After-School Programs for Middle School Students

Prepared by:

Office of the Mayor
Department of Youth and Community Development
Department of Education
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Office of Management and Budget

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OVERVIEW

In keeping with the mayor’s commitment, the City of New York (the City) has developed a long-term plan to ensure that all middle school students attending Department of Education (DOE) schools have the opportunity to participate in free after-school programming. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and DOE currently provide 45,095 middle school student program slots and, on an annual basis, serve an estimated 56,369 students in 239 schools.

The proposed plan will provide $190,000,000 in new funding for school year after-school services. The school year expansion will place programs in all public schools serving the middle grades that have no after-school services at the present time, as well as in additional non-public school sites like community centers and libraries. As a result, starting in September 2014, an additional 62,791 middle school students will have the chance to attend free after-school programs, effectively doubling current service levels. A portion of the funding will also be set aside to enhance currently-funded DYCD Out-of-School Time (OST) programs by increasing their hours of operation, thereby allowing more students to participate in after-school activity more days during the week.

The proposed program model is based on the best practices in after-school programming, including DYCD’s OST programs, and input from DOE and the provider community. Programs will work with school principals to align programming with school-day learning and make special efforts to enroll harder-to-recruit struggling students, such as those at risk of not being promoted who, research has shown, benefit more than other students from participation in after-school activities. Principals will be required to contribute in-kind resources to the programs, by, for example, having teachers take advantage of flexible work schedules that overlap with after-school program hours and providing curriculum resources.
The middle school years can be a bridge to lifelong success and must play a central role in supporting young adolescents in building foundational academic skills, successful academic and personal behaviors, and in the identification areas of interest and strength. After-school programs have a vital role to play in the process. Continuing efforts must also be made to address the persistent achievement gap among income and racial groups. Here, too, afterschool can play a part, increasing the likelihood that all New York City students – regardless of family income or neighborhood – are college ready by the time they graduate from high school.

This plan is the result of a collaborative planning process involving representatives of the Mayor’s Office, DYCD, DOE, after-school providers, and youth development experts, who were charged with the task of identifying an after-school model that will meet the need for after-school programs in all neighborhoods. The city has substantial experience on which to build. The current OST system, which supports a network of after-school programs administered by nonprofits in schools and community centers, represents a unique partnership between DYCD and DOE, which will be enhanced through the expansion. The city has also gained experience from the array of other after-school programs now operating in public schools, such as Beacon Community Center programs and 21st Century Learning Centers.
THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CHALLENGE

Middle school can be an especially challenging time for students, parents and teachers. Early adolescence is a time of positive transition and growth. As they embark on the process of identity formation and start to gain greater independence, middle school students are undergoing extraordinary physical, sexual, emotional and cognitive changes. Great possibilities and potential hazards characterize the path to adulthood. Parents know their adolescent children need greater freedom, but want them to do well in school and stay on track for graduation. Similarly, school principals and teachers want their students to succeed socially and academically, a goal made more challenging as a result of the new higher standards. Encouraging middle school youth to participate in after-school activities aligned with their developmental needs – where they can be with their friends in a productive, safe environment, developing new skills and interests, especially during the hours from 3-6 p.m. – helps everyone. Engaging after-school programs that incorporate choice and are relevant to young people can stimulate and inspire students – while delivering educational and social benefits that address the concerns of parents and support the efforts of school-day staff. When such programs become a focal point for the school and its community, afterschool can become, as Mayor de Blasio has pointed out, “a game changer.”

Research Findings Regarding the Benefits of Afterschool and Expanded Learning Opportunities

Effective after-school programs provide a variety of activities that engage youth and build their self-confidence, resiliency, and interpersonal skills, while reinforcing school-day learning. The best programs stimulate curiosity and imagination, while also improving the "21st Century skills" needed for success in school and work – including self-advocacy, teamwork, communication and critical thinking. With guidance and input from educational experts, after-school programs can also help struggling students by reinforcing school-day instruction, providing individual attention, and offering a chance to practice newly learned skills in a supportive setting. A rich body of research and evaluation studies have documented the ways in which participation in quality after-school programs benefit adolescents. The list of potential benefits is long, reflecting the diverse goals identified by various programs, which range widely in terms of modalities and duration.

At a very basic level, after-school programs provide a safe place for adolescents to study, socialize with peers, play sports, explore the arts, and establish meaningful relationships with caring adults. Without losing sight of these goals, educators and after-school practitioners have in recent years aimed to achieve more specific outcomes related to social
and emotional development and academic achievement. The acquisition of social and emotional competencies is a well-established goal of after-school programming. These competencies include self-awareness, managing emotions and difficult interpersonal situations, ability to demonstrate care and concern for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships with peers and adults, and making responsible, healthy decisions. Where a program’s goal is to help middle school students acquire social and emotional competencies, program staff must identify specific competencies as learning goals for individual program activities and clearly articulate what would constitute demonstrations of those competencies. In high quality after-school programs, activity designs integrate positive youth development principles and cognitive skill development.

The research of Durlak and Weisberg has shown that after-school programs that include a social and emotional learning component can also enhance educational outcomes (discussed below), if activities are well designed, i.e., are sequenced, adopt active learning techniques, focus attention on time and skill development, and establish explicit objectives for the skills being taught. School principals and teachers will recognize these features as components of the standard curriculum map they develop to guide academic instruction during the school day.

In considering outcomes related to academic success, it is useful to divide them into two groups: “precursor” outcomes and academic achievement outcomes. A recent review by Child Trends concluded that after-school programs are more effective at helping middle school students attain precursor outcomes than academic achievement outcomes. Precursor outcomes include increased attendance at school, higher rates of homework completion, reduced incidents of disruptive behavior, and improved study habits. These outcomes generally precede the attainment of academic achievement outcomes like higher grade point averages, higher standardized test scores, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills required to succeed in college. Increasingly, leaders in education and afterschool are collaborating to integrate their resources and best practices to intentionally focus activities on academic skill-building goals.

The new program model described below will allow principals and nonprofit partners to craft after-school programs that meet the social/emotional and academic needs of their students. Individual programs will differ in their specific goals, the activities offered, and the participant outcomes they aim to achieve. DYCD and DOE oversight and technical assistance on continuous quality improvement strategies will ensure that programs adjust and refine their models based on participation data and feedback from DOE, school staff, families and participants.
THE NEED FOR AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES

Together, DOE and DYCD now provide 45,095 after-school program slots for middle school students that serve an estimated 56,369 students in 239 schools annually. At this level, approximately one in four of the city’s 224,279 middle school students can be served. Currently, 273 traditional schools with middle school grades do not have a comprehensive after-school program. An Afterschool Alliance survey found that more than one in five children is left unsupervised after school, and that in New York City, more than 98 percent of parents surveyed are overwhelmingly supportive of after-school programming. This survey also found that an estimated 1.1 million New York State students would attend after-school programs if one were available. (NYSAN Testimony to Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2014-15 Executive Budget; America After 3 pm survey.)

While the city has the goal of making after-school programs available to all middle school students who want to take advantage of them, usage patterns among current programs and national research indicate that some middle school students will choose not to participate because they are engaged in other activities during the after-school hours – organized sports, family responsibilities, or even jobs. Adolescents often have numerous other commitments from after-school tutoring to sports or taking care of a younger sibling. In addition, after-school evaluations note that engagement is difficult to sustain as adolescents mature and their interests fluctuate.

Less than 10 percent of the OST middle school programs DYCD currently runs have a wait list, indicating the existing ratio of after-school slots to the overall student body in schools with a comprehensive after-school program is sufficient to meet demand. DYCD bases its modeling on 10 years of experience from current programs to create a reasonable baseline that avails a program slot for virtually all who want it.
Drawing on that experience, it is reasonable to expect that a considerable percentage of middle school students will not attend after-school programs 100 percent of the time they are offered. An analysis of DYCD’s current OST middle school programs shows that through one funded program slot, more than one middle school student can participate in and benefit from after-school activity. The number of youth served exceeds the number of funded program slots by a factor of 1.25. The following chart shows the current profile of middle school after-school programs in city public schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE/PROGRAM</th>
<th>MIDDLE SCHOOL FUNDED PROGRAM SLOTS</th>
<th>ESTIMATED MIDDLE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOE FUNDED AFTERSCHOOL</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYCD OST</td>
<td>13,455</td>
<td>16,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYCD BEACON</td>
<td>12,700</td>
<td>15,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYCD CORNERSTONE AND NDA</td>
<td>2,940</td>
<td>3,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>45,095</strong></td>
<td><strong>56,369</strong></td>
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THE EXPANSION PLAN

In its initial phase, the city plans to expand after-school enrollment, so that over half of the DOE middle school population will be able to participate in after-school programs, beginning in September 2014. The expansion will be sufficient to place a program in each of the 273 district schools, in addition to eligible charter schools with students in the middle grades, that do not currently have a comprehensive after-school program. Charter schools would be eligible for funding, provided their school day ends at 3 p.m. and they lack a comprehensive after-school program.

The enhancement will also enable the city to increase the number of young people participating in existing after-school programs located in schools. Market research conducted earlier in OST’s development revealed that for parents, accessibility is key to utilization. By ensuring that every middle school has an after-school program, the expansion plan will address concerns parents have about their children having to travel between school and the program. In addition, an aggressive marketing plan will be part of the launch of the initiative, aimed at increasing awareness among prospective participants and families. This will include an explanation of how English Language Learners and students with IEPs will be supported in afterschool, where necessary.
The chart below shows the anticipated increase in number of middle school students served. In addition, current OST middle school programs will be enhanced by increasing their hours of operation and price per program slot to match the expanded program model.

### PLANNED EXPANSION

**TOTAL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS: 224,279**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE/PROGRAM</th>
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<th>ESTIMATED MIDDLE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CURRENT PROGRAM SLOTS/ENROLLMENT</td>
<td>45,095</td>
<td>56,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW PROGRAM SLOTS/ENROLLMENT IN DISTRICT PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND QUALIFYING CHARTER SCHOOLS</td>
<td>47,503</td>
<td>59,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW PROGRAM SLOTS/ENROLLMENT IN NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL SITES</td>
<td>2,730</td>
<td>3,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (CURRENT + NEW)</td>
<td>95,328</td>
<td>119,160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Priority will be given to placing programs in stand-alone middle schools that currently lack after-school programs and which demonstrate the capacity to implement quality after-school programs.

### FUNDING

**TOTAL AVAILABLE FUNDS: $190,000,000**

- **DYCD and DOE Support, Evaluation and Quality Assurance**: $31,195,000
- **Total Program Funding**: $158,805,000

A portion of the overall funding will be set aside for programs in non-public school settings, including community centers and cultural institutions like libraries.
ENHANCED PROGRAM MODEL

The enhanced model builds on the best features of DYCD’s current OST initiative and other exemplary programs, such as The After-School Corporation’s (TASC) expanded learning opportunity programs for middle school students. The enhanced model will increase the annual price per program slot to bring more equity to the current system in which large organizations contribute private funds to support higher quality programming, while small organizations rely solely on city funding and struggle to meet program standards; connect payment to contractor performance; bring more school resources to the after-school programs; and actively target struggling students. These features, presented in more detail below, distinguish the enhanced model from current OST and TASC models.

• **Higher Price/Increased Hours.** The expansion model increases the price per program slot to $3,000 (from $2,100 in the current OST model) and the annual duration to 540 hours (from 413 hours in the current model). The TASC model, by comparison, provides 340 hours at a price of $1,650. The price of $3,000 per program slot will allow all providers to match the funding level now obtained by those with fundraising capacity who supplement current OST funding to ensure quality programming. Staff costs are the primary driver of overall program costs, and DYCD’s evaluations of the current OST system underscore the relationship between program quality and staff credentials, as well as the importance of dedicating time to program planning and analysis during non-program hours. At $3,000 per program slot, more programs will be allowed to hire certified teachers to serve as educational specialists and to retain more highly educated and experienced activity specialists – such as professional artists and graduate students in science – who can be paired with youth workers to offer engaging, project-based learning activities.

• **Performance-based Contracts.** After the first year, a portion of funding will be tied to achievement of contract targets based on participation. While current OST contracts are performance-based, the TASC model is not.

• **School Contribution to Afterschool.** A principal’s interest in having a program will be evidenced through a modest, but required, in-kind contribution, amounting to 10 to 15 percent of the total program funding received from DYCD. It is anticipated that some principals will be interested in donating teacher time to the after-school program by, for example, arranging teachers’ schedules so they are
available after school, identifying a single point of contact to work on the CBO partnership, or providing curriculum resources. This is not a required feature of the current OST model, but is a feature of the TASC model.

• **Targeting Struggling Students.** After-school providers will work with principals and parents to enroll students who are performing below their grade level and would benefit the most from after-school services. Research shows that struggling students are often the least likely to enroll in after-school activities, yet gain the most when they participate. Thus, programs will be encouraged to reach out to the families of such students and inform them of the potential benefits of having their child participate in the after-school program. In the case of programs serving youth with special needs, DYCD would allow a higher price per program slot.

In every after-school model, an effective school-community partnership and integrated staffing pattern are vital to successful implementation. Under the enhanced model, educators and staff of nonprofit providers will collaborate with middle school students and their parents to design a menu of after-school activities that meet the particular needs of their communities – both in terms of scheduling, and the expanded learning and enrichment opportunities the program will offer. Working together, principals and middle school teachers will help after-school staff, including education specialists, to align programming with school-day instruction and assist participants with their transitions from one grade to the next and to high school. In turn, after-school staff, including on-site directors, education specialists, activity leaders, and others, can help school-day staff by supporting participants’ social-emotional development and providing new enrichment and learning opportunities. They can also work with participants’ families to help them support their children in school and afterschool.

An important part of planning for the after-school program will be developing a cooperative agreement. Through the agreement, the school will be required to designate a school staff member to serve as the primary liaison to the after-school program. The school will also identify the resources such as space, staff time, and materials it will contribute to the after-school program. The nonprofit provider will be expected to integrate its own resources with those of the school to create a quality program. The mutual contributions and responsibilities of each partner will be formally articulated and specified through the agreement to be signed by the school principal and the executive director of the nonprofit provider.
Hours of Operation

The new programs will be expected to operate on a schedule consistent with the principal’s plan for the school year in each host school and the community’s needs for middle school after-school programming.

Programs will be required to offer a total of 540 hours of after-school programming, of which 324 hours will comprise structured activities. Programs will operate for at least 9 hours per week for 36 weeks during the school year, offering structured activities in the program content areas described below. Of the total 540 hours, 216 hours of activities may be unstructured and offered during the school week or on school closing days. Unstructured activities may include tutoring, counseling and recreation. Participant attendance rates will be tracked only for the 324 annual hours of required structured activities.

The enhancement of existing OST programs will also require current providers to offer a total of 540 hours annually, at the price per program slot of $3,000.

Program Design

Under the proposed model, principals, school staff, and nonprofit providers will collaborate on a program design that will include content areas and activities that meet the needs of students at their schools. To ensure student progress and outcome achievement, structured activities would have clearly identified and measurable learning goals or skill gains, and be aligned with school-day instruction. Activities would include project-based activities that reflect the interests and passions of participants and strengthen their engagement.

Each program will be required to have a full-time director with a Bachelor of Arts and at least three years of supervisory experience, as well as an education specialist on staff to help design quality program activities that meet the requirements listed above. The education specialist will also coach and train other program staff on ways to design, identify and implement such activities. Schools will encourage teachers – including drama, dance and art instructors – to lead after-school activities. Technical Assistance (TA) will also be given to assist program staff on strategies for integrating youth development with academic skill-building and assessing participant outcomes. Both educational specialists and TA providers will help providers develop engaging activities in the more challenging areas, such as literacy and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).
Structured Activity Content Areas

Providers will be expected to build program designs that will include, but do not need to be limited to, the following content areas.

Enrichment Activities. These activities will be designed to build basic literacy and math skills, as well as “21st Century skills” like teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking. Activities will focus on literacy, the arts, STEM, or a combination of these areas, and, ideally, tap into available resources of the school and the community, such as libraries and cultural entities.

Leadership Development. These activities will be designed to foster engagement in school and community and develop skills that encompass a range of critical competencies. They will help middle school students make informed choices about their futures and encourage socially responsible behaviors. Programs would include service learning and civic engagement projects. In addition, programs would include activities designed to help participants successfully transition to high school, including awareness and exploration of post-secondary education options and career opportunities.

Academic Support. These services will include homework help, individual or small group tutoring, and independent, or self-directed, reading time. Such services may be designed in accordance with explicit policies agreed upon with the principals of the schools attended by the participants.

Physical Activity and Healthy Living. These activities will include sports, martial arts, dance, and other forms of physical exercise, as well as active learning designed to teach healthy living practices and the importance of physical activity and good nutrition. DYCD will encourage programs to include opportunities for physical activity in their program designs, given the widespread concerns about obesity among youth.

Family Engagement

Parents’ involvement and support are crucial in helping children achieve the benefits of after-school programming. Parents are needed as key partners who can help motivate their children to enroll in an after-school program and attend on a regular basis. They can also be invited to celebrate their achievements, whether these are improved grades in school, performances in theater productions, or completion of successful community service projects.

Working with DOE staff, after-school program staff can ensure that parents of middle school students are informed about school and after-school offerings, receive periodic updates on their children’s participation and progress, given a menu of ways they can become involved in their school after-school community, and offered strategies for advocating on behalf of their children.
Technical Assistance and Evaluation

TA will be available to address common challenges, including the adoption of sound management practices, effective staff supervision, program development, development, tracking and communicating program outcomes, youth recruitment and engagement, and implementation of evolving best practices in the after-school field. The specific TA needs that emerge as programs get underway, as well as evaluations of the new after-school programs, will lead to insights on ways invested stakeholders (DYCD, DOE, schools, non-profit providers, students, and their families) can improve their effectiveness in promoting student achievement. The middle school after-school expansion will adopt a student-centered approach and measure program success first and foremost by the degree to which students benefit.

Program Quality and Accountability

The new after-school programs will receive tools and assistance directly from DYCD to support program quality and will be held accountable for performance standards relating to program quality and student engagement and learning outcomes. Using DYCD’s comprehensive Program Quality Monitoring Tool (PQMT), DYCD contract managers will assess program performance, identify areas that need improvement, and document what is going well. In addition, the DYCD electronic reporting and management system (DYCD Online) captures real-time enrollment and attendance data. By tracking patterns of enrollment and attendance, the basic indicators of program quality and student engagement, providers and DYCD managers working together will be able to closely monitor programs and ensure continuous quality improvement.

Programs will be expected to maintain full enrollment throughout the school year and meet contract targets based on participation.
Select Research and Evaluation Studies

Benefits of Quality Afterschool Programs for Middle School Youth


Attendance in Afterschool


Parent Engagement


Program Quality and Accountability

For New York State’s Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool, visit the New York State Afterschool Network site at http://www.nysan.org/userfiles/file/nysan/.