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welcome

to *Forum Focus*, a regular publication of the Forum for Youth Investment. *Forum Focus* is published five times a year as an insert in *Youth Today*. The Forum for Youth Investment is dedicated to changing the odds for children, youth and their families by sparking and supporting action to improve the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement in neighborhoods and across the nation.

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Redefining the Terms to Reach Older Teens

After-school advocates have focused relatively little attention on high school-aged youth. But the tide may be shifting. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California will soon release a report arguing for increased investments in this area (Lee, 2004). Public/Private Ventures recently released a report documenting the successes and challenges facing a cohort of eight Boys and Girls Clubs in New York and Boston during a three-year effort to enhance services to underserved teens (Herrera & Arbreton, 2003). California has developed a unique 21st Century Community Learning Centers' funding set-aside to create new high school programs.

It is not surprising that high school programs are last on the after-school pri-

orities list. Arguments for after-school programs focus on the hours between 3:00 and 6:00 P.M. as unsupervised time when children can get hurt and young teens can go astray. By high school, common wisdom suggests that teens either don't need or won't accept supervision.

It is alarming to think that these programs may not remain on the priority list. But, without concerted action, non-formal learning opportunities for older teens may decrease as city budgets are being tightened and school districts from New York (Atkins, 2003) to Oregon (Oppenheimer, 2003) are being forced to cut funds for extracurricular sports and

activities, as well as music and art instruction during the school day.

More than two-thirds of teens in a nationally representative survey say they would be likely to participate in academic enrichment, leadership and community service programs after school if such programs were available (YMCA, 2001). Broken down by age, percentages suggest that interest is fairly consistent across the high school years — with 71 percent of 14- to 16-year-olds and 65 percent of 17- to 18-year-olds saying they would participate.

The number of teens actually participating in activities, however, declines steadily with age. Public/Private Ventures' study of three communities, for example, found that while

[continued ▶](#)

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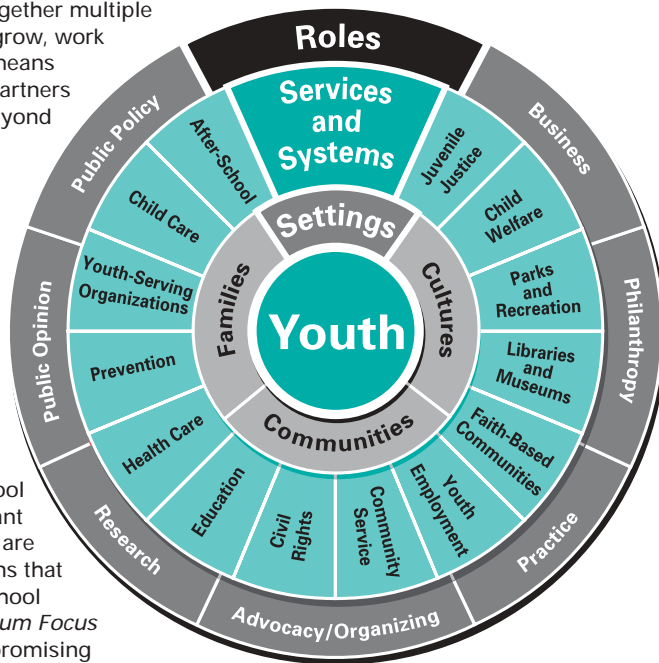
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MAXIMIZING SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER YOUTH

Investing in the successful development of teenagers requires a commitment to thinking developmentally and a recognition that older youth are looking to weave together multiple opportunities to learn, grow, work and contribute. It also means looking for programs, partners and funding streams beyond those labeled "after-school." Programs cut across systems and range from service-learning to pregnancy prevention to increasing college access.

As the issue of older youth and out-of-school time is gaining new attention across the country in the context of the after-school movement, it is important to remember that there are many programs for teens that operate in the out-of-school hours. This issue of *Forum Focus* documents a range of promising developments for capitalizing on the after-school momentum to increase learning opportunities for older teens.



two-thirds of 13- to 15-year-olds reported participation in out-of-school activities, only half of 15- to 17-year-olds and one-third of 18- to 19-year-olds participated (Sipe, Ma, & Gambone, 1998). The reasons behind these declines have not been fully documented by research. But it is critical that decision makers not mistake low teen participation rates for lack of interest.

THE OLDER TEENS ARE, THE MORE THEY WANT THEIR TIME TO COUNT

“I used to pick activities based on having fun. Now it’s more about teaching myself and gaining knowledge — that’s the difference.”

Whether opportunities are related to academic achievement, service or employment, teens want to learn skills that matter and they want their time to count for something. In discussions with Providence youth, middle schoolers valued traditional recreational and enrichment programming and were interested in a variety of shorter activities. Older youth were interested in fewer activities of a longer duration, and those with direct connections to future goals and aspirations (The Forum, 2003, December). As one youth noted: “I used to pick activities based on having fun. Now it’s more about teaching myself and gaining knowledge — that’s the difference.”

Creative efforts by large-scale programs such as the After School Matters

initiative in Chicago (Wynn, 2003), The After-School Corporation (TASC) and others to experiment with paid internships, apprenticeships and credit-bearing learning opportunities outside of school warrant serious attention. In California, the first cohort of high schools benefiting from a 21st Century Community Learning Centers’ funding set-aside is participating in a capacity-building effort that should yield important lessons about the unique developmental needs of older youth and demonstrate program effectiveness.

THE OLDER TEENS ARE, THE MORE THEY WANT AND NEED PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY

By high school, most teens have some degree of freedom to manage their schedules. Many have increased family and work responsibilities. Either way, this increased discretion means that teens are likely to be more selective about when and where they choose to participate in voluntary activities.

Investments in teen programs present not only design challenges, but accountability risks. At a time when program participation rates are under scrutiny, given the results from several evaluations that have found the frequency and duration of participation in after-school programs appears fairly low across age groups (Kane, forthcoming), it is important to make sure that target participation rates set for high school

students are realistic given their needs and their options.

TASC has responded to the attendance dilemma by allowing teens to check in with after-school program staff on days they are attending an internship with a local employer and still be recognized as “participating” in an after-school activity. The California Department of Education’s response to this challenge has been to create tiered participation targets that link to expected outcomes.

Making the case for increased investments in older youth during out-of-school time requires making the case for doing business differently — rethinking a range of strategic and conceptual decisions including recruitment and attendance, policy framing, program content and partnership development. The good news is that this work is happening.

This issue of *Forum Focus* zooms in on some promising solutions. In [research update](#) we summarize findings from two recent studies of programs serving high school youth and offer an age-appropriate framework for describing features of quality out-of-school program settings. In [on the ground](#) we describe how TASC is engaging teenagers after school in New York City. [voices from the fields](#) features candid conversations with B.J. Walker, chief of human infrastructure for the City of Chicago, and Nancy Wachs, executive director of After School Matters. ■

research update **EXPANDING AND IMPROVING OPTIONS FOR TEENS**

Strong research looking at out-of-school time programs for high school youth is still hard to come by. Yet

two new studies — one released last fall and another forthcoming — add to the dialogue in useful ways.

Increasing Opportunities for Older Youth in After-School Programs (Herrera & Arbreton, 2003) continued ▶

FEATURES OF DEVELOPMENTAL SETTINGS: AGE-SPECIFIC SNAPSHOTS

Applying what is known about developmental theory to program settings is a critical step in creating effective experiences for teens. Below we have added a developmental dimension to a list of positive program features introduced by the National Research Council in 2002, bringing the challenges of creating age-appropriate settings to life.

9-YEAR-OLDS	FEATURES	16-YEAR-OLDS
Children are paired with “buddies” — other participants in the after-school program that are also in their class. They spend the ten minutes of free time in between school and the program with their buddy, either in the cafeteria or on the playground — two designated areas where parent volunteers relax with children until buses have left and the space used for the program is ready.	Physical and Psychological Safety	In an effort to reduce conflicts occurring after school, a core of volunteer parents and staff from a local community center are ready to greet students, providing “coverage” and creating an opportunity to build rapport between youth and neighborhood adults between the last school bell and students’ travel home or to after-school programs.
The Culture Club after-school program offers a consistent schedule. The activity board for Tuesday lists: Snacks: 2:50; Games Around the World: 3:15; Homework Heroes: 4:15; Discovery Workshops: 5:00. Whatever day it is, participants know they will spend the afternoon with adults they trust, get to move around the center and do something interesting.	Appropriate Structure	From 2:30–4:00, the teen center offers a variety of options, including computers, open gym, a quiet area for reading/studying or an informal volunteer-led activity like sketching. At 4:00, teens meet in small groups to work on their community service projects. At 5:30, some stay to talk with specific staff, a small group prepares to leave for their street outreach shift, and others prepare the lounge for open mike night.
Staff development and retention is a strong focus. The director maintains open communication and consistently follows through on compensation and recognition, training, scheduling and adequate program resources. Staff support allows the center to provide children with consistent adults ready to focus on their needs in the program.	Supportive Relationships	Club members get a lot of support from each other in Express Yourself — a ritual the group initiated when the program began. At every meeting, participants set aside time to share issues on their mind. Adult staff provide a consistent presence, modeling listening, creating a psychologically safe environment, and following up with individual youth as needed.
Staff members help children make “a plan” for how they want to use their time, helping children who want to join an activity with other children to do so, and structuring activity spaces and materials ahead of time to minimize conflicts and encourage inclusion.	Opportunities to Belong	Teens set and monitor the program rules based on their principles of inclusiveness and mutual support. New young people are greeted by peer staff members who talk to them about what goes on at the center, and set the tone for making “The Spot” a place where everyone can belong.
“Everybody cares for the center” is a motto practiced every day at South End Neighborhood Club. During snack time, participants rotate being “on” for snack duty, helping with serving the snack and doing light clean-up afterwards.	Positive Social Norms	“Family meetings” provide space for teens and staff to set goals, plan activities, make decisions, solve problems and reflect. Staff facilitate discussions, some scheduled and some ad-hoc, modeling active listening, structured problem-solving and a focus on positive program culture.
On Thursdays, several participants in the local after-school club travel to a nearby retirement community to listen to the stories of seniors and spend time with them. The youth will collect these stories into a book that will be distributed at the community fair.	Support for Efficacy and Mattering	Fifty cents of every purchase of coffee from a youth-run coffee delivery service in downtown Nashville goes to support youth programs — young people earn income, learn the skills of running a small business, and contribute to their community to provide expanded opportunities for their peers.
Students involved in the Readers for Life literacy program can spend a half-hour reading to a guide dog in training, building reading skills while avoiding the social pressure of reading aloud to other people. This reading time also helps the guide dog get used to human contact.	Opportunities for Skill Building	Poetry slams are popular events at the Zone. Youth form groups that review and practice poetry together. To gain skills, interested youth join weekend workshops taught by their peers or college students. Slams are held every few months, and there are opportunities to join a competitive slam team.
Program staff comprised of graduate student teachers and neighborhood parents make regular links with teachers and parents through face-to-face meetings and “passports” that each student carries between school, after school and home.	Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts	Staff at this employment program function as part educator, part guidance counselor and part life planner. They move freely between where youth live, hang out, and go to school, and are respected in all worlds. They help teens develop individualized plans, connect with the services they need, and make the most of their internship experiences.
A school-coordinated neighborhood after-school initiative allows participating students to join after-school activities in one of four sites. Vans, purchased through foundation grants and jointly operated between sites, pick up participants and take them safely home.	Basic Care and Services*	An after-school drama troupe creates original theater to address physical and mental health issues impacting young teens in their neighborhood. At each performance, they make sure that related health information is available and help connect their peers to community resources.

Source: The Forum for Youth Investment (2003). *Out-of-School Time Policy Commentary #2: High School After-School: What Is It? What Might It Be? Why Is It Important?* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Available online at www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/comment/ostpc2.pdf.

Examples developed by Forum staff.

List of features adapted from National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Available online at www.nap.edu/catalog/10022.html.

* This category was added by the Forum for Youth Investment.

chronicles the experiences of eight Boys and Girls Clubs in Boston and New York City during a three-year intensive effort to provide and enhance programming for underserved teens. While the clubs were successful in engaging large numbers of teens, they also experienced a range of challenges.

Their general approach was to increase the time, variety, quality and intensity of programming available to teens. Specific strategies they employed included 1) hiring dedicated staff; 2) increasing staff time spent on teen recruitment; 3) tracking individual youth progress; 4) collaborating with schools and community agencies to recruit, refer and track youth progress; 5) increasing the amount of time teens have access to clubs; and 6) creating more academic and job-related programming.

There were many successes across sites. New teens were engaged — more than 50 youth per club, per year of the initiative — and a high percentage of new recruits were disadvantaged. Regular attendance and retention rates comparable to or better than typical after-school programs underscored the clubs' successful outreach efforts.

In terms of quality, roughly 80 percent of new teen participants across clubs reported that adult staff were supportive and knew how they were doing in school. Over 80 percent reported experiencing at least one leadership

TABLE 1: YOUTH-REPORTED ACADEMIC AND JOB-RELATED BENEFITS ACROSS CLUBS

Academic Benefits	
Grade improvements	76%
Learning how to apply to college	68%
Job-Related Benefits	
Learning how to find/apply for a job	71%
Getting a job	71%

opportunity at the club, with about half experiencing five or more such opportunities. In addition, 71 percent said staff helped them find employment, and 76 percent said participating helped improve their academic performance (see Table 1).

Despite these successes, participating clubs also faced many similar challenges, including 1) keeping and retaining higher-risk youth; 2) finding individual case management to be expensive and time-consuming; 3) staff turnover; and 4) developing programs that engaged teens.

The After-School Corporation in New York City has been working with Policy Studies Associates over the past several years to conduct a thorough evaluation of TASC after-school projects. Two years ago, a strategic decision was made to ensure that half of the projects undergoing in-depth study in the case study portion of the evaluation

would be high school projects. In addition to the qualitative portion of the study, student performance data is also being collected specifically on high school participants.

The report (Birmingham, 2004) will provide valuable descriptive analyses of the nature, content and implementation of programming for high school. Evaluators observed significant differences between TASC projects located in elementary and middle schools and those located in high schools — in terms of student recruitment, what kinds of content participants respond to, and how projects are staffed and structured. One critical difference is the important role that choice plays in programming for teens — with projects offering a full-choice schedule in terms of activities and more flexibility related to attendance at the high school level.

The report will also paint a picture of a crucial ingredient of TASC high school projects' success — the creation of small, supportive learning environments that are rich in positive relationships and a sense of belonging and camaraderie. These settings offer teachers working after school opportunities to develop and foster very different kinds of relationships with students than they can during the school day and offer students new opportunities for learning and cognitive growth that these rich, supportive environments make possible. ■

on the ground **OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME ALTERNATIVES IN NEW YORK CITY**

the After-School Corporation is one of many organizations working to broaden the after-school landscape to include opportunities that are relevant to and utilized by high school students. By providing older youth with safe places to spend time, opportunities to gain valuable skills and a sense of belonging, TASC high school projects demonstrate how to appeal to the increasingly sophisticated and complicated teenage audience. In 2002–2003, high school enrollment in TASC projects was 3,920 New York City youth, about 10 percent of the total TASC enrollment. In 2004, the organization will release a new set of findings from their evaluation that zooms in specifically on the nature and benefits of projects serving high school youth, offering important new insights into this under-explored territory (see [research update](#)).

Established in 1998 by the Open Society Institute, TASC provides grants to community-based organizations that partner with individual public schools to implement school-based after-school projects that enhance academic and social development. TASC's role is to ensure the quality, sustainability and availability of opportunities through program development, training, technical assistance, fundraising and policy advocacy work.

From the way in which the programs are marketed to youth to the types of activities offered, TASC is taking seriously the developmental realities that shape the after-school landscape for teenagers. According to Jennifer Birmingham of Policy Studies Associates, an evaluator of TASC's high school projects, socialization is a primary draw for middle school students' participation in programs, while older youth are looking for opportunities to build practical skills. "For high school students, it really is about activities they feel will benefit them personally and, if they're on the college track, offer useful skills." TASC projects address this head on by offering teens the freedom to select from a range of activities, including career awareness, community

service, the arts, and cultural and political issues in the community, with more flexible participation requirements.

Beginning in 2001, several TASC projects began receiving Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to offer targeted academic support and career development opportunities to low-income teens at risk of dropping out of school. Currently located in 14 New York area high schools, groups of roughly 30 TASC fellows meet regularly with advisors at their schools to identify strategies for academic improvement, career planning and employment experience. Students meet these jointly developed goals by participating in after-school activities and an intensive summer institute. After-school opportunities for fellows focus primarily on academic and leadership development, with the summer activities revolving around internships. Fellows have been placed in internships around the city, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Children's Museum of Manhattan, Mt. Sinai Hospital, the United Nations, local middle and elementary schools, and a range of other agencies.

"Our kids have a lot of experiences because there are many resources available through the Lincoln Center. Our internship program started with students working at the College Board, getting a lot of exposure to the business world and the academic admissions world. Some work in churches, some as ushers at the New Victory Theater in Times Square, one student is at a law office."

To coordinate the recruitment, training, academic and daily supports necessary for this venture to be successful, each site has at least one onsite fellowship advisor who serves as a liaison between students and their employers. Andrea Kamins, who serves as internship coordinator at Martin Luther King High School (MLK), says many students are eager to participate and take it upon themselves to make their interest and availability known. "They come in and

fill out an interest form that basically tells us who they are, what they are looking for, what grade they're in, how much time they can commit, etc. Even if we don't have anything available at the time, we put that into a rolodex, and when opportunities come up, we know how to make a good match."

MLK's internship program, sponsored by the Lincoln Square Business Improvement District, connects students with a variety of local businesses and organizations. According to Kamins, "Our kids have a lot of experiences because there are many resources available through the Lincoln Center. Our internship program started with students working at the College Board, getting a lot of exposure to the business world and the academic admissions world. Some work in churches, some as ushers at the New Victory Theater in Times Square, one student is at a law office." While many internships are unpaid, WIA funds provide limited stipends to students during the school year and guarantee minimum-wage salaries for summer internships.

Under WIA regulations and guidelines, the program is available to students as a direct service for two years, with a third year added on recently as a "follow-up" for students who have graduated, offering them additional career development resources and contacts.

Participating students at MLK, all in their second year of the program, are already making plans for next year, according to Kamins. "The students are aware that the program will end for them next year, but they would like to stay involved. They would like to have a less formal time to come together and stay in touch."

Jared Delancey, WIA internship coordinator at TASC, works with former participants who have graduated and need additional support. "Our next event for graduates will focus on technology," he says. "Business experts and CEOs from technology firms will come talk to the kids and then they'll work on developing their own Web page. It's a very hands-on experience that down the road could lead to a job connection." ■

voices from the fields

FORUM INTERVIEWS WITH
B.J. WALKER AND NANCY WACHS

After School Matters (ASM) is an ambitious effort to dramatically increase the supply of out-of-school opportunities for Chicago teens. A partnership between the City of Chicago, the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Public Library, ASM began with Maggie Daley's determination to replicate a single after-school arts program, Gallery 37. It now spans the city and reaches over 20,000 teens, offering a variety of apprenticeships and activities focused on career exposure, enrichment and education in neighborhoods across the city. To get a snapshot of ASM's progress since its launch in 2000, we talked with B.J. Walker, chief of human infrastructure for the City of Chicago, and Nancy Wachs, executive director of ASM. For more information, visit ASM's Web site at www.afterschoolmatters.org.

B.J. WALKER, CHIEF OF HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE, CITY OF CHICAGO**Q: How does ASM connect with what other city departments are doing?**

BJW: Whenever we do anything related to After School Matters, we bring together all city departments that have any role promoting youth programs — human services, libraries, parks, schools, housing, workforce development — and we're all sitting at the table collaboratively to figure out what we need to do. But it's always a challenge to get different government departments and agencies together to work toward one goal. The mayor's leadership has been critical in terms of overcoming that challenge.

Q: How do you make the case to invest in older youth, and how do you make the case to youth that they should be involved?

BJW: A big piece of ASM's message is "find your future." This is compelling from both a teen's and employer's point of view. If you're the owner of a business or a major civic leader in the city, you say to yourself, "These kids are the future and an investment now can pay dividends for our society, our businesses, our market place and our workforce."

Teenagers have told us, "We want to learn real authentic skills, we don't want to just be making stuff. We like hanging out, but we want to learn real skills we can use." A big part of what ASM does

is offer apprenticeships. We teach teens coaching and refereeing so they can get a job with an after-school or summer sports program. We teach them life-guarding. At one point the city couldn't get enough lifeguards for our pools in the summer. So in collaboration with the parks department, we're growing our own. And these are real jobs that pay \$10–\$12 an hour once kids are certified.

We keep diversifying. We have a new initiative working with the Algebra Project that is generating a group of math literacy workers — teenagers who learn math games and go out to work with younger children. So we're developing groups of kids that can go out and work in programs with younger kids who look up to them, giving them a sense of accountability. It's having residual effects far beyond "this is an after-school program between 3:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M." ASM has become far more than what we envisioned when we first decided to do it.

Q: What lessons from Chicago's experience might be useful for other cities?

"You really have to build ownership of something like this. It's easy to think up a program and deliver it; it's much harder to root a program in the community."

BJW: First, listen to kids — we've done a lot of talking with kids to find out what interests them and what would generate their responsiveness. Second, talk to adults — you really do want adults to think about how important this is, not just for them individually, but how important it is for the future of the city. It's bigger than just the kids, it's about the future, and you want people to be aware of that. Third, involve those who have to implement programs — principals, teachers, park program leaders. These folks have to be involved in helping you think through the program and what they are doing because they are going to be there day after day.

You really have to build ownership of something like this. It's easy to think up

a program and deliver it; it's much harder to root a program in the community. Ultimately that's the goal — strengthening neighborhoods so that kids in those neighborhoods can grow, develop and be safe.

NANCY WACHS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AFTER SCHOOL MATTERS**Q: What do you see as ASM's biggest achievements thus far?**

NW: One of our biggest achievements has to do with system change. Getting After School Matters off the ground has required real cross-department collaboration, not only lip service.

I also think that our apprenticeship model is really the way to go for teens, and we have growing demand for our program as a result.

Obviously the other huge success is the scale of the program. We started with six sites three years ago, now we're at 35. We've served 20,000 unique teens since we started.

Q: How is thinking about the after-school hours for high school youth different from focusing on younger populations?

"The difference is that teenagers can walk. They are not interested in after-school programs as they are structured in the younger grades — a little homework, a snack, some arts or sports."

NW: The difference is that teenagers can walk. They are not interested in after-school programs as they are structured in the younger grades — a little homework, a snack, some arts or sports. Developmentally, teens see themselves as young adults. They can move around independently and they need autonomy and choice, so the challenge for after-school programs is to engage them in a more adult way. That's why our apprenticeship model works. If a teen is interested, they apply online, interview with an apprenticeship instructor, and are expected to show up and produce in order to earn a stipend.

Q: *Who teaches in ASM programs and how are they trained?*

NW: We hire professionals in the field as instructors — working artists, people in tech fields, sports professionals. Teacher liaisons from the school assist instructors with specific kids, facilities issues, etc. Professional instructors are one of the appeals for teens — they respond to their excitement and passion about the topic. Instructors get basic youth development training each semester through the Chicago Department of Human Services, and advanced instructors' training is also available. We are not trying to make them all youth development workers, but obviously they need to understand how to work with teens.

Q: *How do you get the word out to young people?*

NW: One of the delights, achievements and challenges is that because of word of mouth, we have very high demand for our programs. Now a big challenge is creating enough programs to meet that demand. Our marketing department does a great job of promoting opportunities within schools. The reality is we used to have to beat the bushes and drag older

kids into after-school programs. Now, they hear about it from other kids and they want to come. It has become a cool thing.

We also really want to embed teens our organization itself. As a teen once told me, if teens build it, they will tell their friends, and they will come. So an important question is how do teens become part of structuring the activities? We do focus groups all the time; we listen to what teens tell us. But now we're trying to figure out a way to offer apprenticeships within our own organization.

Q: *Talk about your recent efforts to reach out to community-based organizations (CBOs).*

NW: The bulk of our programs are located in schools. Part of the initial intent of ASM was to keep schools open past 3:00 P.M., embed the program in the community and encourage other activities on school grounds. Last summer, for the first time, we issued a request for proposals to CBOs, and worked with about 135 organizations to offer apprenticeships and summer internships based on the year-round apprenticeship model.

An important part of the goal in working with CBOs is to reach a different population — youth who have dropped out or are disengaged from school. We've always said our programs were available to drop-outs, but let's face it, they are not likely to come into the schools for an after-school program. CBOs have been very interested in and appreciative of the model.

Q: *What can other cities learn from the work you have done in Chicago?*

NW: Stipend programs are expensive and we're questioned a lot about that. But we think it's really important. Stipends tell the kids "we value you and the work you do." But it's an ongoing challenge for us and will be for others, too.

Teens are a huge untapped resource in our communities. Lower grades are incredibly important, but opportunities really do fall off as kids get older. Many people think it's too late once they're teenagers; we don't think so. These kids are begging for stuff. And there's a way to do it, but you can't just take the model that's worked in the younger grades. ■

key resources**HIGH SCHOOL AFTER-SCHOOL**

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