Journal Of Youth And Community Development (JYCD)

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Focus and Scope

Journal Of Youth And Community Development (JYCD) fills a unique and critical niche in the youth development arena: it is a place designed for bridging applied research and practice. In other words, it addresses issues and features studies and practice efforts that have implications for those workingwith and on behalf of young people in youth-serving organizations and the intermediaries that support them.

To that end, we have refined our section policies below. We seek Feature Articles that address important topics, issues and trends, Research & Evaluation Studies that share new findings from approaches to applied research and evaluation, and Program & Practice Articles that present and discuss programs, practices, trainings and policies designed to inform and improve practice. These sections are peer-reviewed, and authors need to specify how their articles bridge youth development research and practice.

Our Resource Reviews share valuable resources and keep JYD readers abreast of important developments in the field. Our invited Thought Leader Commentaries provide cutting-edge thinking on major issues by leading figures in the field. Our Forum section stimulates discussion and debate about important topics and emerging issues in the field of youth development. These sections are editor-reviewed though suggestions for resources to review and thought leaders to invite are most welcome.

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Contents

Journal of Youth Development's Stance on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access

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ABSTRACT

The Journal of Youth Development is committed to furthering diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in scholarly publishing. This Editor's Note provides an overview of our ongoing resolve and collaborative process to review and shape policies and procedures to enhance our contributions to recognizing, valuing, and promoting racial equity, inclusion, and social justice.

Key words: diversity, equity, inclusion, access, anti-racism, bias, publishing.

Introduction

The Journal of Youth Development (JYD) is an applied journal, rooted in bridging development research and practice. At our core is our commitment to valuing the diversity of youth, youth workers, and researchers that are dedicated to inclusive, equitable youth development approaches and positive outcomes for all youth. However, we recognize that the field of youth development lacks diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in far too many key areas. JYD is committed to making a difference and we have begun developing strategies to make our publication submission and selection processes inclusive, accessible, and equitable.

Context

We live in a time filled with political turmoil, health and economic uncertainty, shifts in roles and responsibilities of families, schools, and programs, and increasing racial unrest. As a result, the United States has begun to reflect on how to use these moments—specifically the death of George Floyd—to address inequities due to historical racism and various forms of ongoing bias and discrimination. As a society, many have come to realize that racism and other structural barriers to opportunity have created underlying social, economic, and health conditions that have left youth of color, especially Black youth, facing disproportionate and unfair risks and, in some cases, death. These current realities reflect centuries of inequity due to discrimination and racism inflicted upon Black communities and actively promoted and too easily tolerated by dominant White society. What does this all mean for the field of youth development, and for this journal that serves to advance it?

On May 25, 2020, 17-year-old Darnella Frazier—a Black girl on her way to the corner store to buy snacks with her 9-year-old cousin—courageously filmed the murder of George Floyd by aWhite police officer. She was given an honorary Pulitzer Prize for her video that helped disprove the police narrative, create momentum for accountability, facilitate the trial's historic outcome, and catalyze a global racial justice movement. Young people have been at the forefront social justice throughout history. Could this historic moment be a spark to ignite our collective response as youth development advocates?

Still reeling a week later, the JYD Publications Committee met. In those early days, we were all inundated with perfunctory thoughts-and-prayers statements from every possible organization. There was strong support from the almost all White committee for JYD to take a stand. As JYD's editor, I firmly felt that instead of a statement of support, JYD should offer a commentary to speak squarely to racial injustice and youth work with a concrete call to action for those in the field and for the journal itself.

We must leverage this critical moment to center the lives and value of all young people and to boldly challenge the status quo in how we understand and support them. The power of racism as a structuring ideology within society—within youth work, within publishing—lies in its ability to reimagine itself in new moments and contexts. This editorial shares our ongoing resolve and collaborative process to both reflect and pursue bold action beyond rhetoric and performance as we stand in solidarity with the communities we study and serve to ensure that all young people thrive.

Call to Action

Corliss Outley and Dale Blyth (2020) put forth a commentary that outlines the need to promote a strong and sustained commitment to antiracist approaches to research, practice, and policy in the youth development field. "As a journal and a representative of our larger field, we must condemn racism in all of its many forms and acknowledge the impact that historic, deeply rooted, and systemic inequities have on our youth, our youth workers, and our scholars as well as our institutions and organizations (Outley & Blyth, 2020, p. 2). Specifically, they call upon our fields' journals to strengthen our antiracism efforts by (a) diversifying our editorial boards, (b) ensuring fairness in all journal processes, and (c) highlighting content that documents the impact of racism on youth development.

Equity Task Force

With the commentary as our lighthouse, JYD's publications committee assembled an Equity Task Force to review and shape JYD policies and procedures to enhance our contributions to promoting racial equity, inclusion, and social justice. The task force was composed of JYD editors, publications committee members, reviewers, authors, and those committed to social justice and antiracism

(see Appendix). We intentionally included members who are from historically excluded groups, and in different career stages and roles. We are grateful for their time, perspectives, and insights.

The task force identified four priority areas and created subgroups to discover issues and develop recommendations (some from Roberts et al., 2020) for JYD:

1. **Mission:** the ways our mission and goals might be adjusted to best reflect our values and the importance of equity in our field.

2. **Leadership:** the diversity of our leadership groups and how people are selected to ensure inclusivity.

3. **Expectations:** the ways we seek manuscripts and set clear expectations for how authors address equity, race, and diversity.

4. **Operations:** the criteria and ways we review and edit submissions.

The full task force and each subgroup met from January through May 2021 and submitted recommendations to the publications committee in June 2021.

Proclaiming Our Stance

The publications committee and editorial team co-created and publicly proclaim the following vision, mission, and values for this journal:

We, the journal editors and members of the JYD Publications Committee, have worked together to create a new vision and mission statement and a set of values and recommendations to more fully reflect the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and an anti-racist approach to researching, understanding, publishing, and practicing quality youth development. These efforts are not intended to narrow the types of manuscripts we seek but rather to ensure that all perspectives are welcome, reviewed appropriately, and published in ways that advance the field, enhance bridging between research and practice, encourage diverse voices, and ensure equity for all youth, their families, and their communities.

Our vision is a world in which all youth and communities are authentically represented in youth development scholarship and practice, and in which youth development scholarship contributes to repairing historical and current inequities.

Our mission is to bridge research and practice by cultivating and publishing youth development scholarship with and for youth, practitioners, and researchers in pursuit of an equitable and just society in which all young people can thrive.

We value

• the dignity, humanity, and value of every young person

• strengths-based approaches that lift up assets of individuals and communities

• human rights and equitable opportunities for all through the promotion of antiracist and social justice approaches, including racial, gender, and economic justice

• diverse scientific and systematic approaches to knowing and making meaning

• wisdom and knowledge gained through practice and experience

• critical understanding of historical and current intersecting systems of oppression

• different types of scholarship, including the scholarship of

o discovery

o integration including synthesis across disciplinary perspectives

o application and engagement

o teaching and learning processes

working in partnership with and on behalf of practitioners and researchers and the diverse youth and families they serve and study

• partnership approaches that equitably involve practitioners, researchers, youth, families, and cultural perspectives

• expanding the authentic understanding of youth and their contexts as part of youth development scholarship

• constructive and critical discourse across diverse perspectives in order to enhance and advance youth development approaches, programs, and theory

• open access for all authors and all users

Charting Our Course

Efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and access and to address disparities are underway at all leadership levels. We have solicited a systemic review of past JYD articles from a diversity lens, and we aim to update our guidance for authors, examine our peerreview processes for potential bias, and track progress on diversity goals. The task force relied heavily on the strategies put forth by Buchanan et al. (in press), and each subcommittee offered the following recommendations.

Leadership

Recommendations and strategies for leadership on equity focus on four levels: publications committee, editor, section editors, and reviewers:

• We have established a standing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access (DEIA)

Committee to oversee JYD's commitments to build a more diverse and inclusive publications committee, track and report DEIA data, and establish onboarding processes with DEI guidance.

• Our editor-in-chief is to take a position on DEIA through editorials (like this one) and other channels, ensure accountability of DEIA progress, and represent the journal commitment to DEIA with its co-sponsoring associations.

• At the section editor level, the aim is to produce a briefing document on unconscious bias in the review process, solicit submissions by members of under-represented groups, prioritize or reserve space for manuscripts that focus on DEIA efforts, encourage authors to cite those from under-represented groups, and develop an accountability system to examine the diversity of reviewers.

• At the reviewer level, we want to explore alternative strategies like panel or group reviewing as well as incentives and recognition for reviewers. We want to expand the reviewer pool through mentoring junior reviewers, recruiting a more diverse reviewer pool, and training practitioner reviewers.

Expectations and Operations

We were pleased to discover and will draw upon the Recommendations and Diversity Accountability Index (Buchanan et al., in press) to ensure equity in how research is conducted, reported, reviewed, and disseminated. For example, we will develop review criteria to incentivize and assess diversity of samples. Articles should report and justify the diversity of their sample, make clear the extent to which findings generalize across populations, and make transparent how author identities relate to the topic and/or participants. Adding this expectation does not mean that each submission must have a diverse sample, but rather that the authors need to acknowledge and be explicit about any limitations

Expanding Our Perspectives

We cannot do this work without you, our readers, reviewers and contributing authors. We encourage you to read and share our articles. For example, in this issue alone I would highlight "Silence is Not an Option: Oral History of the Study of Race in Youth Development Through the Words of Esteemed Black Scholars" (Harris & Outley), "Sociopolitical Participation Among Marginalized Youth: Do Political Identification and Ideology Matter?" (Marchand), "The Complexities of Student Engagement for Racially Minoritized Youth in an After-School Program"(Sjogren & Melton), "Increasing Latinx Youth Engagement Across Different Types of After School Organizations" (Moncloa et al.), and "Examining the Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions of 4-H Professionals Related to LGBTQ+ Youth" (Gonzalez).

Recent publications address indigenous identity (Farella et al., 2021), LGBTQ+ inclusion (Randet al., 2021), critical consciousness (Gonzalez et al., 2020), Black family engagement (Case, 2020), the Thrive model though an equity lens (Fields, 2020), Latinx adolescents' peer ethnic discrimination

(Ma et al., 2020) countering fascism (Arbeit et al., 2020), Black families' reactions to socialization interventions (Anderson et al., 2020) and leading with youth of color (Clemons, 2020).

Next, we invite you to work with us as we explore and enhance the peer-review process. We want to grow our reviewer pool to reflect the diversity of the field. Enroll as a reviewer and indicate your interest areas. As the online platform is upgraded, we will be working to strengthen how reviewers can share their background and expertise to be best matched with manuscripts. Then as a reviewer, ask difficult questions, offer concrete and constructive feedback, and challenge authors to discuss generalizability, implications, and limitations.

Finally, as contributing authors, we ask you to trust us with your manuscripts and help us address diversity concerns. For example, report and justify the diversity of your sample, make clear the extent to which your findings generalize across populations, make transparent how author identities relate to the topic and/or participants, and suggest potential reviewers with your submission to help us diversify our reviewer pool.

We are determined to meet this moment and make JYD's publication submission and selection processes inclusive, accessible, and equitable.

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Creating Opportunities for Young People: Statewide After-School Networks

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A B S T R A C T

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress made a once-in-a-generation investment in after school and summer learning programs with the potential to provide supports and opportunities for children and youth across America. At the same time, after 2 decades of development, networks in all 50 states were poised to advise and support the investment in innovative quality programs. This thought leader piece explores impact of the statewide after-school networks, funded in part by the Charles Stewart Mott foundation, and how they increase access for millions of children and youth in quality after school and summer learning programs. The piece makes the case for increased recognition of the role of statewide after-school networks and increased collaboration between network leaders and researchers interested in positive youth development

Key words: networks, after-school, policy, funding, innovation

Introduction

In March 2021, the United States Congress passed the American Rescue Plan with an unprecedented $8.45 billion in funding allocated specifically for after-school and summer learning programs, a nearly unheard-of commitment to supporting learning beyond the formal school day. It was estimated that those funds could create and expand learning opportunities for nine million more young people, effectively doubling the number of youth benefitting from the academic, social, emotional, and health supports that these programs provide. From the White House to state houses in all 50 states, it was acknowledged that after-school programs are ready to help kids recover in a historic time when young people need more supports than ever before.

I would say honestly, if it weren't for my after-school program, I would not be the person I am today. Definitely it is my second home, it is where I feel accepted and loved. Especially during this time of COVID my program was still there and they were still checking up on me, making sure that I was okay during such a time. — Angie Mejia, Afterschool Ambassador (Collaborative Communications, June 16, 2021)

Poised to inform, advise, manage, and innovate with the new funding are the statewide after school networks. Established in every state—with funding in part from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation—these networks are cross-sector statewide coalitions of partners from education, business, state government, philanthropy, law enforcement, health, and nonprofits working with a common vision and coordinated strategy to advance quality after-school and summer learning programs. For more than 20 years in some states, these networks have been building momentum and support for after-school programs. With data, research, stories, and champions, the networks make the case for the need and potential of after-school and summer learning programs.

Now in an extraordinary era of growth, networks are informing and coordinating the systems and strategies that ensure the investment is well-managed, focusing on quality and sustainability. In this commentary we share examples of where the networks are leading meaningful change with impact. While not exhaustive, these examples exemplify the needed creativity, resourcefulness, and coordination that networks bring to youth development broadly, and how they are a necessary cornerstone for field-building work. We hope the commentary will bring increased partnerships with the networks and open the door for a research agenda demonstrating how networks amplify impact of programs.

Remarkable Network Impact

The statewide after-school networks formed and developed over 2 decades in parallel with a growing body of research on social impact networks. Researchers might recognize these efforts as "generative social-impact networks" (Plastrik et al., 2014) for their sophisticated approach of presenting after-school programs as part of nearly any solution needed in a community, from providing more literacy supports to building workforce skills to reducing risky behaviors.More recently researchers have noted that networks grow in response to complex problems and how they uniquely take a systems approach in aligning resources (Shumate & Cooper, 2021) and, in out-of-school time, by applying the science of learning and development (Boyd-Brown et al., 2022). In Networks for Social Impact (2021), Shumate and Cooper urge us to look for impact from network activity that is "above and beyond what would have happened anyway" (p.44) and that includes both what can be directly attributed to the network and that to which the network contributes.

In states large and small, we see measurable impact of more and better opportunities for young people that may be attributed to network activity. Linking the network impact to the body of definitive research on the impact of after-school programs on youth outcomes would contribute to a compelling examination of how networks amplify and scale program impact. In the meantime, we offer two

examples of how networks are changing the game at a systems level to benefit more programs and more young people.

Vermont: Call for Universal After-School and Summer Opportunities

In Vermont, more than 26,000 youth are waiting for an available program. This growing need, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has had policymakers in Vermont concerned for the well-being of children, youth, and families. Vermont Afterschool—the statewide after-school network—has worked for decades to educate policymakers about both the crisis and the opportunity to support young people with after-school programs.

In 2020, Governor Phil Scott announced his goal to offer universal after-school across the state—meaning after-school and summer programs would be accessible and affordable for all families and youth who want to enroll, particularly those who have low incomes and/or live in rural locations. Now Vermont Afterschool is bringing together partners to build a sustainable, fully funded universal after-school and summer system by 2025. To get there, Vermont Afterschool is taking a multi-year approach, using current funding sources as a bridge. They have identified six keys to success: commitment, collaboration, coordination, improving program quality and data systems, reaching youth and families, and sustainable funding. Once this vision is realized, Vermont will be the first state in the country to offer such a model to children, youth, and families.

California: Whole Child Health and Wellness Collaborative

With more than six million students, California has immense scale and bold solutions. More than a billion dollars have been invested in after-school programs, known there as expanded learning programs. Approximately 50% of schools provide publicly funded expanded learning programs, prioritizing the state's most vulnerable students, with these programs operating at over 80% of California's low-income elementary and middle schools.

With a growing system of supports, the California AfterSchool Network (CAN) took the vision one step further. They intentionally brought together youth allies from multiple sectors and communities with the intent to advance expanded learning programs as partners in creating hubs at schools and other community sites to promote whole child, whole family, and whole community health and wellbeing. With hundreds of cross-sector partners from mental health, social services, substance use prevention/intervention/ treatment, education, expanded learning, and child and family advocacy, CAN formed the Whole Child Health and Wellness Collaborative. In 2021 they released a Statement of Strategic Direction Towards Equity-

Whole Child Health and Wellness outlining a vision where every child is well known, well cared for, and well prepared to thrive. (California AfterSchool Network, 2021) The statement also includes "shared equity strategies" that can be implemented from the state to the site-level through cross-sector partnership with expanded learning programs to meet critical needs and create a new future free of the deeply entrenched inequities that remain embedded in educational and health systems.

Follow the Money: Networks and the American Rescue Plan (ARP)

An ideal alignment happened in 2021: Historic investments flowing through states specifically for after-school and summer programs and networks were positioned as experts and resources able to connect state departments of education with programs throughout their states. Many networks played formal and informal roles in helping policymakers understand the opportunity through briefings, town hall meetings, and youth summits, providing data and stories from the field and more.

The funding flowed quickly, and in many states, networks offered the expertise and capacity to ensure state grant competitions were informed, fair, and well-managed, including

• The Arkansas Out-of-School Network and Arkansas State University partnered with the Arkansas Department of Education to administer the state's $25 million set-aside for after-school and summer programs. The plan is aligned with the Arkansas Positive Youth Development Grant Program Act (166).

• The Connecticut After School Network was integral to the design, development, and implementation of the Summer Expansion Grant Program in 2021, funded by ARP/ESSER (elementary and secondary school emergency relief) dollars, which provided $8,652,870 in funding to 235 grantees, serving over 96,000 students statewide.

• The Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network informed the allocation of over $95 million of ARP funds to support community-based out-of-school time programs and school-age childcare. The network worked alongside three state agencies from ideation to implementation and served as the primary thought-leader on all initiatives creating a new public–private model.

• Ignite Afterschool—the statewide network of Minnesota—was tapped by the Minnesota Department of Education to administer $13.2 million in ESSER III funds to culturally specific community-based organizations.

• Beyond School Bells—the statewide after-school network of Nebraska— is working with the state Department of Health and Human Services to administer $4.5 million in Child Care CARES1 Act funds and partnering with the Nebraska Department of Education to help support their ESSER III roll out.

• The Utah Afterschool Network coordinated with the state department of education to provide $20 million of ARPA funds to after-school and summer providers.

• In every state, the networks played a key role in informing the field about policy and funding opportunities. All networks share regular communications via newsletters and social media, and many networks host regular forums to engage and educate both program leaders and policymakers.

Leading Innovation: Quality Systems and Partnerships

Complex problems have many unknowns and networks have great potential for innovation with appropriate time and resources (Shumate & Cooper, 2021). The statewide after-school networks have acted as conduits of change creating better systemic alignment and new approaches in areas including readiness, workforce, youth development, social and emotional learning, STEM learning, and more.

To innovate and support programs with skill-building strategies, states first seek to establish a shared definition of quality, create a culture of improvement, and shape systems of professional development. As of 2020, 42 states have developed quality standards and guidelines, and another seven states are in the process of developing standards. (American Institutes for Research, 2020). These quality standards frequently include guidance on safety, health, and nutrition, physical environment, curriculum/activities, staff engagement/interaction, and family involvement.

There are large and small examples of innovations by networks where new partnerships are developed to provide engaging learning opportunities for young people in large-scale, systemic ways. We'll focus on three areas here where the Mott Foundation has invested additional resources to seed increased activity:

STEM Learning

In all 50 states, after-school and summer programs are sparking students' interest in STEM subjects, helping them explore future STEM careers, and developing STEM skills like problem solving and collaboration. Innovative programs are creating deep learning experiences like in Maine, where girls are applying an engineering mindset to build igloos, or in Alaska, where summer camps are teaching young people filmmaking and technology skills. In Nebraska, understanding that young people lacked access to engaging hands-on STEM learning opportunities, Beyond School Bells (the Nebraska network), created mobile TMC (Think, Make, Create) labs housed in a 6'x12' trailer that brings hands-on, interactive learning resources including electronics, textiles, various arts, robotics that encourage young people to "make" and be creative. The mobile makerspace is equipped with roll-out carts, tables, and a canopy so that work and creativity can occur indoors or outdoors. There are now 13 TMC labs in Nebraska, and the demand is growing. The idea has been replicated in other states.

Entrepreneurship

In Ohio, 82 youth created and pitched solutions "to promote health, address racism, marshal peer support, and bring more art and sports into students' lives" as part of the Ohio Afterschool Network's Winter Pitch Challenge reported by the Mott Foundation (2021). The winners won Amazon gift cards, an opportunity to work with successful entrepreneurs, and scholarships for entrepreneur-focused programs. This is just a small part of a web of activities across the state where different partners foster an "entrepreneurial mindset" in young people and develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem for out-of-school-time programs statewide. State leaders found that these innovative, high-quality programs engaged young people with new levels of creativity and problem-solving skills that help accelerate learning.

College and Career Readiness

The state networks create comprehensive frameworks that include all parts of the systems needed to support innovative programs, including professional development, quality standards, research, and partnerships. This is particularly notable in college and career readiness, where there are many potential opportunities to support young people in planning for their future. The Maryland Out of School Time Network has developed a College and Career Readiness Toolkit as a comprehensive guide to help middle and high school out-of-school-time programs get laser focused on building 21st century skills and supporting young people as they navigate through the complex world of planning for their advanced education and careers.

Conclusion

Among his bestselling management ideas detailed in Good to Great and the Social Sectors (2005), Jim Collins describes a "flywheel," where with persistent effort, organizations gain momentum, and inch-by-inch there's eventually a "breakthrough," where the ambition looks unstoppable. In many places the statewide after-school networks are leaning into that moment when conscious choice and discipline leads to greatness. But the wheel doesn't keep flying without effort and intention, the landscape keeps changing, and the human need continues to grow.

We urge researchers and network leaders to work together to align their efforts and ideas. The networks have access to tremendous data and strategies that could benefit from a researcher's keen eye and deliberate study. And the academic community will find the network an ideal place for action research and thought partnership in shaping studies that will have broad impact.

We urge funders and corporate partners to connect to statewide after-school networks to realize their goals of scale and impact. By investing in core operations, we give the networks room to innovate and

find the solutions most needed by their communities for their youth.

And we urge the statewide after-school networks to keep innovating. This is a unique moment to be bold, to build on the decades of forming partnerships, and to push toward greatness.

In closing, we remind ourselves of how all of these systems and strategies are designed to change the lives of young people. There are now nearly 25 million young people who are not able to access after-school programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). We need everyone connected with youth development to join with the statewide after-school networks to identify the resources and solutions so that all children and youth have access to engaging, powerful learning, mentors, and supports so they can thrive.

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The Key to Engaging Every Student: Building Greater Linkages Between National, State, and Local System Leaders

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A B S T R A C T

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated how essential summer and after-school programs are for youth and their families. Policymakers took note of the needs and the evidence base, and prioritized stimulus funding to expand access and accelerate learning. American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds were quickly released to schools through different mechanisms, initially prioritizing speed over infrastructure design. The funds were intended to fuel robust school–community partnerships to provide students who suffered from pandemic-related learning and developmental setbacks with comprehensive, high-quality programming; yet the timeline for planning and implementation often hindered progress toward that vision. This article discusses the challenges to scaling critical services, the strategies that states and partners are putting into place, and opportunities to strengthen relationships and infrastructure at the national, state, and regional or local level.

Key words: after-school, out-of-school time, state education agency (SEA), COVID recovery, American
Rescue Plan (ARP), elementary and secondary school emergency relief fund (ESSER), statewide after school network (SAN)

Background

Two decades following the publication of Alexander and Entwisle's (2003) Baltimore Beginning School Study, which coined the term "summer learning loss," this year held great significance for the field of out-of-school time. The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated how essential summer and after-school programs are for youth and their families. Policymakers took note of the needs and the evidence base, and prioritized stimulus funding to expand access and accelerate learning. As we wind down 2022 and look toward 2023, it's time to both celebrate progress and reflect on the systemic obstacles that we have yet to overcome to provide enriching and engaging programming for all young people.

While 2021 marked the first year that stimulus funds were widely available to support summer and after-school programs for learning recovery and acceleration, 2022 offered school and program leaders more

time to plan strategies to disperse funding and support implementation. American Rescue Plan (ARP) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds were quickly released to schools through different mechanisms, initially prioritizing speed over infrastructure design. The funds were intended to fuel robust school–community partnerships to provide students who suffered from pandemic-related learning and developmental setbacks with comprehensive, high-quality programming; yet the timeline for planning and implementation often hindered progress toward that vision. With a December 2024 spending deadline ahead, the field has limited time to act.

In July 2022, the United States Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh—along with five national partners from AASA (the Superintendents Association), Afterschool Alliance, National Summer Learning Association, the National League of Cities, and the National Comprehensive Center at Westat—announced a bold vision to Engage Every Student1—providing access to summer and after-school programs to all families and youth who want to participate. The call to action is intended to continue momentum and provide schools and communities the connections and assistance they need to expand partnerships, quality, and access.

Beyond ARP, public and private funding for summer and after-school is largely fragmented and siloed. We see the impact of this through all levels of the system, and more importantly, on the ground in schools and programs. Each funding stream reflects its unique priorities, requirements, and jargon. We spent several summers of our early careers visiting programs across the country, including privately funded networks, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), and migrant education programs. The challenge of stacking funding sources was immediately visible at one school we visited where students in separate programs wore tshirts reflecting the federal funding stream that provided discrete funding: 21st CCLC, migrant education, and so on. Following the visit, we shared feedback about opportunities to promote positive program culture and to stack funding. We also sympathized that the t-shirts reflected the complexity that hard-working educators annually confront when designing and implementing programs. These kinds of policy-to-practice barriers create uncertainty and led to lack of coordination, innovation, and expansion on the ground. School-based program leaders find themselves in a repeat cycle of applying for new funding and awaiting notification of final budget allocations far later in the planning process than is optimal for planning for quality with community-based partners. At the system level, we see how fragmented funding inhibits scale and continuous quality improvement. Ultimately, a lack of predictability of services among providers and families along with other factors impedes the long-term sustainability of our efforts.

Despite the siloed nature of our funding and a very diverse landscape of out-of-school programs (OST) that historically competed for scarce funds, a number of communities across the country have successfully promoted diverse portfolios of programs. These communities, like those belonging to the Every Hour Counts network, have recognized that one size does not fit all; not one approach or model will appeal to all kids or meet the needs of all families. They coordinate program offerings through centralized websites and 311 community phone-based hotlines, allowing families to locate and access programs offered by different providers—from their school to their library or mosque—with different objectives, hours, and timeframes. Some communities also point to places where families can simply access meals, books, and digital resources for their children when school doors are shut. The unfortunate news is that even in cities where this infrastructure exists, it is often not sustained and too easily forgotten. This kind of critical infrastructure requires that grasstops system-level leaders and grassroots program providers are meaningfully connected within their community ecosystem, funding is aimed at system-building, and families and community members demand continuity of summer and after-school programs as essential and reliable year-round services.

Learning From State ARP Strategies

Over the past year, the National Comprehensive Center at Westat has led a community of practice focusing on the Strategic Use of Summer and Afterschool Set Asides in partnership with over 10 states and the United States Department of Education. Participating state leaders–representing their state education agencies, statewide after-school networks, and other state agencies or organizations–are committed to confronting systemic challenges to achieving greater access, quality, and outcomes that they alone cannot address. States formed action plans that coalesced around four facets of summer and after-school sustainability to strengthen their systems and grassroots-to-grasstops connections: (a) data to promote access, quality, and outcomes; (b) technical assistance systems to build capacity and promote quality; © strategies to promote robust partnerships; and (d) strategic and sustainable funding. States reflected where additional connections with national, state, youth-serving intermediary, and/or district and community partners might benefit their strategies and sought input from a wider range of stakeholders to inform their work.

This year, participating teams will more deeply test various tools and strategies with district and community program providers from their state. At the close of our first year, one state team reflected that the regular meetings and community of practice provided them with a reflective space that helped them balance power differentials related to scale of services and funding sources and priorities, allowing them to work more cohesively on unified strategies.

While we are awaiting evidence to demonstrate how effectively states and communities managed stimulus funds, we have reflected on features that seemingly enabled progress toward access, quality, and outcomes within our community of practice. These themes have also begun to surface in Westat's forthcoming Summer Learning and Enrichment Study and framework-in-development on the decision points that states have considered to respond to the U.S. Department of Education's call to action.

• States with existing out-of-school time infrastructure and cross-system relationships were better equipped to meet youth and family needs.

Specifically, state education agencies that historically prioritized summer learning and after-school, through state-based sources or other prioritization, held an advantage. The more they were connected nationally and throughout their state, the greater they were positioned to call on and activate partners and existing systems to expand quality youth services through ARP.

• The ways that states chose to release ARP and ESSER funds had an impact on their ability to influence access, quality, and outcomes. While some states

deployed funds through grant programs—either through the state education agency or through a partner such as the statewide after-school network (SAN)—others deployed via formula or used a mix of grant and formula funding.

• Despite the need for speed, state leaders' moves reflected their concerns and perceived opportunities for influence. Some states moved away from competitive

funding programs due to equity concerns for rural districts that may not have had the same grant writing capacity as larger suburban or urban districts. States that opted for formula funding or that did not specify data collection requirements shared that they have limited opportunities to collect consistent and meaningful data on how dollars were spent and what programs looked like. In contrast, states that specified data collection and reporting requirements in conjunction with the release of funds will presumably have greater information on programming and impact. Collaborations between state education agencies (SEA) and SANs were viewed positively and promoted attention to a shared vision for quality and data collection.

State education agencies within the Strategic Use of Summer and Afterschool Community of Practice reflect the diverse range of strategies to manage ARP and ESSER funds. Regardless of where they entered the community in their cross-agency partnership and strategy development, they are all implementing new and enhanced strategies to respond to provider needs and sustain to their work, including strategies to

• Provide enhanced guidance on stacking and organizing federal and state funding for summer and after-school, to help districts draw from multiple sources and provide comprehensive programming.

• Develop or strengthen communications protocols within their SEA to better reach districts and community partners.

• Offer or increase technical assistance to ensure quality.

• Promote increased partnerships among districts and community-based organizations to support high-quality enrichment programming and sustainability.

• Support the collection and use of data on program availability, implementation, and outcomes.

Notably, multiple state partnerships are working to identify exemplary models and adapt web resources and toolkits to help districts and partners adopt evidence-based practices. The Community is also working together to tell our stories of impact.

Looking Ahead

As the National League of Cities' Robert Blaine pointed out, ARP and ESSER funds provide us with an opportunity to move from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset. We would assert that there is no greater opportunity to embrace diverse, evidence-based summer and after-school models and to build out and strengthen cross-system partnerships at every level.

But we know that opportunity is time limited and time sensitive. What can we do over the next year to make a lasting impact?

Through our work with states and nationally, one thing is clear: There is a great need and opportunity to use this time to strategically connect districts, community providers, intermediaries, systems leaders, and capacity building organizations within states. State level OST systems leaders should know all of the intermediary and capacity-building organizations in their state. School district leaders should know all of the direct service providers and cultural institutions in their community. All of these groups should also have access to state and national thought leaders who can support their planning, share coherent stories of access and impact,2 and promote long-term sustainability. Statewide after-school networks will continue to play an important role in this effort. Similar to youth-serving intermediaries at the community or regional level, approximately 30 after-school networks have built maps of varying levels of detail and sophistication to help understand the landscape of assets and gaps in services throughout their state. They are well-positioned as conveners who can drive statewide visioning, partnership, and sustainability planning.

If we regularly convened and connected statewide summer and after-school partners at all levels of the system, states, and communities, districts and program leaders would experience numerous and immediate benefits, such as

• greater ability and efficiency in identifying and activating existing community assets—including education service centers to help build the capacity of program providers and measure impact;

• more easily identifying exemplary partnerships that draw from various public funding sources that support summer and after-school programming;

• better organization and communication about diverse portfolios of OST offerings throughout the state to help families and youth navigate opportunities and access programs;

• avenues to amplify youth voice, identify and discuss barriers to access, and strategies to reach students traditionally underserved in OST who could benefit from programs;

• collection of stories of impact from grassroots organizations to aggregate, make meaning of, and share with grasstops as we make the case for sustained investments in our field; and

• greater ability to identify gaps in services and plan for sustainability locally, regionally, and nationally.

To that last point, near-term strategies should be considered to build additional infrastructure for summer and OST in rural areas. Youth-serving intermediary organizations primarily serve urban areas and surrounding counties. Former United States Deputy Secretary of Education and National Comprehensive Center Advisory Board Member, Terry Peterson, recommended that states invest a portion of their remaining ARP & ESSER dollars to plan for sustainability. As part of this, state partners could work with community foundations and United Way agencies to build needed infrastructure and backbone support for rural communities beyond stimulus funding. This type of sustainability and infrastructure planning could be a priority of statewide summits around the country.

Conclusion

Now is the time to step up collaboration at all levels of the system to better serve youth and families. We need strongly connected grassroots organizations and grasstops leaders at the national, state, and local levels in order to effectively tell our stories of impact and ensure that all communities are equipped to meet the needs of youth and families. If we strengthen the connections between statewide partners, communities, districts, and program leaders, we will be better positioned to make the case for dedicated and reliable funding for summer and afterschool for all.

Reference

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An Enhanced Mentoring Model's Impact on Youth in Boys and Girls Clubs

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A B S T R A C T

Although federal funding has been provided to add mentoring to youth development programs for decades, we still lack knowledge about the impacts of mentoring on youth outcomes. This research seeks to fill a gap by documenting youth outcomes from an enhanced mentoring approach for urban Boys and Girls Clubs (BGC) in the Southeastern United States delivered by paid staff who serve as mentors through group activities and 1:1 interactions with youth. We perform logistic regressions of secondary data from a cohort of BGCs to understand the relationships between enhanced mentoring and youth outcomes related to program retention, behaviors, and academics. We find the presented approach has a significant relationship with retention with those mentored being 1.92 times more likely to return the following program year. Mentored youth also experienced higher expectations from staff and were less likely to be involved in a physical fight with peers.

Key words: youth mentoring, youth development, delinquency, youth program development

Background

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) has made significant mentoring investments as a prevention and early intervention strategy with at-risk youth. Despite these investments, youth outcome impacts are not fully understood. This study examines OJJDP-funded mentoring's impact on youth in a Boys and Girls Clubs (BGC) network in a Southeastern U.S. metropolitan area.

Youth mentoring centers on adult mentor–youth mentee relationships. Although youth mentoring research has evolved with youth program growth, mixed results on youth outcomes continue to perplex program leaders and researchers (Dubois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019;Rhodes & DuBois, 2006).

Youth mentoring has shown encouraging impacts on areas like education and self-esteem, albeit with modest effect sizes (Dubois et al., 2011; Karcher, 2005; Raposa et al., 2019;). Effective mentoring during adolescence may also have positive effects into adulthood on college self-efficacy (McClain et al., 2021). Research indicates the mentoring relationship's duration positively impacts youth outcomes, especially if it is 12 months or greater (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Inversely, a sample of youth (n = 1,139) in Big Brothers Big Sisters programs report negative academic outcomes when mentoring relationships end abruptly (Grossman et al., 2012).

Youth mentoring research has expanded but the majority of literature focuses on one-to-one models, often delivered by volunteers, rather than youth development professionals. Studies have found comparable positive outcomes from models that utilized older peers, teams, and multiple adult mentors (Dubois et al., 2011; Rhodes & Dubois, 2006). More hybrid models, such as youth-initiated mentor selection, combine informal and formal strategies and indicate potential for positive youth outcomes (Van Dam et al., 2021). It is unknown if youth outcome impacts from traditional mentoring apply to hybrid models.

BGC mentoring has been described as "collective mentoring," whereby the staff embody an all hands-on-deck approach to mentoring all youth (Hirsch et al., 2011). This study focuses on an enhanced BGC mentoring model delivered by paid staff mentors, where members receive oneto-one mentoring added to existing group activities. While all staff supported youth, mentors received informal and formal training and support. Staff–youth relationships are central to youth experiences; one study reported that high rates (96%) of BGC youth indicated that at least one adult staff had high expectations of them (Arbreton et al., 2009). Only one other study of the BGC approach addresses mentoring youth outcomes; however, the findings have limited generalizability given its focus on 3 evidence-based mentoring program designs (Mentzer et al., 2015). This study seeks to fill a literature gap by documenting youth outcomes from enhanced mentoring.

Previous BGC studies documented youth development program practices, youth and/or staff experiences, and programming's youth outcomes. Youth outcomes have primarily been analyzed in conjunction with attendance frequency (days per week). Previous BGC "hybrid" mentoring model research showed a strong relationship between attendance frequency and enhanced mentoring (Snyder et al., 2020). Anderson-Butcher et al. (2003) found several areas predictive of youth BGC attendance: unstructured games, recreation offerings, peer relationships, and parental buy-in. The authors also found BGC programs to be protective against delinquent behaviors like truancy regardless of attendance (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003). Similarly, Mentzer et al. (2015) found that youth attending OJJDP

mentoring-funded BGCs avoided delinquent behaviors throughout their tenure. Higher attendance frequency is associated with positive indicators particularly for teenagers, including decreased negative behaviors (Arbreton et al., 2009). This study describes the model's impact by answering the following question: How do youth outcomes, such as retention, club experience, and behaviors, vary according to participation in enhanced mentoring?

Methods

To compare retention rates, club experiences, and behaviors for youth in enhanced mentoring with those of non-mentees, data was obtained from multiples sources, including Boys and Girls Club of America (BGCA). Data sources were merged using a unique identifier. The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board determined informed consent was not required for the use of deidentified previously collected administrative data.

Data Sources

Administrative Data

Individual demographic and participation data were provided by regional BGC, representing 5,164 students attending 22 clubs in school year (SY) 2018-2019. Variables included member unique identifier, school year, age group (child or teen), gender, race/ethnicity, single parent household or a household living below the federal poverty level. Household characteristics were hypothesized to be proxies for greater mentoring need and transient youth. BGC calculated a school-year attendance variable, indicating average attendance 1, 2, or 3 days per week. A variable designating clubs as Teen Centers was included, as BGC observed these clubs with teen staff and space had greater retention and positive youth experiences.

Mentoring Data

The regional BGC team compiled a list of members receiving enhanced mentoring from paper records and included a binary mentoring flag. There is no standard mentee selection process; mentors selected members they believed would benefit most from mentoring.

National Youth Outcomes Initiative

BGCA conducts an annual member survey called the National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI). This voluntary survey is disseminated each spring; youth complete the survey on a computer on site, and they can skip questions. This study's questions of interest cover dimensions of club experience, grades, truancy, and fighting behaviors. BGCA provides de-identified results to each club for quality improvement. BGCA developed the NYOI Measures Guide 2018 to facilitate data analysis

(O. Guessous, personal communication, November 2018). Surveys from SY2018-2019 with unique member identifiers were matched to the administrative data set. The SY2019-2020 survey was not conducted because of COVID-19.

Outcome Variables

The analyses compared three categories containing a total of thirteen outcomes related to enhanced mentoring's impact. The first category is retention with one outcome (returning to BGC the following school year); the second is club experience with nine outcomes (sense of belonging, emotional safety, physical safety, overall safety, fun, adult connections, staff expectations, recognition, and overall club experience); and the third is youth behaviors with three outcomes (grades, truancy, fighting). Figure 1 shows the development of analytic samples to assess retention, club experience, truancy, grades, and fighting (asked only of teens age 13 and older).

Figure 1. Development of Analytic Samples to Assess Retention, Club Experience, and Behaviors
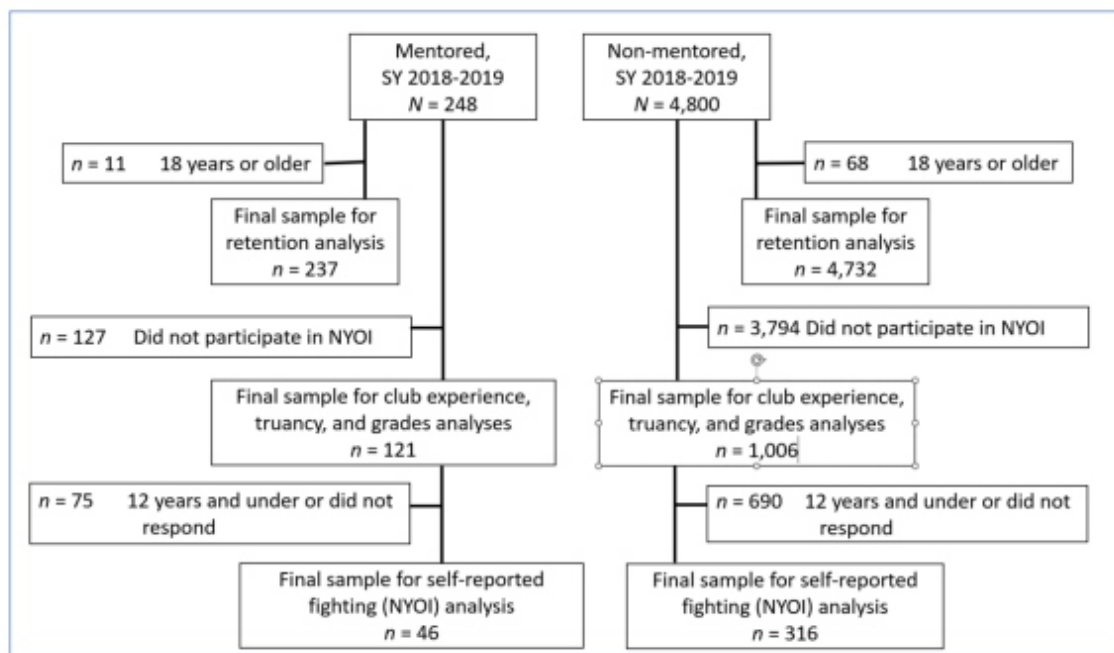
Retention

Retention was measured for members attending in SY2018-2019 by flagging those under 18 that returned SY2019-2020.

Club Experience

Youth answered Likert scale questions about eight quality indicators across five domains that reflect quality youth development programming aspects: (a) providing a physically and emotionally safe, positive environment, (b) creating fun and sense of belonging, © building supportive relationships, (d) setting high expectations and providing opportunities, and (e) providing formal and informal recognition. The research team adopted BGCA's scoring approach for consistency in sharing results. Between three and six questions are used to calculate scores for each indicator, using a proprietary scoring methodology. These eight indicators are combined into an overall club experience indicator. Scores are collapsed into three levels: optimal (consistent very positive experiences), fair (not negative experiences but not consistently great), and needs improvement (negative or strongly lacking experiences; NYOI Guide to Measures, 2018). BGCA considers fair scores an opportunity for improvement, so fai and needs improvement were combined to not optimal in analyses (NYOI Primer, 2018). Club experience outcomes were dichotomized as a binary indicator: optimal or not optimal.

Youth Behaviors

Three youth self-reported survey items are included across the following areas: overall academic performance in the past year, number of school days lost due to truancy in the past month, and number of physical fights in the past year. Only teenagers respond to fighting questions.

Statistical Analysis

All thirteen outcomes were expressed as binary responses, therefore logistic regressions were used for analysis with odds ratios results. Separate regressions were run for all outcomes within the three categories. All regressions are fully adjusted controlling for age, gender, race/ethnicity, single head of household, household poverty status, attendance frequency, and Teen Center status. Chi-square tests were used to analyze whether OJJDP-mentored youth differed from non-mentees. Table 1 includes descriptive statistics of control variables with Nindicating the number of youth who responded to each research question. Since youth attending frequently may have a higher chance of being selected for mentoring, an interaction term between mentored and attender type was included, but not found to be significant. Because clubs with Teen Centers may affect teen outcomes differentially, an interaction term between Teen Center and age group was included, but not found to be significant. All analyses were conducted using Stata, version 16.1/MP.

Results

Table 1 presents demographic and participation characteristics across the three analytic samples by mentoring status with shaded values for mentored and non-mentored differences (.05 significance, Pearson chi-square test of independence). For the retention sample, mentored and non-mentored groups differ by attender type (members attending more are more likely to be mentored) and by age group (teens are more likely to be mentored), but are similar across gender, race, and household characteristics. For the NYOI survey sample, mentored and nonmentored groups differ by Teen Centers (mentored members are more likely to be from Teen Centers). For the fighting sample, mentored and non-mentored groups differ by attender type and single-parent households. Fully adjusted regression model results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive Demographics by Enhanced Mentoring Participation and Outcome

Demographic	Retention		NYOI Survey		Fighting	
	Non-mentored	Mentored	Non-mentored	Mentored	Non-mentored	Mentored
Total *n* (%)	4732 (.95)	237 (.05)	1006 (.89)	121 (.11)	316 (.87)	46 (.13)
Teen Center	2916 (.95)	160 (.05)	571 (.88)*	81 (.12)*	194 (.84)*	36 (.16)*
Attender Type						
1x/2x per week	2106 (.45)*	50 (.21)*	167 (.17)	17 (.14)	90 (.28)	11 (.24)
3x per week	2626 (.55)*	187 (.78)*	839 (.83)	104 (.86)	226 (.72)	35 (.76)
Age Group						
Child (ages 5-11)	2912 (.62)*	119 (.50)*	532 (.53)	55 (.45)		
Teen (ages 12–18)	1820 (.38)*	118 (.49)*	474 (.47)	66 (.55)	316 (1.00)	46 (1.00)
Gender						
Female	2249 (.47)	113 (.47)	521 (.52)	55 (.45)	156 (.49)	20 (.43)
Male	2483 (.52)	124 (.52)	485 (.48)	66 (.54)	160 (.51)	26 (.57)
Race/Ethnicity						
Black	3873 (.82)	187 (.78)	854 (.85)	99 (.82)	277 (.88)	37 (.80)
White	249 (.05)	13 (.05)	47 (.05)	9 (.07)	14 (.04)	3 (.07)
Hispanic	362 (.08)	23 (.09)	61 (.06)	9 (.07)	13 (.04)	4 (.09)
Other	248 (.05)	14 (.05)	44 (.04)	4 (.03)	12 (.04)	2 (.04)
Single-parent HH	3717 (.79)	191 (.81)	780 (.78)	94 (.78)	237 (.75)*	28 (.61)*
HH in poverty	2228 (.47)	103 (.44)	412 (.41)	55 (.46)	111 (.35)	19 (.41)

Table 2. Fully Adjusted Logistic Regression Analysis Examining Difference in Youth Outcomes Between Mentored and Non-Mentored Youth

Variable	n (%) [a]		Odds ratio	95% CI	P-value
	Non-mentored	Mentored			
Retention (returned SY2019-20)	2452 (.51)	174 (.70)	1.92	[1.41, 2.61]	<.001
Sense of belonging	410 (.41)	55 (.46)	1.18	[0.80, 1.74]	.398
Emotional safety	373 (.38)	51 (.44)	1.24	[0.83, 1.83]	.293
Physical safety	572 (.57)	63 (.52)	0.83	[0.56, 1.22]	.344
Overall safety	301 (.30)	40 (.33)	1.14	[0.75, 1.71]	.542
Fun	447 (.45)	58 (.49)	1.19	[0.81, 1.75]	.382
Adult connections	605 (.60)	79 (.65)	1.21	[0.81, 1.81]	.354
Staff expectations	716 (.72)	93 (.80)	1.64	[1.02, 2.64]	.042
Recognition	521 (.53)	64 (.54)	1.07	[0.73, 1.59]	.719
Overall club experience	423 (.42)	57 (.47)	1.21	[0.82, 1.78]	.325
Grades (reported mostly A's and B's for past year)	880 (.90)	110 (.93)	1.78	[0.84, 3.79]	.135
Truancy (skipped school in past month)	254 (.26)	33 (.28)	1.15	[0.74, 1.77]	.536
Fighting (involved in a fight within prior year)	88 (.28)	5 (.11)	0.27	[0.10, 0.73]	.010

We found that mentored youth in SY2018-19 were 1.92 [1.41, 2.61] times more likely to return the following school year compared to non-mentored.

All mentored youth outcomes trend towards higher rates of optimal responses except for physical safety. Of the nine club experience outcomes, staff expectations is the only one found to be statistically significant. Members receiving enhanced mentoring were 1.64 [1.02, 2.64]times more likely to report optimal levels of staff expectations than those not mentored.

We found one youth behavior outcome to be statistically significant (fighting) with mentored youth considerably less likely (0.27 [0.10, 0.73]) to report a fight within the prior year compared to non-mentored youth (11% compared to 28%). It should be noted that the sample size for the analysis of this variable is small.

Discussion

This study sought to determine the youth impacts of an enhanced mentoring approach implemented by a BGC network in a major metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. Given limited research on this model, these findings advance youth outcome knowledge and lay groundwork for future studies.

Mentoring goals should be tailored to each youth but generally focus on reducing or preventing negative outcomes, building life and leadership skills, improving academic achievement, and strengthening social and emotional wellness. For mentoring to have its desired effects, youth must engage with mentors to build trusting relationships. Mentoring approaches can be one-to one or group formats, or a combination of both and can be delivered by paid professionals or volunteers. However, youth outcomes based on receiving one-to-one or group mentoring show little difference (Haddock et al., 2020). A sample of young girls' (n = 113) self-reported outcomes from a combined one-to-one and group mentoring point to positive social outcomes (Deutsch et al., 2017), yet combinations of one-to-one and group mentoring approaches delivered by professionals are not well-documented in the literature. The BGC model analyzed in this study is an enhanced mentoring approach, where paid professional staff offer one-to-one mentoring integrated into youth development programming. Gaps exist in the literature to both evaluate youth outcomes and define this approach. This study examines an enhanced mentoring approach where select BGCs received funds for mentoring a subset of youth.

The results for enhanced mentoring are consistent with published studies of BGC's youth development model that show a positive relationship with retention rates, reduced negative behaviors, positive adult–youth relationships, and positive academic performance (AndersonButcher et al., 2003; Arbreton et al., 2009). Enhanced mentoring correlates with certain youth outcomes in our study, including year-over-year retention, increased positive perception of staff expectations, and decreased physical fighting. A similar correlation between mentoring and decreased fighting has been found especially for at-risk youth with environmental risk factors, such as single-parent households (Cheng et al., 2008; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Mentoring has been shown to be an effective strategy for youth violence prevention due to mentoring relationships providing youth increased protective factors, such as connection to supportive adults (Thornton et al., 2002).

This study analyzed year-over-year retention, whereas prior BGC studies have emphasized weekly attendance rates within a school year (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Arbreton et al., 2009; Mentzer et al., 2015). When compared to non-mentored youth, mentees were found to have higher average weekly participation rates within the school year (Snyder et al., 2020) and more likely to return the following year. The findings translate to the BGC retaining 3 out of 4 mentored youth versus 2 out of 4 non-mentees. The higher participation and retention rates among mentees have implications for other youth outcomes and warrant additional study. Some BGCs have adopted attendance targets of one to three times per week based on the prior finding of a positive link between more frequent attendance and teen outcomes across delinquency, character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyle choices (Arbreton et al., 2009).

Higher program dosage in a school year and across years has the potential to impact youth growth and development. Youth retained in BGC programming and enhanced mentorship receive greater exposure to BGC's positive youth development opportunities during critical times. Quality relationships with caring adults have been shown to buffer negative socioenvironmental and familial experiences (Cavell & Elledge, 2013; Herrera et al., 2013). Because of their participation level, mentored youth can create and maintain relationships with caring adults.

The BGC-enhanced mentoring model occurs in a collective mentoring context, so understanding staff–youth relationships is essential, especially those with additional OJJDP mentoring. Relationships are cited in qualitative studies of BGC's youth development model as a primary driver of youth and family engagement (Arbreton et al., 2009; Carruthers & Busser, 2000). Mentoring literature extensively documents how quality and length of relationships impact youth outcomes (Cavell & Elledge, 2013; Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Regardless of mentoring status, this study's members reported a high level of adult connectedness. A significant finding shows that mentees experienced higher expectations from staff than non-mentored individuals. All members interact with adult staff and create connections; however, our study points to a differentiation for mentees. Enhanced mentees were more likely to have "optimal" staff expectations, which points to the model's impact on quality relationships. Enhanced mentorship also influenced youth behavior—mentees were less likely to report fighting within the prior year. These outcomes align with overarching BGC program goals and could justify continued investment in prosocial interventions that reduce delinquency.

Limitations

Limitations exist due to analyzing historical secondary BGC data, most notably a small sample size for some survey questions. Because of COVID-19, the NYOI survey was not collected in 2019-2020, which limited the power to detect additional outcome differences and study

outcomes longer than a year. The NYOI survey is self-reported and may be impacted by social desirability bias, an effect where respondents tend to over-report perceived good behaviors and under-report perceived bad behaviors. Youth complete the survey on site with peers and staff.

Selection bias could not be ruled out during mentee selection since staff subjectively chose youth mentees rather than random assignment. There are no standard mentee selection criteria. The NYOI is also completed by attending youth at the school year's end which biases the sample toward those who remained in the program longer.

Validating the BGC's enhanced mentoring model in a controlled environment was not this study's focus. This study was not prospective experimental research but a retrospective analysis of collected data to inform practice change. Future research collecting qualitative data on youth experiences and mentee selection may reduce selection bias to an extent; however, the BGC collective mentoring environment cannot be changed.

Conclusions

Several positive youth outcomes were associated with the enhanced mentoring model. Future research should explore multi-year mentee outcomes to understand longer-term impacts. More research is needed to understand mentee selection criteria for BGC's enhanced mentoring and whether selection bias is an attenuating factor. More robust research would inform the development of best practices, policy, and training for this mentoring approach, and provide further insights to funders like OJJDP.

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