

Making Afterschool Work for High School Youth: A One-year Turnaround in 21st CCLC



Intervention Design

In August 2008, the Lansing School District contracted with the Weikart Center to develop a one-year intervention that would dramatically improve management capacity, the quality of instruction at the point of service, and ultimately, attendance by high school aged youth. Attendance in afterschool programs has been linked to numerous positive outcomes, but sustaining participation by older youth has been a persistent challenge.¹

The Weikart Center customized an application of the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)² aimed at three levels of the program: the instructional setting, where the youth and staff meet during content-driven offerings; the organizational setting, comprised of the director and four site coordinators; and the broader policy context where the program director had to negotiate between state regulation and district policies. The intervention incorporated a relationship-based team approach. Members of the

Background

The Lansing School District in Michigan, as a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grantee, provides programming for three high schools and one middle school.

In the summer of 2008, the Michigan Department of Education, administrator of state 21st CCLC funds, referred the Lansing 21st CCLC program to the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center) for support due to relatively low attendance.

Weikart Center team served as mentors for different intervention targets: site coordinators and front line staff seeking to improve the quality of instruction, design of offerings, and increase youth voice and governance; the Project Director, a 20 year principal with no prior afterschool experience, building skills in advocacy and afterschool program management; state consultants and district leadership working to resolve persistent hiring challenges. Importantly, each level of the intervention focused on improving the quality of experience available in the program in order to improve attendance.

Progress Through Partnership

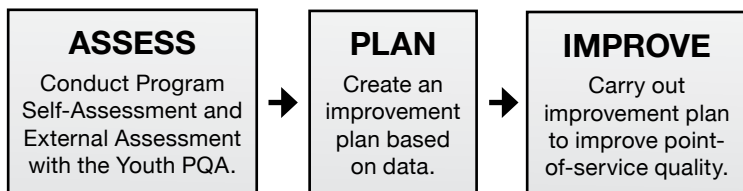
The Weikart Center team provided 150 hours of technical assistance and training over the course of one year. The first months were dedicated to

¹ Weiss, H. B. (2004). Understanding and Measuring Attendance in Out-of-School Time Programs. *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation No. 37*. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/issues-and-opportunities-in-out-of-school-time-evaluation/understanding-and-measuring-attendance-in-out-of-school-time-programs>; Afterschool Alliance. (2009). Afterschool: The Challenges of Recruiting and Retaining Older Youth. *Afterschool Alert: Issue Brief No. 37*. http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_37_recruitingandretaining.cfm.

² The Youth Program Quality Intervention is a research-validated process for improving program quality. In a randomized control trial, researchers found that staff in afterschool programs exposed to the intervention were more likely to 1) engage in continuous improvement practices and 2) deliver high quality instruction to youth than those in non-intervention programs.

relationship building, training staff, and laying the foundation for the Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI).

The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)



The YPQI Cycle (above) was implemented in three phases: (1) Program Launch, (2) Program Assessment, and (3) Program Improvement, all of which are guided by a learning approach based on principles of positive youth development.³ In phase 1, the team focused on articulating the vision of the program, which included program goals, daily program offerings, branding, and engaging youth voice. The team began by performing a needs assessment with input from stakeholders (youth, principals, evaluators, parents, teachers, vendors, and program staff) to establish a shared vision and set of goals. In phase 2, the team supported site staff to collect program quality data and to plan with that data. During this phase, the team also provided technical assistance for the Project Director by sharing best practices from the field and arranging for learning calls and site visits with peers. The team also introduced the practice of Observation-Reflection, a strengths-based supervision and coaching technique. In phase 3, the team focused on providing customized training and coaching opportunities, as well as developing a comprehensive data-driven plan for the next school year.

Outcomes

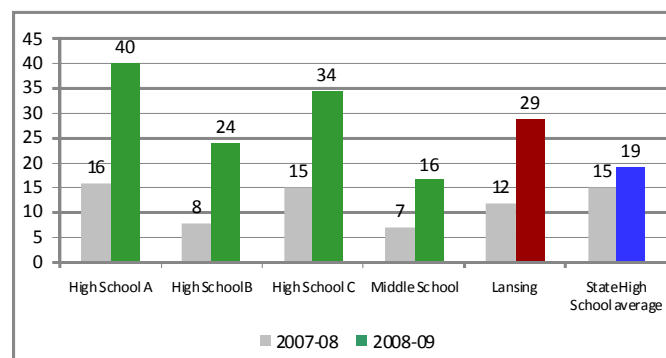
The Weikart Center’s work with the Lansing program staff strengthened program quality as measured on the Youth Program Quality Assessment.⁴ On a district level, program enrollment and overall average daily

³ This learning approach is the basis for both the Youth Program Quality Assessment, and a set of ten Youth Worker Methods training workshops.

⁴ The Youth PQA is a research-validated instrument designed to assess point of service quality in out-of-school time programs. It is both an evaluation and a learning tool: robust enough for research and high stakes accountability, and user-friendly enough for program self-assessment. For validation information see Smith, C., & Hohmann, C. (2005). *Full findings from the Youth PQA Validation Study*. Ypsilanti: High/Scope Press.

attendance more than doubled. All sites increased average daily attendance substantially more than the Lansing district and high school averages, and all but one site increased the percentage of youth who attend regularly (30+ days), exceeding the average for high school sites around the state. Sites reported that the Weikart Center trainings helped them provide additional opportunities for authentic youth voice and choice, which increased return attendance.

Change in Average Daily Attendance 2007-08 to 2008-09



Source: EZReports, 2009

Conclusion

The partnership between Lansing’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the Weikart Center team yielded great progress toward program quality in the instructional setting and raising attendance throughout the district. It provided an opportunity to work closely with all levels of the 21st CCLC system, developing strong relationships and offering comprehensive support that resulted in substantive impact. The intervention served as a pilot for the Technical Assistance & Coaching Support System (TACSS), a five-year initiative launched by the Michigan Department of Education in partnership with the Weikart Center in the Fall of 2009. The TACSS initiative, based on the Youth Program Quality Intervention and a well-established Technical Assistance model,⁵ offers expanded training opportunities and assigns coaches to 54 grantees and 280 sites throughout the state to help project directors implement their own data-driven continuous improvement process.

⁵ Rosenberg, L., Derr, M. Boller, K., Hallgren, K., Hawkinson, L., Marton, K., & Dadgar, M. (2006). *Meeting Head Start and Early Head Start Grantee Needs for Training and Technical Assistance: Final Report of the Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Quality Assurance Study*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.