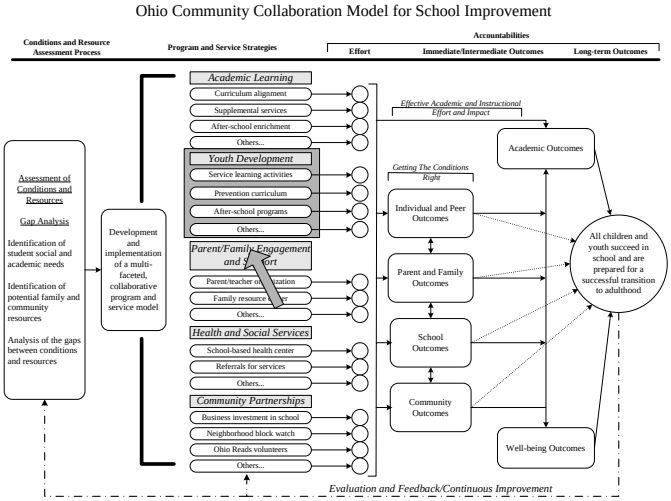
Youth Development

Introduction



This section is structured to provide you with a comprehensive overview of successful youth development programs, including school-based and -linked after-school programs. This program and service strategy is a core component within the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI). You will learn about the important outcomes these programs yield, including their contributions to school improvement and family support. You will learn about key design principles and strategies needing to be implemented for these outcomes to be achieved. You also will learn about the potential barriers to successful programs and how to address them. Finally, you will learn a simple vocabulary, which will facilitate your planning and decision-making.

What do we mean by youth development?

Youth development refers to a wide variety of programs and services. After-school programs, mentoring, peer counseling, social recreation, arts, sports, values education, service learning, community service, volunteerism, leadership development, extracurricular activities, conflict resolution, life skills programs, youth employment, career counseling/job skills training, academic enrichment, and prevention programming all fit under the umbrella name of “youth development.”

Youth development also describes their primary aims. All such programs and services are designed to ensure that kids enjoy healthy development, succeed in school, and grow up to be productive, adult citizens.

To achieve these aims, youth development leaders rely on research-supported design principles and youth development strategies. They use these principles to design programs and services. Youth development strategies refer to the activities and methods implemented in programs and services. For example, one of the most important youth development strategies is to create the conditions whereby each youth enjoys one-on-one interactions with a caring adult. Other key strategies involve group activities that provide youth with active, experiential learning activities and supports and blending non-academic, engaging activities with academic activities.

Youth development programs and services often are oriented toward problem behaviors and risk factors. As important as this work is, youth development programs must do more than ensure that kids are free of problems (Pittman, 1999).

In fact, the best programs and services have a dual focus. While they address problems and risk factors, they also are designed to build youths' strengths and assets (Benson, 1997; Dryfoss, 1990; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1997; Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000). These strengths and assets also are called "protective factors" and "developmental assets." Both are indicative of healthy development, and both strengthen youths' resilience. Regardless of what they are called, essentially these factors are the conditions that underlie healthy youth development and successful achievement.

The main idea is to strengthen these factors to promote healthy development and, at the same time, eliminate and prevent risk factors associated with problem behaviors and negative outcomes. Table 6.1 presents many of the most important competencies, strengths, assets and related conditions. All are important qualities or attributes that youth need to succeed. In short, adults working with youth should target these factors, developing them when they do not exist and strengthening the ones that do.

In essence, these competencies, strengths, assets and related conditions work in something like a "banking system." The more youth "bank," the better they are equipped to deal with daily life challenges and stressors. The key is to help all youth develop and experience these competencies, strengths and assets. The more they have, the more they are prepared at the "front-end" of life. In other words, they have the competencies, skills and supports to be successful in school and life. Successful youth development programs, services and strategies are the delivery system for these important outcomes.

Table 6.1: Competencies, strengths, assets and related conditions
• Youth have social competence, self-esteem and self-confidence • Youth have effective social and life skills • Youth have problem solving skills (able to ask for help when needed; able to resist pressures; have refusal skills; able to problem solve non-violently, etc.) • Youth associate with pro-social peer groups • Youth have strong relationships with caring adult role models • Youth have values for honesty, integrity, caring and responsibility • Youth have a sense of purpose; feel personal control and empowered • Youth are easy going, flexible and have a sense of humor • Youth are optimistic (see the positive) • Youth feel safe and secure • Youth have a strong sense of identity • Youth are linked to a faith-based organization (spirituality) • Youth are involved in community service opportunities • Youth feel a sense of personal responsibility • Youth have self-regulation skills (able to identify emotions, etc.) • Youth have empathy (able to see things from other people's perspectives; show respect and

Table 6.1: Competencies, strengths, assets and related conditions
concern for others) • Youth do not have potential or identified learning disabilities • Youth have their basic needs met (food, shelter, etc.) • Youth are engaged in school; value education; are motivated to do well; experience positive school climate • Youth have opportunities for skill-building and learning via participation in pro-social activities (vocational experiences, extracurricular activities, hobbies, leadership experiences, etc.) • Youth experience a sense of belonging to pro-social institutions or groups (school, sport team, youth organizations, club, family, community, etc.) • Youth display pro-social behaviors (are substance free, abstain from gang involvement and sexual activity, etc.) • Youth receive recognition and reinforcement for involvement in pro-social activities from school, family, community, etc. • Youth feel that the school, family and community have high expectations for them and that they view youth as valuable assets

From: Anderson-Butcher, 2004; Benson, 1997; Dryfoss, 1990; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1997; Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000.

Outcomes associated with youth development

A great deal of research has documented the need for specially designed youth development programs, services and strategies. In other words, youth development programs, services and strategies are not all alike, and they are not inherently beneficial. Important choices are involved; and, each choice has some bearing on whether you will achieve the outcomes you want and need.

Research has documented significant outcomes that stem from theoretically sound, research-supported programs and services. More specifically, research has documented improvements in desirable outcomes and reductions in problem behaviors and bad outcomes.

Table 6.2: Outcomes associated with youth development	
Improvements in: • Grades • Attendance at school • Interpersonal skills and social competence • Quality of peer and adult relationships • Self-control and problem solving • Mental health • Commitment to school • Effort in school	**Reductions in:** • Drug and alcohol use • School misbehavior • Aggressive behavior and violence • Truancy • High risk sexual behavior • Smoking • Unsupervised time

From: Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998; Leffert, Saito, Blyth, & Kroenke, 1996

Key design principles and strategies for youth development

You probably will not achieve these desirable outcomes unless you implement the key design principles and strategies that yield them.

Several key elements and strategies contribute to the success of positive youth development programs. The following design principles and strategies build from the overarching design principles and strategies discussed in the programs and services introduction section. That said, the following principles and strategies shown in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4 are specifically tailored to youth development programs and services.

Table 6.3: Checklist of overarching design principles and/or strategies for successful programs	
☐	Program is designed to create intended results
☐	The logic behind the program makes sense as the services link to outcomes
☐	Program uses multiple strategies to accomplish its goals (comprehensive)
☐	Program is evaluation-driven and continuously improved upon
☐	Program is research-supported and theoretically-sound
☐	A variety of teaching and learning strategies are used
☐	There is sufficient dosage
☐	The program is implemented the way it was originally designed
☐	Staff are well-trained in the program design
☐	Participants have a “say so” in how the program is structured and implemented
☐	Program is tailored to meet individual needs
☐	Program is appropriately timed and located
☐	Program is implemented in culturally competent ways
☐	Program is family-centered and -supportive
☐	Strategies foster self-determination and personal control
☐	Participants are empowered
☐	Participants’ strengths are built upon in the program
☐	Positive relationships and bonding are created
☐	Program activities are enjoyable and meaningful to participants
☐	Staff are engaging

Table 6.4: Key design principles and/or strategies for youth development*	
Principle and strategy	**What this looks like**
Interpersonal[∞] skill development	
Relationships Relationships Continued	• Programs help develop relationships and connections among youth and healthy adults • Programs’ staff promotes positive relationships with peers • Programs seek to promote positive relationships with school and community • Youth have opportunities to connect with their culture

*Table 6.4: Key design principles and/or strategies for youth development**	
Principle and strategy	**What this looks like**
	• Staff is warm, caring and supportive • Staff provides guidance and responsiveness to youth and families attending the program • Youth learn proper communication skills • Staff is involved in on-going professional development relative to building relationships with and among program participants
Belonging	• Programs seek to provide opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability status • Programs promote identity formation through inclusion, participatory, meaningful activities • Programs' activities show support for cultural and bicultural competence • Youth can actively participate in programs' activities and events • Programs offer activities where youth can make positive contributions • Activities youth engage in offer opportunities for youth to experience positive social exchanges
Competencies	
Pro-social norms	• Programs and staff encourage youth to develop clear standards and rules for their own and others' behaviors • Values, morals and obligations for service are promoted by program • Youth are encouraged to develop clear and explicit standards for behavior that minimize health risks • Youth experience pro-social involvement with peers, school, community and family
Cognitive competence	• Staff seeks to influence cognitive abilities, processes or outcomes • Youth attending the program improve academic achievement, decision-making, planning and goal setting skills • Programs promote logical and analytic thinking and problem solving skills • Youth engage in activities that offer skill promotion in self-talk skills
Social and self-regulatory skills	• Youth learn developmentally appropriate interpersonal skills such as communication, assertiveness, refusal strategies, conflict resolution and negotiation tactics • Youth learn interpersonal negotiation strategies and how to use them with peers and adults • Youth develop skills for identifying feelings, managing emotions and frustrations and empathizing with others • Youth develop skills for identifying and managing emotional reactions or impulses • Programs provide training and rehearsal strategies for practicing these skills
Behavioral competence	• Staff teaches skills and provides reinforcement for effective behavior choices • Staff teaches and reinforces pro-social behaviors through verbal strategies and through non-verbal strategies

*Table 6.4: Key design principles and/or strategies for youth development**	
Principle and strategy	**What this looks like**
Moral competence	• Youth learn empathy and respect for others as promoted by the program • Youth engage in pro-social rules and/or norms • Youth develop a sense of right and wrong through activities offered by the program • Youth develop a sense of social justice via the program
Intrapersonal[Δ] development	
Self-determination	• Youth experience genuine empowerment in the program • Youth are educated to be autonomous and independent thinking • Programs and staff promote youth decision-making and self-advocacy • Youth make choices and serve in leadership roles • Youth gain ability to live and grow by self-determined internal standards and values
Beliefs in the future	• Programs and staff promote optimism in youth attending the program • A belief in one's future potential is embedded into program activities • Youth create long-range goals and options • Youth are provided with opportunities to plan for their future such as college visits
Identity	• Youth develop a healthy identity and sense of self • Youth are encouraged in positive identification with social or peer groups • Programs and staff seek to assist youth in positive identification of cultural groups
Spirituality	• Programs promote the development of beliefs in a higher power or internal reflection or meditation • Youth feel supported in exploring a spiritual belief system • Programs and staff support youth in identifying a sense of spiritual identity, meaning or practice
Self-determination and empowerment	• Programs and staff help youth build positive beliefs about self and one's abilities through empowerment-oriented practices • Staff offers youth-based programming that includes enabling strategies, activities that promote responsibility, and meaningful challenges • Programs' staff respect youth and take their views seriously • Programs focus on achievement, improvement, goal setting and mastery • Youth engage in activities that make a real difference in their community • Staff engages in practices that focus on improvement rather than on relative current performance level
Resilience	• Programs and staff encourage adaptive coping responses to stress • Psychological flexibility and capacity are promoted
Recognition and reinforcement of positives	• Programs and staff rewards, recognizes and reinforces involvement in pro-social behaviors and activities

*Table 6.4: Key design principles and/or strategies for youth development**	
Principle and strategy	**What this looks like**
Structural considerations	
Physical and psychological safety	• The programs operate in safe, secure and health-promoting environments • Youth have opportunities for safe and healthy interactions with peers and others
Opportunities	• Youth are offered positive activities in which they can actively participate and to which they can make contributions • Youth have opportunities to experience positive social exchanges • Programs offer opportunities to learn physical, social, cognitive and emotional skills • Youth are exposed to new intentional learning experiences • Programs provide opportunities for youth to practice and rehearse newly-developed skills
Structure	• There are clear and consistent rules, expectations and boundaries • Programs' staff has a clear understanding of the need to establish boundaries and limits, and boundaries and limits are implemented • Programs and staff provide continuity and predictability • Age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate monitoring occur in all sites and activities
Integrates school, family and community efforts	• Programs create connections and synergy among all the various systems related to healthy youth development including family, school and community • The "whole child" is valued • Comprehensive supports are developed in response to identified early needs • Youth and family are linked to additional resources as appropriate
Fun and enjoyable	• Programs engage youth "where they are" • Youth engage in activities that are fun and enjoyable • Activities that are youth-oriented are promoted by program and staff
Outcomes oriented	• The programs are designed to improve results and specific skills and outcomes are developed • Programs use fun, meaningful activities in strategic ways to recruit, engage and retain youth and improve results (for example, playing basketball is not necessarily the only outcome - the physical, social and emotional skills that are developed from playing basketball matter most)

From: Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, & Furano, 2001; Catalano et al., 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002

[∞]Interpersonal indicates the ability to relate to others on a personal level. It is between people.
[Δ]Intrapersonal is associated with those abilities and characteristics within a person.

As the above inventories indicate, you have the opportunity to make many important choices. The outcomes you will achieve hinge on the choices you make. However, you do not have to choose one principle or strategy at the expense of the others.

In fact, you should implement as many principles or strategies as possible, at the same time ensuring they are tailored to your needs and conditions. For example, Catalano and colleagues (2002) found that the more of these design principles incorporated into the program the better the outcomes. After reviewing all of the effective programs, these researchers concluded that effective programs had addressed a minimum of five of these design principles. Furthermore, these researchers found that three design principles seemed to stand out as critical within effective programs:

- They develop skills and competencies;
- They help students feel confident about themselves and their abilities; and
- They promote positive pro-social norms and values.

The fact remains, however, that, where youth development is concerned, one size does not fit all. There is no getting around the need for informed choices. As you make these choices, you will need to take into account all the important features of the youth you serve, your agency and the local environment. As Eccles and Gootman (2001) suggest, these design principles often vary across programs in order to meet the goals of the agency, within the constraints they face, and with the population of youth served in mind.

Other considerations in youth development

This section highlights other considerations in youth development that need to be taken into account. First, you will learn about the need for understanding how, when and why you may use "targeting strategies," i.e., designing specific programs for specific types of youth. For example, some students need one type of program, whereas other students have completely different needs, and these needs may fluctuate over time.

Then you will learn about the roles and functions of after-school programs in youth development. You will be presented with key concepts for creating effective programs, including initiative building activities and motivators for youth engagement.

Remember to incorporate model programs overviewed in the program/services overview chapter into your youth development strategies.

Planning programs for specific populations: after-school programs as an example

Targeting Strategies need to be taken into account when you are working with a diverse group of individuals. Targeting strategies are employed when it is helpful to identify special sub-populations who share needs, problems and aspirations. The main idea is to plan programs for entire groups of people who have enough in common to justify a special program, including tailored strategies and activities.

This targeted planning usually proceeds on the basis of regular, accurate assessments of the students' needs, problems and aspirations. For example, students at risk of early school failure may be targeted for after-school programs. Students at risk for dropping out may be targeted for career development programs. Students in the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system may be targeted for mentoring programs. Students with substance abuse and mental health problems may be targeted for life skills groups. Latchkey kids who are home alone may be targeted for child care programs. Youth in families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) may be targeted by youth development and school staff for family engagement activities.

Once these examples of programs for special populations are provided, four program planning reminders become important for after-school leaders:

1. Even with extended day and other after-school programs, most schools can not meet the needs of all such targeted populations. School-linked programs in the community are a practical necessity;

2. When organizations (e.g., schools, boys and girls clubs) offer specialized programs that cater to some populations of students (e.g., chronic juvenile offenders, gang members), other populations may shy away from the program and the sponsoring organization;

3. Some "at risk" populations will prefer community-based programs, especially ones that provide opportunities for youth-led programs and regular access to social and health service providers; and

4. Some populations will have the resources and supports to engage in private or fee-based community programs.

The lesson is that "cookie cutter" approaches to youth development do not work. In other words, one size truly does not fit all.

You will need to target different types of youth for different types of programs and activities. Some programs will be for ALL youth; others may be for certain targeted groups. For example, many different "types" of youth will participate in extracurricular activities, but then specific opportunities for targeted kids like those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), those with anger management needs, those needing extensive tutoring, or those needing homework time, may be designed accordingly.
In essence, quality youth development programs individually meet the needs of each and every youth by creating engaging and diverse pro-social opportunities.

After-school programs

After-school programs are one of the most important kinds of youth development programs and services. These programs provide supervision for youth during the working hours, provide essential family support, and contribute to overall school improvement efforts. Because they are so critical to youth, families and schools, you will need to know how to design and improve them.

After-school programs respond to many important needs. For example, in-school time often is insufficient to close the achievement gaps. Moreover, many youth are left alone and unsupervised between the hours of 3 and 7 P.M. When youth are alone, the stage is set for a predictable cluster of problem behaviors such as delinquency, early sexual activity and substance abuse, as well as less obvious problem behaviors like sedentary lifestyles associated with obesity and the failure to complete homework assignments.

In brief, healthy youth development and academic achievement often decline together. Therefore, if schools hope to boost academic achievement, they also need to *promote healthy youth development*. After-school programs are an ideal place to emphasize and improve both.

In addition, after-school programs also *meet valuable family support needs*, particularly child care needs. After-school programs have met those needs by providing affordable "child care" in the after school hours. Essentially, when the school and after-school programs support families, they make a huge contribution to school improvement. Strong, stable families served by the school are more likely to be connected to it. They are less likely to move or to choose another school. The immediate impact is less student turnover; or, more positively stated, a more stable, healthier student population.

Furthermore, highly successful after-school programs also effectively *expand the boundaries of school improvement*. These programs and their leaders help recruit others, including youth, parents, community program leaders and social-health service providers, to help with school improvement priorities. The efforts of these stakeholders contribute greatly to school improvement, as outlined in the table below.

Table 6.5: After-school programs' contributions to school improvement
• They provide more academic learning time, along with access to alternative teaching and learning methods, tutoring and homework assistance • They support classroom teachers by providing additional resources for their students' learning and academic achievement • They provide targeted interventions to those in need of additional time • They provide safe, secure, health-enhancing places where kids spend their out-of-school time constructively • They encourage associations with other kids who are committed to healthy development and success in school • They develop a sense of connection to school • They contribute to a more positive school climate • They make contributions to the prevention and reduction of problem behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency and depression • They strengthen kids' protective factors, resilience and developmental assets • When they cater to parents and families, they strengthen families, improve home supports for learning and reduce student and family transience or mobility • They provide for youths' and parents' career development opportunities, promoting the value of school experiences • When programs include involvement of teachers, knowledge of their students in the community is gained by the teachers • When higher education institutions are involved as partners, they help kids and parents understand what it takes to get into a college or university and how to plan for their futures in higher education • When programs are community-based, they make schools hubs of family support and community development – literally, the centerpieces of neighborhoods

After-school programs, at school and elsewhere in the community, can be powerful influences on youth and vital components in school improvement. Thanks to research, there is a growing stock of knowledge about successful after-school programs. Examples of the most important components of quality after-school experiences follow.

Balancing academic learning and achievement outcomes with other youth development outcomes and needs

Success in school and high academic achievement are youth development outcomes and strategies. When youth succeed in school and are connected to it, problem behaviors are prevented and developmental assets and protective factors are strengthened. The key is to balance the academic components with the non-academic components. Otherwise, many youth, especially those who may need after school programs the most, will not attend. And, even if some attend, they will not stay because they experience "more school" instead of a blended experience that helps with school, but that is fun and meaningful as well.

Make sure you have the resources not to just do the job, but to do it well

Sometimes there is a tendency in these programs to provide more activity-oriented programs that serve the masses as opposed to serving fewer youth in results-oriented programs that create outcomes (see program services introductory chapter). Remember, you need to have enough human and financial support in order to implement a quality activity. Otherwise, the program will not do what it is intended to do, and dosage effects

will not be present. As such, you will want to ensure that you monitor the staff-to-youth ratios and keep them as reasonable as possible. If staff-to-youth ratios are high, you will want to develop ways in which volunteers and/or older, expert youth can help in the leadership of the program. It also is possible to train and employ parents, older youth and other community members to help you.

Involve teachers in after-school programs

The direct benefits related to academic achievement and overall success in school that after-school programs can yield do not happen automatically. They are maximized when classroom teachers are both beneficiaries and contributors to students' after school experiences.

Teachers are able to benefit and contribute when they are involved in planning academic and non-academic experiences for their students (also see the academic learning chapter). These teachers do not have to show up after school. However, they *do* need to help after-school program leaders plan what students need to work on and do. In brief, regular, effective communications between teachers and program providers is vital. In many successful after-school programs, at least one person's job description focuses on making connections and communicating with classroom teachers, serving them and students at the same time.

Table 6.6: Ideas for linking after-school programs with schools and teachers
• Attend school staff meetings and present on the agenda • Eat lunch in the teachers' lunchroom • Attend parent-teacher conferences and other events at the school • Provide babysitting supports during parent-teacher conferences • Have an after-school bulletin board • Hire liaisons that interact with school staff • Work with the principal to establish regular meetings times • Use e-mail and voicemail to relay messages and communicate with teachers • Make friends with the custodians and kitchen staff • Help the school by monitoring recess, halls and/or lunch room • Communicate changes seen in student achievement and behavior • Create newsletters • Work together with teachers to assess student progress at the end of each marking period • Provide tracking and monitoring of students' attendance, homework completion and grades • Get information from teachers (i.e., state curriculum, local standards, and what is taught in the classroom) • Have teachers present in-service training for program staff • Incorporate lessons into the after-school program that build upon what is happening in the day time • Teachers provide activities for students to do in homework time, etc. • Teachers include after-school program participation in student plans such as individualized education plans (IEPs) • After-school staff helps in classrooms and with school field trips • Clearly define in writing the days and times particular spaces in the school will be used • Use language such as "we" and "our" to express shared goals and needs • Let teachers know what will happen in their classrooms

Table 6.6: Ideas for linking after-school programs with schools and teachers
• Invest in storage cabinets on wheels • Decide what will happen if something is damaged • Check in regularly with teachers to see how things are going • Express appreciation to school staff members who support the program

Building initiative

Quality youth development programs focus on building initiative (Larson, 2000). Youth with initiative are goal directed, intrinsically motivated, and willing to put forth effort over time. Larson (2000) writes that programs that develop initiative have three qualities. They need to be:

- Youth-oriented—youth are motivated intrinsically;
- Have a temporal arc of effect—the youth must become engaged over time and do whatever it takes to be successful; and
- Have their "eye on the prize"—there is a meaningful end product or outcome that results.

For example, if youth are interested in playing the piano (intrinsic motivation), they will practice over time to increase their skills (temporal arc of effect), and finally they will perform their piece at a recital or some other similar venue (prize or end product). Other youth development strategies are related to the concept of initiative.

Other key strategies underlying initiative building activities

You and other program designers interested in building initiative need to create programs that are *responsive* to youth. This means the programs are designed to *meet youths' interests*. Good program designers find out the types of activities in which youth are motivated to participate and try to understand what types of things get youth excited and engaged. As mentioned in the program/services overview chapter, you must determine important magnets, hooks and glue, as well as barriers to program participation, and design youth development programs accordingly.

It also means that programs should be designed to *address unmet needs*. For instance, youth may have anger management problems or difficulties in making friends. Programs can be designed to develop competencies, skills and assets that address these identified areas of improvement.

You also want to give youth a "say so" in how programs are structured and how activities are offered. Youth may serve as leaders, mentors, and even be co-designers of the programs. Take a moment to stop and try to see things from the *youths' perspectives*. Look at the activities, the related choices, and relevant life issues from youths' points of view. This will help determine solutions and strategies are meaningful to youth, and will allow youth to better generalize their newly learned skills to new settings and

environments. In essence, by being *youth-centered* and *youth-led*, there is a greater likelihood of promoting interpersonal and intrapersonal development and competencies.

Youth also need to be provided with *choices*. The child development literature supports the notion that when children are presented with choices, they develop decision making skills, feel like they have options, and are more often willing participants in the activity. By providing youth with choices and opportunities for leadership, programs are helping youth learn *self determination* and become *intrinsically motivated*.

Key motivators

Several key motivators also assist in fostering intrinsic motivation and involvement among youth (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2001, 2002). You can view these "motivators" as indicators of program quality, emphasizing the ones you already have in place and developing the missing ones.

Relationships with staff and adult volunteers are central motivators and connectors for youth. More specifically, Katz (1994) notes that when youth have a positive adult role model or friend in their life, they are more likely to have second chance opportunities presented to them which can help them develop more resiliency and can promote positive youth development.

Conversations with youth point to some key qualities of staff. It is important to have *staff with specific expertise in certain content areas*. For instance, staff may have expertise in wrestling or drama, or teachers may be most effective at offering academic enrichment activities because they have content expertise and understand the curriculum. Staff also should be *actively involved in all aspects of the program*, as opposed to standing on the side in supervising roles. Youth feel respected, empowered and valued as adults join with them in programs and activities. Furthermore, it is important to ensure there is *diversity within the staff*, so the youth can identify with individuals who are similar to themselves, as well as interact with others who may be different.

Program designers also should help youth develop *positive peer friendships.* Youth often attend youth development programs either to make new friends or to "hang out" with their current friends. Programs should help youth build interpersonal skills so they learn how to be a good friend and can model these skills with other youth.

Social and recreational activities also serve as important motivators, initially recruiting and later retaining youths' involvement. These activity settings also can be great mediums for teaching interpersonal skills. For instance, important life skills such as cooperation and teamwork may be reinforced during ultimate frisbee activities, basketball or in various tag games.

Learning new skills and competencies also are important motivators for youth involvement. In addition, youth are motivated to attend often because they are provided with opportunities to be involved in activities to which they otherwise would not have been exposed. Exposure is one component of learning, and the more positive events to which you can expose the youth, the better.

Remember to examine the program/services overview chapter for more highlights related to successful recruitment, retention and engagement.

Addressing barriers in youth development

In designing and implementing youth development programs, there are always barriers that must be overcome. The following section highlights specific barriers and also provides minimizing strategies, solutions or “barrier busters" in order to help you overcome these challenges.

Many barriers in youth development center on a common *mindset* that exists within the field. This mindset involves several interrelated *tensions* (Lawson, Anderson-Butcher, & Barkdull, 2002; Anderson-Butcher, Midle, Hansford, Fallara, & Grotevant, 2004), including but not limited to the following:

1. **Quantity versus quality**: Do we want to serve more youth with fewer programs or serve less youth with more quality programming?

2. **Safe haven versus comprehensive youth development**: Are we mostly concerned with keeping youth supervised and safe or do we truly desire to develop important skills, assets and competencies among participants?

3. **Unstructured versus structured**: Do we have a loosely knit, free-play, unstructured program or a strict, predictable and structured one?

4. **Academic versus social/recreational**: Do we focus only on structured academic programming, especially academic achievement, or focus on social, recreational and enrichment?

5. **Activity-oriented versus results-oriented**: Is our intent to provide activities in which youth will engage or to provide intentional programs that are designed to create outcomes?

Barrier: Common mindset and related tensions

Individuals working within youth development will approach their work with varying degrees of these aforementioned mindsets. Too often, however, it seems youth development programs are focused on the masses, safe havens, mostly unstructured, social/recreational, and activity-oriented (e.g., Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004). Table 6.7 presents common mindset and related tension barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

Table 6.7: Common mindset and related tensions - Specific barriers and minimizing strategies

Barrier: Common mindset and related tensions	**Minimizing strategies**
• Tendency of staff to implement "activities" as opposed to focusing on creating outcomes • Programs serve as "holding pens," where the perception is that programs are successful as long as youth are busy, supervised and having fun • Programs attempt to do "everything" and do nothing really well • Programs are too academic, are truly extended school days and many youth will not come	• Provide high quality, results-oriented programs • Use logic models to link program activities to intended outcomes • Define the purpose for each program and activity (program with intention) • Focus on developing skills, competencies and assets within all programs and activities • Do not forgo quality of programming just to serve more youth • Provide a balance between activity-oriented and results-oriented programs; use social and recreational activities to recruit youth into other more outcomes-focused programs • Work with licensing agencies and resource/referral networks to support quality improvement efforts

Barrier: Recruitment and retention

Many times these mindsets and related tensions are grounded in issues around recruiting and retaining youths' involvement in programming. For instance, if programs are too structured and academic, youth simply will not attend. Conversely, if programs are too social/recreational, then outcomes will not occur. Likewise, youth often self-select into these programs. If programs are not designed to meet youths' needs and interests, they simply will not be motivated to participate. Table 6.8 presents common recruitment and retention barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

Table 6.8: Recruitment and retention - Specific barriers and minimizing strategies	
Barrier: Recruitment and retention	**Minimizing strategies**
• It is hard to attract different "types" of youth • Youth feel "required" to attend • Youth do not feel they have a say in what types of programs are offered; programs are implemented by staff "to the kids" • Youth self-select and are not "attracted" to certain types of programs • Programs use "one size fits all" approaches • Attendance is sporadic and not regular • There are many opportunities, both pro- and anti-social that compete for youths' time • Programs are not located where youth can access them	• Design program so participants have choices, "say so" and control • Plan programs and activities with participants • Use social/recreational activities to recruit youth • Develop relationships among youth, staff and peers to increase motivation for involvement • Design fun, engaging and meaningful programs • Ensure cultural sensitivity and appreciate diversity; use inclusive language • Counteract social norms and labels • Ensure there are programs that meet multiple needs • Have multiple activities arranged simultaneously so youth can choose • Individualize programs to meet identified youth needs • Provide specific programs for aggregate groups of youth with common characteristics, needs or desires (i.e., gender-specific programs; have a 4-H Club, Boy Scouts, and/or dance classes within an after-school program)

Barrier: Behavioral management problems

Another common barrier or challenge within youth development programming involves behavior management and discipline issues. Sometimes youth simply act out and are non-compliant. It truly is difficult to create positive outcomes for youth when participants are uncooperative and taking attention away from programming. Table 6.9 presents common behavioral management problem barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

Table 6.9: Behavioral management problems - Specific barriers and minimizing strategies	
Barrier: Behavioral management problems	**Minimizing strategies**
• Youth display inappropriate behaviors that take staff away from the program and attention away from other youth and the program activity • Time within the programs is not maximized • Youth have a lot of unstructured, undirected time in programs	• Anticipate problems before they arise rather than waiting for a crisis to occur • Enhance "time-on-task" or time that youth are actively engaged in a program activity (as opposed to sitting and waiting) • Use appropriate tone and inflection when talking with youth • Reduce time where youth are inactive or in unstructured activities (i.e., provide activities for youth to do when they first arrive to the program)

Table 6.9: Behavioral management problems - Specific barriers and minimizing strategies	
• Transitions between programs and activities are not well thought out • There is no consistent schedule of activities so youth do not know what is coming next and act out • Staff often focus on the negative and related consequences • Youth are bored because activities are not developmentally or skill-level appropriate • Rules are not well known and consistently reinforced • Programs do not have extra staff who can address acting out behaviors • Staff are not well trained in preventing and de-escalating problem behaviors	• Provide consistency within the program through regular schedules and activities that happen each time • Have enough equipment/supplies to enhance the number of youth engaged in the activity (i.e., 10 basketballs for 30 youth as opposed to 1:30) • Instead of having one activity for the entire group, break into several smaller groups to do the same activity (i.e., have three kickball games as opposed to one) • Prepare youth for transitions ahead of time by reminding them there is 5 minutes left • Maximize while simultaneously containing space (ie., use cones for boundaries in games; enforce that certain activities are in certain rooms and wandering is not allowed) • Provide at least five positive comments for every one negative comment • Use precision commands that direct youth to choose the "right" behaviors • Provide age-appropriate, individualized and engaging programs • Use and reinforce school rules or guidelines to provide youth with consistent messages

Barrier: Funding

It might be easier for you and other youth development workers to implement quality, results-oriented programs, attract and retain all youth, and prevent behavior problems if there were endless financial and human resources available to programs and staff. *Funding* is a very real challenge that often times drives many of our program planning decisions. Table 6.10 presents common funding barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

Table 6.10: Funding – Specific barriers and minimizing strategies	
Barrier: Funding	**Minimizing strategies**
• Programs are under-funded • Programs and organizations have their funding cut during hard economical times • Funding streams for specific types of programs are non-existent • It is hard to find funding for administrative overhead, but administration is essential to the implementation of quality and	• Ensure the services you are providing relate to the outcomes toward which you are working • Evaluate programs and document success stories and outcomes • Make sure you are in compliance with the requirements of your funding source • Develop strong working relationships with current and potential funders • Collaborate with other partners to maximize program opportunities (i.e., work with the school to secure low-cost

Table 6.10: Funding – Specific barriers and minimizing strategies	
accountable programs • Inadequate funding contributes to low pay and high turnover rate for staff	space) • Use volunteers to support program operations • Develop partnerships with local businesses and others who can contribute resources/supplies • Find ways to blend funding streams to support • Support, listen to and value staff • If you do not have extra money to pay staff, then develop other ways to show them they are appreciated • Encourage staff to be creative, have fun and be challenged

Remember to examine the sustainability chapter for more highlights related to funding.

While there are numerous barriers, if you follow the key design principles and strategies, you can eliminate many of these barriers from the out-set. Keep these barriers in mind when you are completing your strategic plan or organizing activities and events.

Conclusion

Clearly, youth development programs and services, including after-school programs at schools and in the community, have the potential to benefit youth, schools and families. Unfortunately, in too many schools, communities and neighborhoods this enormous potential remains untapped. When these programs' potential is untapped, the desirable outcomes identified in the previous discussion are not achieved. No one is served under these circumstances.

Thus, the key is to unleash the potential of existing youth development programs and services and to develop new ones as well. After-school programs, both school-based and school-linked, are especially important. In fact, after-school programs have the potential to enhance school improvement initiatives, while simultaneously fostering healthy youth development.

This important work requires dedicated, informed youth leaders. These leaders must know which outcomes they want and need to achieve as well as how to implement theoretically-sound, research-supported design principles and program strategies to achieve them.

These leaders also must know how to adapt their programs and services in response to the local conditions and populations needing to be served. They especially must know how to engage youth as co-designers and co-leaders. Moreover, they must know to how anticipate, identify and address common barriers to success.

This section has been designed to prepare you for such youth development leadership, enabling you to help unleash the enormous potential of youth development programs and services. It has been structured to build on the experiences and strengths you bring to this important work while at the same time emphasizing best practice principles, strategies and quality indicators of successful programs and services. It particularly explores the critical need for stronger linkages between schools and these youth development opportunities. Finally, it has identified common barriers and ways you can address them.

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