



K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative

Interim Evaluation Summary
Spring 2017

This report is a summary of interim findings from the ongoing evaluation of the K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative, funded by The Oregon Community Foundation and The Ford Family Foundation. A more detailed version of this report, as well as other reports (e.g., topical learning briefs) are found on the OCF website: <http://www.oregoncf.org/grants-scholarships/grants/k12-student-success>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative aims to support and improve student success, particularly for those students who face gaps in opportunity and achievement. Twenty-one organizations throughout Oregon received funding between 2013 and 2016 from The Oregon Community Foundation and The Ford Family Foundation to support out-of-school time programming for middle school students of color, students living in rural communities and/or students from low-income families. The Initiative also includes a robust learning community focused on program quality improvement as well as efforts to strengthen the out-of-school time field in Oregon more broadly. While the Initiative and its evaluation are midcourse, there are some early key findings:

- **The Initiative is making progress toward improved student outcomes.** While it is too early to expect changes in academic outcomes such as standardized test scores for participating students, many shorter-term benefits for students, their families and grantee organizations already are apparent. Grantees report that students are completing more homework and improving their grades, families are receiving needed support and organizations are benefiting from professional development and program improvement planning. Further, the increased and improved programming that the Initiative is bringing to middle school students is decreasing the opportunity gap for these students at a crucial period of their development; this increased opportunity should ultimately result in improved student success.
- **The Initiative is strengthening out-of-school time programs by providing funding for programming and a robust learning community that supports a rigorous program quality assessment and improvement process.** Grantees note that in addition to expanding and improving programming, their experience with the Initiative has led to improved relationships between staff and students, and increased collaboration opportunities between OST providers.
- **There is ongoing need for support to sustain and improve OST programs in Oregon.** Initiative grantees are challenged in finding sufficient funding to sustain programming beyond that received through the Initiative. Grantees also have many needs for ongoing support and training; the Initiative is currently providing much of the limited professional development available for OST staff in Oregon. In addition, Initiative grantees face high rates of turnover of both management and youth work staff, which presents challenges for knowledge transfer and quality improvement.
- **The Initiative is strengthening the out-of-school time system in Oregon by building awareness and supporting alignment of funders, developing robust professional development resources and disseminating lessons learned.** In particular, foundation staff commitment to openness about lessons learned and leadership in bringing other funders together for important conversations about how to better support OST providers in Oregon have resulted in alignment of supports for OST providers, including expanding use of the Youth Program Quality Intervention and Assessment framework and tools.



ABOUT THE K-12 STUDENT SUCCESS: OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME INITIATIVE

In Oregon and throughout the United States, the circumstances of one's birth determine the opportunities that are available and the life paths that are achievable. In particular, children from low-income families do not receive the same opportunities in their homes, schools and communities available to other Oregonians. Race, geography and other factors exacerbate this opportunity gap, with far-reaching implications for personal achievement throughout life.

The K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative began in 2013 with an initial commitment from The Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) of \$5 million in funding over five years to support the expansion and improvement of out-of-school time (OST) programming for middle school students. Fourteen grantees were initially awarded three years of funding, and in 2014, through partnership with The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF) and their commitment of an additional \$2.6 million, the Initiative added seven more grantees, bringing the total to 21 organizations engaged with the Initiative between 2013 and 2016. While both foundations have since made additional commitments to the Initiative, allowing for funding of additional groups of grantees in 2017 and beyond, this interim evaluation report focuses on the 21 organizations who received funding between 2013 and 2016.

The Initiative includes three primary components: funding to expand and improve OST programming; a robust learning community to strengthen OST programs and organizations; and awareness building, advocacy and dissemination to strengthen the OST field in Oregon.

Funding to expand and improve OST programming

Grantee programming supported through the Initiative includes summer, after- and before-school programming that promotes positive youth development for middle school students who are at a critical transition point in their development. Grantee programming addresses the opportunity and achievement gaps by focusing on support for students of color, students living in rural communities and/or students from low-income families.

The 21 OST providers engaged in the Initiative between 2013 and 2016 deliver a variety of after-school and summer programs. The content and foci of the grantee programs vary. Despite their differences, all grantees share the following program elements: academic support, positive adult role models and family engagement efforts. In addition to these core components, Initiative grantees also provide culturally specific and responsive programming, focus on social-emotional skill development, provide experiential and enrichment opportunities, and/or support student readiness for career and college.

All the OST programs funded through the Initiative serve middle school students from low-income families. In addition, over half of the grantees are serving students of color and/or youth in rural communities – in some communities these programs are the only available option for rural youth.

The evaluation team estimates that grantee programs served over 4,000 middle school students during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years combined; due to challenges with capturing student data, roughly two-thirds of these students are included in analyses for the Initiative evaluation. These students are split roughly in thirds between sixth, seventh and eighth grades. About half are male and half are female. Approximately 40 percent are Hispanic/Latino, just under one-third are white, and about 10 percent are African-American.

Learning community to strengthen programs and organizations

In addition to funding for programming, grantees participate in an ongoing learning community that supports a rigorous program quality improvement process and provides opportunities for grantee leaders and staff to learn from and with each other.

Supporting the program quality assessment and improvement process is a central component of the Initiative. The Initiative utilizes the Youth Program Quality Intervention and Assessment (YPQI/A), developed by the Weikart Center at the Forum for Youth Investment. The YPQI/A is built on a solid research base and is designed to support assessment and improvement of the quality of youth programs regardless of program content. Staff at all grantee organizations are trained to conduct, and have conducted, annual self-assessments using the YPQI/A. A subset of individuals have also been trained to be external assessors and all grantee organizations have received an external assessment in addition to their self-assessments.

As part of the YPQI/A, grantees engage in an annual Planning with Data session to review and reflect on assessment results. In addition, the Initiative provides funding for grantee staff to attend Youth Work Methods trainings, which are aligned to the YPQI/A framework and support program improvement. Finally, following each round of assessments, grantees engage in reflection and planning for incremental and targeted program improvement.

Awareness building, advocacy and dissemination to strengthen the OST field in Oregon

Finally, the Initiative includes intentional efforts to strengthen the OST field in Oregon. The Initiative is funding expanded and more systematic professional development opportunities, such as the Youth Work Methods trainings offered by the Institute for Youth Success. These trainings are offered throughout Oregon, reaching not only Initiative grantees but other OST providers as well.

Efforts to share lessons learned are ongoing. In 2016, OCF and TFFF staff and Initiative grantees presented at two Oregon conferences about their experiences with the Initiative and the benefits of its learning community. Foundation staff also regularly share information with government, private and corporate funders, convening discussions about how to align support for OST providers in Oregon (such as through expanded use of the Youth Program Quality Intervention and Assessment).

Finally, the evaluation of the Initiative is assessing the effectiveness of the Initiative and supporting dissemination of shared learning. Findings are shared through reports such as topical learning briefs focused on subjects such as academic support, positive adult role models and family engagement.



BENEFITS OF THE INITIATIVE

The K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative is positively affecting the students, families and organizations involved, and the evaluation is tracking outcomes and benefits for students as well as for their families and the grantee organizations. While the Initiative and evaluation are midcourse, there are some early indications of these benefits, as described below.

Benefits for students

The Initiative is funding programs that are supporting students in a variety of ways to improve student outcomes. The evaluation is analyzing data about participating students' academic experiences, including reading and math scores, attendance, and discipline. Increased academic success for students is a long-term outcome, and therefore it is perhaps unrealistic to expect to see rapid (e.g. within a year or two) change. Limited time has passed thus far between students' participation in programming and the outcomes of interest (such as annual reading and math test scores). Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that the first round of academic outcome analyses do not yet suggest positive treatment effects.

While additional time and analyses are necessary to explore the relationships between Initiative-supported OST participation and student attendance and test scores, students, staff and parents report a variety of indicators of positive progress toward academic and social-emotional success for students.

- Increased engagement in school: Students are completing more homework, are attending school more and are increasing their grades.
- Increased social-emotional skills: Students are taking more ownership of their work, have increased confidence and have more of a sense of academic identity.
- Increased future orientation: Students are now thinking about their future goals and how their school performance will help or hinder their ability to reach those goals; in addition, more students now believe that college is possible.

Many research studies have identified positive relationships between high-quality OST programming and student success. High-quality OST programs can improve student attendance and engagement with school, boost social-emotional skills and improve academic performance, which in turn increases the likelihood of high school graduation and post-secondary attainment. Therefore, continued attention and commitment to program quality improvement should also lead to improved outcomes for students participating in grantee programs.

“ Apart from supporting her academically and emotionally, [the program] gives her tools to be a child leader, and they are planting the idea that [the students] can better themselves, study and go to college as their first priority. ”

- Parent

Benefits for families

OST programs also provide benefits to parents and families. Parents note the following outcomes for themselves and their families due to their students' participation in grantee programs.

- Increased peace of mind: Parents are reassured knowing students are in a safe and enriching place while they are at work.
- Improved relationships: When students complete homework during programming, there are fewer fights at home, and parents know students are getting the help they need on assignments.
- Increased confidence with navigating the school system: Program staff members help with translating school forms and explain the school system and requirements to parents.
- Increased family well-being: Programs help with a variety of family challenges and provide referrals to other needed services such as health care and housing.
- Increased social support: Parents are building community as they meet each other through their students' participation in OST programming.

Benefits for grantee organizations

Finally, the grantee organizations benefit from their participation in the Initiative in a variety of ways. When asked about their experiences with the K-12 Student Success Initiative, grantee staff and leaders describe a range of benefits.

- Staff engagement and retention: Grantee staff and leaders describe improved relationship-building among themselves and with students, which is improving staff engagement and providing a satisfying sense of accomplishment.
- Increased awareness and collaboration among OST providers: Grantees have offered examples of new and deepened collaborations; some attribute those directly to the Initiative learning community.
- Reflection and improvement in a "safe space": Grantees value the space, time and support the Initiative provides to help them reflect on and plan for improvement of programs without the fear of losing funding. Grantees appreciate the new data they have about program quality that can help them demonstrate their success. They also appreciate the emphasis on working to improve manageable pieces, and some reported that goals set in the first year had already resulted in specific improvements.
- Increased and improved relationships: Grantees describe many successes related to relationship-building. Depending upon grantee, this has meant stronger relationships between staff and students, between programs and schools, between programs and families or between schools and families.

PROGRESS TOWARD INITIATIVE GOALS

The Initiative is ongoing, and therefore so is progress toward the Initiative goals.

The Initiative is making progress toward improved student outcomes.

While it is too soon to expect to see long-term academic outcomes, this report does shine light on the shorter-term benefits of the OST programs involved, including increased student engagement in school, growth in student social-emotional learning and positive benefits for their families and for the grantee organizations.

Further, the grantees are contributing to narrowing the opportunity gap by providing expanded and improved programming for middle school students. Initiative funding has provided programming for many middle school students who did not previously have access to such out-of-school time programs. In particular, many of the grantees are now serving a much larger population of middle school youth than prior to their engagement with the Initiative – some developed entirely new programs for middle school students, others expanded into new schools or served greater numbers of middle school students within their existing programming. Ultimately, this expanded opportunity for middle school students to access high-quality programming should lead to increased student success and a narrowing of the achievement gap.

The Initiative is strengthening out-of-school time programs.

The Initiative is strengthening out-of-school time programs by providing funding for programming and through a robust learning community that includes technical assistance and professional development centered in a rigorous program quality assessment and improvement process.

Learning community activities have intentionally centered grantee needs, experience and perspectives whenever possible, positioning foundation staff as learners alongside grantee leaders and staff. Grantee feedback indicates that participants appreciate learning community activities, which are seen as a rare opportunity for networking and professional development with others doing similar work.

Learning community trainings have provided professional development on a variety of topics, from utilizing data for program improvement to cultural competency and quality coaching skills for youth program managers. The Initiative will continue to provide technical assistance to grantees to address ongoing needs, including more support for collecting and using data and training in additional substantive program areas such as family engagement.

All grantees have gone through the program quality assessment process and have created and started implementing improvement plans based on the assessment results. Some have reported that they have already made progress on

“Having [the Initiative] put a focus on middle school shows the importance of the middle school years to our organization and our administration... shining a light on the importance of the transition years.”

- Grantee

goals set in those improvement plans. In addition to the assessment and quality improvement plans, grantees are participating in a wide variety of trainings targeted specifically at the programming areas identified in their improvement plans.

There is ongoing need for support to sustain and improve OST programs in Oregon.

While Initiative funding has clearly benefited the grantees, the need for funding to sustain programming and continue improving program quality remains high. OST providers are challenged in finding sufficient funding to sustain programming beyond their participation in the Initiative. The possibility is real that the increased reach and program improvements gained by grantees may be lost if sustainability challenges are not addressed. This, in turn, will diminish the Initiative's ability to reach its goal of decreasing the achievement gap.

Grantees also have many needs for ongoing support and training; the Initiative is currently providing much of the limited professional development available for OST staff in Oregon. In addition, Initiative grantees have faced high rates of turnover of both management and youth work staff, which presents ongoing challenges for knowledge transfer and program quality improvement efforts.

The Initiative is strengthening the out-of-school time system in Oregon by building awareness and disseminating learnings.

The Initiative is significantly increasing professional development opportunities for grantee organization leaders and staff, effectively helping to professionalize the work of individual organizations and the field more broadly. The statewide reach of the Initiative is spreading resources and knowledge that might normally be confined to the metro area or higher education institutions to more diverse and rural communities.

The Initiative's commitment to openness about what the foundations and grantees are learning and leadership in bringing together other funders is resulting in greater awareness of one another's work and greater alignment of efforts to support and improve OST programming in Oregon. This is most visible through the expanding use of the YPQI/A. As of the 2016-2017 school year, several other funders are supporting OST programs in engaging in the YPQI/A, including the Portland Children's Levy, the Multnomah County SUN Community Schools and PGE Foundation. This ongoing coordination and collaboration with other funders and OST stakeholders in Oregon is setting the stage for a more organized, focused and effective system of support.

Though there is clear desire to further improve systems and policy related to OST in Oregon, there is not yet a clear policy agenda for doing so and little infrastructure dedicated to supporting OST at the state level. To further the work of the Initiative, it will be critical to engage with and support partners, including organizations like the Institute for Youth Success, that can play a vital role as system leaders and providers of support for the OST field in Oregon.



MOVING FORWARD

The Initiative has already begun to respond to many of the challenges and needs experienced by OST staff and leaders. In particular, the most recent round of funding (awarded in late 2016) marked a shift in focus for the Initiative. No longer were programs expected to both expand to serve more students and work on program quality improvements through the learning community. Instead, going forward grantees will focus on improving existing program quality and will engage in related organizational capacity-building through the learning community. Technical assistance and professional development will also support improved data collection and use, provide professional development in substantive areas of importance (e.g., cultural responsiveness) and support knowledge transfer.

The Initiative evaluation will continue to examine the degree to which the Initiative is able to narrow the opportunity and achievement gap by tracking student success for the students who participated in programming through the 2016-2017 school year. The evaluation will also continue to gather evidence of the benefits and unanticipated outcomes of participation in the Initiative for families and OST providers. Finally, as the Initiative shifts increasingly toward strengthening programs and the broader OST system, future evaluation efforts (and reporting) will also aim to both support and share findings related to those efforts.



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