

Learning in Communities / Providence

Providence Out-of-School Time Program Provider Survey

Prepared by Community Matters for
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

by

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I. Background

The 2003-2004 Providence Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Provider Survey is a project of Learning in Communities / Providence, a citywide convening, research, and planning process to increase the participation of children and youth in high quality out of school time programming.

The picture of OST programming in a city or community is notoriously difficult to capture in its daily, routine state. Existing on the margins of the more established worlds of education and human services, OST programs are often characterized by their limited institutional or financial security, high staff turnover, and grassroots, volunteer, or non-traditional provider agencies. As a field that has only recently begun to emerge into wider public awareness, OST programming is still forming its identity as a sector. Historically, the many forms of practice that fall within its loose definition have not lent themselves to careful documentation.

In the last several years, Providence has begun to address that situation. First, in 1998, the Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University created the *Providence Youth Opportunities Guide*, a printed and Internet reference tool offering city youth and parents referrals to citywide and neighborhood-based programs for youth 10 to 20 years old. Then, in 2002 and 2003, the United Way of Rhode Island and the Providence Public Schools commissioned and published *Stepping UP! Out-of-School Time and Youth Development in Providence*, a study conducted by Community Matters. It profiled out of school time programming in the city, and included the first citywide survey of school-based programs.

Most recently, as companion efforts to this program survey, the Learning in Communities / Providence planning effort has produced market research on Providence youth and parents to understand the needs, interests, concerns and preferences of the consumers of out-of-school time services. "Youth Voices on Out-of-School Time" is a Forum for Youth Investment report on a youth research meeting held in November 2003.

“Enhanced Out-of-School Time Activities for Middle School Students in Providence, Rhode Island,” is a report by Market Street Research that includes the results of six focus groups and a citywide survey of 400 middle school age youth and parents, conducted in December 2003 and January 2004.

II. Survey Purpose

The 2003-2004 survey of OST program providers in Providence carries this work forward. In service to the discrete planning challenges before the Learning in Communities / Providence team, it focuses on the Providence organizations that provide OST programming, the people who staff them, and the youth they serve.

The purpose of the survey is to enable the leadership of the Learning in Communities / Providence project – and the emerging team that will work on the newly formed Providence After-School Alliance – to characterize accurately the supply of OST programs in the city, and to propose specific actions for the Business Plan based on this data and analysis. It seeks to do three things:

- **Sample widely and inclusively:** Secure responses from a large and sufficiently representative sample of OST program providers to make accurate general characterizations of the nature of programming in the city
- **Profile programs:** Gather new data on the hours, location, structure, focus, staffing, and licensure of responding programs
- **Document youth participation:** Collect preliminary data on participants in OST programming – the ages and numbers of children and youth, the neighborhoods in which they live, the frequency of their participation, the longevity of their involvement in programs, and the modes of transportation they use.

This survey is not exhaustive. It is designed to lay a foundation upon which future surveys and other research can build. While perfectly ambitious within the frame of a rapid citywide planning process, the scope of the survey is deliberately narrow. There is much more to learn about Providence OST providers and the children and youth they serve.

III. Survey Design

The target audience was public and private non-profit agencies and community based organizations providing out-of-school time programming to children and youth between the ages of 5 and 21. School-based programs without strong ties to community-based agencies were not profiled, because the survey work of *Stepping Up*, published in January 2003, reported on over 100 school-based programs. As it happens, most large Providence school-based programs are also partnered with community-based agencies; many are therefore profiled in this analysis.

A total of 96 program providers were asked to participate in the survey, representing a broad and inclusive cross-section of programs. A deliberate effort was made to seek data from those offering all the major types of programming in the city.¹ The types and numbers of providers contacted include:

- Community Schools / 21st Century Community Learning Centers (3)
- Academic Enrichment and Tutoring Programs (9)
- Arts and Cultural Groups (17)
- Community-Based Programs (15)
- Community Centers (9)
- School-Based Licensed Programs (16)²
- Recreation Centers (Providence Department of Recreation) (10)
- Youth Development/Community Service/Mentoring Programs (17)

A principal criterion for selection was inclusion – we wanted large and small programs, programs serving children in all communities, programs serving immigrant children, programs that were new, and programs that were well established. In order not to exclude any large body of participating children or youth, we contacted every agency in the city whose OST programs were believed by observers to serve 100 or more children and youth. A complete list of organizations contacted – and those who became respondents – is attached as Appendix A.

The survey was designed as a 10-15 minute, on-line questionnaire. We sought answers in many areas:

- Types of programs offered
- Amount and Timing of Programming, including Summer Programming
- Location
- Program Structure and Model
- Licensing
- Staffing
- Age and Number of Children and Youth Served
- Frequency of participation and length of involvement (also called “dosage”)
- Neighborhoods Served
- Transportation
- Expansion plans

¹ One area of programming in the city that has not been inclusively profiled is athletic programming. Although many sports and recreation programs are featured in this report, neither school-based teams nor local youth sports leagues have been comprehensively included in recent surveys. Future research must examine more deeply the nature and quality of sports programming for children and youth in the city.

² These school-based licensed programs tend to be smaller than their community-based licensed counterparts, are often based at parochial or independent schools, and often serve only those children who are students in their school. Other major licensed providers are surveyed in the community-based and community centers categories; citywide, such programs serve 65-75% of children in licensed programs.

The team used email outreach to increase the reach of the appeal for survey participation. Use of an on-line survey site made survey participation easier for potential respondents, and accelerated data collection and synthesis. Hardcopies of the survey were also mailed to all identified providers for whom no email could be located, and targeted to specific providers with no computer access. The survey was launched on December 19, 2003 and closed on January 30, 2004. A copy of the survey instrument is attached as Appendix B.

IV. Survey Sample

Sixty-seven organizational respondents produced 78 completed surveys. Some agencies completed more than one survey by reporting on each of their programs through a separate survey. All told, more than 90 distinct programs were profiled.³

The response rate can be understood in several ways. As a fraction of the surveyed pool of 96 agencies, 64 responding organizations represents 67% of all entities surveyed.

Another assessment of the response rate of the survey is the large number of licensed programs that responded, and the substantial fraction of the available licensed slots represented by these respondents. Of the 43 programs licensed by the State of Rhode Island to provide OST programming to school-age children, 23, or 54%, responded to the survey. More importantly, the 23 licensed programs that did respond are by far the largest such programs, serving at least 70% of the children in licensed programming in the city.⁴

Finally, the respondents report that on December 1, 2003, they were serving 13,661 children and youth. There is, no doubt, some double-counting, and even a small amount of triple-counting, involved – wherein a child involved in more than one program is counted by each. There may also be some overreporting by programs, as some figures are based on estimates by program staff. However, while there may be some children attending more than one program in this survey, recent market research shows that many Providence youth are not involved in any OST programs at all; often, those who are involved have contact with only one program, one day per week.⁵

³ The question arises: How many programs were surveyed? A single answer is difficult, as the definition of “program” is not consistent across the field. A total of 67 agencies produced 78 survey responses, representing as many as 80 or more sites and perhaps as many as 95 or 100 discrete “programs” lodged within the agencies. But some multi-sited programs consider themselves a single program, many agencies replied with a single survey to cover different programs, and few respondents replied to every question. For purposes of this analysis, each response is treated as coming from a single program.

⁴ Respondents to this survey claim to have a cumulative licensed capacity for 2,928 children. This is probably a high number, since in 2002, the total number of licensed slots on record in Providence state government was only 2,968. Nevertheless, the survey’s coverage of licensed programs is good: even if the respondents have overestimated their slots, the survey has responses from agencies which are licensed for the vast majority – between 70 and 80% – of available school-age slots.

⁵ 48% of Providence middle school youth do not participate in any organized OST activity. Those who do average 1.4 days per week in a program; see “Enhanced Out-of-School Time Activities for Middle School Students in Providence, Rhode Island,” February 2004, by Market Street Research.

There are no precise methods for calculating the effect of the inevitable double-counting of individual children, or the tendency of programs to over-report participation. Nor is there a simple and accurate way to correct for these phenomena. What is clear is that a failure to correct these distortions of the data only invites skepticism about all future claims and interpretations. By reducing *substantially* the estimated number of children that the survey data represents, one can create a reliable floor, rather than a questionable ceiling, for all future discussion.

The survey team developed a range for establishing the estimated number of unduplicated children served, reducing the original number by both 25% and 50%.⁶ A twin reduction of this magnitude in the total number of 13,661 children and youth claimed by the respondents achieves three goals. It recognizes the limits of the existing data. It completely sets aside any potential concern that the survey authors or the city might “over-claim” the numbers of children served. Finally, it frames the imprecision of the data by providing a useful estimated “range” of the number of actual, non-duplicated children and youth served by respondents – somewhere between 6,831 and 10,246.

Therefore, this survey accounts for the experience of between 6,831 and 10,246 youth, a figure that is somewhere between 18% and 27% of the city’s 5- to 18-year-old population of 38,000.⁷ It is certainly fair to say that this survey inclusively samples a pool of providers who are serving the majority of those Providence school age children currently engaged in OST programs.⁸

V. Key Findings

Many Providence OST programs share common characteristics.

- **Almost all programming is available five days a week or more.** The average among all respondents is 5.0 days per week. Programs are open an average of 43 weeks per year. 53% of programs are open 48 weeks per year or more.

⁶ These percentages were arrived at by assuming that at the least, one quarter of students profiled were either participating in more than one respondent program, or were a part of an overly generous estimate by enthusiastic respondent staff. A further assumption is that even at its most duplicative and over-counting, the sample was unlikely to produce a total that is more than double the actual number of children served.

⁷ Many US cities currently claim OST participation levels of 30% or less. Mayors in over 80 cities across the country recently estimated that fewer than a third of children who wanted after school care were receiving it in their communities; see “After-School Programs in Cities Across the United States,” US Conference of Mayors, June 2003, at www.usmayors.org/uscm/uscm_projects_services/education/afterschoolreport03.pdf. Boston is a notable exception, having achieved involvement by half its school age children, according to *A Survey of Boston Parents About Their Children’s Out-of-School Hours*, a 2003 poll and analysis sponsored by the Boston After School for All Partnership, available at www.afterschoolforall.org/news/ASFAP%20Parent%20Survey.pps

⁸ It is important to note that the findings of this survey represent only those children and youth who are, according to the respondent programs, participating in after-school programs. The Market Street Research report details the perspective of middle school youth who do *not* participate, and their parents.

- **Responding programs serve nearly all Providence neighborhoods.**⁹ 59% of respondents serve children and youth throughout the city. The neighborhoods most frequently served are, in order of mention, South Providence, Elmwood, West End, Olneyville, Washington Park, Smith Hill, South Elmwood, Hartford, Mount Pleasant, Federal Hill, Elmhurst and Mt. Hope.
- **Most programs in the survey are community-based.** 72% of programs are at a community site, and 36% of programs are at a school site.¹⁰
- **Not all programming takes place after school.** A third of programs offer weekend activity and 17% of programs offer before school programming.
- **Summer programming is major component of most programs.**
 - 62% of programs have programming for the full summer
 - 18% of programs have programming for part of the summer, and
 - 71% of those offering summer programming have full day programming.
- **More than two thirds of responding programs – 71% – are *not* licensed by the state.** Many programs that are licensed are smaller, school-based programs, with the notable exceptions of the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Clubs, which account for nearly 50% of licensed slots in the city.
- **Staffing patterns are often quite similar, even among very different programs.** A total of 959 staff work in the 77 programs that responded to this question on the survey. Three quarters (73%) of staff work only with youth, 7% of staff work only in administration, and 20% of staff work both with youth and in administration. 63% of staff work part time, the remainder full time. Nearly four out of five programs (78%) have a full time director.
- **Transportation practices vary widely among children and youth.**
 - 33% of children/youth walk to and from their program;
 - 28% of children/youth get a ride from their parent or guardian, or car pool;
 - 11% of children/youth use transportation provided by the program;
 - 8% of children/youth take a school bus to and from program;
 - 7% of children/youth take a public bus to and from program;
 - 13% use other methods of transportation.

Several programs, particularly those serving young children, reported that a lack of viable transportation options presented a significant barrier to enrollment. One site attributed a recent 50% drop in enrollment to a new Providence Public

⁹ Because of the large number of programs reporting that they serve children and youth from all neighborhoods, drawing definitive conclusions about the distribution of programs from this data is difficult.

¹⁰ Some programs operate at both school and community sites. Therefore, the total is greater than 100%. These proportions reflect, in part, the survey design, which particularly targeted community-based programs, while including school based programs with community affiliations.

Schools policy that no longer permits students to use school buses to reach their before- and after-school programs. Another large agency uses private vans to transport students to its program sites from their schools; it cited its limited van capacity, and the reluctance of schools to permit OST program staff to stay with children at the school while they wait for the van, as two major impediments.

Substantial additional research is needed to understand the particulars of transportation in Providence, a critical aspect of an emerging OST system

- **School based programs' limited and uneven access to facilities in a school building can compromise program stability and quality.** Several respondents expressed frustration with their inability to access the spaces they desire in their partner school. In some cases, programs are confined to a noisy and busy cafeteria. In others, the amount of space the program is offered by the principal varies from year to year, and limits the capacity of the program. These difficulties make offering excellent programming challenging and can discourage parents from enrolling their children in OST care.¹¹
- **Most Providence OST providers anticipate program growth.** 65% of programs intend to expand at some point in the future.

Program structures and models vary.

- **The majority of programs follow an “enrollment” framework.** 74% of programs are classified as enrolling children or offering classes or scheduled sessions. However, with key exceptions like Rhode Island Children’s Crusade and the Boy Scouts, many of these programs are relatively small.
- **Drop-in programming affects many more children than any other form of programming.** Although only 19% of respondents run drop-in programs, this minority of providers includes many of the city’s largest agencies for youth – such as the City of Providence Recreation Centers, many larger community centers, the Boys and Girls Clubs, and others. Respondents report serving 7,322 youth in 15 drop-in programs, an average of 488 children per program.¹² In comparison, the 58 responding programs where children enroll serve 6,339 students, an average 109 youth per program.
- **Most respondents offer a range of programming.** Many programs used more than one of these descriptions to characterize their work, so the percentages are well over 100%:

¹¹ A more complete discussion of OST programming in the Providence Public Schools is contained in *Stepping UP! Out-of-School Time and Youth Development in Providence*, January 2003, by Community Matters, United Way of Rhode Island and the Providence Public Schools, publishers.

¹² There is consensus among providers and knowledgeable observers that many children participate in drop-in programs in Providence. However, since few drop-in programs record attendance, it is wise to treat the participation figures that they generate as informed estimates, rather than counts.

- 56% of programs described themselves as “combined programming,” offering a mix of homework help, social, recreational and other activities
- 28% of programs are youth development/youth leadership programs
- 24% of respondents offer arts and culture
- 15% offer academic enrichment
- 15% offer sports and recreation
- 13% offer mentoring
- 12% offer community service

Providence children and youth participate in OST programs in large numbers, at all age levels, in diverse programs that are very large, quite small, and all sizes in between.

- **A total of 13,661 children and youth are reported as participants in respondent programs, an average of 182 participants per program.**
- **Forty one percent of children served by respondents are elementary school age, 36% are middle school age, 20% are high school age, and 3% are over 18 years old.**¹³
- **Program sizes vary dramatically**, with 2,427 the largest number served by a single program, and some programs reporting as few as 20 children served. Roughly one quarter of programs serve 34 children/youth or less; half serve as many as 82 children/youth; and twenty-five percent serve 152 or more.

Providence OST providers are engaging many children and youth in frequent and sustained program activity and adult-child contact.

- **Half of Providence children and youth who are in OST programming are spending three or more afternoons a week at their programs.** 15% of children and youth attend their program 3 days per week, and 32% of children and youth attend their program 4 or more days per week – a total of 47% of those profiled. This confirms a high level of weekly contact between participating children and youth and their peers and program staff. 15% of participating youth attend their program 2 days per week; 26% 1 day per week; and 12% less than 1 day per week.
- **Providence OST programs claim long-term ties to the many of the children and youth that they serve.** Respondents report that 41% of children and youth have been attending the program for two or more years, including over a fifth

¹³ The focus of this survey on community-based programming may contribute to this age distribution, making it a slightly older group than is served by all OST programming citywide. There is some evidence that Providence school-based programming disproportionately serves young children. For instance, research in *Stepping UP!* suggests that school-based OST programming serves a greater proportion of children at the elementary level (47%) than at the middle (27%) and high school (37%) levels.

(22%) who have been connected with the program for more than three years. 19% have been with the program for one to two years, and 39% have been with the program for less than one year.

- **Respondent's reporting on the frequency of children's participation and their longevity in programs must be treated as preliminary.** Outside observers and readers of early drafts of this report express a combination of surprise, pleasure, and doubt about the degree to which programs claim long-term and frequent connections to children. This warrants additional research.¹⁴

Middle school age youth bring a special mix of independence and dependence to OST programming – they are unlike their older and younger peers, and their programs reflect those differences.¹⁵

- **Middle school age youth are developing fast, and their needs are reflected in Providence OST programming for their age group.** 38% of programs focused on serving middle school age youth focus on youth development or youth leadership, more than double the number available for elementary age children.
- **Programs serving middle school children offer more targeted choices than those serving younger children.** The number of programs offering combined programming with many different activities declines from 83% for elementary aged children to just over half for middle school youth. At the same time, many more programs serving middle school age youth offer intensive arts & culture, athletics, and community service opportunities.
- **As they age, participating middle schoolers exercise increased independence.** Fewer than half of students at programs focusing on middle school aged youth attend for 4 or more days per week, compared to 71% of students in elementary focused programs.
- **Many students enrolled in programs targeting middle school youth enjoy a high level of involvement with their OST program.** 45% of middle school students enrolled in a program attend 4 or more days per week.
- **Overall, however, few middle school students in Providence experience high weekly exposure to OST programming.** The 45% of students enrolled for 4

¹⁴ Further verification is a task beyond the scope of this initial survey. Future research is warranted to document all instances in which this high frequency and long-term pattern is born out, to tease out any lessons from programs which are successful in establishing strong ties to participating youth, and to correct any exaggerations that may occur out of enthusiasm and limited documentation of attendance.

¹⁵ The data in this section are from programs which focus primarily on serving middle school youth. For purposes of this section, the research team selected only those programs which primarily serve middle school aged children, rather than including those programs that serve children across the entire 5 to 18+ year old age range. For a more complete description of this analysis, see Appendix E.

days or more in programs that primarily target middle school age youth -- cited immediately above -- represent only 10% of Providence middle school age youth.

- **Middle school age youth do not have the same long-term attachment to their programs as older youth.** A quarter of students in programs focusing on middle school age youth have attended their program for 2 years or more, compared to half of students in programs focusing on high school age youth.
- **It is difficult to determine the transportation patterns of middle school students in the after-school hours.** Parent pickup or carpool is the most common mode of transportation for students traveling to and from programs that focus primarily on middle school youth. However, a large number of middle school students attend programs that serve children of all ages, such as the Boys and Girls Club and the Recreation Centers. In this analysis, we are unable to determine the modes of transportation used by the middle school aged students at these “all age,” 5-18 year old, inclusive programs. Further research is needed to fully understand the types of transportation used by Providence children and youth in the out-of-school hours.¹⁶

The City’s Recreation Centers constitute an unusual, even unique resource in the OST world of Providence, but they are under-resourced.

- **The Recreation Centers are, by comparison with their OST provider peers, among the most accessible buildings and programs in the city.** They are open more than 50 weeks of the year, as compared to a citywide average program availability of 43.1 weeks.¹⁷ They are open seven days a week for ten, twelve, or more hours per day. Within that time, 88% of scheduled activities are youth oriented.¹⁸
- **Each week, an estimated 1,858 children and youth across the city participate in Rec Center activity during afternoons, evenings and weekends.**
 - 33% of children served are 5 to 9 years old
 - 35% are 10-13
 - 24% are 14-18
 - 8% are older youth over 18 years old.
- **Three fifths (61%) of children and youth using Rec Center facilities walk to the program.** This makes the Rec Centers by far the most neighborhood-based OST programming in the city. Neighborhood-based providers like the YMCA

¹⁶ In the Market Street study, 56% of middle school students report that transportation is a barrier to participation in OST programming.

¹⁷ To be fair, it should be noted that much of the Rec Centers’ extraordinary building accessibility is not accompanied by extensive program offerings; other providers may make their facilities available for less structured programming that goes beyond the average of 43 weeks per year.

¹⁸ ProvStat Team, *Mayor Cicilline’s Prov Stat Meeting Re: Recreation Centers*, December 18, 2003.

and Boys and Girls Clubs report 38% walkers; citywide community centers report 27% walkers.

- **71% of children who come to Rec Centers do so three or more days per week, according to best guess estimates of Rec Center Directors.**¹⁹ Only school-based licensed programs report a higher level of daily participation (91%).
- **67% of children and youth in Rec Centers are thought to have been participating for 2 years or more.** The next highest such numbers are 59%, among community center programs, 56% among licensed school-based programs, and 53% among community based programs.
- **The accuracy of much of the Rec Center’s attendance and participation data cannot be verified.** Such records have historically not been kept. Current Recreation Department management, under the leadership of Frank Santos, is changing this practice, so future data will be better.
- **The Rec Centers have a high ratio of children to staff.** While precise figures are not available, it would appear that Rec Center child:staff ratios are roughly twice as high as those of community-based centers. Licensed programs and more intensively staffed approaches like 21st Century Community Learning Centers report having three, four, and five times as many staff per child or youth.²⁰

VI. Conclusion

Thanks to this analysis, Providence has compelling findings that build upon past research efforts and open new avenues for program action. The survey offers insights into numbers of children served, range of programs, barriers to participation, conditions of middle school age programming, and the potential of the Rec Centers, among others.

The survey also raises as many questions as it answers. As is inevitable with community-based research in service to a pressing short-term goal – like the nine-month development of the Business Plan for the Providence After School Alliance – we are left with a set of deeper questions to pursue. Future inquiries can probe the quality of program activities, staffing and professional development, funding and financial management, leadership, and the structure of sponsoring agencies, organizations, and partnerships. Over time, research will embrace the most challenging questions, which have to do with exploring,

¹⁹ This is a very high number, and should not be regarded as fully documented, as it is based on best guess estimates of staff, rather than attendance records or other data.

²⁰ The average number of staff at the Rec Centers is 6.1 per site (this includes both full-time and part-time staff). The average daily youth attendance is 186, leading to a very rough staff:child ratio calculation of 1:30. Community-based Centers had the next highest ratio, of 1:18. Both Academic and 21st Century Community Learning Center sites in the survey report staffing and child participation numbers that suggest a ratio in the 1:6 range.

understanding, and documenting the impact – on children, families, communities, agencies, funders, policies and the public – of the range of OST programs in Providence.

The survey team has attached as appendices the survey sample pool and respondent list, the survey instrument, a detailed description of methodology, two different analyses of program data (by program type and by age of youth served), and a chart of the neighborhoods served by respondent programs.

VII. Acknowledgements

Catherine Walsh, Raymonde Charles and Kathleen Pannhorst of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT worked extensively on design, analysis, data, and administrative support. Frank Santos and Tony Heywood of the Rec Centers and Maryclaire Knight of the Providence YMCA went above and beyond the call of duty to secure and share extensive program data under demanding circumstances. Dozens of providers went out of their way to accommodate the survey process, in which, perhaps inevitably, one size did not fit all. Thanks to everyone.

VIII. Appendices

- A. Survey Pool and Respondents**
- B. Survey Instrument**
- C. Methodology**
- D. Analysis by Age**
- E. Analysis by Program Type**
- F. Neighborhoods Served by Respondent Programs**