusted. She said, "This is VERY important for this community, because if they don't know you, then they won't [come]." Another provider believed

that many children do not enroll because their parents fail to hand in the registration material in time and/or may have trouble reading or understanding the lengthy registration and various permission forms. Still another suggested that parents need help understanding how their child could benefit from participating in AfterZone programming.

Youth attend the AfterZones only with the written permission of a parent or guardian. Therefore, the comments from these providers suggest that parents might be underutilized partners in bringing youth to the AfterZones. However, because PASA wants to project the image of the AfterZones as a place that respects youth's autonomy, PASA and its partners will have to think carefully about how best to communicate with parents.

### Outreach to Teachers

PASA believes that youth participation could be boosted even further by engaging teachers in running and promoting AfterZone programs and providing incentives for youth to participate, such as grade credit and acknowledgement by teachers. To this end, in Winter 2009, PASA started sending an AfterZone newsletter to teachers, in part to help explain how the AfterZone classes can reinforce school-day learning.

### Incorporating Youth Culture

An important recruitment strategy utilized by PASA involved developing an AfterZone "brand" that has currency with youth. To the extent possible, PASA tries to incorporate youth culture and style into the look and feel of the AfterZones. This approach is reflected in all promotional material and programming. Asked to describe AfterZone's desired image, a PASA staff member replied: "It's cool! It's hip! It's Providence!"

PASA encourages providers to write descriptions of their programs for AfterZone brochures in a way that informs youth about activities but also pitches them as exciting, informal and fun. One PASA staff member recalled working with a provider to come up with a more enticing name for her program. "The cooking class used to be called something like, 'That's Italian!' and we changed it to the 'Cooking and Eating Club.' Kids relate to that: 'Oh! I get to go and eat! That's what I want to do!' Just changing

the name made a big difference in terms of kids' signing up. And then, once they come, they think it's fun. Not to bait kids into coming. They just don't sign up because it doesn't sound fun, or it hasn't been pitched very well."

Hip-hop music and dance styles are also injected into recruitment events. For example, AfterZone staff may play rap music at these events, or include hip-hop dances or positive raps at the AfterZone year-end performance shows. Hip-hop culture is also reflected in AfterZone program offerings. For example, local AfterZones offer classes in hip-hop dance and a jewelry-making class called "Bling-Bling" (hip-hop slang for jewelry). They also organize a writing program titled "Nonviolent Verses," which is included in the program brochure with the following description: "Can you rap, sing or write poetry? If so, come join 'Mr. Deep Positivity' for Nonviolent Verses and show your skills. You'll write, record and perform your raps, songs and poems. You'll also receive a copy of your recorded work on CD, so come join the fun!"

Anyone who has spent time with young people knows that it is not always easy to anticipate what will interest them. One PASA staff member remarked:

*We find that [middle school youth] as a general population are a bit fickle. We think we've found a topic that they're interested in, but then we offer something new in that particular area the next session and nobody signs up for it! And we can't figure out what happened. It's just that, for whatever reason, it's not cool anymore.*

It is important to note, however, that the AfterZones are meant to appeal to a diverse group of youth. As a result, in addition to programs like "Bling-Bling" and hip-hop dance, local AfterZones offer more traditional programs like soccer, basketball and martial arts, which are very popular. Other activities include "NASA Robotics," in which youth build electricity-powered robots out of Legos, and the ecology-focused "Sun Cars and Fun"—programs that appeal to more specialized interests but provide youth with valuable and unique learning experiences. (PASA reports that these programs attract small numbers of youth, but those who attend are passionate about them and attend regularly.)



## Youth Retention Strategies

While it's important to get youth to register for AfterZones, it's equally as important—and probably more challenging—to get them to attend on a regular basis.

In-person meetings and phone calls for the purpose of recruitment continue for roughly the first three weeks of a program cycle. During this time, PASA begins to focus on attendance and retention. Once again, multiple strategies are used, informed by [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net).

### Phone Calls Home to Absent Youth

Just as the recruitment events and phone calls rely on personal contact with youth, PASA focuses on personal contact to reconnect absent youth to the program. Each time a youth is absent during the session, AfterZone staff call the youth's home to inform the parent of the absence. The program provider is expected to call the youth to address the absence and encourage him or her to return. Although the calls are a requirement in the providers' formal agreement with PASA and they are given a small amount of funds to cover their time, PASA estimated that only about one third were calling absent youth. PASA has been searching for ways to ensure they follow up more consistently.

### Working With Providers Whose Numbers Drop

During the first two to three weeks of a session, PASA staff review attendance figures generated from [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net) at least once a week. They take action if enrollment, retention or attendance rates for any program are below 60 percent. As a senior PASA staff member explained:

*We HAVE to get on this early....During those first few weeks, I'll meet with the AfterZone managers individually each week and go through their numbers. And I grill them: "Tell me the story. Why is [attrition] in this program so high? You have 16 kids enrolled, but there's only 8 kids who've ever showed up. What's happening? Who's making phone calls on this?"*

Besides making phone calls home, the AfterZone managers contact the instructor or visit the program to try to identify the reason for low

attendance and work together on a solution. The same PASA staff member said:

*If we see that the program is understaffed, we might say, "You have some really great content, but you need more staff for the intensity of what you're trying to do." Or, "You need somebody (e.g., a young City Year member) who can bring a 'hip' factor in to keep kids engaged in what's going on."*

We did not collect enough data to establish whether PASA consistently followed up on attendance and retention issues. However, one AfterZone manager we spoke to in 2008 said she was sometimes frustrated because she was unable to respond to providers in a timely fashion, suggesting that time constraints and a heavy workload may limit staff's ability to give corrective feedback to providers as often as they would like.

### Creating Positive Experiences

Dressing the AfterZones in the trappings of youth culture might get youth in the door, but it isn't enough to keep them engaged. One PASA staff member explained:

*I believe that the promotional aspect of what we're doing—the look, the feel, the posters—is 15 to 20 percent of the branding experience. The other part of it is the experience that young people have while they're in the program. "Is this fun? Is this relevant for me? Are you treating me as if I'm mature?" Are the adults that are working with them being authentic?*

With this in mind, PASA is intentional about including programs that will provide positive experiences for youth, hiring staff youth can relate to and supporting a culture of mutual respect between adults and youth.

### Hiring Young Staff

PASA tries to use young people—students in high school or college, or recent college graduates—whenever possible to work with youth as assistant staff or volunteers. In addition to the site coordinator (who generally has experience and training in working with youth), each anchor school has

between three and six assistant staff (called youth engagement specialists, or YES workers); four schools also have City Year AmeriCorps members who assist with logistics, distribute snacks and help youth transition from one activity to another. PASA and AfterZone staff believe that the older teens and young adult staff members are more approachable than older staff and provide middle school youth with someone to whom they can relate.

This view is supported by a study of an OST initiative in New York City, which found that hiring older teens or young adults as assistant staff was associated with higher levels of youth attendance.<sup>40</sup> One AfterZone site coordinator commented that her high school assistants were an asset because the youth sometimes preferred to talk to “a younger guy” than to her. As she explains:

*[Middle school youth] are still looking for that older person that they can really have a relationship with, and if they can't find it with one of the lead teachers, they usually find it with the high schooler. The kids love them. [The high school assistants] open their mouths, and the kids are like...[Whispers] “You're so cool!”*

One challenge inherent in using older teens and young adults as staff or assistants is their relative lack of experience and training. P/PV was told that there was wide variation in the skill level of City Year AmeriCorps members in terms of their behavior management skills and their commitment to their job. By the 2008–09 school year, PASA had improved the way they worked with City Year members—for example, by giving them a more defined role in developing and leading activities, providing them with more intensive training and putting them under the direct supervision of the (more experienced) site coordinator.

### Treating Youth with Respect

As a group, the providers we spoke with had a nuanced understanding of middle school youth’s unique developmental characteristics and said that they genuinely enjoyed working with these youth. When individual providers were asked to describe how they related to youth, many of their responses centered around the importance of treating youth respectfully and with a great deal of patience. They reported communicating their respect for youth

in many different ways: allowing youth to help set ground rules for behavior; being honest and straightforward about expectations; treating youth with “the same consideration and respect that they (staff) wish to be treated with”; managing behavior without yelling; and striving to provide top-notch activities, well-trained workers, proper equipment and a good facility—“because kids can tell the difference between half-assed [where the adults are just going through the motions] and well run.”

### Summary

The AfterZones succeeded in enrolling nearly half of the students who attend the seven anchor middle schools. Eighth graders, however, have proven much more difficult to reach than youth in sixth and seventh grade. PASA uses a variety of approaches to recruit and retain youth. These approaches share the following elements:

- Close monitoring of enrollment and attendance data using [youthseivces.net](http://youthseivces.net) to ensure a quick response if numbers drop,
- Reliance on personal contact to encourage youth to participate, and
- A climate that is respectful of youth and youth culture.

Attracting large numbers of youth is clearly one of PASA’s main priorities. However, participation in after-school programs will benefit youth’s development only if the programs are high quality. The next chapter looks at the quality of AfterZone programs as well as the strategies PASA has put into place to drive quality improvement.



# Quality Improvement

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**Chapter IV**



**N**eighborhood scans of Providence’s OST programs prior to the initiative’s launch revealed not only the relative dearth of programs designed specifically for middle school youth but also that the quality of the existing programs varied considerably. And, as research has shown, if OST programs are not high quality, youth are unlikely to benefit from participating.<sup>41</sup> High-quality programming is especially important for middle school youth. They are less compelled by their parents to attend after-school programs than are elementary school students. Therefore, to successfully engage this age group, programs need to be challenging, interesting and fun and must offer youth opportunities to engage in positive interactions with adults and peers.

PASA understood this from the beginning. Improving the quality of after-school programs for the youth of Providence is an explicit part of its mission. Quality is emphasized in all AfterZone written materials and is articulated on PASA’s website, which identifies “high quality” as a core principle of the AfterZone model. Indeed, one of PASA’s three senior staff works solely on developing and implementing systemic quality improvement strategies.

In this chapter, we describe the components of PASA’s quality improvement strategies and discuss their benefits and limitations. We then examine the quality of AfterZone programs from the perspective of adults who observed and rated program activities using a quality assessment tool, and from the perspective of youth who completed a survey about their experiences in the programs. Both perspectives measure quality in terms of the nature of relationships among and between peers and adults, perceived learning, opportunities to exercise choice and youth’s engagement and interest in participating in the program.

## PASA’s Quality Improvement Strategy

The quality improvement strategies PASA used with AfterZone providers consisted of the following components:

- An agreed-upon set of standards by which programs are gauged;
- An assessment tool and feedback mechanism; and
- Professional development opportunities for activity instructors and their supervisors.

### Quality Standards and Indicators

Developing a consensus within the provider community around a set of standards of high-quality OST programs for middle school youth was the first step in PASA’s multi-pronged quality improvement strategy. Early in the AfterZone initiative, PASA organized a working group of providers, policymakers, and youth advocates to gather standards developed in other cities and identify those that would be appropriate for Providence.<sup>42</sup> The standards they ultimately adopted addressed the following five areas:

- Health, safety and environment;
- Relationships;
- Programming and activities;
- Staffing and professional development; and
- Administration.

Sample quality standard for “relationships” and associated indicators:

***Participants interact with one another in positive ways and feel they belong.***

- Children and youth demonstrate good social problem-solving skills and positive social behavior (e.g., can negotiate solutions, make compromises, work together toward a common goal, empathize with others’ feelings, cooperate and work well together).
- Children and youth strongly identify with the program/organization (e.g., use ownership language such as “our program,” wear gear with the name of the program/organization on it and hold one another accountable for rules and guidelines).

Each of these areas had related practices—or indicators—that could be measured or rated.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, PASA’s next step involved identifying an assessment tool that could measure the extent to which these practices were being implemented in AfterZone programs.

### The Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA) Tool

The assessment tool chosen by PASA and the working group was the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA, Form A) developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation specifically for youth in grades 4–12. They selected this tool because it is a research-validated observational instrument that is well aligned with the quality standards adopted for AfterZones.

Using the tool, observers could rate programs along the following quality dimensions:

- Safe Environment—addressing both the physical and emotional safety of the environment;
- Supportive Environment—describing adult support for youth development and learning;
- Interaction—capturing adult and peer interactions; and
- Engagement—measuring opportunities for youth to plan, make choices and reflect<sup>44</sup>.

To assess the other quality standards the working group adopted, PASA developed its own form (referred to as Form B), in partnership with High/Scope. Form B focuses on program practices in the following domains: Family and Civic Engagement, Staffing and Professional Development, and Administration. This two-form measure—consisting of the YPQA’s Form A and the new High/Scope-PASA Form B—was named the Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment (RIPQA).<sup>45</sup>

Appendix A provides the list of scales and subscales included in YPQA/RIPQA.

### Assessment and Feedback Process

After establishing the assessment tool, PASA hired two consultants (referred to as quality advisors) who had been trained by High/Scope in the use of the

YPQA; these quality advisors helped train AfterZone staff and began observing program sessions.

The assessment and feedback process proceeds in the following way: A team that typically consists of a quality advisor, an AfterZone manager and, when possible, supervisors from the CBO site management agency observes each session for 45 minutes.<sup>46</sup> The team tries to observe the session from the start, as the instructor leading the activity generally sets the tone for the session and explains its purpose at the beginning. The observers take notes on what they see, focusing on the RIPQA scales and subscales. After the observation, the team completes scoring each RIPQA dimension. Later, the team members compare their scores and discuss and resolve any discrepancies. During a follow-up meeting, the team works with the instructor(s) who led the activity to develop an action plan and offer additional coaching, if appropriate.

Programs offered in multiple AfterZones or over several sessions are typically observed once a year. Because PASA wants to concentrate its resources on programs that are likely to be offered in more than a single AfterZone program cycle, programs delivered by City Year AmeriCorps members, who usually stay for only a year, are not observed. Also, PASA does not observe new programs until they have run for at least a full year, to give providers a chance to correct any start-up “kinks.”

Initially, the team observed two sessions of each program. However, after the first year, PASA decided to observe each program only once due to the cost and time needed for repeated observations.<sup>47</sup> However, if a program scored low on any dimensions of the observation tool, the team would observe it a second time to see if it had improved. To our knowledge, only two or three programs scored low enough to warrant a follow-up visit.

As we discuss next, this assessment and feedback process has clear benefits and specific limitations as well.

### Benefits and Accomplishments

PASA has taken several steps to secure the providers’ cooperation and buy-in with regard to the quality improvement strategy. First, providers are not required to be observed; participation is completely voluntary. Second, PASA makes it clear that

the purpose of the process is self-improvement rather than monitoring and that the results do not at all affect the program's possibilities for future funding. Third, to make the process less threatening, AfterZone managers, who work closely with providers, serve on the observation teams. PASA also hopes that having an independent consultant (the quality advisor) on the team adds an impartial expert opinion to the feedback given to the providers. And, finally, continuous improvement is emphasized by discussing the findings with the providers following observations and creating a jointly developed plan of action.

In terms of getting the providers to agree to be observed, PASA's strategy appears to have succeeded. PASA believes that not making observations mandatory engenders the providers' willingness to participate. In fact, PASA reports that, to date, no provider whom it has approached for an observation has refused.

Our interviews indicate that the providers who went through the assessment and feedback process viewed it as useful and as an opportunity for growth. While three providers mentioned they received good scores on the RIPQA observations and thus were not asked to make any changes, two providers were given specific recommendations to improve their programs. One commented on how the advice he received had changed his interactions with the students:

*Instead of raising my voice, [the quality advisor] told me to just stand there and tell [the students] that we can't start the game until they are all quiet. And sometimes I blow my whistle [to get their attention]. Both things worked....It helped with these discipline issues and handling kids. In a sense, [the observation feedback] improved that part of the program.*

The other provider described the steps his program took after the observation feedback:

*[We made] sure the place was safe, with good lighting, with no debris, with the floor dusted and mopped, and we secured the equipment so no one would get hurt....[The observation feedback] was like a wake-up call. It made me realize that PASA was concerned about the safety of kids and whether [the students] were getting proper training.*

Another strength of the assessment process became apparent during the second year of the study, when PASA began to use RIPQA scores to identify the training needs of program providers and tailor professional development to address these needs. Furthermore, in response to providers' feedback, in the coming year (2009–10), PASA plans to make a quality advisor available to provide one-on-one technical assistance to providers so that follow-up training can be tailored to individual needs.

Another accomplishment is that PASA's self-assessment process is now being used outside of Providence. In partnership with the Rhode Island After-School Plus Alliance (RIASPA), PASA has worked to disseminate quality standards and to promote statewide use of the RIPQA. As a result, both the RIPQA and the self-assessment process (utilizing PASA's quality advisors) have been adopted statewide by the Rhode Island Department of Education in the self-assessments mandated by the 21st CCLC grant.

### Limitations

We observed two possible drawbacks to the RIPQA process as it is currently implemented. First, although the process is very thorough and comprehensive, it is also time-consuming and therefore costly. Due to cost and time limitations, it has not been possible for the team to observe and provide feedback to each program provider in a single year. It took two years for the team to observe all of the providers PASA targeted for observation. And, as noted, programs that had not yet run for a full program cycle and programs run by City Year AmeriCorps members, college students or other transitional staff were not targeted.

Second, while one-time observations produce snapshots of the programs' quality and allow PASA to identify those that need improvement, observing only once limits the potential benefits of *continuous* program improvement. While PASA did conduct follow-up observations of the few programs that received low scores on their first observation, follow-up observations have not been routinely carried out. Without follow-up observations, it is impossible to know if an action plan has produced the desired change.

Engaging providers in the RIPQA assessment process only once a year may not be frequent enough to effect desired improvements in program quality and foster a culture of self-improvement. In fact, studies have found that effective quality improvement processes incorporate frequent observations and opportunities for staff coaching.<sup>48</sup> Aware of this limitation, during the 2009–10 school year PASA plans to focus its RIPQA process on a small group of 10 programs each program cycle.<sup>49</sup> This approach will allow PASA to observe each program twice and give the providers more intensive technical assistance and systematic follow-up.

### Professional Development

Professional development for providers is another vehicle used by PASA to help enhance the quality of AfterZone programs. Indeed, the quality of OST programming is largely dependent on the quality and capacity of its workforce.<sup>50</sup>

In an effort to build the capacity of organizations across the city and state, PASA offers free professional development trainings to AfterZone providers as well as staff of any other youth-serving agency. The trainings generally last three to four hours and are offered in the morning on workdays.

### Training Content

With at least two trainings available every month, PASA's workshops cover a variety of topics. For the past three years, PASA partnered with the Boston Medical Foundation's Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (BEST) Initiative to provide a 32-hour, 8-week training on youth development principles. BEST workshops focus on such topics as strategies for behavior management, competencies of youth workers and positive youth outcomes. PASA estimates that, over the three years, staff from at least 50 percent of AfterZone provider organizations (including independent providers) participated in the BEST training.<sup>51</sup>

Professional development activities are most effective when linked to the identified training needs of the audience. In 2008–09, PASA's professional development workshops became more closely aligned with the quality standards and practices assessed by the RIPQA. For example, PASA arranged for two trainers from BEST to attend training from High/Scope in

the YPQA principles and then develop eight workshops to help boost providers' competencies in the effective youth programming practices measured by the assessment tool.

In creating its professional development agenda, PASA used providers' feedback and knowledge gained through the RIPQA observations to identify the practices that needed improvement. For example, RIPQA scores revealed that AfterZone providers of sports programs tended to offer fewer opportunities for youth to reflect, plan activities and make choices. They also needed to engage youth more frequently in small groups, allowing them to act as group facilitators and letting them partner with adults to run activities. Informed by the RIPQA scores, PASA designed two workshops for the sports program providers that focused on how to integrate youth development principles into sports programs.

Increasingly, PASA has designed professional development workshops to support its more concentrated focus on aligning AfterZone activities with school-day learning and offering activities that systematically incorporate middle-school academic standards. In order to strengthen providers' skills in this area, in 2008–09 PASA collaborated with one of its longstanding programs to develop a six-workshop series on integrating academics with after-school curricula. The first workshop introduced the concept of a standards-based curriculum. Subsequent workshops focused on specific content areas: literacy, health, arts and sciences. A follow-up workshop was organized to offer additional assistance to providers who were beginning to include the standards in their programs.

### Response to Professional Development

We learned about providers' participation in and response to PASA's professional development program through interviews with provider agency staff, P/PV surveys of 60 AfterZone program instructors and PASA's own surveys of provider agency staff.

Consistent with its overall voluntary capacity-building orientation, PASA encourages and reminds providers to attend professional development opportunities but does not require their involvement. The Memorandum of Understanding between PASA and provider agencies only states that providers "shall



participate in professional development whenever possible.” Participation in professional development activities is only required for programs that wished to become “endorsed,” a category of programs that have maintained certain youth attendance levels and receive expedited review for inclusion in the AfterZones in return. (The endorsement process is described in greater detail later in this chapter.)

While PASA’s approach to voluntary participation in professional development activities is consistent with experts’ current view about how intermediaries can work most effectively with program providers,<sup>52</sup> it also has drawbacks. Specifically, getting AfterZone providers to attend has been challenging. Staff from small provider organizations with just a few people or only a single person on staff found it difficult to participate due to lack of time. Some individuals who offer programs in local AfterZones had other jobs that conflicted with the trainings or did not participate because they were not being paid to attend. When agencies sent staff to training, they reimbursed them for their time. This presented an additional expense that was burdensome for agencies with limited budgets. Coordinating trainings and scheduling them at times when most people were available to attend presented another challenge. To overcome these challenges, PASA is working to raise funds and provide stipends to make attending trainings less burdensome for AfterZone providers.

The challenge of getting full participation in PASA’s professional development activities is reflected in the results of surveys P/PV administered to 60 providers who led or assisted in the AfterZone activities observed in 2008–09. Several questions in the survey asked about the training providers received through PASA. About one third (36 percent) reported that they participated in the BEST training offered by PASA. Aside from the BEST workshops, 30 percent of surveyed staff said they participated in other PASA-sponsored professional development activities during 2007–08, spending an average of 3.3 hours in these trainings. Slightly more—38 percent—reported participating in 2008–09, spending an average of 3.6 hours in training.

The majority of individuals who attended PASA’s professional development activities found them valuable, though a small proportion did not. When asked about their experiences in interviews with P/PV researchers, providers replied that the

workshops and trainings provided practical information relevant to their work. They also appreciated the opportunities to learn from one another and to network. In a feedback survey PASA administered to AfterZone providers in 2008, 38 percent rated the professional development as “excellent/very effective,” 33 percent rated it as “good/effective,” 10 percent rated it as “fair/somewhat effective” and 19 percent rated it as “not effective.”

### Additional Quality Improvement Mechanisms

In addition to the RIPQA self-assessment process and professional development workshops, PASA has created other quality improvement strategies. For example, PASA implements an endorsement incentive to improve the quality of AfterZone programs and retain those that achieve a certain level of excellence. Programs can become “endorsed” if they meet a number of criteria, such as filling at least 60 percent of their available youth participant slots, maintaining an average daily attendance of at least 60 percent, using a written curriculum, and having program staff attend 70 percent of monthly meetings and participate in the RIPQA observation process.

Providers are entitled to several advantages if they achieve endorsed status, including receiving an additional 5 percent of their total AfterZone grant award for administrative and operating costs, completing a shorter grant application than the one required of non-endorsed programs, receiving more intensive coaching and capacity-building assistance from PASA, and receiving consideration as a preferred program when Coordinating Councils<sup>53</sup> make programming and funding decisions. In the two years it has offered endorsed program status, PASA has endorsed 32 programs offered by 24 providers, about one third of the provider pool.<sup>54</sup>

PASA also uses attendance and retention of youth participants as a broad indicator of program quality. [Youthservices.net](http://Youthservices.net) data are made available to local Coordinating Councils to consider when making decisions about which programs to offer in upcoming sessions. Although PASA understands that there is not always a direct correlation between the popularity of a program and its quality, because RIPQA scores are not given to the Councils to use in deciding what programs to fund, attendance and retention data are used as a proxy for quality: Programs

that are poorly attended or have difficulty retaining youth are not likely to be refunded.

### The Quality of 2007 to 2009 AfterZone Activities

Studies have empirically linked the quality of OST programs with positive youth outcomes.<sup>55</sup> If programs are high quality, youth are more engaged—emotionally and cognitively—and are thus more likely to reap benefits. To learn about the quality of the AfterZone programs, P/PV collected two kinds of data: scores from the RIPQA assessment tool and surveys of youth who participated in the activities.

#### RIPQA Scores

P/PV obtained RIPQA scores for 76 AfterZone programs observed from December 2007 to March 2009.<sup>56</sup> The programs included in the sample were selected from all three local AfterZones and represent the four broad activity types the AfterZones offer: 27 are related to academic enrichment, 24 to art, 11 to life skills and 14 to sports.

To provide context for interpreting these RIPQA scores, we also looked at High/Scope's "Wave-2 sample" scores, a YPQA validation study.<sup>57</sup> The validation study's sample consisted of 116 observations

of activities offered in 46 organizations in Michigan. The majority (53.4 percent) of observed activities were after-school programs, 17.2 percent were summer programs, 16.4 percent were residential, 6.9 percent were offered during school, and 6 percent were other types of programs. The average age of youth who participated in the Wave-2 sample was 13. (Note: the average age of the youth in the observed AfterZone activities was 12.)

Table 3 shows the aggregate scores of the AfterZone programs in the four areas measured by the assessment tool. AfterZone programs scored the highest on measures of Safe Environment and Supportive Environment, both of which had mean scores of 4 or higher (out of 5), which indicates that most safety and support-related staff practices were seen most of the time during the observation. Engagement received the lowest mean score, 2.6 (out of 5), which indicates that youth were given limited opportunities to set goals and make plans and choices during the observation.

Table 3 also indicates that the pattern of mean scores for AfterZone programs is similar to that in High/Scope's Wave-2 sample. The pattern is also consistent with the findings from another P/PV study that used a comparable observational instrument to gauge the quality of after-school activities;

**Table 3**  
**Mean Scores for AfterZone Activities and Wave-2 Sample Activities<sup>a</sup>**

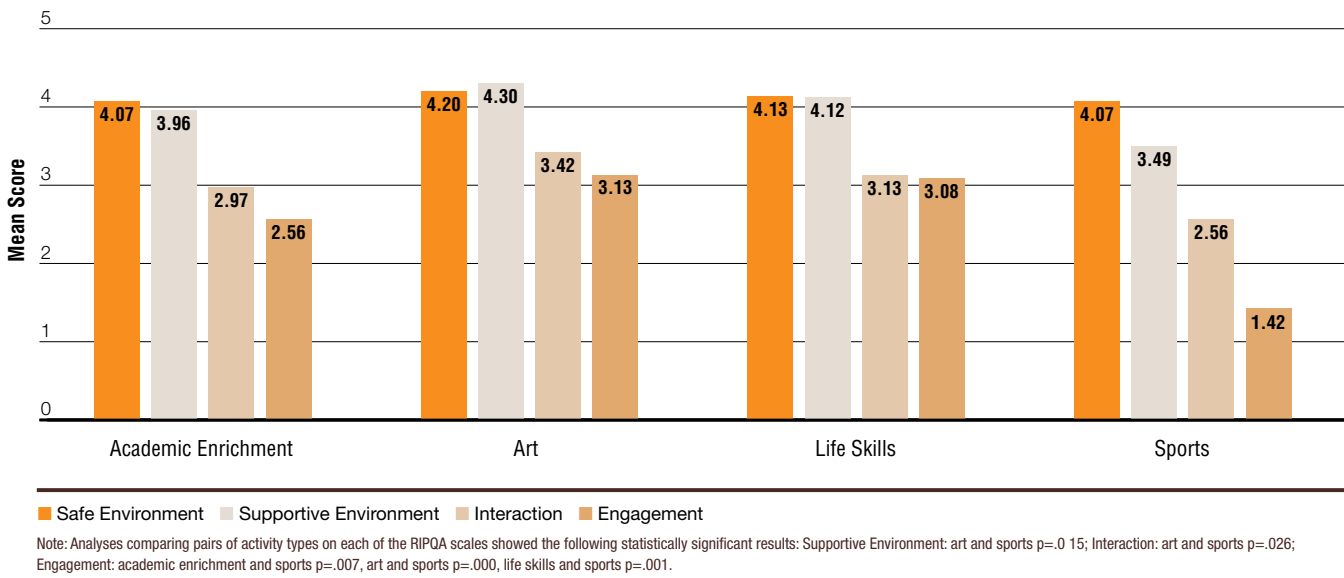
RIPQA/YPQA Scales	Mean Score of AfterZone Activities (n=76)	Mean Score of Wave-2 Sample Activities (n=116)
<b>Safe Environment:</b> physical and emotional safety of the environment	4.12	4.40
<b>Supportive Environment:</b> adult support for youth development and learning	4.00	3.77
<b>Interaction:</b> adult and peer interactions	3.06	3.03
<b>Engagement:</b> opportunities for youth to plan, make choices and reflect	2.60	2.68

Note: Both the RIPQA and the YPQA use a three-point scale; a score of 1 is assigned when something is not delivered, 3 when something is delivered only to some youth or only some of the time, and 5 when something is delivered to all youth.

a Because RIPQA scores in this implementation study were collected for descriptive purposes and there was no longitudinal assessment of the activities linked to identified outcomes, it was not possible to determine the extent to which the scores of observed activities could be attributed to PASA's quality improvement efforts.



**Figure 3**  
**RIPQA Scores Across Activity Types**



this study found that scores on measures of positive adult support were higher than scores on measures of opportunities for youth to make decisions about their activities.<sup>58</sup>

#### RIPQA Scores Across Activity Types

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, AfterZone offers activities in four broad categories: art, academic enrichment, life skills and sports. We compared the scores of the four types of activities to learn whether and how they differ on the dimensions measured by the RIPQA. As Figure 3 illustrates, art activities received the highest scores on all RIPQA scales, while sports activities received the lowest. Sports activities, academic enrichment and life skills activities scored similarly on Supportive Environment and Interaction, with all scoring significantly lower than art activities on these dimensions. Sports activities scored significantly lower than the other three types of activities on Engagement, indicating that they were providing fewer opportunities for youth to reflect, make choices and plan than were other activity types. As noted earlier, PASA learned this about sports activities through the RIPQA assessment and consequently developed two workshops to help enhance sports providers' skills in this area.

#### Youth's Assessment of Their Experiences

In addition to measuring the quality of AfterZone programs through observation, we wanted to get a sense of how youth experienced the programs. In order to benefit from participating in after-school programs, youth have to be engaged and feel they are gaining new and valued skills and knowledge. Distracted, bored or frustrated youth will get little out of an activity. Youth should also feel supported and encouraged by the adults in the room and valued by their peers. For middle school youth, it is especially important that they feel they have a say in what they do. To assess the quality of youth's experiences, we surveyed 318 youth who participated in 36 different programs, delivered in all three AfterZones. (Youth's demographic characteristics are reported in Appendix B.)

Overall, the findings from the survey suggest that youth feel AfterZone programs create supportive and engaging environments in which youth are involved in decision-making and have positive interactions with their peers.

The survey collected youth's opinions in five general areas:

- Positive Adult Support—how much adults encourage youth and help them succeed in the program;

**Table 4**  
**Youth's Experiences in AfterZone Activities**

Survey Scale	Average	Percentage Who Gave a Rating of 3 or Higher
Positive Adult Support	3.61	89.2%
Engagement	3.55	88.6%
Perceived Learning	3.49	86.3%
Peer Affiliation	3.11	74.0%
Voice and Choice	3.04	61.9%

Note: Scale ranges from 1=low to 4=high.

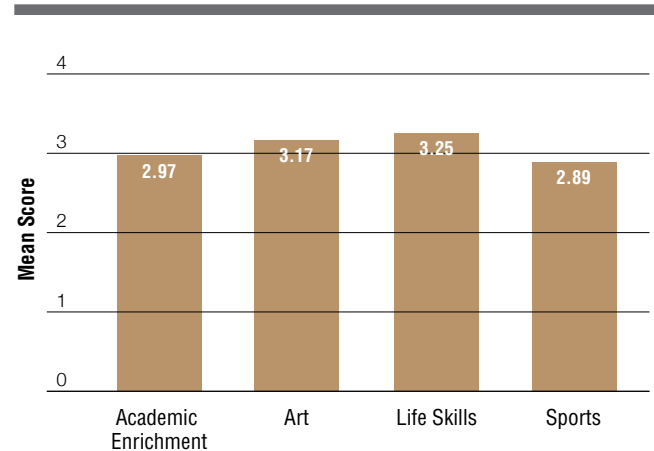
- Engagement—how engaged youth are during the program and how much they enjoy program activities;
- Perceived Learning—how much youth feel they learn in the program;
- Peer Affiliation—youth's perception of the quality of relationships among the youth during program activities; and
- Voice and Choice—the extent to which youth have opportunities to plan and make choices about their activities.

(See Appendix C for details about the survey's constructs, items and reliabilities.)

There are differences in the ways the youth survey and the RIPQA define Engagement that must be noted. In the youth survey, Engagement measures how much youth liked the activity and were cognitively challenged by it. The youth survey's construct Voice and Choice overlaps with what the RIPQA calls Engagement, namely, allowing youth to plan and make choices about their activities.

Table 4 displays the youth's mean ratings of the five areas. A score of 1 indicates the activity is very weak in this area; a score of 4 indicates it is very strong. The surveyed youth reported high levels of

**Figure 4**  
**Mean Scores on Voice and Choice Construct by Activity Type**



Note: Difference in means of sports and art activities was significant at  $p=.018$ .  
Difference in means of sports and life skills activities was significant at  $p=.002$ .

Perceived Learning and Engagement (liking, being challenged) in AfterZone programs. According to the youth, instructors provided high levels of support and afforded the youth opportunities to help plan activities and give input about how they are carried out. Consistent with the profile of scores from the RIPQA observations, on average, youth's mean ratings of Positive Adult Support were higher than they were for Voice and Choice. That is, both the observers and the youth gave decision-making and choice relatively low ratings.

#### Youth's Experience in Different Activities

As we did with the scores on the RIPQA, to better understand the experiences of AfterZone youth, we compared survey responses of youth participating in the four activity types. Across the activity types, the youth reported similar levels of Positive Adult Support, Engagement, Perceived Learning and Peer Affiliation. However, youth who participated in sports programming gave significantly lower ratings of their opportunities to plan and make decisions about activities than did the youth in art and life skills programs (see Figure 4 for average scores). This result echoes an earlier finding—sports activities also received lower scores on RIPQA's Engagement scale, which captures the youth input dimension.

## Summary

PASA's quality improvement strategy involves two primary elements: observation and feedback using the RIPQA assessment tool and an agenda of professional development activities for providers. Over time, these two components have become more integrated and refined to better address the needs of providers and to complement ongoing developments in the AfterZone model (i.e., the move toward more alignment with school-day learning).

The observation and feedback process is thorough and comprehensive; it uses a team that includes independent, trained observers and a research-validated assessment tool that focuses on key youth development practices. At the same time, however, the process of observing, comparing scores among team members, writing up an action plan and providing feedback to the program's instructor requires a great deal of staff time. Because of the large number of programs to observe and the limited number of staff to complete the observations and provide feedback, little time is left to return to the program to determine whether suggested improvements are being implemented or if quality has been maintained. This lack of systematic follow-up limits the potential of the process to foster continuous program improvement.

The snapshot of the quality of AfterZone programs three years after the initiative's launch is fairly similar to that of another set of programs in Michigan observed using the same assessment tool. AfterZone programs scored high on measures of support and emotional/physical safety. The relatively low scores on measures of youth choice suggests that, despite the AfterZone model's consistent emphasis on the importance of choice, instructors were still not fully engaging youth in making plans and decisions during the time of our study.

In surveys, youth participants reported that they enjoyed AfterZone programs and found them to be supportive learning environments. Youth's reports of relatively high levels of adult support and lower levels of youth choice mirror the differences observed in the RIQPA data. According to the RIPQA observation and youth survey data, sports programs provided fewer opportunities for youth to be involved in planning activities and making decisions than did other types of programming. PASA has responded by offering intensive training to sports providers in how to more effectively incorporate youth development practices.



# The Search for Sustainability

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**Chapter V**

**F**rom the very beginning of the AfterZone initiative, PASA and the city partners wanted to build a sustainable OST system in Providence. As a result, PASA began developing the core strategies of its plan to sustain the initiative as soon as it was launched. Over the five years of implementation, PASA succeeded in meeting its annual fundraising goals and began building a foundation for the long-term survival of the AfterZones.

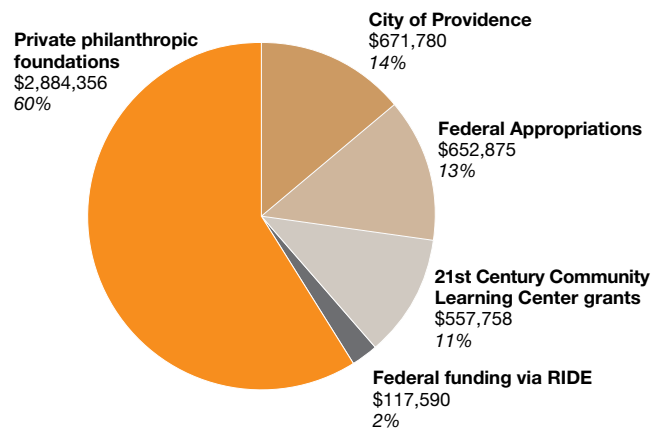
Like most programs and initiatives that are started with time-limited funding, securing renewable sources of support has been difficult. PASA's search for sustainable funding has been particularly challenging because it coincided with, and has been affected by, a severe and prolonged nationwide economic downturn. After a brief review of PASA's fundraising record, this chapter focuses on how PASA planned to proceed with these efforts at the time the study ended.

### Fundraising During the First Five Years

From 2004 to 2009, PASA raised almost \$4.9 million to match the \$5 million grant from The Wallace Foundation. As the chart above shows, most of these matching funds (60 percent) came from private foundations, with the remainder coming from federal, state and municipal sources. PASA also garnered a substantial amount of in-kind support for the AfterZone initiative, receiving \$396,480 in 2008–09.

Reflecting the city's commitment to the initiative, a major portion of the in-kind support came from municipal sources. The Providence Public School District (a city-controlled and city-funded entity) contributed \$180,000 for late buses to take youth home at the end of the program, and the police department contributed \$100,000 in overtime pay to the officers who ran AfterZone's popular police sports league programs. In addition, for each of the last two years, the mayor included a line item of more than \$200,000 for the initiative in his annual budget. Beyond the importance of the money itself, these funds demonstrate the high level of support

**Figure 5**  
**Sources of Matching Funds:**  
**July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2009**



Source: PASA

that the city—and especially the mayor—has for the AfterZone initiative. According to PASA, it was the first program to win a line item in the city's budget under Mayor Ciciline's administration.

The mayor has been a vital resource in PASA's fundraising effort. As chairman of PASA's board, he was actively engaged in advocating and raising funds for the AfterZone initiative throughout the first five years (and beyond, as is addressed later in this chapter). He reached out to potential funders and advocated for the initiative at federal and state levels to garner support and raise additional funds.

To position the AfterZone initiative for future fundraising, PASA and the mayor worked hard to focus local and national attention on its efforts. In one year alone, they participated in eight national conferences and forums and began receiving calls from cities across the country interested in learning more about the initiative. Between 2008 and 2009, the initiative gained a national profile. It was featured on *The Today Show* after Providence was recognized as one of America's Promise's 100 best communities for young people. An in-depth description of PASA and the AfterZone model, including a set of videos and a replication toolkit, was featured on Edutopia, a website funded by the George Lucas Educational Foundation to highlight innovative practices in public education (see [www.edutopia](http://www.edutopia)).

org). And PASA was selected as one of 50 semifinalists nationwide for the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government's Innovations in American Government Award.

In short, PASA completed the first five years of implementation (and reached the end of their \$5 million start-up grant from The Wallace Foundation), with a track record of successful fundraising, a mayor who actively advocates and fundraises for the initiative, the support of city institutions, and a growing national profile.

### The Search for Renewable Funding

PASA's early sustainability plan identified three potential funding sources to support the AfterZone initiative during its first five years and beyond: childcare subsidies from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services and 21st CCLC grants, both of which are prominent sources of funding for OST programs, and a fee-for-service charge to parents of participating children.<sup>59</sup> PASA anticipated that over a three-year period (2007–10), childcare subsidies and 21st CCLC grants could bring in roughly \$3.2 million (\$800,000 and \$2.4 million respectively) and parent fees could bring in an additional \$440,000.

### Unexpected Challenges to Securing Sustainable Funds

Three factors that subsequently arose made it unlikely PASA could realize this particular plan: PASA's board's unwillingness to charge fees, a reduction in state childcare subsidies and stiffer competition for grants.

#### Reduced Willingness to Charge Fees

In 2008, PASA's board did not approve the plan to charge a fee to parents to enroll their children in AfterZone programs. Board members were concerned the costs would increase the financial strains that Providence's low-income families were experiencing as a result of the rise in unemployment from the deepening recession.

#### Reductions in State Childcare Subsidy Funds

PASA had planned to use state childcare subsidies to support the work of the site management agencies and estimated that these subsidies could cover

10 to 15 percent of the overhead and administration costs agencies incur from managing an AfterZone program. However, in 2007, the state changed the eligibility requirements for these funds and lowered the rate of reimbursement for the subsidies. These combined changes greatly reduced the number of youth who could qualify for them. As a result, PASA could no longer rely on state childcare subsidies as a major source of funding to support the site management agencies' work in the local AfterZones.

#### Stiff Competition for 21st CCLC Grants

PASA has depended on 21st CCLC grants as a funding source for the local AfterZones. When three of the four CBOs came on board as site management agencies in 2007, PASA secured a 21st CCLC grant for each agency and used funds from another 21st CCLC grant it had inherited from the Educational Partnership, PASA's original host agency, to support the fourth site management agency. The grants funded the site coordinator and support staff in the anchor schools and helped cover the cost of programming and shuttle bus services in the local AfterZones. The grants provided \$175,000 a year for three years, or more than half of the estimated \$250,000 to \$300,000 it takes to fund an anchor school serving 200 youth.<sup>60</sup> PASA planned to apply for additional 21st CCLC grants for each new site management agency that came on board, intending to use these grants to support all of the anchor schools.<sup>61</sup>

By 2009, competition for these grants had become more intense, and PASA realized that it might be able to add only one new grant per year rather than the two or three per year they had been awarded so far. If the competition continues to be intense, PASA's transition to CBO management of the local AfterZones could slow down. Winning extension or renewal grants may also prove more difficult.

Finally, the worsening economy has made it more difficult to secure renewable funds in general.

### The Short-Term Outlook

At the time the study concluded, the initiative appeared to be on sound financial footing for the next two to three years (i.e., through 2011 or 2012), thanks in large measure to a new three-year, \$2.3 million grant from The Wallace Foundation and



\$652,000 in federal appropriations that the mayor secured for the AfterZones by working with the Rhode Island Congressional Delegation. In addition, PASA was pursuing several strategies, discussed below, to meet the initiative's annual operating budget of roughly \$2.5 million, including grantwriting and maintaining close relationships with the mayor and government officials. In his role as chairman of PASA's board, the mayor was seeking to add members who could contribute to PASA's fundraising and sustainability efforts and reach out to individual donors for major gifts.

### **Aggressive Grantwriting**

PASA carried out an aggressive grantwriting effort in the fifth and last year of its original grant from The Wallace Foundation, applying for funds from local, regional and national foundations as well as from the federal government. Several grants were ultimately awarded, including the new grant from The Wallace Foundation. At the end of the study period, several proposals were still outstanding.

### **Continued Support From the Mayor and the City**

The mayor planned to continue requesting funds for the initiative from the city budget at a level comparable to that of the last two years. PASA also expected the in-kind support it has received from the police department and the school district to continue.

The mayor, who intends to run for a third term in 2010, has pledged to continue to use his position to marshal city resources for PASA and the AfterZone initiative—and to deepen local AfterZones' integration into the work of the city's youth-serving departments and institutions as an "embedded community priority." He charged a member of his staff, to whom several city departments report, with identifying how existing city resources can help further the initiative's efforts to support student learning. This staff person subsequently met with school district officials and city organizations that currently offer educational programs (e.g., the zoo and the botanical gardens) to explore how these existing programs can be offered through the AfterZones; they also discussed ways that the programs might be aligned with the school's new science curriculum, planned for a Fall 2009 launch, so that youth who participate can receive academic credit.

### **Fundraising for PASA**

Just as it had been trying to fundraise to sustain the AfterZones, PASA was attempting to raise money to develop its own capacity as an intermediary. In Spring 2009, the Rhode Island Foundation awarded PASA a three-year capacity-building grant of \$50,000 a year, plus the assistance of a strategic consultant, to expand and develop its board and create a funding plan for its own future sustainability.

### **The Long-Term Outlook**

PASA and the mayor share the view that the long-term sustainability of the AfterZone initiative can best be achieved by integrating after-school programming into the fabric of students' school day, creating a "seamless transition" from one to the other. In the mayor's view, high-quality after-school programs must be seen as an integral part of education—not as something "extra"—for the public to demand sustainable funding to support these programs. PASA and the mayor have advocated for a "robust day of learning," in which students apply the academic concepts and skills they learn in their classrooms in experience-based after-school activities.<sup>62</sup> In short, linking the AfterZones to schools in an extended-day learning model is their vision for the long-term future of the initiative.

To bring this vision about, during the 2008–09 program year PASA took steps to strengthen its academic programming and increase the points of intersection between AfterZone programming and the schools' curricula. Examples of these efforts include adding time during AfterZone programming for homework completion, offering training to AfterZone providers on integrating academic learning into youth development-focused programs, and attempting to get permission from the school district for students to earn credit for participating in science-based experiential after-school programs. With a grant from the Nellie Mae Foundation, PASA began to develop a menu of summer programs that will be taught jointly by a teacher and an activity provider (e.g., a program that integrates sailing in the bay with lessons about wind science).

In Spring 2009, PASA was awarded a three-year, \$500,000 grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation that will allow it to continue developing

plans for an extended-day learning model. The grant supports a new position, the Director of Extended Learning Opportunities, who will work with representatives from the mayor's office, the school district and PASA to develop strategies for linking AfterZone programming with the school-day curriculum. Through this grant, PASA hopes to create additional opportunities for co-teaching and for involving more classroom teachers in AfterZone activities. The grant will also be used to offer joint training that will help teachers incorporate youth development principals in the classroom and help after-school providers to integrate academic learning into their programs. The new grant from The Wallace Foundation will also support PASA's effort to move toward an extended-day learning model.

The mayor hoped that the Nellie Mae and Mott Foundation grants would better position the AfterZone initiative for whatever federal funding becomes available. He planned to convene a group of mayors to meet with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to discuss the possibility of tapping into the "Race to the Top" fund, a \$4.35 billion federal program aimed at school districts considering various school reform initiatives, including extended-day programs.

### Challenges and Risks

Although the effort to weave school-day and after-school programming into a coordinated learning day presents opportunities for innovative and potentially beneficial activities for youth, the effort also contains serious challenges and risks.

First, PASA will need to develop a much closer partnership with the school district than it currently has. The extent to which an extended-day learning model is in line with the school district's most pressing priorities and concerns is unclear. Although PASA's and AfterZones' relationships with the anchor middle schools have improved over the five years and more school teachers actively support their local AfterZone, PASA leaders still struggle to be included in key school district planning meetings. Further, as is common with youth development-focused OST programs, PASA has had difficulty convincing the schools that high-quality enrichment and experiential programs can promote youth's academic achievement

and increase test scores. There are also fundamental differences in terms of school and AfterZone philosophies and approaches to students that will need to be bridged, as the comments of one PASA leader suggest: "Some [school] people think that we're not as rigorous around discipline as we need to be. And we're saying, 'No, these are positive youth development practices that we're using here. We're really trying to have young people have a different experience.'"

Creating stronger linkages with the school carries certain risks for the AfterZone initiative. PASA has tried to cultivate the impression that local AfterZones are fun, cool places to be—places that are *not* like school. As it brings the AfterZones toward a closer alignment with the schools, PASA realizes that it must work to maintain the initiative's image and not allow the program to become perceived as merely an extension of school. In the words of one PASA staff: "Extended-learning time has to take on a different face after the bell rings at 2:30. Otherwise, kids will sniff it out. And, for some kids, there will be no motivation for them to come at all. They'll just stop coming if it feels too much like school."

Finally, it is not clear if or when substantial public funding will become available for extended-day learning initiatives, especially given the current difficult financial times. Although President Obama has called for the expansion of after-school programs and has publicly endorsed extended-day learning programs, it is not clear what funds Congress will ultimately make available. Funding from other public sources, at a time of severely stretched budgets, is equally unlikely, at least until the economy improves. Consequently, the likelihood of securing long-term funding for the AfterZone initiative, whether to support extended-day learning or otherwise, is uncertain.

### Planning for a New OST Initiative for High School Students

When data collection for this study ended, plans were underway for an OST initiative targeting Providence's high school students. Although this effort will be distinct from the AfterZone initiative, PASA intends to serve as the intermediary for both the high school and AfterZone initiatives; PASA will

likely grow to meet these new staffing needs. A high school initiative will bring the city closer to its original goal of providing quality supports and services to all of the city's youth. It will also present opportunities and challenges that will affect the development of PASA and the AfterZone initiative in ways that cannot be predicted.

## Summary

Consistent with recommendations from experts on building a solid funding base,<sup>63</sup> PASA has used a range of different fundraising strategies and secured funds from a variety of sources during its first five years. Specifically, it has:

- Received dedicated funding from the city;
- Made good use of a variety of other existing public funding streams, as evidenced by the 21st CCLC grant awards and the one-time federal appropriations;
- Received several private philanthropic grants; and
- Garnered in-kind supports from city agencies.

The mayor has played a large role in PASA's success; he was active in securing resources for the initiative, helping to leverage city funds and in-kind contributions and bringing \$652,000 in one-time federal appropriation funds. As a result of these efforts, PASA has been able to cover the initiative's annual operating costs and is likely to have the funds in hand to sustain itself and the initiative for the next two to three years.

However, the long-term sustainability of the AfterZone initiative, and especially PASA, remains unclear. As long as the current mayor is in office and budget cuts are not too severe, the city and its various agencies are likely to continue to direct resources and support to the initiative. But the extent to which public and private entities will continue to invest in OST system-building once the current mayor leaves office remains to be seen. Finding renewable funding to sustain the AfterZone initiative over the long term will continue to be a major challenge. The sustainability of PASA is even more uncertain. Most funders and policymakers prioritize

the funding of direct services—in this case, actual OST programming—above capacity-building needs. This is especially true when funds are tight.

The amount of public funding that will be available for OST programs remains unclear. The recession has decreased private foundation endowments, which has slowed private giving. Lastly, the movement toward an extended-day learning model is still too new to predict whether it will help foster a financially viable future for the initiative—one in which public funds are used to support after-school learning as well as school-day learning. All of these factors suggest that ensuring PASA and the AfterZone initiative are securely financed will be an uphill battle—at least over the next several years.



# Conclusions

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**Chapter VI**

**B**ased on the need for an efficient and effective way to make high-quality OST programs available to large numbers of low-income youth, cities have begun to invest in building systems that can coordinate, grow, improve and sustain the independent efforts of OST providers. This study examined the structure and operations of the AfterZone initiative, a citywide system-building effort in Providence, RI, that aims to provide high-quality, accessible OST services to the city's middle school youth. Specifically, the study looked at the implementation of the initiative's unique multisite, neighborhood campus service delivery model; it also documented the mechanisms that PASA (the intermediary created to lead the initiative) put in place to engage and retain middle school youth, to ensure AfterZone programs are high quality and to sustain the initiative beyond the start-up grant period.

In the five years since its inception, PASA can point to many significant achievements. Chief among these is the fact that Providence now has an accessible, citywide system of after-school programs of solid quality where almost no good middle school programming existed. The AfterZone initiative integrates as many as 100 of Providence's OST providers into a network with a coordinated schedule and a centralized registration process, and PASA has established a grant application system for distributing program funds. The initiative includes a system for transporting youth to programs outside of the anchor middle schools and then home at the end of the day. Through consistent data collection and an effective use of [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net), PASA keeps close watch over enrollment and attendance—in individual programs, in local AfterZones and at the citywide level—and uses these data to inform planning and decision-making. Finally, the quality of AfterZone programs, as measured by systematic observations and youth feedback surveys, indicates that most programs, especially those focused on the arts, provide youth with high levels of adult support and with opportunities to learn and interact with peers in positive ways.

Other aspects of PASA's system-building efforts have met with more qualified success, and serious challenges do remain. To date, eighth graders have not been as attracted to the AfterZones as have youth in sixth and seventh grades. PASA's quality improvement strategies, while thorough and systematic, lack consistent follow-up, limiting their power to produce and document improvement. The transition to CBO management of local AfterZones, which was intended to embed the initiative more deeply into the fabric of the city, has not progressed as smoothly as was hoped, with some CBOs feeling underfunded. Finally, like with most OST programs around the country, PASA's long-term sustainability plans for the initiative have been hampered by a severe economic downturn that has affected all sectors of the national and local economy.

In this concluding section, we discuss in greater detail the accomplishments of PASA's system-building efforts and identify areas that need further development to ensure youth benefit and the system can be sustained.

### **Leadership and Management of the Initiative**

*Active support from the mayor and PASA's strong leadership shaped the initiative and propelled it forward.* The mayor's active engagement throughout the initiative has been crucial to the progress Providence has made in building its citywide OST system. Riding on a wave of popularity and change following his election, the mayor was able to bring key city players together to plan the initiative, and he leveraged commitments from city departments and the school district to redirect their resources (staff, facilities and funds) to help support it. As an advocate and champion of the AfterZone initiative both within Providence and beyond, he expanded available resources and brought the initiative to the attention of national foundations and elected officials. He worked closely with PASA throughout, making sure the intermediary had the support and cooperation it needed from the city to carry out its mission. He is continuing efforts to secure the initiative's long-term survival.

PASA's focused, skillful and strategic leadership has also been vital to the initiative's progress. By carefully cultivating relationships with providers and focusing on capacity building and collaboration,



PASA overcame the provider community's initial concerns about the intermediary's effect on their access to youth and funds, brought almost all of Providence's OST providers under the AfterZone umbrella, established itself as a resource for the city and maintains broad-based support. While keeping a steady focus on the goals of the AfterZone initiative, PASA has made modifications based on changing conditions on the ground, been open to feedback and suggestions, and learned from missteps and mistakes.

The intermediary's three senior staff members possess a blend of talent, knowledge and experience—in advocacy, strategic planning, youth program management, community relations and regional planning—that helps PASA meet the challenges of its far-reaching mission. PASA has frequently augmented its in-house talent by seeking expert opinions, reviewing relevant research, and hiring various experts to help it develop a three-year business plan and a quality improvement strategy as well as conduct studies of early implementation. Finally, PASA's project-management and decision-making approach is data-driven, and the intermediary makes good use of its data tracking tool to monitor progress and determine what is working and what is not.

*An effort to transition from PASA's direct management of local AfterZones to management by CBOs was intended to embed the AfterZones more deeply into the fabric of the city, but this effort did not progress as smoothly as was hoped.* PASA's leadership has been crucial to building the infrastructure needed to support a citywide system of high-quality programs. To keep the system going, however, PASA believes that the city's public and private stakeholders, including its youth-serving CBOs, will need to increase their ownership of and investment in the AfterZone initiative. PASA pursued this goal by contracting with four local CBOs that had experience running programs for children to serve as site management agencies. Supported by 21st CCLC grants, each agency is responsible for managing a single AfterZone middle school, which entails hiring and supervising school-based AfterZone staff and overseeing all of the logistical, coordination and supervisory tasks that are part of the daily operations of the school program.

However, the transition to CBO management of local AfterZones remains problematic. PASA would

like the site management agencies to play a more active role in tracking attendance, developing relationships with the school-day faculty and staff, fundraising and performing other management tasks. It is not clear, however, that the agencies have the organizational capacity to carry out an expanded role. Recent and severe cuts in their own budgets, staff and services have made it difficult for them to commit more staff time and resources to managing AfterZone middle school programs without additional compensation.

Because PASA believes that CBO management of the local AfterZones is necessary for the long-term sustainability of the initiative, it plans to continue searching for funding and technical assistance providers to help strengthen the internal infrastructures of the agencies weakened in the economic downturn. PASA hopes that this type of support will enable the agencies to play the site management role more effectively, while simultaneously strengthening their own internal organizational capacity and long-term financial viability.

### Implementing a Multisite Campus Service Delivery Model

*Off-site programming is a costly option but may provide youth with enriching learning experiences.* The AfterZone multisite service delivery model, where programs are offered in middle schools as well as in the community, presents unique opportunities and challenges. To access off-site programs, youth have to be shuttled from the middle school to the off-site location at the start of the afternoon, and then back to the middle school in time to get picked up by parents or board a school bus home. The fleet of vans and shuttle buses PASA and its partners have patched together is both expensive and logistically complex to run. The campus model also entails funding additional managers—namely, AfterZone managers—to integrate the school-based and off-site programs. However, off-site programs offer youth enriching learning experiences in, for example, an art center or a marina, that are simply not possible in a school setting. Consequently, PASA and the AfterZone Coordinating Councils believe the potential benefits of offering youth these unique opportunities outweigh the costs of transportation and additional time required from staff to carry them out.



***The challenge of integrating and supporting program providers operating in multiple locations is met through an effective use of staff and open channels of communication between the field and PASA.*** The AfterZone multisite service delivery model presents more oversight and management challenges than the typical school-based after-school program. Assigning a site coordinator to each middle school and an AfterZone manager to each AfterZone appears to provide enough field staff to enable daily operations to run smoothly. With the help of assistant staff and volunteers, the site coordinators attend to the many daily logistical details, such as taking attendance, making sure youth get to off-site programs, and ensuring youth and providers leave classrooms and other school facilities clean and in good condition.

The AfterZone managers play a particularly crucial role. In addition to overseeing the off-site providers in the local AfterZone, they provide intensive support to the school-based site coordinators, dispensing advice and guidance for the myriad tasks and decisions that make up their daily routine. In addition, the AfterZone managers make sure PASA is kept abreast of developments on the ground. PASA senior staff's supervision of AfterZone managers' work in the field helps ensure successful and consistent implementation of citywide strategies. PASA's role is also critical in that it assumes time-consuming tasks that can be most efficiently handled at the city level—such as maintaining the citywide youth participation database, organizing professional development trainings and engaging in fundraising.

### **Engaging Middle School Youth**

***PASA developed the AfterZone model with a keen sensitivity to the developmental needs of middle school youth.*** Middle school youth have historically been difficult to engage in OST programs, in part because few programs have been developed specifically for their age group. Based on extensive upfront research, PASA was able to identify qualities known to be important in promoting participation among this age group, such as autonomy and choice. It was also able to tailor AfterZone programming and recruitment and retention strategies to middle school youth's social, emotional and academic needs and interests. For example, the AfterZone initiative provides youth with opportunities for choice through a

multisite service delivery system, wherein youth can attend programs at their own school or at off-site locations in the community. While secure in their own anchor school, youth can safely try other types of programs in less familiar environments. PASA's strategies—such as incorporating aspects of youth culture into the style and content of programming and giving youth a voice within the activities—appeal to the sensibilities of this age group and help set the AfterZones apart from programs for younger children.

While the AfterZones appeal to middle school youth's need for more autonomy and choice, PASA and the program providers also recognize youth's ongoing need for adult support, guidance and encouragement—and design recruitment and retention practices accordingly. For example, recruitment strategies are based on making direct personal contact with youth and building relationships between youth and adults, a critical principle of positive youth development. In addition, PASA seeks to hire young assistant staff the youth can relate to, look up to and look forward to seeing when they come to the program. Such practices are designed to help youth develop personal relationships with staff and activity leaders, which is a key factor in engaging and retaining youth and a crucial aspect of youth development programs.

***Successful recruitment practices included face-to-face contact with staff followed by close monitoring and follow-up phone calls.*** PASA sets targets for enrollment and attendance levels and puts these targets in the Memoranda of Understanding with CBO partners. In addition, PASA closely monitors enrollment and retention data with [youthservices.net](http://youthservices.net), which enables it to intensify outreach if necessary or identify reasons for attrition or low attendance. Recruitment practices that allow youth to meet the program providers and sample program materials and projects are particularly successful. PASA doesn't rely on just one recruitment strategy, such as recruitment fairs, but also incorporates additional face-to-face opportunities. Staff engage in targeted phone outreach to recruit students and place reminder phone calls to all enrolled youth at the beginning of the session. Further, if youth do not attend programs for which they signed up, or are absent from the program, a staff member will call to find out why they are not attending and try to reengage them.

*The AfterZones succeeded in enrolling nearly half of the students who attend the seven participating middle schools. Involving the older middle school youth, especially eighth graders, however, proved more difficult than expected.* Most AfterZone participants were sixth and seventh graders. Some schools saw enrollment numbers begin to decrease in seventh grade, but in all schools there was a sizable drop in enrollment among eighth graders. The difficulties that PASA has had attracting eighth graders highlights how programming for middle school youth needs to be finely attuned to the rapid developmental changes youth are experiencing during the middle school years. Activities that appeal to students who have recently left elementary school may not appeal to older middle schoolers trying to distance themselves from their younger schoolmates as they prepare to move on to high school. To better serve youth as they move into the higher middle school grades, PASA and AfterZone providers will need to learn more about the interests and concerns of youth in this age group—as well as the barriers that may be preventing them from enrolling (such as increased responsibilities at home)—to inform recruitment strategies and programming.

### Improving Program Quality

*PASA implements comprehensive quality improvement and professional development strategies and activities; however, voluntary participation and lack of timely follow-up may decrease the power of these strategies to improve program quality.* The quality improvement strategies used by PASA with AfterZone providers include an agreed-upon set of dimensions or standards that define high-quality programming; an assessment tool, the RIPQA, used to gauge program quality along each of these dimensions; and a feedback mechanism and professional development opportunities designed to build the capacity of activity instructors to incorporate best practices into their programs. In addition to activity assessments and professional development, PASA implements a set of requirements and incentives designed to keep and further improve their most committed program providers. Programs that maintain a specified level of youth attendance and participate in the RIPQA process are rewarded a financial bonus and given expedited review on their application for inclusion in the AfterZone initiative. Putting these strategies into place citywide by the third year of the initiative represents a considerable achievement.

PASA's decision to make providers' participation in the RIPQA assessment process and professional development activities voluntary has the benefit of fostering a culture of collaboration and capacity-building between PASA and the providers. However, the power of these systems to effect change is limited by the lack of regular follow-up. While thorough and systematic, the use of the RIPQA-based observation and feedback process is costly and time-consuming. A team of trained observers conduct a 40–50 minute observation using the RIPQA tool. After the observation, they compare scores, write up an action plan based on their findings and provide feedback to the program's instructors. Because of the large number of programs to observe and the limited number of staff to do the observations and feedback, little time is left to return to the program for follow-up observations.

Follow-up observations could ensure that the program provider has made suggested changes or, in cases where program quality is quite high (as it generally was in the observed programs), that the strong practices previously seen are being maintained. This would create a true system of continuous program improvement, which would be more effective in raising program quality. In the 2009–10 school year, PASA plans to focus on a small group of providers whose RIPQA scores indicated a need for improvement and provide this group with more intensive coaching and frequent follow-up.

### Sustaining PASA and the AfterZone Initiative

*Long-term sustainability for the AfterZone initiative is a challenge.* The short-term financial outlook for PASA and the AfterZone initiative is good, thanks in large measure to a new grant from The Wallace Foundation; a one-time federal appropriation; and continuing support from the city, the school district and the police department. The grant from The Wallace Foundation will give PASA three more years to search for new, sustainable sources of revenue, and unless the city experiences more severe budget cuts, PASA expects to continue receiving funds and in-kind contributions from municipal sources.

In our experience studying OST and other youth programs, achieving long-term sustainability and finding renewable sources of funding is often difficult, even for proven programs in good economic

times. In the AfterZone initiative's case, the flow of public funding sources, such as the 21st CCLC grant program and state subsidies for childcare, has slowed as a result of the current recession. Similarly, the recession has decreased private foundation endowments, which has slowed private giving.

The effort to make local AfterZones an integral part of the city's agencies, departments and schools has succeeded to the extent that the police department, the school district and the mayor's office continue to direct a portion of their own resources toward supporting it. In large measure, the marshalling of city resources has been engineered by the current mayor, for whom building a high-quality OST system in Providence has been a high priority. It is impossible to know whether a new mayor will continue to leverage support for the initiative.

Similarly, it is too soon to predict whether the extended-day learning movement, which advocates integrating school-day and after-school programs into a seamless network of learning opportunities for youth, will open up a new and financially viable future for the AfterZone initiative. With a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, PASA has begun to plan for what it hopes will be the next phase of the initiative's evolution: namely, providing enrichment activities to support school-day learning. The challenge for PASA will be to demonstrate to district leadership and the public that high-quality OST programs can improve student learning while maintaining the AfterZone model's youth-oriented, choice-based approach to programming.

## Final Thoughts

This report documented the experiences, accomplishments and challenges of Providence's effort to design and implement a unique citywide system to coordinate, grow and improve its OST programming. Building on its existing but largely independent provider community, and galvanized by committed and effective leadership, the city made enormous progress toward reaching its goal of making high-quality after-school programs accessible to low-income middle school youth in a relatively short period. It has shown that a campus model is feasible and indeed attracts middle school youth. It has also demonstrated that, with a concerted effort on tracking program quality and providing professional

development, programs of solid quality can be put in place within a four- or five-year time horizon.

P/PV's final report on the AfterZone initiative will be an in-depth study of the ways in which youth participate—how frequently they attend, how long they remain involved, the range of programs they select and how they spend their out-of-school time when they are not in AfterZone programs. The report will also examine whether and how youth benefit from participating, in terms of their developmental and school-related outcomes, compared with their non-participating peers.

## Endnotes

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- 31 The grant was awarded to the Educational Partnership, an educational reform organization. After three years and the development of a new business plan, PASA's original steering committee and Mayor Cicilline decided to form an independent nonprofit for PASA. The nonprofit became officially incorporated in July 2007 with Mayor Cicilline serving as the Board Chair and Hillary Salmons as the Executive Director.
- 32 For logistical and scheduling reasons, Club AfterZone is only offered at the anchor middle schools. Youth who go to off-site programs do not participate in Club AfterZone.
- 33 According to an earlier implementation report on the initiative, Coordinating Councils were very active during its start-up phase. Participation decreased once these systems were in place and there was less of a clear role for the Councils. See Brickman, A. 2007. *Assessment of Phase 1 of the Implementation of the AfterZones*. At the time of our study, local Council meetings were primarily attended by a core group consisting of the AfterZone manager, the site management agency representative, and one or two providers.
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- 35 All youth, including those who travel to off-site programs, congregate in a central location at the middle school at the start of the afternoon so that school-based staff can take attendance.
- 36 See Grossman, J.B., C. Lind, C. Hayes, J. McMacken and A. Gersick. 2009. *The Cost of Quality Out-of-School Time Programs*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. An accompanying "cost calculator" can be found at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/cost-of-quality/cost-calculator>. This calculator estimates that the cost of programs like the AfterZones would range from

- \$1,109 per slot (the cost of the 25th percentile most resourced program) to \$2,257 per slot (the cost of the 75th percentile most resourced program). The number of slots a program has is equivalent to its average daily attendance. To convert this “per slot” cost into a “per youth” cost as reported in the text, one must divide the slot cost by the number of AfterZone youth that fill a slot. Local AfterZones are open four days a week, and preliminary data indicate that participants attend 1.6 days per week on average. Thus, on average, 2.5 youth “fill” one AfterZone slot. Dividing the slot cost by 2.5, we calculate that the “per youth” cost for programs like the AfterZones would range from \$444 to \$903.
- 37 The agencies comprised the John Hope Settlement House, the Providence Housing Authority, the West End Community Center and the YMCA. At the end of the 2008–09 school year, the Boys and Girls Club was added.
- 38 The issue of youth participation in AfterZones, and the relationship of various patterns of participation to youth outcomes, will be explored in depth in P/PV’s final report on the initiative, which will be published in 2011.
- 39 Walker and Arbreton.
- 40 Russell, Mielke and Reisner.
- 41 Durlak and Weissberg.
- 42 See *Providence Guide to After-School Quality Standards*. Retrieved 2009 from PASA at [www.mypasa.org/failid/TEPQuality\\_Guide\\_61.pdf](http://www.mypasa.org/failid/TEPQuality_Guide_61.pdf).
- 43 See *Revised Quality Indicators*. Retrieved 2009 from PASA at [www.mypasa.org/failid/Revised\\_Standards\\_indicators\\_matrix\\_7\\_11\\_06.doc](http://www.mypasa.org/failid/Revised_Standards_indicators_matrix_7_11_06.doc).
- 44 YPQA/RIPQA define “reflection” as opportunities to review, summarize and/or evaluate recent events or activities through talking with others or writing.
- 45 All subsequent mentions of RIPQA will refer to Form A. PASA used Form B to identify capacity-building needs of the CBO site management agencies, but it has not used this form in assessments of AfterZone providers.
- 46 In the first year that observations were conducted, each activity was observed twice in a session. Subsequent activities were observed only once.
- 47 PASA consulted with High/Scope before eliminating the second observation. According to the three models of quality improvement and accountability systems developed by High/Scope, when resources are limited and the main purpose of assessment is to advance staff learning and promote buy-in, single (yearly) self-assessment observations are sufficient. See Smith, C. and T. Akiva. 2008. “Quality Accountability: Improving Fidelity of Broad Developmentally Focused Interventions.” In Yoshikawa, H. and B. Shinn (eds.). *Transforming Social Settings: Towards Positive Youth Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 192–212; and Smith, C., T. Akiva, et al. 2009. “Quality and Accountability in the Out-of-School Time Sector.” In R. Granger, K. Pittman and N. Yohalem (eds.). *New Directions for Youth Development: Defining and Measuring Quality in Youth Programs and Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 109–127.
- 48 Sheldon, J. and L. Hopkins. February 2008. *Supporting Success: Why and How To Improve Quality in After School Programs*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures; and Metz, R.A., J. Goldsmith and A.J.A. Arbreton. April 2008. *Putting it All Together: Guiding Principles for Quality After-School Programs Serving Preteens*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
- 49 Fall and winter program cycles are each 11 weeks long; the spring cycle is 6 weeks long. It is likely that PASA will concentrate on a smaller group of providers during the shortened spring program cycle.
- 50 Weiss, H. and Priscilla M.D. Little. October 2008. *Strengthening Out-of-School Nonprofits: A Role of Foundations in Building Organizational Capacity*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.
- 51 PASA’s professional development activities were open to instructors who delivered programs as well as to their supervisors.
- 52 See Wynn, J.R. 2000. *The Role of Local Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field*. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children.
- 53 As discussed in Chapter I, the Coordinating Council was the group of providers, staff and other local stakeholders who were responsible for programming decisions for the local AfterZones.
- 54 Providers can offer more than one program in the AfterZones. However, both program grants and endorsed status are given to the individual program, not the provider. Therefore, a provider may offer two different programs, only one of which is endorsed.
- 55 See Lauer, P.A., M. Akita, S.B. Wilkerson, H.S. Apthorp, D. Snow and M. Martin-Glenn. 2006. Out-of-School-Time Programs: A Meta-Analysis of Effects for At-Risk Students. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(3), 275–313; and Vandell, Reisner and Pierce.
- 56 We analyzed RIPQA scores of 40 AfterZone activities observed by PASA’s consultants during the 2007–08 school year and 36 activities observed in 2008–09. The first group of activities contained programs that were deemed by PASA as “best” programs. PASA agreed to let P/PV use the RIPQA scores on these 36 activities. In the 2008–2009 school year, to comply with the needs of the research study, PASA allowed P/PV to select which activities would be observed. In selecting activities for observation, P/PV made sure that (1) all three AfterZones were represented; (2) activities of different types (e.g., academic enrichment, art, life skills and sports) were represented in proportion to how they were offered in the AfterZones; and (3) programs were not observed in 2007–08.
- 57 For more information about the YPQA Validation Study and the two samples it used, see Smith, Charles and Charles Hohmann. 2005. *Full Findings from the Youth PQA Validation Study*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Retrieved



2009 from HighScope Educational Research Foundation at [www.highscope.org](http://www.highscope.org).

- 58 Walker and Arbreton. The activities observed in this study were from five Beacons Centers. Three of the centers served middle school youth, one served high schoolers and one served elementary students.
- 59 Grossman, Lind, Hayes, McMacken and Gersick. The study found that 11 percent of teen programs charged enrollment fees and 15 percent charged fees for specific services, such as a field trip.
- 60 The 21st CCLC grants are funded by the federal government but awarded by the state department of education. The grants are awarded for a three-year period, after which the grantee must apply for a two-year extension grant, which is funded at a reduced level.
- 61 PASA has since secured a fifth grant for the Boys and Girls Club to run the site at the Roger Williams Middle School in the Olneyville AfterZone starting in the 2009–10 school year.
- 62 *Providence City News*. Issue 277, January 29, 2009. Retrieved 2009 from ProvidenceRI.com at [www.providenceri.com/CityNews/newsletter2.php?id=193](http://www.providenceri.com/CityNews/newsletter2.php?id=193).
- 63 See Institute for Youth, Education and Families. 2009. *Financial Strategies to Support Citywide Systems of Out-of-School Time Programs*. Washington, DC: Institute for Youth, Education and Families. Retrieved 2009 from National League of Cities at [www.nlc.org/IYEF/education/afterschool/resources.aspx](http://www.nlc.org/IYEF/education/afterschool/resources.aspx).



# Appendices

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## Appendix A

### Mean Scores on RIPQA Scales and Subscales

**Appendix Table A.1.**  
**Mean Scores on RIPQA Scales and Subscales for AfterZone Activities**

RIPQA Scales and Subscales	Mean Score of AfterZone Activities (n=76)
<b>I. Safe Environment</b>	4.12
A. Psychological and emotional safety is promoted.	4.42
B. The physical environment is safe and free of health hazards.	4.63
C. Appropriate emergency procedures and supplies are present.	3.11
D. Program space and furniture accommodate the activities offered.	4.48
E. Healthy food and drinks are provided.	3.96
<b>II. Supportive Environment</b>	4.00
F. Staff provide a welcoming atmosphere.	4.46
G. Session flow is planned, presented and paced for youth.	4.45
H. Activities support active engagement.	3.75
I. Staff support youth in building new skills.	3.91
J. Staff support youth with encouragement.	3.60
K. Staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict.	3.51
<b>III. Interaction</b>	3.06
L. Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.	3.60
M. Youth have opportunities to participate in small groups.	2.79
N. Youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators and mentors.	2.33
O. Youth have opportunities to partner with adults.	3.51
<b>IV. Engagement</b>	2.60
P. Youth have opportunities to set goals and make plans.	2.30
Q. Youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests.	3.03
R. Youth have opportunities to reflect.	2.49

## Appendix B

### Demographic Characteristics of Surveyed Youth

During the Fall 2008 and Winter 2009 sessions, P/PV administered surveys to 318 youth who participated in 36 different AfterZone activities. The table below provides information about demographic characteristics of the surveyed youth.

**Appendix Table B.1.**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Surveyed AfterZone Participants**

<b>Average Age</b>	12 years
<b>Age Groups</b>	
8–10	3.6 %
11–12	60.8 %
13–14	35.6 %
<b>Grade Level</b>	
Five	0.6 %
Six	38.3 %
Seven	36.7 %
Eight	24.4 %
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	45.6 %
Female	54.4 %
<b>Ethnicity<sup>a</sup></b>	
Black/African American	33.9 %
White	10.0 %
Hispanic/Latino	50.6 %
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.9 %
American Indian	5.8 %
Other	11.6 %

a Youth could mark more than one ethnic category, and therefore the categories do not add up to 100 percent.

## Appendix C

### Factor Analysis of Quality of Youth's Experience Survey

We used factor analysis to group youth's responses to the survey questions. Eight constructs, all of which were used in previous P/PV studies of youth programs, were created. Items and reliability coefficients for each construct are listed in Appendix Table C.1.

All survey items used a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1, indicating "not at all true" or "not at all," to 4, indicating "very true" or "very much."

#### Appendix Table C.1.

##### Positive Adult Support – 10 items ( $\alpha = .92$ )

- The staff in this activity say nice things to me when I do something good or try hard.
- The staff in this activity understand me.
- The staff in this activity encourage students to help each other.
- The staff in this activity pay attention to me.
- The staff in this activity care about me.
- The staff in this activity make me feel like part of the group.
- The staff in this activity encourage all students to cooperate.
- The staff in this activity let students work together.
- The staff in this activity do a pretty good job of answering students' questions.
- The staff in this activity explain things clearly.

##### Engagement – 9 items ( $\alpha = .88$ )

- I put a lot of energy into what we do here.
- I would describe this activity as very interesting.
- I really enjoy this activity.
- This activity is fun.
- I really pay attention to what the staff says.
- This activity is well organized.
- Do you use your skills and talents?
- Do you enjoy what you do here?
- How hard do you concentrate?

##### Emotional Engagement – 5 items ( $\alpha = .73$ )

- When I'm in this activity, I feel happy.
- When I'm in this activity, I feel excited.
- When I'm in this activity, I feel disappointed.
- When I'm in this activity, I feel bored.
- When I'm in this activity, I feel interested.

##### Perceived Learning – 3 items ( $\alpha = .74$ )

- The things in this activity get me to do my best.
- I've learned new things in this activity.
- This activity helped me get better at things.

##### Peer Affiliation – 4 items ( $\alpha = .81$ )

- Students like being with each other in this activity.
- Students in this activity get to know each other really well.
- Students are pretty well behaved in this activity.
- Students follow the rules in this activity.

##### Voice and Choice – 8 items ( $\alpha = .76$ )

- Staff let you do things in a way you think is right for you.
- Staff let us help decide what the rules are in this activity.
- Staff let students help decide how we do things.
- Staff ask for suggestions about how or what we do.
- Staff let students help plan what we do.
- Do you have a choice about what you do here?
- Can you influence what happens to you?
- I have very little choice about what I do here.

##### Negative Staff and Peer Interactions – 7 items ( $\alpha = .85$ )

- The staff in this activity put students down.
- The staff in this activity bother me.
- I don't like the staff in this activity.
- The staff in this activity make fun of what students say or do in ways I don't like.
- Staff often lose control of the class.
- There are groups of students who don't get along in this activity.
- Do you wish you were doing something else while you are here?

##### Desire to Participate – 3 items ( $\alpha = .64$ )

- I try to miss as few sessions as possible.
- This activity did not hold my attention at all.
- I often count the minutes waiting for this activity to end.







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