



All youth ready for college, work & life.

Making Quality Count

LESSONS FROM THE READY BY 21[®] QUALITY COUNTS INITIATIVE

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With a technical appendix by Charles Smith, Samantha Sugar and Leah Wallace




About the Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21[®] – ready for college, work and life. Informed by rigorous research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. A trusted resource for policy makers, advocates, researchers and practitioners, the Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, connections and tools they need to create greater opportunities and outcomes for young people.

The Forum was founded in 1998 by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, two of the country’s top leaders on youth issues and youth policy. The Forum’s 25-person staff is headquartered in Washington D.C. in the historic Cady-Lee House with a satellite office in Michigan and staff in Seattle and New York.

About the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality uses a youth development approach to position point of service quality as a powerful public idea that drives higher levels of understanding, expectation, and action about the quality of experiences available to youth. The Weikart Center helps organizations strengthen the services they provide to youth programs in their networks by providing evidence-based tools, training, and expert consulting to design, pilot and effectively scale up quality improvement and accountability systems.



Making Quality Count

LESSONS FROM THE READY BY 21 QUALITY COUNTS INITIATIVE



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Introduction

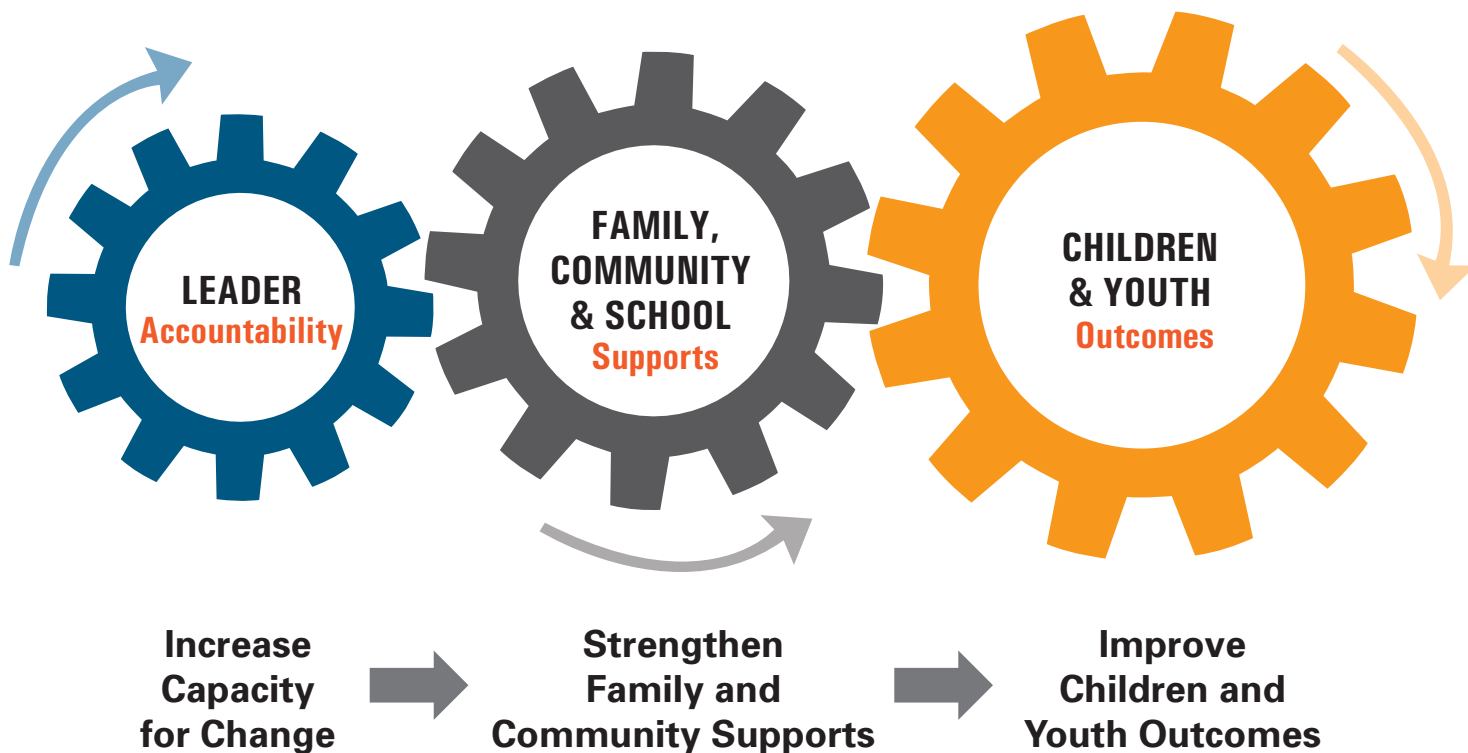
The out-of-school time sector – the range of agencies offering services, supports and opportunities to children and youth during the non-school hours – can be a strategic resource in efforts to ensure all young people are Ready by 21[®] – ready for college, work and life. However in most places, out-of-school time (OST) efforts are more fragmented than they are connected. Leaders lack basic information about the contributions such agencies can and do make, and the quality of programming varies significantly. As a result, OST programming does not always have a clear place on the leadership agenda, and efforts to build the capacity of the sector come and go.

The Ready by 21 Quality Counts initiative (Quality Counts) provided leaders and intermediaries from cities and states across the country with a bold challenge, improving the quality and reach of OST programming, a suite of technical assistance supports, and an infusion of national and local momentum.

Quality Counts was based on three key assumptions. First, that high-quality OST programs can influence important social and academic outcomes for children and youth (Granger, 2008). Second, that instructional quality¹ in these settings can be improved (Smith, Lo, Sugar, Akiva, Frank and Devaney, in preparation). And third, that effective leadership is critical. Communities and funders can buy pilots, but getting to a scalable, sustainable *system* requires building on existing policies and programs. In other words, moving the small gear (see figure 1) can make a big difference.

In response to these assumptions, Quality Counts helped communities assess their current capacity at several levels and then based on that assessment, do three things: introduce a strategy for improving program quality and workforce skills, increase available information about the OST sector, and support the emergence of a leadership agenda connecting quality to other key issues and partners.

Figure 1. Ready by 21 Theory of Change



¹ We use the term "instructional quality" to refer to the range of interactions that staff and youth have in programs.

Framing the Challenge

In selecting places to work with, our goal was to identify mid-sized cities or communities that were not already participating in any major OST system-building demonstrations, but were interested in and had the potential to make progress. A major interest of ours and of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the lead funder,² was to test the assumption that it is both possible and necessary, especially in these economic times, to help "typical" communities work with what they have and make significant, sustainable progress.

Of 25 sites invited to apply, 12 were selected to participate in the fall of 2007, based on two main criteria: 1) the extent to which the lead intermediary and/or its partners had the *capacity* (positioning and expertise) to build and sustain a quality improvement system, and 2) the presence of local *opportunity* (resources, vision, commitment, awareness) for a system to be built and sustained. Though our original goal was to target communities, we shifted course when several state-level colleagues proposed implementing a centralized approach that involved 2-4 local communities and would also lay the groundwork for a statewide strategy.

Having a track record performing specific functions was important for lead agencies (e.g., convening, communications, data-driven planning, training), but we did not restrict eligibility to certain types of organizations. As a result, a diverse array of intermediaries and other entities led this work at the state and local levels including United Ways, advocacy organizations, school districts, capacity building organizations, direct service providers, and provider coalitions.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MODEL

Sites received a range of training and technical assistance (TA) supports from the Forum for Youth Investment and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The primary focus was to help sites plan, implement, and

² Additional funding for the Quality Counts initiative was provided by the Atlantic Philanthropies.

Quality Counts Lead Organizations

Local Sites

- Austin Ready by 21 Coalition – Austin, TX
- Council for Youth Development – Columbus, IN
- Black Oak Mine Unified School District – Georgetown Divide, CA
- Our Community's Children – Grand Rapids, MI
- Marion County Commission on Youth – Indianapolis, IN
- Oasis Center – Nashville, TN
- St. Louis for Kids – St. Louis, MO

State Sites

- Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development
- Kentucky Child Now
- New York State Office of Child & Family Services
- Oklahoma Afterschool Network
- Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance & Providence After School Alliance
- Schools Out Washington*

* Washington State participated in year one of the initiative, thanks to support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

begin to institutionalize a quality improvement strategy within a network of youth-serving organizations. All sites chose to implement the *Youth Program Quality Intervention*, an evidence-based continuous improvement strategy that trains managers to implement a low-stakes cycle of assessment, planning, and improvement that improves staff instruction (for a more detailed

description of the YPQI, see page 17). A mixture of on-site and on-line trainings and consultation help sites build their own local cadre of trainers, assessors and quality advisors who bring cohorts of sites together in professional learning communities to participate in the YPQI.

A secondary focus of TA was to help sites respond to other information gaps in their OST system building work and to address key issues influencing the scale and sustainability of quality improvement efforts. In order to increase available information about the OST sector, most sites conducted some kind of inventory of the programmatic landscape. Some collected data about the professional development landscape, several surveyed OST staff directly about a range of workforce development issues, and several are exploring the development of integrated data systems to link information about quality, participation and outcomes (see side bar).

Building demand for quality among the provider community, the public, and decision-makers can help ensure that pilot projects grow into systems and eventually become institutionalized. To help sites address some of the critical policy and leadership issues, support was provided in the areas of stakeholder engagement, building demand, developing a shared vision for child and youth success, and strategic planning. All sites participated in a two-day Ready by 21 Leadership Institute focused on these topics and received ongoing coaching on connecting their quality improvement work to emerging policy priorities or developments. Several sites also received on-site facilitation and coaching in support of a local or state strategic planning process.

In addition to training and TA, sites participated in regular national networking opportunities including three annual cross-site meetings, received a monthly e-newsletter highlighting developments across sites, and maintained regular (at least monthly) contact with a liaison from the Forum. In addition to these technical and networking supports, sites also received two pass-through grants over the course of the initiative that totaled

roughly \$90,000 (half at the outset and half after one year) and which had to be matched 2:1 with local resources.³ Funds were used primarily to support staffing of the work, as well as the implementation of local trainings and events.

Understanding the Program Landscape

Most Quality Counts sites agreed early on that building a quality improvement system with broad reach would require having a better handle on the program landscape – who is doing what, with what youth, in what neighborhoods, when, etc. Toward that end, several sites mounted new data collection efforts, updated existing databases, or began or advanced the development of online program locator tools. Some examples:

Austin's Youth Services Mapping system:
www.ysm-austin.com

Resources on Line for Youth, Indianapolis:
www.roymccoy.org/

Washington's OST Supply/Demand Study:
www.schoolsoutwashington.org/986_214/SupplyDemandStudyReportsMaps.htm

³ Two Indiana sites, Indianapolis and Columbus, split a single award over the course of the initiative.

Results

Faced with a bold challenge, a modest infusion of cash, and tailored technical assistance, the Quality Counts sites rose to the occasion. Sites made progress on multiple levels toward a broad range of goals, and are all continuing this work in some fashion despite the conclusion of the national initiative and unprecedented economic constraints. We discuss results broadly in this section; additional detail regarding the evaluation is available in the Technical Appendix.

INCREASED COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Sites made notable progress over the course of the initiative in areas we consider key to implementing and sustaining a quality improvement system. Progress was measured through a pre and post assessment focused on five broad domains: *Leadership Horsepower*, *Community Vision and Demand*, *Quality Improvement System (QIS) Capacity*, *Intermediary Capacity*, and *Provider Capacity* (see sidebar). During a readiness assessment in November 2007, interviews with site leads were scored using a detailed rubric, and ratings were assigned for each element in the framework.

At the outset of the initiative, scores were lowest in *provider capacity* and highest in *leadership horsepower* and *intermediary capacity*. Follow up interviews conducted in February 2010 pointed to progress in all five domains (see figure 2), with the most notable movement in *community vision and demand* and *provider capacity*.

In the *community vision and demand* area, the most growth occurred in two specific elements – *demand for change*, and *link to youth and families*. In terms of provider capacity, the largest positive changes occurred in two areas – *presence of standards*; and *quality assessment, improvement and monitoring*. *Coordination across providers*, a specific element in the *QIS capacity* domain, also demonstrated substantial positive change.

Core Capacities for Success

Leadership Horsepower

- Decision-maker agenda focused on quality and reach
- Change structures

Community Vision and Demand

- Positive vision for youth
- Demand for change
- Link to youth and families
- Standards and quality policies applicable across sectors

Quality Improvement System (QIS) Capacity

- Program data and information
- Coordination across providers
- Coordination across sectors

Intermediary Capacity

- Linkage to policies and decision-makers
- Communications and convening
- Training and technical assistance capacity
- Cross-sector reach

Provider Capacity

- Standards present
- Quality assessment, improvement and monitoring

Figure 2. Changes in Site Capacity (in Aggregate)

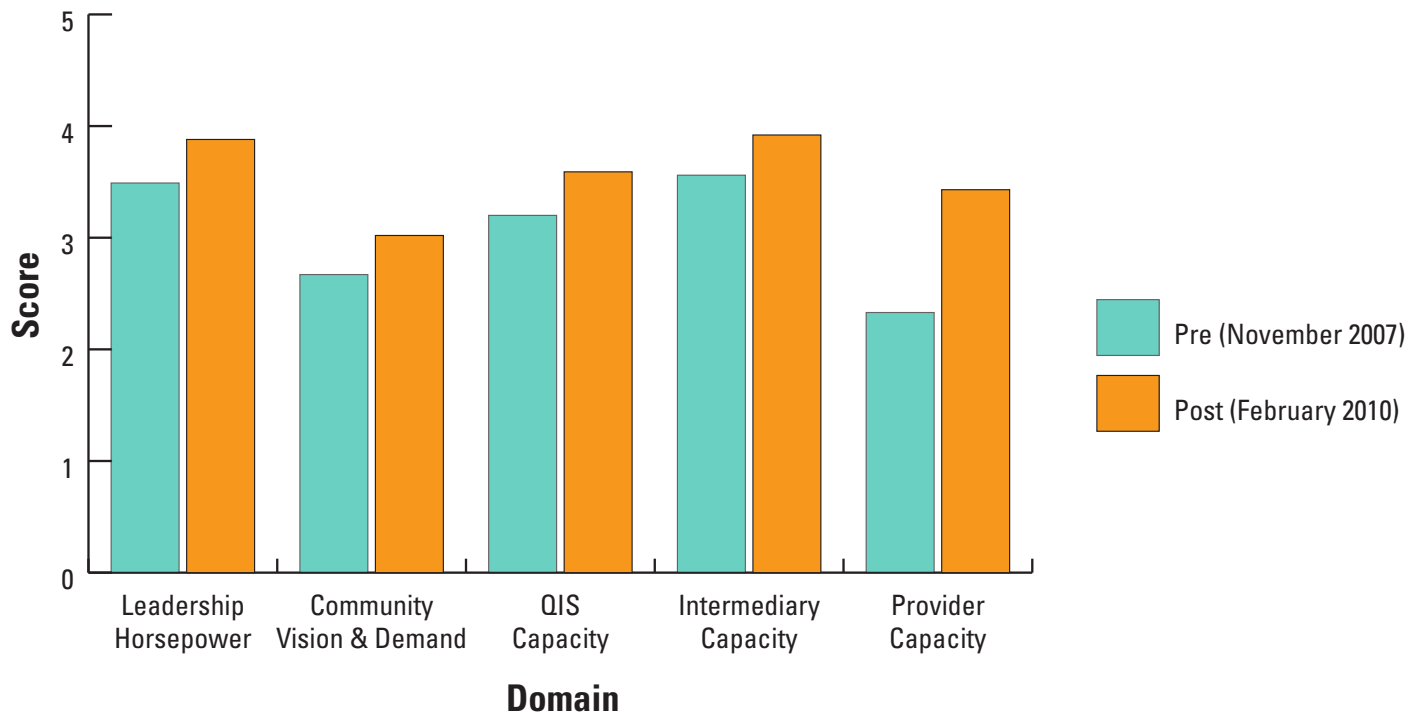
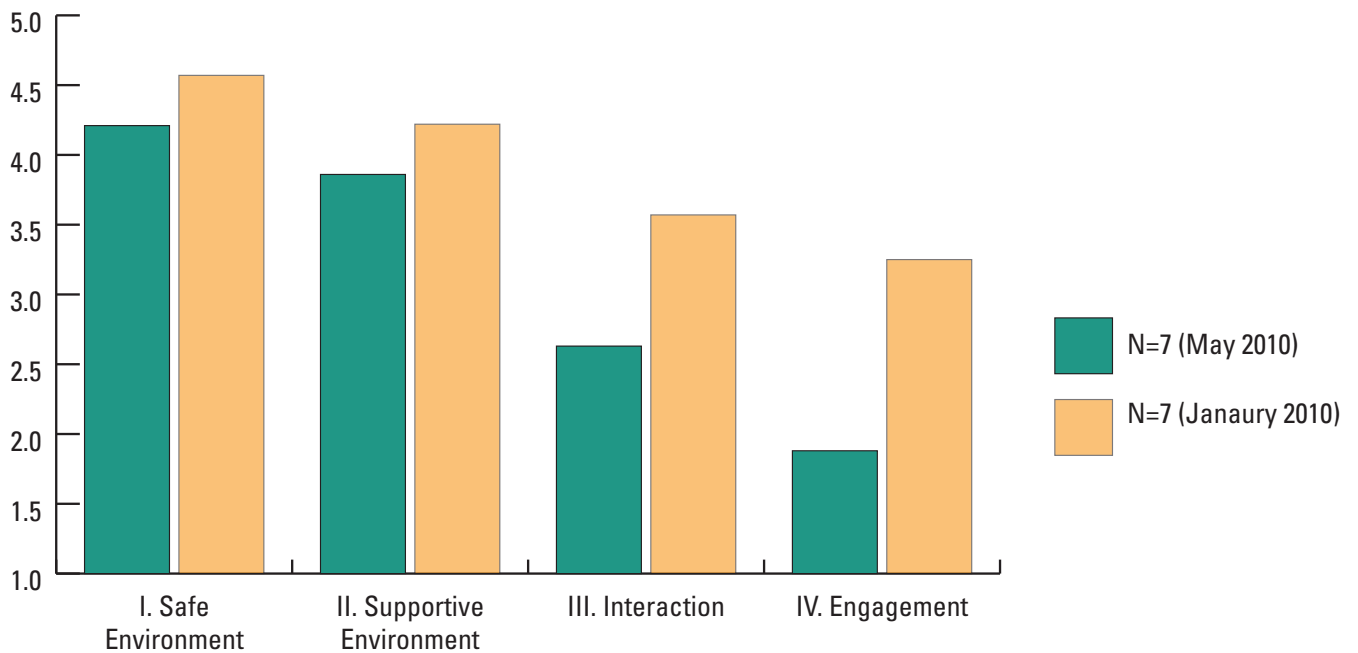


Figure 3. Youth Program Quality Assessment Scores



SATISFIED LEADERS

While these findings suggest important progress was made, we are particularly interested in what participating leaders tell us about the utility of the experience. Intermediary staff and youth organization managers reported that a) participation was worth their time and effort, b) they learned something important, and c) local programming for youth improved as a result.

In addition to universally high marks concerning the value of the technical assistance related to the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* model, framing Quality Counts within Ready by 21, a broad community mobilization strategy, appears to have been useful. As one leader noted, “The Ready by 21 big picture approach created the framework for everything else to fit into. The Youth PQA gave us that practical tool that measures and provides ways to improve the quality of programs.” Specifically, site leads said that embedding the focus on quality improvement within Ready by 21 helped them increase awareness of the importance of quality (100% responded yes), connect quality with a broader child/youth policy agenda (91% yes), bring new stakeholders to the table (88% yes), and generate resources (44% yes).

BETTER PROGRAMS

Our technical assistance model focused primarily on building the capacity of intermediary leaders and program managers in youth organizations, and the results discussed so far focus primarily on the extent to which sites built the capacity necessary to implement and sustain a quality improvement system.

Beyond surveying site leads and managers about their perceptions, our evaluation was not designed to measure pre-post changes in program quality across sites in a rigorous way. However some sites did design their pilots toward this end, and these data suggest that improvements in the quality of instruction did in fact occur in the sites where such reports were generated. For example, figure 3 shows changes in quality (as measured by the Youth PQA) for a group of seven Nashville organizations that participated in a five-month quality improvement pilot as part of the Nashville After Zone Alliance.

Recommendations

Over the course of the initiative, we and the sites learned a great deal about the context in which conversations about youth program quality play out at the state and local levels, what it takes to engage different stakeholders, and how this work unfolds on the ground. In this section we explore seven such lessons that we hope will inform and strengthen current and future efforts to build quality improvement systems.

MEET LEADERS WHERE THEY ARE.

“Most useful was your willingness to help us think strategically and craft support so that it was most useful for our local situation.”

Anonymous Site Lead

The individuals and organizations leading this work in communities and states bring a range of expertise, perspectives and priorities to the table and the constellation of opportunities, resources and challenges they have to work with differs from place to place. Our commitment to meeting leaders where they are, a foundation of the Ready by 21 strategy, influenced the Quality Counts TA model in several ways. This commitment was also mirrored at the site level, as site leads assessed the local lay of the land and then worked carefully to respond to unique needs, concerns, capacities and opportunities.

Site engagement began with a readiness assessment designed to measure core capacities necessary for the successful implementation of a quality improvement system. Sites used “readiness profiles” summarizing these data to devise work plans focused on the core capacities they needed to develop, in the context of their own objectives and timelines. Sites then had discretion as to the type, amount and timing of most TA supports, based on a “menu” approach.

Sites were encouraged to build on existing infrastructure from the start. As a result, they were not required to adopt a specific quality

Ready by 21®

Ready by 21 is a strategy that *meets leaders where there are*, challenges them to think and work differently, and helps them progress further and faster to ensure that all young people are ready for college, work and life.

Quality Counts was the first Ready by 21 Challenge. For more information about how Ready by 21 helps leaders leverage available resources and better coordinate policies and services, see www.forumfyi.org/readyby21.

assessment tool or model, especially if traction was developing around a different approach. While all sites did choose to implement the *Youth Program Quality Intervention*, often aligning it with their local standards, how the model is implemented – how the effort is coordinated, staffed, what resources it draws on and connects to, etc. – differs in every site.

One example of sites being responsive to their local realities played out in Nashville, where early on, site leads expressed concern about emphasizing assessment, fearing resistance among the provider community. Prior to launching a pilot of the full YPQI model, they therefore decided to offer a series of training workshops focused on the different topics that would later be assessed. Though these training modules are typically introduced following a baseline assessment, being flexible about implementation alleviated concerns about assessment and paved the way for a smooth introduction of the full model over time.

Feedback from sites suggests that the flexibility inherent in this approach responded to their needs and was critical to their success. As Sonia Johnson from Oklahoma put it, “Significant leadership changes occurred over the course of our efforts. With steady support and consultation for bringing new leaders into this work, these changes provided opportunities to evaluate and adjust our strategies to better meet community needs.”

MAKE QUALITY THE GALVANIZING TOPIC.

“The implementation of the Youth Program Quality Intervention in the afterschool community of Central Texas has truly been transforming...For the first time, afterschool is being viewed as a true link to learning and development.”

*Laura Celli,
Austin Independent School District*

Quality has been prominent in the national dialogue about OST over the past several years, particularly among evaluators and funders. Evidence that OST programs can, but often do not achieve positive outcomes has contributed to a focus on quality, as has increasing evidence linking teacher quality to student success. Going into this work, however, we were uncertain about the extent to which local individuals and organizations were focused on quality in OST programs.

While most communities (including the majority of our sites at the outset) lack systemic approaches to assessing and improving quality, there were efforts to identify standards, encourage self-assessment, or shore up professional development supports underway in all sites.

Generating a critical mass of interest in the issue of quality, among high level leaders as well as youth organizations, therefore proved relatively easy for most sites. Local events designed to generate interest in the issue, bring new partners to the table, and recruit interested sites drew substantial participation, from elected officials and state agency directors to frontline staff and program directors.

While quality improvement is just one of aspect of building an OST system, focusing on quality can spark or drive broader system-building efforts. The YPQI model provides common language that helps a broad range of people and agencies see themselves as part of an important, research-based field of practice. The process itself is also very

concrete, helping to ground what can sometimes be abstract system-building conversations. Everyone can easily see their role in it and the benefits.

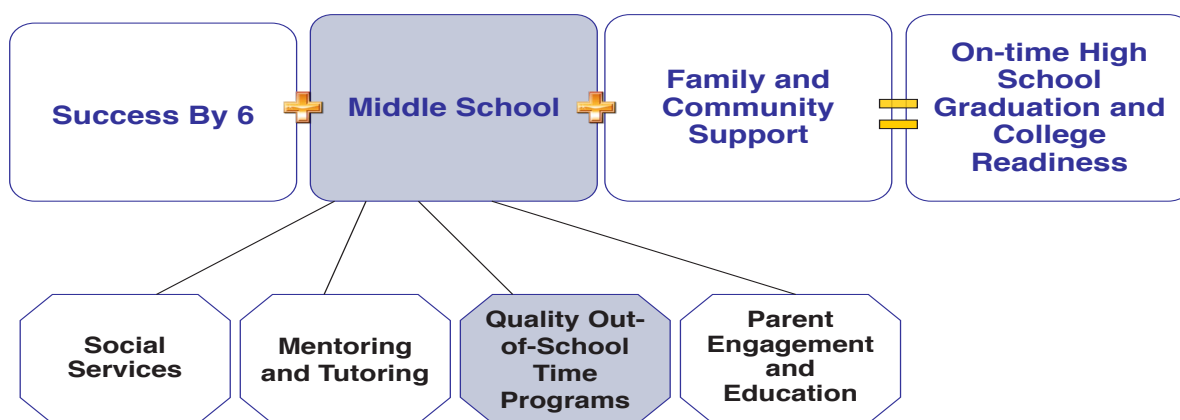
Sites were successful in connecting OST quality with key entities and individuals, but they were also successful in connecting quality to key issues. Entry points differed based on local context. For example in some places the work was framed as a strategy for strengthening the after-school workforce; in others the language of management and continuous improvement resonated more. For some, the quality work was framed as a broad, cross-sector strategy to improve overall youth outcomes, while in others, positioning it as a logical way to expand infrastructure already in place to support the early childhood and child care workforce was particularly strategic.

Whatever the entry point, positioning quality strategically is not a discrete task that happens early in the process and gets checked off a list. Sites were regularly encouraged and given tools to help them engage new stakeholders and identify “moving trains,” policy opportunities or existing initiatives which the quality work could leverage.

Thanks to this kind of ongoing strategic planning and reflection, actors in Iowa were successful in positioning OST quality improvement as a cross-sector strategy in the state’s plan to reduce the dropout rate. In Austin, United Way Capital Area framed OST quality improvement as a signature initiative in their middle school success strategy (see figure 4). In Rhode Island, after-school quality is on the radar of the Governor’s Urban Education Task Force. New Youth Master Plans in both Grand Rapids and Nashville feature improving the quality of after-school programs as one of a handful of recommendations for improving child and youth wellbeing.

Figure 4. United Way Capital Area Education Plan

Children and youth are happy, healthy, and prepared for success in school and life



USE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TO BRIDGE POLICY “SILOS.”

“The Youth PQA reinforces the fact that a good learning environment is a good learning environment – regardless of the content or the specific setting.”

*- Joseph Tomchak,
Pawtucket Boys and Girls Club,
Pawtucket, Rhode Island*

Though many have argued for decades for stronger connections between the youth development and education sectors, this concept’s time may have finally come. Schools alone cannot prepare young people for productive futures. Policy experiments like “expanded learning” and “Promise Zones” are gaining traction, and educators and other human service providers are finding common ground in the concept of supporting the “whole child.” As long as OST programming remains fragmented and lacks clear quality standards and other attributes of a formal “system,” it is likely to remain on the periphery of policy solutions geared at strengthening opportunities for learning and development.

Practitioners working in OST often describe the value that having a common framework

and language to talk about effective youth development practice can bring to an organization or network. Over the course of Quality Counts, we heard this reinforced, but we also began to see and feel the power of bringing such common language into a *cross-sector* group – organizations that all serve children and youth and are working toward common aims, but may not consider themselves part of a unified system.

From the outset, Quality Counts sites were challenged to engage a broad range of organizations in their quality improvement strategy. The argument was that increasing coordination is important in and of itself, and that ultimately, the full range of community settings where youth spend time should become powerful, positive developmental contexts.

The extent to which different types of youth-serving entities work together ranges considerably from place to place and is driven largely by infrastructure connected to funding streams. Depending on how broadly “OST” is defined, public health agencies, libraries, schools, scouts, youth leadership programs, parks and recreation, and mentoring organizations may all see themselves as part of a common field. In other places, the OST label may refer primarily to school-based programs operated in the afternoon by schools or community-based partners.

Figure 5. Building Cross-Sector Quality Improvement System

Site	Youth-Serving Sectors					Funding Streams			
	Education	After School	Parks / Recreation	Faith-Based	Libraries / Museums	United Way Grantees	21st CLCC Grantees	Juvenile Justice / Child Welfare	Prevention / Health
Iowa		○	◆	◆		○		○	○
Kentucky		○		○		○		○	
New York	□	○	○	○	□	○	□	○	○
Oklahoma	◆	◆	◆	◆		◆	□	◆	◆
Rhode Island	◆	○	◆		◆	◆	○	□	
Austin, TX	○	○	□			○	○		
Georgetown, CA	□	□	□	□	□		□		□
Columbus, IN	○	○	○		○	○	□		
Grand Rapids, MI	○	○	○	○	○	◆	○	◆	
Indianapolis, IN		◆		◆		◆		◆	◆
Nashville, TN	□	○	○	○	□	○			○
St. Louis, MO		○		○		○	□	□	○

○ - Engaged, 12/2008 ◆ - Engaged, 06/2009 □ - Engaged, 02/2010

Classroom Teachers and the YPQI

In 2008, high school teachers in the Black Oak Mine school district were trained in the YPQA and began assessing one another in pairs and developing joint action plans based on their data. Teachers are working to integrate the Youth PQA with other assessment tools and have cross-walked the tool with the CA Standards for the Teaching Profession, revealing a great deal of common ground in terms of content.

According to Debbi Herr, retired Safe and Drug Free Schools Director for the district, “Understanding teacher culture was very important for us to get buy-in. Teachers found it useful and did not find it a high stakes exercise.”

According to Larry Bryant, veteran teacher in the district, “Because of this process, we’re now focusing on youth engagement school-wide.” Most notable is the integration of a substantial service-learning strategy into the high school curriculum to increase opportunities for youth choice and engagement. When new funds were raised to support a major service-learning strategy, the YPQI was built into the proposal as an evaluation strategy, giving the schools an ongoing mechanism for teacher reflection and continuous quality improvement.

Most recently, a grant written by the president of the local teachers’ association integrated the Youth Program Quality Intervention into teacher evaluation. This will allow even more teachers to be part of the YPQI process.

To watch a video about this work see: <http://forumfyi.org/content/empowering-staff-improving-quality>

On the whole, sites were very successful at bringing multiple sectors in their work (see figure 5). Anchoring this work with the Youth PQA, a content-neutral tool that defines good youth development practice and has been tested in a range of settings, was critical in facilitating this cross-sector work.

Several sites were successful at involving juvenile justice and child welfare, systems that are often not part of the OST conversation yet play a significant role in the development of many vulnerable youth. One unanticipated and exciting outcome of the cross-sector emphasis was the participation of schools and classroom teachers in quality improvement work in several sites (see sidebar on page 10).

BUILD CAPACITY FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT WHERE IT MAKES THE MOST SENSE.

“Intermediaries face the incessant challenges of small “p” politics, the building and refurbishing of legitimacy and support among the constituencies whence money comes and to which it goes.”

Lawrence Brown, 2005

Developing the capacity of intermediaries was a primary goal of the Quality Counts initiative. Intermediaries play a diverse range of roles, and often struggle to build legitimacy and justify their added value, given they are rarely in the business of direct service delivery. Managing continuous quality improvement efforts for networks of direct-service providers can be an important niche for training organizations focused on capacity building or for funding intermediaries or public agencies looking to strengthen the capacity of grantees and/or increase accountability. It can also be a gateway, linking intermediaries to new types of youth organizations that can benefit from participation in continuous quality improvement.

In order to be responsive to local constraints and opportunities, we did not pre-determine the entry

Types of Organizations Leading Quality Counts Efforts

- Cross-Sector Coalitions
- School Districts
- Capacity Building/Training Organizations
- State/Local Advocacy Organizations
- Government Agencies
- United Ways
- Youth-Serving Organizations
- State Afterschool Networks

point for this effort in communities. As a result, a diverse array of intermediaries and other entities, ranging from government to coalitions to training organizations, led different aspects of this work at the state and local levels (see box).

In addition to the diversity of lead organizations, the sheer number of intermediaries involved was notable. For fiscal purposes there needed to be one lead agency per site; however, in all sites the work was led by multiple partners. This is not surprising given the broad charge given to sites. In many places a high-level coordinating body working on policy or planning issues was engaged to build demand and raise awareness about the importance of quality, while an agency with professional development expertise working closer to the front lines was charged with implementation of the quality improvement strategy.

Growth in intermediary capacity was notable in terms of strategic partnership development, positioning/credibility, and trainer expertise. Ron Jackson from St. Louis for Kids noted, “As a result of serving as the lead agency, we have gained increased credibility as a leader on afterschool and youth development issues in both the local community and at the state level... Funders have begun to express interest in quality improvement systems and look to SLFK to provide data and information.” Suzanne Hershey in Austin noted that their Ready by 21 Coalition is now, “...

associated w/ leadership to build a vision for young people that is inclusive across age groups, neighborhoods and youth issues, and a model for determining 'who is doing what' to support young people's development."

Intermediaries play a range of important roles and as such, they represent an important part of the infrastructure that must be strengthened in order for OST systems to thrive. The functions associated with building quality improvement systems can be created and housed in a variety of organizations, and with focused technical support and a modest infusion of resources, these organizations can indeed increase their capacity to deliver valuable services to the field.

BUILD ON EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE TO ENSURE SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY.

"The way Orange County has embedded this into our daily system – monitoring tools, linguistic integration within funding applications, professional development, training and requirements, etc. – ensures the work will be sustained both short and long term."

**- Carol Chichester,
Orange County, New York Youth Bureau**

Many youth and community development strategies have been deemed effective, but few have proven effective at scale. A major reason for this is that research-based models are often brought into communities without adequate attention to local context or the infrastructure necessary to support and sustain the work. Quality Counts, and the Ready by 21 strategy more broadly, were designed with this challenge in mind.

Helping sites think strategically and creatively about how to connect their quality improvement efforts to relevant policy developments, local resources, existing structures and initiatives was

Sustainability Snapshots

All Quality Counts sites have succeeded in sustaining at least some aspect of their quality improvement strategy following the close of the initiative. Though long-term prospects remain unclear, this is a significant accomplishment in these financial times.

Nashville. Quality improvement has become a centerpiece of the Mayor's new After Zone Alliance, with up to \$100,000 allocated in 2010-11 for continuous improvement activities with NAZA programs.

Austin. The United Way Capital Area has dedicated a half-time position to the coordination of quality improvement activities, now a signature initiative in their Middle School Success strategy.

Georgetown Divide. Local leaders in this rural community have secured new funds to support quality improvement activities through federal Drug Free Communities Support, CalServe, and the California Teachers Association.

Rhode Island. The Youth PQA is being integrated into this state's BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Any school-age care site requesting a 3-star level or above must now submit a self assessment using the instrument and over time, it will become the official assessment tool for the QRIS.

Oklahoma. Following a pilot in the city of Tulsa, the Oklahoma Department of Education has allocated funds to implement the YPQI statewide through 21st CCLC programming.

a constant theme and a regular topic of monthly coaching calls with sites. The tools and resources provided were not meant to replace what was already happening at the sites, but to make that work more efficient and effective.

Sites were successful in connecting their quality improvement efforts to existing infrastructure.

Those connections facilitated access to resources that are now helping to sustain the work or some aspect of it in most sites. These connections obviously played out differently in each site, but some common strategies did emerge. For example in many sites the local United Way was involved from the outset or became involved over time, and in many cases they are now helping to sustain the effort. Roles for local United Ways can range from host, to coordinator, to sponsor, to champion. Their ubiquitous presence across the country, their evolution from traditional funder to community catalyst, and their commitment to supporting programs that have an impact on the lives of families makes United Ways natural partners in this work.

In several Quality Counts sites, state education agencies are key partners in quality improvement efforts. With a built in set-aside that can be used to support evaluation and professional development, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is a logical place to build capacity for continuous quality improvement. Depending on the size of the state program, this strategy can reach a substantial subset of OST programming in the state. In some instances, non 21st CCLC programs have been able to participate in state-sponsored professional development opportunities. In Rhode Island and Michigan, YPQI-like assessment and improvement strategies were already being implemented through the state education agencies at the outset of the initiative, and those efforts were strengthened and leveraged during Quality Counts. Over the course of the initiative similar state-level strategies were developed in Kentucky, Oklahoma and Washington.

Other state agencies including juvenile justice, human services and public health also participate in and in some cases support youth program quality improvement efforts in several Quality Counts states. In New York State, the Office of Child and Family Services, which includes juvenile justice, child welfare, youth development and other departments, led the Quality Counts effort, embedding a set of research-based processes and tools within the state's county Youth Bureau

Orange County Youth Bureau's Integrated Planning Process

Every three years, each county Youth Bureau in New York is required by the state to develop an Integrated County Plan (ICP); essentially a three year master plan or agenda for youth services.

As Quality Counts got underway, Orange County was gearing up to develop their ICP. With technical assistance from the Forum for Youth Investment, Orange County used this as a strategic opportunity to rethink the planning process. As a result, they built in mechanisms for mapping the range of services available for children, youth, and families; engaging stakeholders (including youth) in identifying gaps and priorities; and introducing quality standards.

They also made the strategic decision to link the county planning process (and as a result, future program investments) to the state's Touchstones goals framework, rather than create a new set of goals and indicators to track progress locally. Touchstones is organized into six developmental areas, which now serve as the organizing framework for the planning work and for a series of "dashboards" that local leaders use to track available services and gaps.

The practical decision to link to Touchstones has significant implications. It aligns county and state policy, enhances local data comparison capabilities, and ensures that the Youth Bureau's investments reflect a broad developmental approach. The Orange County ICP process will serve as a prototype for the state as a whole.

system which works with over 3,000 programs across the state. Given that Youth Bureau functions include monitoring programs receiving public funds, that system represents a natural partner in quality assessment and improvement efforts.

Youth Bureaus are also responsible for integrated county planning across several youth-related funding streams. Ready by 21 strategic planning tools that help diverse leaders develop and track progress against a shared vision for children and youth were critical in bringing a developmental frame to the Youth Bureau planning process and aligning county planning efforts with the state's commitment to high quality programming (see sidebar).

CREATE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.

“The connections you have helped us make to other cities doing similar work have been phenomenal.”

Anonymous Site Lead

Learning is a social enterprise, and our experiences during Quality Counts underscored this at two levels. Numerous site leads described linkages to their counterparts in other places as one of the most valuable components of the national technical assistance strategy. And at the local level, powerful professional learning communities are emerging in which youth workers interpret data and plan for improvement with their peers.

At the national level, cross-site connections were facilitated through basic initiative-wide networking opportunities like cross-site meetings and calls, but also through targeted “match-making” in pairs or small groups. When a site expressed a specific interest – involving youth in program assessment, for example – the site liaison would invite one or two other sites experimenting with this kind of strategy to join a call to share experiences and offer advice. Assuming topics were general enough to be of interest to others, such exchanges were documented and shared with the full group. Occasionally representatives from other communities outside of Quality Counts were invited to serve as peer resources.

Networking opportunities like these are particularly important since the individuals leading this work in communities are employed in different

kinds of institutions or intermediaries. While United Way employees may have opportunities to interact with their United Way counterparts, and school administrators have various peer networks they can join, individuals building cross-sector quality improvement systems for youth programs are employed by school districts, philanthropy, intermediaries, state after-school networks, youth agencies, and local or state government. Given the unique nature of their roles, they may have more in common with one another than with their own colleagues or fellow association members.

Change, like learning, happens in the context of relationships. At the local level, the professional learning community that is created when youth workers come together to reflect on their practice, make meaning of data, and plan for improvement is a powerful vehicle for change. This was reflected in on-the-ground testimonials from youth organization managers participating in the YPQI and through observations of site leads who interacted with cohorts of staff participating in the process. One local program manager said, “The trainings provided us with a framework for carefully evaluating all phases of our current programming... the strongest impact has been on our professional development. We are now more consistently able to be reflective. We are more aware of how modifications in the structure of program activities can result in increased opportunities for youth... we are more conscious of our responsibility to make every interaction between staff and youth a positive learning experience...”

The *Youth Program Quality Intervention* brings staff together around actionable data focused on things they have control over. This kind of collective empowerment strategy, not typically associated with evaluation or assessment, is facilitated by and perhaps only possible in a low-stakes approach that is focused on improvement.

KEEP THE STAKES LOW.

“Assessments in the past have tended to be high stakes and result in a high level of anxiety, with little to no change...this

process engages programs to internalize the changes that need to occur. We've found programs to be very excited and engaged in the process."

- Candy Markman, Nashville Mayor's Office

As public and private investments in out-of-school time have increased at the local, state and federal levels, so have efforts to maximize returns through quality improvement and accountability. Rather than high stakes quality ratings aimed at driving consumer choice, or performance assessment designed to weed out low-performing staff, the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* focuses on producing data that drives learning and change. It can be considered a low stakes accountability system that creates an organizational culture focused on quality and empowers staff to improve their own practice through data-driven professional learning communities.

Low stakes should not be confused with no stakes. Data can be used to inform policy and planning – for example to drive resource allocation for professional development – without being used to make high stakes decisions about individual agency funding or accreditation. And agencies can be held accountable for participating in an improvement process, without being held accountable for achieving certain scores or improving scores by a certain percentage over time. In fact, numerous local funders in Iowa, New York, Nashville, Grand Rapids and Rhode Island now require participation in the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* as a condition of funding.

Data can be threatening and it can be empowering. Low stakes approaches focused on empowerment can result in increased ownership over program processes, and ultimately, change. According to Joseph Tomchak, Director of Programs at the Pawtucket Boys and Girls Club, the low stakes approach has been important. "All full-time staff members are directly involved in the training and implementation of Rhode Island PQA. Since the tool literally teaches as it is utilized, staff readily learn what a high-quality program should look like. They are able to look critically at one another's

programs and make informed observations on how programs can be improved. Staff see the value, observe the results, and embed the assessment process into their program management efforts."

Findings from a randomized trial of the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* conducted concurrent to the Quality Counts initiative confirm that this low-stakes approach does in fact improve instructional practice in a diverse range of OST programs (Smith, Lo, Sugar, Akiva, Frank, Devaney, in preparation). Feedback from lead staff involved in Quality Counts affirms the effectiveness of the approach. Ninety-five percent of program managers and 100 percent of site leads surveyed reported seeing improvements in youth programming as a result of participating in the initiative. This combination of evidence from rigorous research and lessons learned through in depth field work suggest that low stakes accountability approaches are an important strategy for strengthening the OST sector.

Looking Ahead

Finding effective strategies for strengthening OST systems has never been so important. The field has expanded at an unprecedented pace over the past decade as stakeholders have recognized the need to support working families and as evidence has demonstrated that OST programs are useful for preventing problems and for supporting and academic success. However this almost complete shift from “nice” to “necessary” now faces serious challenges.

We have a window to demonstrate that OST systems can be viable, accountable partners in community’s efforts to support learning and development. But that window may not be open for long, as policy changes threaten to shift federal resources allocated for “extended learning” to school districts, and as the economic crisis puts dire constraints on state and local budgets.

Though OST’s policy infrastructure remains tenuous relative to education and other human services, the positioning of youth programs as part of the academic achievement equation led to the development of OST systems at the state and local levels. With these efforts has come an increasing focus on quality standards and outcomes, not unlike what is unfolding in the K-12 sector.

The research, funding, and policy-making communities have all endorsed efforts to bring continuous improvement practices and accountability policies into OST networks. The *Youth Program Quality Intervention* study offers important insights into the impact, sustainability, scalability, and effective components of such strategies. This information is both useful and timely. With the emphasis on high-stakes teacher assessment growing in education circles, what we are learning in OST represents an alternative approach to improving instruction that uses data for empowerment and change.

Building effective quality improvement systems also offers an alternative way to think about scale. Efforts to tackle the scale challenge have traditionally involved identifying specific brand-

name programs that are deemed effective and then attempting to expand those programs to reach more clients – a strategy that unfortunately has a weak track record to date (Granger, 2010). Alternatively, a system-level continuous improvement strategy creates a mechanism for communities to scale up effective youth development practices across the range of programs where children and youth spend time.

Finally, effective quality improvement systems are a sound investment. Extremely modest relative to other OST system building initiatives,⁴ the Quality Counts experience suggests that with a relatively modest infusion of cash and a targeted set of technical supports, intermediary organizations can develop an important capacity and put in place a set of supports that strengthens the quality of OST programs and contributes to overall system building.

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⁴ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s After School Project invested between \$3.75 and \$5 million dollars in each of three intermediaries over 8 years, and their Urban Health Initiative price tag was \$65 million over 8 years. The Wallace Foundation issued OST system-building grants ranging from \$5 to \$12 million each to five cities between 2004-2009.

The **Youth Program Quality Intervention**, recently found effective in a randomized trial, is the basis for numerous quality improvement projects around the country. The YPQI follows an Assess-Plan-Improve sequence to help programs focus on and improve the quality of offerings they provide for youth.

The YPQI is designed to produce action at three levels: the policy level, the organizational setting, and the instructional setting. In the policy context, networks adopt YPQI elements and commit resources to the process. In the organizational setting, managers implement continuous improvement practices focused on the quality of instruction. At the point of service, or the instructional setting, staff provide youth with opportunities to meet critical developmental needs. While the YPQI produces changes at the policy and organizational levels, the real goal is to improve the instructional setting, which youth experience directly.

The Assess-Plan-Improve Sequence

Step 1: Prepare. Staff from the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality help network leaders make decisions about how the system will work, based on local considerations and resources. For example, one network might train a large cadre of external assessors; another might focus more on Technical Assistance (TA) coaching. Network leaders identify participating sites and work with Weikart Center staff to map out trainings and other parts of the intervention.

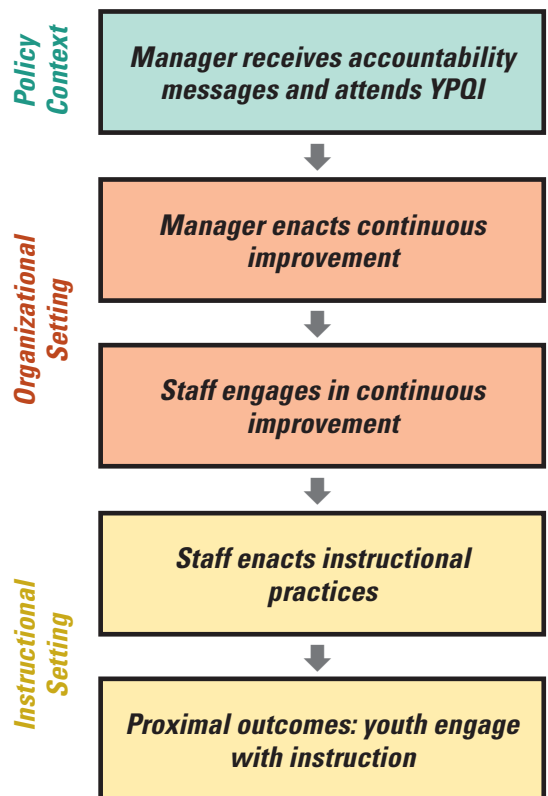
Step 2: Assess. Managers and site staff attend training on using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA) for program self-assessment and external assessment. Managers and site staff conduct program self-assessments at their sites, and select sites host external assessment visits. All Youth PQA data can be stored online through the Scores Reporter, which can also be used to generate reports.

Step 3: Plan. All staff involved in step 2 are encouraged to attend a full-day Planning with Data workshop, facilitated by Weikart Center staff or local endorsed trainers. This workshop demystifies the assessment process so staff feel empowered to implement changes that will improve the quality of their programs. Participants leave the workshop with a draft improvement plan to take back to their sites, with goals designed to be attainable, measurable, and time-tracked.

Step 4: Improve. Managers and staff carry out their improvement plan. Staff may attend Youth Work Methods workshops aligned with their plan, designed to strengthen skills and improve quality at the point of service. Managers may attend Quality Coaching workshops to learn how to better support their staff to implement quality practices with youth. Some networks identify regional coaches to provide ongoing support and mentoring to program staff.

Step 5: Repeat. The Assess-Plan-Improve sequence can initiate a cycle of continuous program improvement.

Three Levels/Targets of the YPQI



The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)



Technical Appendix

The evaluation of the Quality Counts initiative was based on a formative design, meaning that the primary purpose for producing data was to support successful implementation in each of the 12 sites and their respective OST programs. At three time points during the project, extensive profiles of site data were provided to each lead intermediary and served as the basis of cross-site learning conferences and within-site planning. Examples of individual site-level reports are available from the authors. However we also produced several “findings” by triangulating across data sources related to the element of the initiative delivered most consistently across all sites – quality improvement systems based on the *Youth Program Quality Intervention*. In general, these findings should be understood as points of correspondence facilitated by parallel measures across otherwise qualitatively distinct case studies, because the larger “intervention” was different in each network. All findings discussed in the Results section of this report and in this Technical Appendix should be treated as suggestive rather than conclusive.

Several measures were implemented as part of the Quality Counts initiative and we describe samples, measurement items and data for three measures related to quality improvement here. Our primary emphasis when considering both precision (reliability) and meaningfulness (validity) is the usefulness of the data for interpretation and implementation by individual actors at each site. For example, we developed a structured interview with scorable rubrics (Readiness Assessment) where no existing measures were available. Also, while a large number of standardized assessments of program quality were administered by endorsed raters over the course of the three-year project, relatively few of these assessments were conducted in the same OST programs at baseline and post, limiting our ability to detect change in program quality over time.

This Technical Appendix follows the sequence of presentation in the Results section of the report. First we describe change over time from the assessment of community capacity used to drive

project planning and mid-course evaluation of progress. Next, we describe changes in program quality for all OST programs with quality ratings at baseline and post intervention. Finally, we describe leader reports of their overall satisfaction with the quality improvement work.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Community capacity for quality improvement was assessed using the *Quality Counts Readiness Assessment*, a structured expert interview with rubrics designed to translate answers into quantitative scores. The interview asked a series of questions regarding conditions the project team believed might affect implementation of the initiative: *Leadership Horsepower, Community Vision & Demand, Quality Improvement System Capacity, Intermediary Capacity, and Provider Capacity*. Table A1 defines the items and structure for the *Readiness Assessment*. Because the quality improvement work was the most consistent element of technical assistance across all sites, we anticipated that average change over all networks would be greatest in the areas of *Quality Improvement System Capacity, Intermediary Capacity, and Provider Capacity*.

The *Readiness Assessment* was conducted at baseline, at the year two mid-point, and at the conclusion of the initiative at the end of the third year. It was administered to individuals or small groups who were the lead contacts for the Quality Counts initiative at each site, who in each case, were also the lead authors of that site’s proposal for funding under the initiative. The *Readiness Assessment* was administered to the same individuals⁵ at each time point.

Interviews were conducted by trained raters and required approximately 1.5 hours to complete. Rubrics were then scored for an additional two hours on average. At each time point, the first two interviews were scored by paired raters and

⁵ There were two exceptions, in cases with turnover at the site lead level.

scores reviewed and differences reconciled. All subsequent interviews and rubrics were completed by these raters. One rubric is provided in Figure A1. The answer to the interview question in the top panel is used to score each individual item (row). Each item is scored as a level 1, 3 or 5 indicating the absence of the practice or state (level 1) named in the interview question, the partial or unintentional presence of the named practice or state (level 3) or the full realization of the practice or state (level 5) in a site. Composite scores (or indexes) are created at the scale level by averaging across items in a single rubric to create a scale score for that rubric and at the domain level by averaging across scale scores to create a domain score for multiple rubrics.

As a rudimentary reliability check, at the year two midpoint, interviewees were asked to review their baseline scores and make adjustments as necessary, given improved clarity about the meaning of items with exposure to the Quality Counts initiative. Scores changed very little, suggesting that interviewees understood the questions adequately at the baseline and/or that they agreed with the scores given by the trained raters.

Readiness Assessment data was intended for use at the item level as a discussion point for site-based teams. However, for purposes of summative comparison we also constructed the scale, domain and total scores in Table A1 and provide the results of a significance test (T-test) for a comparison of the baseline and post-initiative mean scores. Statistically significant differences are denoted by the asterisks on the post-initiative scores. As expected, positive change was recorded in all but one of the ten scales in the last three domains, and five of these mean comparisons were statistically significant (see notes in Table A1). As a related indicator of the magnitude of the effect, we calculated effect sizes (*d*) by taking the change score (post test – pretest) and dividing by the variation in the pretest (standard deviation). For *QIS System Capacity* (domain III) *d*=0.753, for *Intermediary Function* (domain IV) *d*=0.394, and for *Provider Capacity* (domain V) *d*=1.936. The general pattern described in Table A1 suggests that capacities to deliver technical assistance and training related to the *Youth Program Quality Intervention*, and to implement the quality improvement process in OST programs, increased substantially over the three year initiative.

Figure A1. Readiness Assessment Sample Rubric

III. System Elements - Quality Improvement System Capacity			
<i>III-G. Program Data and Information</i>			
What other types of data are collected across at least several providers (content and schedule information, program quality data, attendance data, outcomes data, background data)?			
Indicators			Supporting Evidence / Anecdotes
1 OST service providers are not mapped	3 Offering times and content of OST service providers across at least two sectors are or have been mapped but not at the level of times/content, -or- no process exists for regular updating with wide public access	5 Offering times and content of OST service providers across at least two sectors are mapped and updated regularly (at least annually) with wide public access	~
1 Program quality data is not collected at the provider level	3 Uniform data on program quality is collected, aggregated, and reported on at the provider level but not across sectors	5 Uniform data on program quality is collected, aggregated, and reported on at the provider level across at least two major sectors	~

Table A1. Readiness Assessment Pre and Post Scores

		Pre N=12	Post N=12
I	<i>System Elements–Decision-maker Engagement</i>	3.61	3.88
I-A	<i>Decision-maker agenda on quality & reach</i>	4.15	4.17
1	Partnership/support of executive office of youth	4.08	4.00
2	Partnership by multiple state/county agencies	4.33	4.17
3	Partnership/support of multiple local funders	4.00	4.00
4	Coalitions work aligned to support agendas	4.17	4.50
I-B	<i>Change structures</i>	3.08	3.58+
1	Organizations/entities charged with "adding it up"	3.50	4.33
2	Master plan for children and youth exists, is widely adopted	2.67	2.83
3	Master plan is adopted by stakeholders across sectors	N/A	2.83
4	Master plan covers a large spectrum of age groups	N/A	3.73
II	<i>System Elements – Communicate Vision & Demand</i>	2.62	3.02*
II-C	<i>Positive vision for youth</i>	3.06	2.94
1	Strong documented vision exists / shared	3.50	3.83
2	Community has measurable "big picture" goal	3.00	2.17
3	Big picture goal is being monitored and reported on	2.67	2.00
4	Active efforts to inform and engage the public	N/A	3.50
II-D	<i>Demand for change</i>	2.30	3.78***
1	Strong demand for change from youth	2.50	N/A
2	Strong demand for change from families	1.83	N/A
3	Strong demand for change from business	2.00	3.67
4	Funders require quality and change practices	3.00	4.00
5	Strong demand for change from external authorities	2.17	3.67
II-E	<i>Link to youth and families</i>	2.50	3.08*
1	Active youth council with influence and access	2.50	4.33
2	Youth engaged in decisions making capacity	3.33	4.00
3	Families active on committees or decision bodies	2.17	2.17
4	Families active in multiple sectors	2.00	1.83
III	<i>System Elements – Quality Improvement System (QIS) Capacity</i>	3.13	3.59
III-F	<i>Standards and quality policies across sectors</i>	2.72	3.56+
1	Quality standards available & applied across sectors	3.00	3.83
2	Uniform quality assessment process implemented	2.83	3.83
3	Quality monitoring process implemented	2.33	3.00
4	Common language is used to communicate across systems	N/A	2.83
III-G	<i>Program data and information</i>	2.89	3.11
1	Offering times and content are mapped and updated	3.33	3.00
2	Uniform data on program quality is collected	2.17	3.17
3	One or two other types of info. collected across two sectors	3.17	3.17
III-H	<i>Coordination across providers</i>	3.58	3.96
1	Staff from different providers meet several times per year	4.67	4.50

		<i>Pre N=12</i>	<i>Post N=12</i>
2	Staff from different providers share/document program goals	3.67	3.67
3	Staff from different providers share T & TA annually	3.83	4.33
4	Staff from different providers meet to do service planning	2.17	3.33
III-I	<i>Coordination across sectors</i>	3.33	3.72
1	Staff from different providers across different sectors meet	N/A	4.50
2	Cross sector providers work for service planning	4.17	4.00
3	Cross sector providers meet for shared T&TA	2.83	4.17
4	Cross sector providers share service goals / objectives	3.00	3.00
IV	<i>Intermediary Capacity</i>	3.61	3.92
IV-J	<i>Linkage to policies and decision-makers</i>	3.73	4.30+
1	Intermediary led community-wide planning process	4.17	5.00
2	Intermediary experience working with state DOE	3.83	4.50
3	Intermediary experience working with DHS	4.00	4.00
4	Intermediary experience working with local funders	3.50	4.50
5	Intermediary experience working with juvenile justice system	3.17	3.50
IV-K	<i>Communications and convening</i>	4.67	4.39
1	Intermediary leads meetings with provider staff	4.83	3.91
2	Intermediary has a web site with goals, services, etc.	4.67	4.27
3	Other communications	4.45	5.00
IV-L	<i>Training and technical assistance capacity</i>	2.63	3.50*
1	Intermediary has trained 100+ staff in methods	4.00	4.67
2	Intermediary trained 20+ orgs. in organization P&P	2.17	2.17
3	Intermediary offers TA on quality standards & assessment	2.33	4.67
4	Intermediary provides TA to local orgs. on assessment/evaluation	2.00	2.50
IV-M	<i>Cross-sector reach</i>	3.40	3.46
1	Convening/communication between after- & in-school providers	3.73	4.00
2	Convening/communication between DOE and DHS	2.82	3.67
3	Convening/communication between CB providers, other sector	3.80	3.50
4	Convening/communication between JJ and other sectors	2.40	2.67
V	<i>Provider Capacity</i>	2.22	3.43***
V-N	<i>Standards present</i>	2.11	3.33***
1	OST providers subject to licensing/accreditation	2.50	2.83
2	OST providers subject to state/local quality standards	2.00	3.33
3	OST providers have documented goals/objectives	1.83	3.91
V-O	<i>Quality assessment, improvement, and monitoring</i>	2.33	3.53***
1	OST providers have documented & reviewed program goals	N/A	4.27
2	OST providers conduct quality assessment	2.67	3.67
3	Providers use data for program improvement planning	2.17	3.50
4	Providers receive external quality monitoring annually	2.17	3.36
TOTAL	<i>Total Score</i>	3.04	3.56**

Note. A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare Readiness Assessment domain and scale scores pre and post scores. Significance is indicated at: + .05 < p ≤ .11 * .01 < p ≤ .05 ** .001 < p ≤ .01 *** p ≤ .001

PROGRAM QUALITY

The prior section suggested that capacities related to quality improvement for both intermediaries and providers improved between the baseline and end of the initiative across the 12 sites.

Because program quality data were collected, it is also possible to describe change in program quality for specific OST programs where data were collected by endorsed raters before and after the implementation of the *Youth Program Quality Intervention*. In this section we discuss fidelity of implementation across the 12 sites and then examine change scores for the quality of instruction in OST program settings for a subsample of providers in four sites.

Fidelity to the Youth Program Quality Intervention

In a recent randomized field trial funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* model produced positive and sustained effects on both managers' continuous improvement behaviors and staff members' instructional quality (Smith et al, in preparation). Notably, these effects were strongest in sites that implemented all elements of the YPQI sequence, so our belief that quality change actually occurred in a specific OST program is bolstered where we know that each element in the sequence was implemented with fidelity. Table A2 describes

elements of the recently validated *Youth Program Quality Intervention* across each of the 12 Quality Counts sites. Implementation fidelity for four of the sites was quite high, as measured by the collection of quality data by external raters and delivery of training for each YPQI component. It is critical to note that Table A2 describes only the collection of performance data on quality and the availability of training/technical assistance for each step of the YPQI sequence and does not describe actual implementation of each step at provider sites.

As an indication of the scale of the training and technical assistance effort related to quality improvement capacity building overall, this group received roughly 1,833 slots of training in the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* training sequence, at 125 training events. In addition to training, sites received 1,960 hours of technical assistance (live, phone, e-mail) to support implementation of the quality improvement work. These figures alone suggest that the level of implementation support to specific OST programs within each site was substantial and that there was a substantial dosage of training and technical assistance.

Change in the Quality of Instruction in Provider Settings

Instructional quality data for the Quality Counts initiative were collected using the Youth Program

Table A2. Fidelity to Youth Program Quality Intervention

Element	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	Site 8	Site 9	Site 10	Site 11	Site 12
Baseline External Assessment	x	x*	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Baseline Program Self-Assessment	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Improvement Planning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Youth Work Methods Trainings	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x
TA Coaching	x	x		x								
Quality Coaching			x				x				x	
Post-Initiative External Assessment (1 year later)	x	x	x	x								

* Site 2 used a "mixed observation method" with 1 external assessor and 3 self-assessors observing the same program offering.

Quality Assessment (Youth PQA), a standardized observation-based assessment of instructional quality which has been subjected to several validation studies (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005; Smith, C., & Hohmann, C., 2005). In general, quality data are collected using one of two methodologies, program self-assessment conducted by teams of staff to generate a quality score for the entire program, and external assessment of specific program offerings conducted by raters of known accuracy.

These two methodologies, including variations were used in the 12 sites, with many sites working with a different cohort of OST programs each year as opposed to year-to-year involvement of the same organizations. Overall, 834 quality self-assessments or external ratings were conducted as part of the initiative in the 12 sites. However, only four sites had both baseline and post initiative data for the same OST programs that were both received and known by the Weikart Center to be collected by endorsed external raters. Each of these four sites had high fidelity to the Youth Program Quality Intervention as described in Table A2 – networks 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Table A3 shows change scores in each of the Youth PQA domains for the four sites with baseline and post intervention data. These scores represent change over a five-point scale. While it is difficult to assess a meaningful metric for the magnitude of this change, when compared to statistically significant change in other one-group and

Table A3. YPQA Change Scores

Change Scores	
Domain	Change Scores N=27 Sites
Safe Environment	0.14
Supportive Environment	0.26
Interaction	0.47+
Engagement	0.71**
Instructional Total Score	0.47*

Note. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare Youth PQA domain and total scores at pre and post. Significance is indicated at: + .05 < p < .11 ** .001 < p < .01
* .01 < p < .05 *** p < .001

experimental samples, the increment of change in the total score for this Quality Counts sample is larger. As a further indicator of the magnitude of the effect, we calculated an effect size (*d*) by taking the change score (post test – pretest) and dividing by the variation in the pretest (standard deviation). For the total score in the Quality Counts sample described in Table A3, *d*=0.65. Although these findings are purely descriptive, the combination of high implementation of an experimentally validated intervention model and positive change scores on the key performance metric suggest that quality improvement in fact occurred.

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION

In the last two sections we presented evidence that according to site leaders, both intermediary and provider capacity related to delivering the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* increased; and according to external ratings of provider settings, that quality of instruction increased for at least the subsample of providers for which we have data. In this section, we consider an additional source of data and examine survey responses from site leaders, OST program managers and front line staff.

At seven Quality Counts sites satisfaction surveys were administered during the final months of the initiative in order to better understand the experience of both site leaders and individual program managers with the *Youth Program Quality*

Table A4. Network Leader Reports on Effects of Quality Improvement Work

All Site Leads (N=32)	Percent Answering "Somewhat" or "Very Much"
Did you see improvement in youth programming in your city?	100
Did you notice that program directors improved their management skills?	100
Did you notice an improvement in direct staff's skills?	97
Was it worth your time & effort?	100

Intervention process. These questions provide feedback that the effort produced some effect on quality and that in a summative sense, was a good use of their time and effort. Table A4 shows responses of network leaders from all 12 Quality Counts sites.

During the spring of 2010, survey data was also collected from site managers who actually implemented the *Youth Program Quality Intervention* at their sites. Of the 70 respondents:

- 82% were female
- 28% African American, 67% White, 3% Hispanic, 2% other
- 3% High School Diploma, 5% Associate’s, 38% Bachelors, 13% Grad program but no degree, 41% Masters
- Average experience in field: 13.3 years; Average experience at site: 7.2 years

Table A5 provides their responses to several questions regarding the overall effects of implementing the *Youth Program Quality Intervention*. These program managers overwhelmingly stated that improvement occurred in both their program and their professional skill set and, in a critical summative judgment, affirmed the quality improvement work was worth their “time and effort.”

Table A5. Program Manager Reports on the Effectiveness of the Quality Improvement Work

<i>Program Managers (N=70)</i>	<i>Percent Answering “Somewhat” or “Very Much”</i>
Did you see improvements in your program?	97
Did you improve as a manager?	98
Was it worth your time & effort?	94