Engaging Older Youth: Program and City Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time

Key Details

KEY WORDS
Disadvantaged youth, High school, afterschool programs, community-based organization, professional development, youth leadership, youth engagement

POPULATION GROUP
Youth living in poverty

STEPPING UP THEMES
Education, Training and Apprenticeships
Civic Engagement & Youth Leadership

RESEARCH ORIGIN
USA

SOURCE
Community-Based Institution

"**High school youth in underserved areas need meaningful opportunities to find their individual pathways, stay engaged in school, and work toward college or other postsecondary education, all of which participation in a strong [afterschool] program can support**"

1. What is the research about?

Afterschool or out-of-school time (OST) programs help keep older youth, who begin to disengage from their education, engaged. OST programs provide youth with developmental opportunities that they might otherwise not have and support their path towards healthy development and a lifetime of learning. Encouraging youth to participate and persevere in OST programs is often a challenge for policy makers, funders and youth workers. To better understand how to promote sustained participation among older disadvantaged youth in OST programs, this research examined programs with high participation and retention rates to identify the program characteristics found to be the most successful in retaining older youth, as well as the strategies that cities are using to support participation in these programs.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research studied OST programs across six cities in the US: Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, Providence, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. These cities were chosen because they provide centralized supports and infrastructure to OST programs.

3. Who is this research about?

This research studied OST programs that focused on engaging middle and high school youth who live in economically distressed neighborhoods.

4. How was the research done?

The study gathered perspectives not only from youth workers but also from youth participants as well as policy makers in governance. The researchers used a five-step process to gather their data as follows:

- General data about program initiatives, participation rates and demographic profiles of participants were gathered from each city that was selected for the study.
- Online surveys were sent out to program leaders from OST programs with high participation and retention rates.
- In-person interviews were conducted with a few OST program leaders and participants.
- Documents obtained from on-site visits and online searches were reviewed.
- Focus group meetings between individuals engaged in community work were conducted to discuss emerging themes.

5. What are the key findings?

The researchers found five program characteristics that were common to OST programs that recorded high participation and retention of youth. They were:

- Providing many leadership opportunities to youth in programs

- Having staff keep informed in several ways about youth outside programs

- Being community-based

- Enrolling 100 or more youth (providing opportunities for greater peer connection)

- Holding regular staff meetings

An additional set of retention and recruitment practices that were consistently reported as being important in engaging older youth include:

- Retention practices: fostering a sense of community through connections to program staff and peers, providing developmentally appropriate activities and incentives, and engaging families.

- Recruitment practices: using peers and staff as recruiters, using organizational relationships, and matching program attributes to youth needs.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research study identifies good practices that contribute to the success of an OST program for older disadvantaged youth. This includes giving youth a sense of engagement and responsibility through opportunities for leadership development. Fostering a sense of community with connections to program staff and peers helps youth feel connected, safe and appreciated.

At the program level, you could structure developmentally appropriate activities and incentives. Keep the youth at the center of your program. In the case of middle school youth, provide them with opportunities for peer interaction. With high school youth, provide them with opportunities to make the transition to college and career through job training, apprenticeships and mentorships.

At the organizational level, you could match your program attributes to youth needs. Meet regularly with your peers, discuss within your community of practice.

At the community level, you could support school program partnerships, network with other providers and attend professional development programs.

Deschenes, S. N., Arbreton, A., Little, P. M., Herrera, C., Grossman, J. B., & Weiss, H. B. (2010). *Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time.* Harvard Family Research Project.

FIND IT ONLINE

http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/publications-resources/engaging-older-youth-program-and-city-level-strategies-to-support-sustained-participation-in-out-of-school-time

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