



EPISODE 1

## Beyond the Classroom

Spandana Pavuluri ([00:09](#)):

Out-of-school-time, sometimes called OST, programs—such as after-school, summer, and other extracurricular programs—offer spaces for young people to develop interests, skills, and social connections beyond the classroom. Despite years of research on the benefits of OST programs, recent studies have shown that many young people from lower-income families do not have the same access to programs as young people from higher-income families. To explore these barriers to participation in programs and the experiences of young people who participate in them, The Wallace Foundation commissioned a student-designed study consisting of focus groups and a survey to help surface young people’s reflections on and hopes for the sector. The research team was made up of 12 high school and college students from New York, Colorado, and Kentucky and was advised by four university researchers. You can read the findings in a brief on Wallace’s website: [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

Spandana Pavuluri ([01:22](#)):

The brief is called “Youth Perspectives on Designing Equitable Out-of-School-Time Programs.” Members of the research team who contributed to the brief are here today to discuss their work. This is the first episode in a three-part podcast that will deal with redefining the OST field and mapping access. The second episode focuses on programs and practices that foster dignity and belonging. And the third episode focuses on professionalization and precarity of the OST workforce. I’m Spandana Pavuluri, a senior at DuPont Manual High School in Kentucky and member of the Kentucky Student Voice Team who worked on the study. I’m also the host for today’s episode. I’ll let my colleagues go ahead and introduce themselves. Shelby?

Shelby Drayton ([02:14](#)):

Hello everyone, my name's Shelby Drayton and I currently serve as a senior manager of coaching facilitation at UP Partnership.

Spandana Pavuluri ([02:24](#)):

Great. Connor?

Connor Flick ([02:28](#)):

Hi everyone. My name is Connor Flick. I use he/him pronouns. I'm an undergraduate at Brown University and the cross-organizational coordinator for the Kentucky Student Voice Team.

Spandana Pavuluri ([02:40](#)):

Great, and with that, we can go ahead and dive right in. One of our key findings was that a majority of survey respondents had either personally faced barriers that prevented them from joining an OST program, or they knew of someone who had. This experience was more common for youth of color than for white youth. Connor, can you talk a little bit about what some of the most common barriers to participation are?

Connor Flick ([03:14](#)):

It's really incredible how many barriers we talked about and how many unexpected ones really came up within our work, within our research, and within all of the students that we talked to about this. So top of mind, some of the major barriers within programs that we saw were really this kind of sense of exclusion for a lot of minority participants; so if you're a student of color, for example, it can oftentimes feel very ostracizing when you're walking into a room that is predominantly white, especially when sometimes those programs aren't really geared towards your demographic or geared towards

something that you're immediately interested in. What we really saw with barriers to joining is a lot of things that come before a student ever really sets foot in the room of the program.

Connor Flick ([04:07](#)):

So what comes to mind, there is really lack of transportation being a big one, to where students aren't really able to get from the school to their home without bus service. And so if you don't have those connections, getting to and from places can be very hard, especially if you live in an area where having regular transportation just isn't really an option. In my home state, Kentucky, that's a very big issue. Another one would be kind of that time capacity with students to where sometimes you have to prioritize other things over doing extracurriculars. For many students that might look like homework, but for other students, it looks a lot like going to work, taking care of kids that are at home, just trying to step up and be a responsible figure around the house. Because maybe both parents work, maybe there's a mixed, intergenerational living situation where more people in the house need care than normal. That sort of situation can push a student away from joining extracurricular activities and out-of-school time.

Connor Flick ([05:19](#)):

Another thing that jumps out, very much related to that, is that socioeconomic aspect of many programs—many aspects of out-of-school time cost money. It costs money to get places. It costs money often to join these programs. There's often an investment or an up-front program cost that needs to be paid for many, many students. And oftentimes, even when there are abilities to get financial aid to waive those fees or get some sort of transportation assistance, oftentimes students don't actually know about that to where there's a big information gap in students getting into these programs and understanding what's available to them and what they can really capitalize on. S---o when we're talking about students being excluded from out-of-school-time spaces, those are the things that I'm thinking about the most with this work and into the future when we're trying to solve these problems.

Spandana Pavuluri ([06:24](#)):

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, Connor, and I think you hit on some of the biggest ones. Shelby, I'll ask you, is there anything that you wanted to add on there about what some of those most common barriers to participation are for OSTs?

Shelby Drayton ([06:42](#)):

Yeah, I totally echo everything Connor said. I think something to note and think about is just how exacerbated some of those, barriers were, especially with COVID and then with coming back the best folks can to a new reality, right? So understanding that now you probably have more students that are really taking on aspects of providing for the family, knowing that inflation is happening, right. And knowing that everything is way more expensive than it was just two years ago, right. So I think really just thinking about all of those aspects, again; the transportation, being able to provide that space at the location that the student always already is, has been most successful for programs that I've run. Where they don't even have to leave and they still get some of that interaction and time with other students and caring adults.

Connor Flick ([08:00](#)):

I actually wanna build on that a little bit too, just because I think one thing that got thrown around a lot, especially in 2020 and that I'm still thinking about is this idea of the pandemic as a portal, in a sense, to where a lot of programs went virtual. And that actually allowed a lot of students to kind of engage with more programs and engage with more OST spaces that they wouldn't normally be able to. And at that same time, there's also that pandemic as a barrier aspect, to where—once again, pulling on my own

personal experience—I had to get off work early to join this podcast because I have to make some money for my family and make sure that I’m paying off what I need to, and that I’m helping out with bills where I need to.

Connor Flick ([08:53](#)):

So I’m completely echoing everything you’ve said, not only with the statistics that we found, but also with my own lived experience. Because I completely relate to a lot of what we’ve been seeing in this, to where the logistics, the money, the oftentimes barriers upon barriers that we’re placing upon students to join OST programs and oftentimes not giving the information or the access to. Ugh, you see a very stratified OST space in my opinion, because of that. And it oftentimes privileges certain demographics over others, which can become difficult, but I’m sure we’ll have more time to talk about that in a little bit.

Spandana Pavuluri ([09:39](#)):

I think when you guys talk about, you know, not having enough information about these OSTs, it’s super, super important to note because the outreach part can be extremely difficult sometimes. You know, how do you reach a student who doesn’t have any social media, doesn’t have any access to certain things? I think that’s a question we need to constantly be asking ourselves. Shelby, you have more than 10 years of experience in youth development. Can you talk about the importance of youth voice and in what ways do you think young people can and should shape OST programs’ goals, activities, and outcomes?

Shelby Drayton ([10:46](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I think for most youth-serving programs, it’s easiest to see how youth can support in planning, you know, activities and allowing folks to provide some of that support in the outreach, right?

So, if they're talking about activities they're interested in, most likely they have friends they can bring that are interested in these activities as well. It's so important to think about the part that youth can play in shaping what an out-of-school-time or an after-school program looks like. Not only in the specific activities, but really start thinking about what do youth want to get out of that space together, right? What do those activities look like? What should outcomes look like? So, I think they can play such a huge part in really showing how to grow their programs, help with recruitment, and getting others involved in the program, as well as starting to develop that student's own relational skills, but also just those soft skills that you need when you're growing up, going into college, going into the workforce.

Spandana Pavuluri ([13:04](#)):

What I'm hearing from you is really this notion that students can and should really be defining the agenda of their OSTs, what they're passionate about, and what's important to them should—we should make time for that and that should be valued, cared for. And Connor, I'm gonna pass it to you in case you wanted to build on any of that.

Connor Flick ([13:27](#)):

I think one thing that's really standing out to me from all of that is just how important, how special OST spaces really are when we're talking about these different programs to where oftentimes when we think of, "OK, we're gonna have 30 young people in a space," we're thinking of a classroom. And what I think OST spaces really allow us to do is reimagine what that idea can look like, reimagine what that structure is, and reimagine what those goals are. And so, when you're talking about something like those soft skills, that really jumps out to me as something to where, yeah, we should have more spaces focused on that, and yes, we should really be orienting around what youth need. Because when we're talking about locations or trying to talk about career planning or really any sort of thing that a young person may want to do in their lives, those are the types of spaces where OST programs can really start filling in and really

start saying, we can help develop your needs to develop your skills and do so in a way that's not like a classroom. And do so in a way that's more fitting to a young person.

Connor Flick ([14:33](#)):

And that's more fitting to the skills that we're actually trying to teach. We want this to be something that's very participatory, something that's very open, something that's very communicative. And something that has a lot of back-and-forth and growth, both on the students, but also on the people who are designing these programs and the people who are facilitating them as well to where it's very much a shared learning process.

Spandana Pavuluri ([15:21](#)):

You make a really important point that, honestly, the superpower of OSTs is that they have so much flexibility and you're not held to the same rigid standards that maybe a classroom setting is. And that flexibility can really lead to something beautiful, especially in the context of student voice and representation. We discussed a number of ways to improve access to OST programs and really the role youth can play in shaping programs. Connor, what else does it take to redefine the field?

Connor Flick ([16:04](#)):

I think there's a couple different ways you could approach this kind of question but I think one of the big things that jumps out to me, especially from this work is really legitimizing, ugh, OST and working with young people as a long-term career path to where I think oftentimes when we talk about working with young people or working in out-of-school-time spaces, what comes to mind a lot of times for, I think a lot of people is this idea of almost a camp counselor-type figure of someone that helps facilitate someone that's in the room. Someone that enjoys working with young people.

Connor Flick ([16:48](#)):

It's very much a stopgap solution and not something that is particularly long-term. And I think really, ugh, reframing the idea of OST spaces as something that can be a career and something that can, for facilitators, for designers, for people who are engaged in this space long-term, ugh, really making sure that the work being done here is as good of work as any other. And really making sure that we're allowing youth to explore what they need and explore what they want and be involved with that design and development, and that they can have stable people and that they can have that continued figure and that continued mentor. And that it's not a revolving door of individual facilitators and counselors and designers coming into the space and coming out of the space because that sort of instability, especially for youth that are most at risk, can cause a lot of damage.

Connor Flick ([17:51](#)):

And it can make a great OST program very, very unstable as it changes over time. So I think that reframing of youth work more as something that is career-oriented, not just a pit stop, but really something that can be done for a long time. Because the people who are running these programs are teachers for our students, whether they're in the room for eight hours, or whether they're in the room for two to where they very much are teachers. And they're very much putting in a lot of work to make sure that these OST spaces are great. And so we should be giving them the same respect and the same focus as everything else because students are learning in these spaces along with every single other.

Spandana Pavuluri ([18:45](#)):

Yeah, that makes complete sense, Connor. I think something that you and I have both been exposed to being a part of the Kentucky Student Voice Team is this whole idea of being stipended for our work. And it—it really is radical when I think about the, all the other context for OSTs that I've been in and it really doesn't have to be that crazy or out of the ordinary. And Shelby, I'm gonna prompt you. Is there anything you wanna build on that?



Shelby Drayton ([19:16](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I think definitely the, really, thinking of OST as a profession and that's actually something that I get to do regularly in my role here, at UP Partnership. So we are a collective of about 40 out-of-school-time youth development providers who are regularly advocating in the city of San Antonio for OST/out-of-school-time, youth development, to be seen as a sector that is a profession, as a lifelong profession and seeing it as an opportunity to grow and support the youth in our roles.

Shelby Drayton ([20:31](#)):

I think the other thing too, especially with the shift with COVID, I believe more youth development and out-of-school-time providers became more basic-needs providers first. I think it's something that youth development and out-of-school-time providers have always done, but it was more amplified during COVID when folks were either not having food, not having resources, or understanding that a lot of these programs had buildings and some parents were those essential workers who didn't have an option, right...

Shelby Drayton ([21:43](#)):

...to stay home or work from home. So being able to provide food and a place with internet for them to stay connected to their school, to their communities, and continue to learn and grow. I think really making sure that as youth development professionals we're sharing the full story; I think sometimes it's hard and we are often looked at as, "Oh, you're just babysitting after school and just hanging out with them," and understanding that it's just, it's way deeper than that. It's really getting to work with students and understand who they are and help them develop—much like you guys were saying earlier—their passions, their energies, really figure out who they are and what they wanna do and how they wanna contribute to this world.

Connor Flick ([22:46](#)):

Actually wanna build on that really fast because there are two different ideas that Shelby and Spandana, you both mentioned that are really, really incredible. And to Shelby's point the idea of many OST spaces becoming these ways to support students' basic needs, I think is a huge deal. And that's something that within Kentucky and within the Kentucky Student Voice Team and our own research, we've seen a lot of to where we've seen a lot of basic needs not be met, especially due to the pandemic and OST spaces are often filling in that gap, or at least trying to, to make sure that their students are, and that their young people are going to be okay and that they can survive these past two years. And so, I think definitely hammering home on that and really focusing on the fact that if we're going to start having better OST spaces that are focused on students that do empower them, that do develop them in a very meaningful way...

Connor Flick ([23:55](#)):

...we need to have a space where kids can be dropped off to where kids can really exist and really have young people that can be empowered and nurtured in these spaces. And if we're focused on meeting their basic needs at the very minimum, empowering and nurturing them is always going to come secondary. And so meeting those basic needs starts with really looking at these social programs and looking at social welfare and trying to transform that as well.

Connor Flick ([24:45](#)):

And so that experience of being stipended really opened my eyes to what's possible within OST spaces to where I've seen many OST spaces and I've heard of many OST spaces, throughout the country, even, where students are often creating these amazing deliverables; they're creating great pieces of art, of writing, they're producing amazing pieces of media. They're going out and engaging with the community. They're doing great work, but because they're under 18, they're not being paid for it. It's all

considered volunteering at best and just engaging with the program at the very minimum. And so, when we're talking about students and young people creating great works and creating great things that they would normally get paid for, engaging with the community in ways that they would normally be paid for...

Connor Flick ([26:02](#)):

...we need to start saying with OST spaces, if at all possible, how do we make sure that our students are being paid? Because if we can start doing that, not only can we start saying these students can support themselves and their families, but we can recruit more students as well from more disadvantaged backgrounds, because now they don't have to go work a part-time job where they're just trying to make ends meet and work eight hours after school every day. Instead, they can come to us, really develop themselves, really engage with the program, do something that they're passionate about and that will build their careers and also get paid for it. That sort of transformational shift, I think, is something that not only develops young people, but I think really, really starts reframing the conversation around empowering them. And making sure that when they become adults, when they're becoming their own people, when they're aging out of these OST spaces a little bit, they have the skills, the abilities, and the wherewithal to hold their own; walk into a big, bright, beautiful world; and truly be successful because of their time in OST programs.

Shelby Drayton ([27:17](#)):

I completely agree and I love that point, Connor. I think something else that it really gets to is starting to really address some of those societal inequities we have. So, if we're willing to show the students that the work that they're contributing to our programs and the way they're learning and growing and investing in themselves is important to us. And we can show them that through, like Connor was saying,

stipending them, which is gonna allow them to still give back to their families, still support, and in the end really help grow overall inequities.

Spandana Pavuluri ([28:13](#)):

Yeah, so to kind of wrap up here I have one last question for both, Shelby and Connor, and that question is what advice do you have for funders, policymakers, and other decision-makers to improve access to OST programs for all youth? So, Connor, let's start with you.

Connor Flick ([28:40](#)):

I think the biggest thing that jumps out to me, truly, is if you're a funder, if you're a policymaker, really sitting down with your OST spaces and trying to figure out what barriers are you trying to take away that you know, your OST program has. Because every single OST program, I don't care how good you are, there is some sort of group, there is some sort of individual that can't make it to your OST program that would otherwise really love to. And so one of those things we have to really start deconstructing how, and who is really coming into this OST space, who are we available for? Who are we trying to target, and who would make this space better if we had more?

Connor Flick ([29:27](#)):

I think we all agree on this podcast here that diversity is very much something that we would like to achieve, and diversity makes our spaces stronger. And so even just start with that question of how diverse is your OST program; does it reflect the community that you serve? And then working from there to say, if it doesn't, how can we make sure that happens? And then that ties into all the things that we were talking about at the top with transportation, with logistics, with making sure that students have the information gap covered of knowing where the OST programs are and knowing how to reach them and knowing how to get aid with, say, paying for different program fees. It taps into the ideas of

stipending not only the students doing the work, but really making sure that the people facilitating and developing these spaces and developing these young people are also being paid fairly.

Connor Flick ([30:19](#)):

And that they're also being treated as, Shelby said, a real sector within the economy and within the communities that they serve. And at the end of the day we have to start asking that question of what are the barriers that we see in our community?

Spandana Pavuluri ([31:00](#)):

Yeah. Thanks so much Connor, and Shelby, I'll now pass the floor to you just to kind of wrap us up with what advice do you have?

Shelby Drayton ([31:08](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. No, I totally thank you, Connor for sharing that. I totally agree. Really just thinking about, are we asking the right questions or are we asking the right questions of the right people, I think are always my first two things. So one, definitely, are we asking about diversity? Are we asking about equitable practices, right? So, whether that's, to Connor's point, the pay with the students, the stipending, or the pay with these development workers who were there full-time as well. I know they're only traditionally seen working during those two hours, but they're there the majority of the day as well; also planning, setting up, organizing and that type of stuff. And then are we asking the right questions of the right people. So is that, have we asked different types of organizations, different sizes, different communities? Have we asked the students participating in organizations what is best for them?

Shelby Drayton ([32:06](#)):

What barriers exist, what successes exist, and how can we really try to amplify those successes and see if we can share those best practices across organizations, and things like that. And I think last is really just thinking about that community focus. So, one thing that I really appreciate about, the Excel Beyond the Bell Network that I work with is that they're willing to talk across the sector to think about, how are we helping each other? We are one sector, we are youth development, we are out-of-school-time, and we're all in this together to really make sure our students are having spaces for them to grow and learn in. So, making sure that we're finding ways to collaborate together with other organizations in your community, with students in your community who maybe might not be coming to your programs regularly, ones who are, and just continuing to grow this work together.

Spandana Pavuluri ([33:11](#)):

Yeah, I love that. And it looks like that's a wrap. So Shelby and Connor, I really want to thank you both for being here. And your words were truly so insightful.

Shelby Drayton ([33:30](#)):

Thank you.

Connor Flick ([33:31](#)):

Thank you.

Spandana Pavuluri ([34:02](#)):

As a reminder, this is the first episode in a three-part series. So if you liked what you heard today and would like to learn more, go ahead and listen to our next two episodes.