

Campaign for Children

Status Report on NYC's After-School System: Demand for Elementary, High School and Summer Programming Remains

September 2015

Executive Summary

Over the past two years, Mayor de Blasio has made the expansion of after-school programs for middle school students a signature initiative of his Administration, an investment that has the potential to address income inequality and improve educational outcomes for our City's children. Ensuring that over 100,000 middle school students have access to high-quality after-school programming enables their parents to work while their children's academic and development are enhanced.

The Campaign for Children, a coalition of over 150 advocacy organizations and providers, was proud to both advocate for the Mayor's prekindergarten and middle school after-school expansion, and to be essential partners in the implementation. The network of community-based providers opened hundreds of new quality after-school programs in New York City.

Given the success of this initiative and its implementation, the Campaign for Children sought to determine whether there is additional demand for after-school programs in New York City for elementary and high school students, and how important summer programming is as part of the after-school model.

A survey of after-school providers regarding their waitlists for elementary, middle school, and high school programs revealed several key findings that document the need for further expansion of the after-school system. **Most significantly, 88% of providers serving elementary school students reported a waitlist.**

A survey of parents of elementary and middle school students enrolled in summer camps further revealed the need to expand and preserve summer program offerings. **Over 90% of the nearly 2,500 surveyed parents reported that they rely on summer camp to be able to work or go to school, and that their children learn crucial academic skills while in summer camp. Nearly two-thirds of parents also reported that they relied on the free meals at summer camp to ensure their children are fed.**

Introduction

Recognizing the value to children, families, and communities, Mayor de Blasio made the expansion of middle school after-school programs one of the signature issues of his first term.¹ As a result of the Mayor's vision and the successful implementation efforts of his Administration and the City's community-based organizations, over 100,000 middle-school children will be served by after-school programs in the 2015-2016 school year. This is a remarkable accomplishment that will have a lifelong impact on thousands of New York City children and youth. The Campaign for Children is proud to have been an active partner and collaborator with the Mayor and his Administration in helping to make the middle school expansion a reality.

The Campaign for Children (C4C) is a coalition of over 150 advocates and non-profit providers who originally came together to stave off dramatic cuts to the early childhood education and after-school systems during the Bloomberg Administration and to ensure the next City Administration made these programs a priority. We continue to work together to ensure every New York City child has access to safe, high-quality, affordable early childhood education and after-school programs. This past year, C4C successfully advocated to maintain 17 after-school programs slated for closure and to ensure over 34,000 children did not have their summer camp programs eliminated.

The Campaign for Children conducted two surveys aimed at learning more from parents and providers about the demand for after-school programs, including summer programming. The results of these surveys most notably documented the demand for elementary school programming beyond the current capacity, and the need for summer programs among parents of elementary and middle school students, who rely on these programs to be able to work and ensure that their children are well-fed and academically and socially stimulated during the summer months.

New York City's After-School System

New York City's after-school system is administered by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). After-school programs serve elementary, middle, and high school children from 3-6 PM after school each day, as well as all day on some school holidays and throughout the summer. The City's after-school system is comprised of three main programs, COMPASS (previously referred to as Out-of-School Time, or OST), Beacon Community Centers and Cornerstone Community Centers.

COMPASS

In 2014, DYCD's Out-of-School Time (OST) program was renamed COMPASS NYC (Comprehensive After School System of NYC). SONYC (School's Out New York City) is the middle

¹ *Mayor de Blasio, Schools Chancellor Farina and DYCD Commissioner Chong Announce 271 New Providers to Expand After-school Programs in Middle Schools; Urge Youth to Apply for Summer Enrichment Programs.* June 17, 2014. <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/293-14/mayor-de-blasio-schools-chancellor-fari-a-dydc-commissioner-chong-271-new-providers-to#/0>.

school component of COMPASS and where the current Administration has focused its expansion efforts. In the first four months of FY 2015, over 98,000 children were enrolled in over 800 COMPASS programs.² This is a 69% increase over the 57,930 children enrolled in the same four months of FY2014.³

Notably, in Fiscal Year 2008, at the height of OST, 87,256 children were served; due to budget cuts, capacity was cut and enrollment dropped to 65,957 in FY13. According to DYCD, during FY 2015 COMPASS served a total of 112,600 children- 47,123 elementary; 58,745 middle school and 6,732 in high school and Option 2 (mixed grade) programs. The increased capacity and enrollment last year is largely due to the successful implementation of over 271 new SONYC (middle school) programs. The City anticipates being able to serve even more children in the 2015-2016 school year with the second wave of the middle school expansion.

In addition to the expansion in the number of children served in middle school programs, the Mayor's SONYC initiative also included an enhancement to existing programs. Middle school programs now receive \$3,000 per student for the school year plus \$600 per student for the summer. The enhanced rate required programs to hire an educational specialist to strengthen the academic portion of the programming.

Notably, elementary school programs are still generally funded at \$3,200 per student, including the summer, and some elementary programs (based on when they were awarded a contract) are funded at \$2,800 per student. Prior to the expansion, due to the age and ratios needed for younger children, the elementary rate was higher than the middle school rate.

Beacon Community Centers

Another category of City-funded after-school program is Beacon Community Centers. Beacons use schools as a hub for community-based programs such as health and mental health services, ESL classes and after-school programs. Approximately 800-1,200 youth are served in each of the City's 80 Beacon Community Center after-school programs. Currently 66 of the 80 programs are City-funded, while 14 are federally funded. With each city-funded Beacon Community Center being funded at approximately \$346,000 per year, there has been no increase in the funding levels for the Beacons since they were created in 1991.⁴

Cornerstone Community Centers

Cornerstone Community Centers are after-school programs located within NYCHA facilities. The de Blasio Administration has increased both the number of Cornerstone Community Centers and the scope of services provided by Cornerstones. In FY 2014 there was an expansion from 25 programs to 70 programs; in the 2015-2016 school year, there will be 94 Cornerstone Community Centers. In the first quarter of fiscal year 2015, Cornerstone Community Programs served 16,782 children, up from 13,278 in the same quarter in fiscal year 2014 and more than

² MMR Prelim FY15 DYCD, at 186. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/pmmr2015/dycd.pdf>.

³ Id.

⁴ Federally funded Beacon Community Centers are funded at approximately \$408,000.

the 13,278 children served by Cornerstones during the entire fiscal year 2013.⁵ Cornerstone Community Centers are funded at individualized rates. Providers have indicated that these rates not sufficient to meet many of the needs that are related to being housed in NYCHA facilities, including security costs, custodian costs, and rat/insect abatement. In addition, based on facility size and layout, programs have varying numbers of classrooms with varying staff needs.

After-school Programs, Including Summer Programming, are Critical for Children and Families

As recognized by the de Blasio Administration when making middle school after-school programming a top priority, after-school programs enable parents to work while also providing children with a safe environment in which to continue to grow academically, socially, and developmentally.

As the Mayor said when he was urging the State to ensure New York City had the resources needed to expand middle school after-school, "We are putting forward programs that will be game-changers for kids. I've seen with my own children what finding a passion in art or science can mean to someone at that age. This is a critical investment that will transform our schools—but it is also a powerful policy to keep kids out of trouble and fight the influences that can take them off the right path. We need the power to make this investment now."

After-school programs serve children and youth at the times when they are at greatest risk for engaging in delinquent behavior: between the hours of 3 and 6 PM⁶, and during the summer months. In addition, in line with the Mayor's Vision Zero Initiative, they also keep children safe by getting them off the street at the time of day when data shows they are most at-risk of being fatally killed by a motor vehicle.⁷ Similarly, summer time in New York City is historically a more violent time of year. The de Blasio Administration has recognized how critical it is to engage youth in pro-social activities during this time of year by creating the "Summer All Out" initiative, which includes keeping NYCHA Cornerstone Community Centers open until 11 PM and on the weekends.

Every \$1 invested in youth services saves \$3 for participants and taxpayers.⁸ High quality after-school programs improve children's development, academic performance, and social-emotional well-being. They allow children and youth to engage in academic and developmental enrichment activities in a safe environment. As has been well documented, summer learning loss is real and disproportionately effects low-income children.⁹ Furthermore after-school and

⁵ Id.

⁶ Fight Crime Invest in Kids. *New York City's Out-of-School Time Choice: The Prime Time for Crime or Youth Enrichment and Achievement*, 2008. Available online: <http://www.fightcrime.org/reports/NYCAS2pager.pdf>.

⁷ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *Vital Signs: Understanding Child Injury Deaths 2003-2012*. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2015cfrat-report.pdf>

⁸ Lattimore, C. B., Mihalic, S. F., Grotspeter, J. K., & Taggart, R. (1998); "The Quantum Opportunities Program"; In D.S. Elliot (Series Ed.), *Blueprints for violence prevention: Book four*; Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

⁹ Rand Corporation. *Making Summer Count: How Summer Learning Programs Can Boost Children's Learning*. 2014. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1120.pdf; National Summer Learning Association. <http://www.summerlearning.org/>.

summer programs allow parents to work and support their families. Thus, these programs, which help close the achievement gap, are a win for children, families, communities, and taxpayers.

Demand for Elementary and High School After-school Programs

Given the Administration's commitment to significantly expanding middle school after-school programs, the Campaign for Children sought to learn whether this expansion addressed the demand for middle school programming and whether there was an unmet need for after-school programs for elementary and high school students.

Methodology

C4C administered an online survey from February 13-March 14, 2015, in which we asked after-school providers how many children in each age range they were currently serving; whether they had a waitlist for elementary, middle or high school; and, if they had a waitlist, how many children were on it.¹⁰

It is important to note the following about the data we collected:

- The data precedes the second wave of middle-school expansion. Presumably much of the need we documented for middle school students will be addressed this coming school year.
- It is possible that a child on a waitlist with a given provider could be on more than one agency's waitlist and/or served at another program while remaining on the initial program's waitlist (and thus is not really a child in need of a slot).
- Many of the after-school providers offer after-school programs at schools and thus would only have a waitlist for the children served in the school. For example, if they were providing after-school at a stand-alone elementary, they would not have access to middle or high school students to put on a waitlist.

The Sample

- 133 total programs from 103 sites responded to the survey during the one month period the survey was administered.
- 83 of the programs in the sample served elementary school students.
- 65 of the programs in the sample served middle school students.
- 32 of the programs in the sample served high school students.
- The sample represented the diversity of after-school program types:
 - 53 COMPASS Elementary Programs
 - 37 SONYC Middle School Programs
 - 23 Beacon Community Center Programs
 - 9 COMPASS High School Programs
 - 8 Cornerstone Community Center Programs
 - 2 COMPASS Elementary programs funded by the Department of Education (as of the FY16 budget, these are now funded and administered by DYCD)

¹⁰ A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

- 1 unknown to C4C

The Findings

The survey of providers clearly documents that there is a high unmet need for after-school programs that serve elementary school students, as well as a need to expand the capacity to serve high school students. The survey also shows that the first wave of the middle school expansion helped to address the middle school after-school need.

Elementary Demand

Of the 83 programs in the sample that served elementary school children, 88% (73 programs) said that they had a waitlist for their elementary school program. In addition, 5 of the programs that did not serve elementary school children at their site said they had a demand to serve elementary school students at their site.

The programs reported waitlists ranging from 2% of their capacity to 357% of their capacity (from 5 children to 357 children.) The average waitlist was 37.6% of their total capacity. It is important to note that several of the programs explained that they stop keeping a waitlist when they reach a certain number (e.g. 30, 50) because they believe there is no point in doing so, as there is no way that that many children would be able to get off of the list and into the program.

Middle School Demand

The impact of the middle school expansion could be seen in the data regarding waitlists for middle school students. Of the 65 programs in the sample that served middle school students, 17% (11 programs) said that they had a waitlist for their middle school program. In addition, 6 of the sites that did not serve middle school students said that they had a demand for middle school programming at their site. The programs reported waitlists ranging from 6% of their total capacity to 158%, with an average of 37%.

High School Demand

Of the 32 programs in the sample serving high school students, 12.5% (5 programs) said that they had a waitlist for high school after-school programs. In addition, 11 of the programs not serving high school students said there was a demand for a high school program at their site. The waitlist ranged from 12%-29% of the total program capacity, with an average of 19.6%. Note that a stand-alone high school without an after-school program, but with a need for one, would not have been in our sample since there would be no provider to respond.

Provider Voices

When asked if there was anything else that providers wanted to tell the Campaign for Children about their after-school program, the City's middle school after-school expansion, or the need for after-school programs in their community, the providers had some insightful thoughts including:

- “There is a high demand for after-school programs for elementary school children in the community. There are too many schools that don't offer after-school programs, so many

children are being turned away and added to waitlists that they will never be called for. My program has a very long waiting list and I have very high attendance rates. I have not moved one student off the list since September.”

- “We have 30 on the waiting list but demand far exceeds that number. We stopped accepting children onto the list after 30 since there is no chance more than 30 could ever be accepted within this school year since very few children withdraw.”
- “More funding opportunities for high school students would be amazing.”
- “We served over 150 participants last summer; our community really needs services for the summer.”
- “We have been receiving a lot of funding for middle school after-school programming but elementary school kids are being left by the wayside in my community.”
- “There is far greater need for elementary school slots than our waiting list reflects. Since it is highly unlikely that spots will become available and families know this, many do not bother to apply once the program is full.”
- “While we don’t serve high school students in our after school program, we do work closely with programs within the agency that serve high school students. Additional resources/support would be helpful as we continue to collaborate with inter-agency programs.”
- “We get calls every day from parents who don’t fill out the application forms for our site because they are looking for immediate solutions. The moment they hear there is a waitlist [for elementary] many of them go right onto calling the next program to see if there’s a possibility their child can get in right away. It’s tough for parents, feeling like they have to make choices between working and making sure their children are cared for. These parents NEED their children to be in supervised activities that build them up socially, physically and intellectually until they’re able to be picked up by a sibling or guardian. For many, that isn’t until after 5 PM.”

Summer Learning and Summer Camp are Critical for Children and Families

Summer programming is a critical component of the after-school system. From its inception, the original OST model included summer programming. The same parents who need their children in a safe and developmentally appropriate environment from 3-6 PM from September through June also need their children in this type of environment during the months of July and August.

This past summer, there was the possibility that 34,000 middle school students would lose access to summer camp. Thankfully, the de Blasio Administration ultimately decided to fund these slots for summer 2015. While parents, advocates, and Council Members are extremely grateful for this decision, they remain concerned that the Administration is not planning to maintain these slots for the summer of 2016.

Methodology

To learn more about the children and families participating in summer camp programming, the Campaign for Children conducted a parent survey during the months of July and August 2015.

The parent survey was administered in English, Spanish, and Mandarin. Surveys were then returned either by mail, email, or fax.

The survey asked parents the following questions¹¹:

- The Borough of their summer camp
- What grade their child(ren) would be entering in September (to determine whether it was an elementary or middle school program)
- Whether the parent relied on summer camp to be able to work or go to school
- What the parent would do if there was no summer camp for their child(ren). (This was a multiple choice question with the following choices: Quit my job to stay home with my child; leave child home alone; leave child with a relative; find another summer camp; other)
- Whether they rely on summer camp for meals (breakfast and/or lunch) for their child(ren)
- When their child continues to learn at summer camp while school is out.

The Sample

Total= 2,483 Parent Surveys

- **Total Elementary= 1,533**
 - Bronx Elementary Total: 268
 - Brooklyn Elementary Total: 453
 - Manhattan Elementary Total: 279
 - Queens Elementary Total: 428
 - SI Elementary total: 48
- **Total Middle= 950**
 - Bronx middle total: 126
 - BK middle total: 172
 - Manhattan Middle total: 183
 - Queens Middle total: 251
 - SI Middle total: 218

Findings

The responses of the nearly 2,500 parents who completed this survey made it extremely clear how vital summer programs are to their ability to work while ensuring that their children are not only in a safe place, but also being well nourished and engaging in a variety of activities that enable them to continue learning.

Parents Rely on Summer Camp to Be Able to Work or Go to School

Notably, **91% of surveyed parents responded that they rely on summer camp to be able to work or go to school.** While the percentage was higher for elementary school students it was also high for middle school: 94% of elementary school parents and 86% of middle school parents responded that they rely on summer camp to be able to work or go to school.

¹¹ A copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix 2.

Some of the parents commented on how important the summer camp program is for their ability to work and support their families:

- “I am a single mother. I have to work. I need the camp to enable me to go to work.”
- “I need them to be in a safe place while I work. I do not have anyone I trust to care for them while I work so I would be unemployed without summer camp. They also learn while having fun.”
- “Summer camp is important to me because I can go to work with the peace of mind that I can leave my child in good hands. It is important to my child because she stays active physically and mentally.”

What Parents Would do Without Summer Camp

Parent responses regarding what they would do if there was no summer camp for their children showed how challenging this predicament would be, given that so many of the families are low-income and rely on these programs to be able to work. In response to this question parents, noted the following:

- I would need to “figure it out one day at a time.”
- “With me and my wife making \$8 an hour we can’t afford outside help and by leaving them alone it is putting them in danger of me losing my family. But I have to work, there is no two ways about it. Help me please.”
- “I rely heavily on this to be able to work.”
- One parent of 4th and 7th graders left comments next to each answer choice before selecting other:
 - Quit my job: “Could not afford to”
 - Leave children home alone: “Not responsible enough”
 - Leave children with a relative: “I have no one that could do it”
 - Find another summer camp: “Too expensive”
 - [X] Other: Explain: “Not sure what I could do.”

The table below demonstrates the conflict that parents would face if there was no summer camp, the number of parents who would need to leave their jobs, and the number of children who would be staying home either with a relative or on their own. **Notably, 21% of the parents or elementary school students reported that they would need to quit their jobs and 23% of parents of middle school students reported that they would leave their children home alone.** In addition, many of the parents were determined to find another summer camp program for their child; while this would likely be the best case scenario, there is no certainty that one would be available.

What would you do if there was no summer camp for your child(ren)?

	Total (Elementary and Middle Combined) N=2,483	Elementary N=1,533	Middle N=950
Quit Job	18%	21%	13%
Leave child home alone	12%	5%	23%
Leave child with a relative	28%	28%	27%
Find another summer camp	34%	36%	30%
Other (Don't know; babysitter; send child out of country/away; change work hours; hire babysitter; bring child to work)	8%	9%	8%

Summer Meals

Summer camps are often summer meals sites in New York City. Any child under age 18 is able to have free summer meals without having to sign up or provide any identification. Historically, the summer meals take-up rate has been very low, but summer camps provide a convenient location for children to access free, healthy summer meals.

The survey asked parents if they rely on summer camp for meals for their children, and nearly two-thirds of the parents responded affirmatively. Specifically, 65% of the elementary school parents and 63% of the middle school parents (64% combined) responded yes.

Summer Learning

Summer camps provide New York City's children with an opportunity to combat summer learning loss. The camps throughout the City provide children with a variety of engaging activities that children are often unable to participate in during the school year, including arts, athletics, civic engagement, field trips, STEM, swimming, and opportunities for social interaction with their peers.

The surveyed parents understood the value of summer camp to their child's healthy growth and development, both when they answered this question and in the comments section of the survey. **90% of surveyed parents responded "Yes," their child continues to learn in summer camp while school is out.** Just 2% of the parents responded "no," with the remaining 8% responding that they were not sure.

Parent comments included:

- “It is important for me, my child and my family because he will have an advantage come September. Because while other kids are watching tv and playing video games, my child is learning and that means so much to us.”
- “The [Program Name] SONYC Summer Camp is important to my family because it gives my children the opportunity to look forward to a rewarding educational experience each day and helps to keep them involved in positive activities. Because of the [Program Name] SONYC Summer Camp I am able to go to work each day knowing my children are in a safe environment, being fed healthy meals and enjoying the activities that are offered. Summer camps keep children off the streets are very important to the families that rely upon these services.”
- “As a mother of three children of all different ages, I don’t know what I would do without [Program Name] summer camp to keep them active, fed, healthy and continuing to learn while not in school. I simply couldn’t afford it with 3 kids. The children looked forward to summer camp to see their friends, play sports and get their summer homework done. Please don’t take this opportunity away!”
- “It helps our son learn but also to socialize with other children.”

Parent Voices

Some of the parents left additional comments that sum up how important summer camp is to their family:

- “My child’s camp experience is important to us because she is able to make new friends, enjoy new experiences, meet new people, but most of all she can be a kid and enjoy her vacation.”
- “Besides needing it in order for us to work, it is important for her to socially interact with children her age. My child is the only child.”
- “My children love that summer camp is lots of fun and the teachers are very good. It is important for kids to not be on the streets or somewhere dangerous. It is very safe. Thank you very much!”

Conclusion

Taken together, these survey findings document that Mayor de Blasio was right to prioritize strengthening and expanding the after-school system as one of the first items of business in his Administration. The benefits to the children who can now attend middle school after-school programs and who were able to go to summer camp this year – as well as to their parents – are tremendous.

The Campaign for Children believes that now is the time to build upon the successful middle-school expansion by taking the additional steps necessary to strengthen and expand NYC’s after-school system. We urge the Administration to build upon their success by taking the following actions:

- Expand the capacity of the elementary school after-school system so that every elementary school child can have access to an after-school program.

- Develop a new model and expand capacity for high school after-school programs.
- Ensure that all after-school programs include summer programming as part of the model.
- Increase the rates for elementary after-school programs to ensure high quality programming, which includes an educational coordinator. Consider developing two models for elementary school children, one for younger children ages 4-7 and one for older children ages 8-12 and ensure per-child rates match the level of care needed.
- Increase the rates for Beacon Community Center and Cornerstone Community Center after-school programs to ensure high-quality care.