PERSPECTIVE

GROWING TOGETHER, LEARNING TOGETHER

WHAT CITIES HAVE DISCOVERED ABOUT BUILDING AFTERSCHOOL SYSTEMS

DANIEL BROWNE

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Art is one of the offerings at the afterschool program at Wright Middle School in Nashville, home of the Nashville After Zone Alliance.

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Students explore underwater life at a program in the Providence AfterZone.

INTRODUCTION

"Who's the most phenomenal basketball player?"

"LeBron James!"

"Who's the most phenomenal singer?"

"50 Cent!"

"Here's something that won't be popular with you," says literacy coach Rachel Roseberry, *"but I'm going to say Taylor Swift is a phenomenal singer because she can write all her own songs."*

Contrary to Rosenberry's expectations, fifth-grader Quandrikus Baker, 11, agrees with her. "No, she is!" he says and starts singing Swift's latest hit.

Roseberry might have guessed that the students in the PENCIL Academic & Career Enrichment (PACE) program at Wright Middle School would be Taylor Swift fans. This is Nashville, after all. It's late afternoon, the regular school day is over, and she is playing a card game called *Apples to Apples* with Quandrikus and two other boys to help them with their vocabulary. The word "phenomenal" has given her an opportunity to talk up Swift's skills as a writer — a good segue into the student writing contest she has come to tell them about. The competition is sponsored by the Nashville After Zone Alliance, a public-private partnership affiliated with the Nashville Public Library, which also supports Roseberry's visits to Wright Middle School through the Nashville Public Library Foundation.

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When is an afterschool program more than just an afterschool program? When, like PACE, it's part of a system that coordinates efforts and resources to bring young people opportunities — such as sessions with a trained literacy specialist — that might otherwise be out of reach.

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> The biggest pay-off [of the system-building work in Providence] is the consistent high quality of the experience. The AfterZone has an identity, a youth-centered culture, that is reliable. Graduates can look back on it. Their siblings can look forward to it. Our school principals would be bereft without it. You just don't get that with a patchwork of programs."
> — *Hillary Salmons, Executive Director, Providence After School Alliance*

BACKGROUND:
THE RISE OF AFTERSCHOOL SYSTEMS

In recent years, a number of U.S. cities have recognized the importance of such systems and set about building them. The trend is a response to a long-standing problem. Young people can benefit academically, socially and emotionally from high-quality afterschool programs.[1] Historically, however, the field has been decentralized and disorganized, with different programs — and the government agencies and private groups that fund them — operating in isolation from one another.[2] The result is a lack of access to high-quality programs, particularly for those young people most in need.[3] Civic leaders in many cities have come to understand that they won't solve the problem simply by paying for more programs ad hoc.

In 2003, The Wallace Foundation began an initiative that eventually included five cities — Boston, Chicago, New York City, Providence and Washington, D.C. — to help them develop afterschool systems. At the time, a few cities and organizations were pioneering this approach (L.A.'s Best in Los Angeles, The After-School Corporation in New York, After School Matters in Chicago), but it was still a novelty. Five years later, Wallace issued *A Place to Grow and Learn*, its first "perspective" gathering lessons from this initiative, which posited two central premises:

1. Children and teens can gain learning and developmental benefits by frequent participation in high-quality afterschool programs.

2. A coordinated approach can increase access to, and improve the quality of, afterschool programs.

The state of the field today
The system-building field itself has grown and learned much since then, and what cities and researchers know now backs up those original premises. In 2010, the RAND Corporation published *Hours of Opportunity*, a Wallace-commissioned study of the five cities in the foundation's first afterschool system-building initiative. RAND found a "proof of principle" that the various organizations and institutions within a city that

1   Patricia A. Lauer, et al., "Out-of-School-Time Programs: A Meta-Analysis of Effects for At-Risk Students," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 76, No. 2, 2006, 275-313.

2   Robert Halpern, "The Challenges of System-Building in the After-School Field," *Critical Issues in After-School Programming*, Herr Research Center for Children and Social Policy, Erikson Institute, University of Chicago, 2006.

3   *America After 3 PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand*, Afterschool Alliance, 2014, 17-20.

have a hand in afterschool can work together to coordinate afterschool services. Even more significantly, such coordination can succeed in increasing access to programs and spur efforts to improve their quality.[4] A separate study of Providence's AfterZone model, one of the first evaluations of an afterschool system, determined that a system of high-quality programs can indeed produce benefits for students — notably higher school attendance. Students who participated in their AfterZone program for more days, and took part in a wider range of activities, had better attitudes, behavior and performance in school.[5]

To Hillary Salmons, executive director of the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), the success of the AfterZone demonstrates that a well-built system is more than just the sum of its parts. "The biggest pay-off is the consistent high quality of the experience," she said in a recent interview. "The AfterZone has an identity, a youth-centered culture, that is reliable. Graduates can look back on it. Their siblings can look forward to it. Our school principals would be bereft without it. You just don't get that with a patchwork of programs."

As the encouraging findings and examples mount, afterschool system building has drawn the attention of urban policymakers across the country. In 2013, Wallace commissioned a survey to get a sense of the prevalence of system building. The survey revealed that at least 77 of the 275 largest U.S. cities have put in place one or more strategies to coordinate their afterschool programs.[6] With

Better school attendance was associated with participation in Providence's AfterZone, according to a study.

4   Susan J. Bodilly, et al., *Hours of Opportunity vol. 1*, RAND Corporation, 2010, 74.

5   Tina J. Kauh, *AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence's Citywide After-School System*, Public/Private Ventures, 2011, 31-37, 46-48.

6   "Largest cities" defined as those with populations of 100,000 or more. Linda Simkin, et al., *Is Citywide Afterschool Coordination Going Nationwide? An Exploratory Study in Large Cities*, FHI 360, 2013, 3.

so many cities showing an interest in afterschool system building and so much more useful information available, Wallace thought the time was right for a new "perspective," a digest of the latest thinking on how to build and sustain an afterschool system, and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead for this promising field.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF AN AFTERSCHOOL SYSTEM

A Place to Grow and Learn presented early insights into how cities were going about the work of building afterschool systems. Since then, Wallace's work with the original five cities in its system-building initiative has wound down, and in 2012, the foundation launched a "next generation" of the initiative to assist nine cities — Baltimore, Denver, Fort Worth, Grand Rapids, Jacksonville, Louisville, Nashville, Philadelphia and St. Paul — that had already begun to build systems of their own. The efforts of these and other cities, as well as a large body of research published in recent years, have helped us to refine our understanding. In this report, we focus on the four components of system building that the most current evidence and experience suggest are essential to a successful effort.

ELEMENT #1: STRONG LEADERSHIP FROM MAJOR PLAYERS

"When the mayor calls a meeting in the community, everyone shows up," says Audrey Hutchinson of the National League of Cities.[7] Indeed, the experience of system-building cities shows that there is no substitute for the leadership of a committed mayor or county executive, especially in the early stages of getting a system off the ground. In the 2013 Wallace-commissioned survey of large U.S. cities, cities where respondents described the mayor as "highly committed" to afterschool coordination were far more likely to see stable or increased funding for system-building efforts over a five-year period. Conversely, the majority of cities with mayors described as "not at all" or "slightly committed" provided no funding or cut funding over the same period. Mayoral leadership was also associated with data use, another key element of an afterschool system: 44 percent of cities with "highly" or "moderately committed" mayors used a "common data system," compared to only 20 percent of cities with low or no mayoral commitment.[8]

At the same time, as the afterschool system-building field has evolved, system organizers have learned an important lesson: All leaders eventually step down. Whether due to term limits or other factors, mayors come and go, as do important civic figures beyond city hall. For school superintendents, the time in office can be particularly brief. In the first decade of its existence, PASA has worked with no fewer than five superintendents. Thus, the committed leadership of a top-level executive like a mayor or superintendent is necessary for successful system building, but it is not enough. For an afterschool system to thrive long term, all the major players — from city agencies, private funders and schools to program providers and the families they serve — need to "own" the effort to some degree. *Hours of Opportunity* emphasizes the importance of system organizers working to engage stakeholders and establish a common vision among them. During the planning phase for New York's system, for example, the city convened a series of working groups consisting of providers, funders, advocates and academics, each addressing a particular topic. RAND notes that, "while not all stakeholders supported every aspect of New York City's [afterschool] vision, it was clearly communicated and key stakeholders reported… that their buy-in was high at the end of the process."[9]

7   "Better Together: Boosting Afterschool by Building Citywide Systems," Wallace Foundation, 2014, video. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/view-latest-news/events-and-presentations/Pages/VIDEO-Afterschool-and-Afterschool-Systems.aspx?VideoID=UD65OVE3pKQ
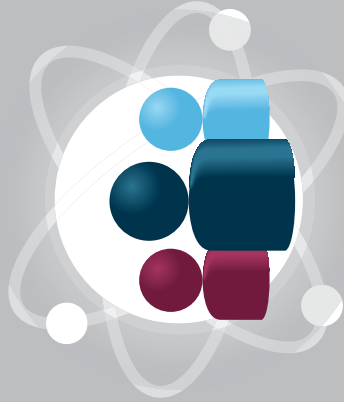
8   Simkin, et al., 13, 20.

9   Bodilly, et al., 64.

The Four Elements of Afterschool System Success

Young people can benefit academically, socially and emotionally from high-quality afterschool. Historically, however, the field has been decentralized and disorganized, resulting in a lack of access to effective programs. In response, many cities are developing afterschool systems to coordinate efforts and resources. Their work and a growing body of research point to four key elements of a successful system, described in the report *Growing Together, Learning Together: What Cities Have Discovered About Building Afterschool Systems*. To read the report and related publications, visit wallacefoundation.org
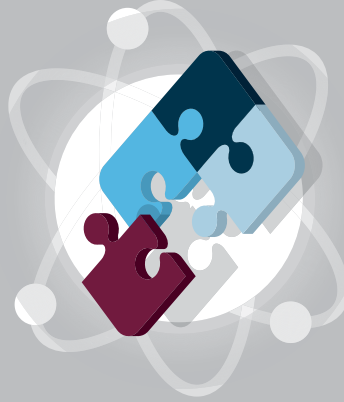
QUALITY

Cities must decide what quality means to them, how "high stakes" to make their assessments and how to support continuous improvement of programs.

DATA

Gathering and sharing data on a large scale takes both technology to track and organize information and a skilled staff to interpret and act on it.

COORDINATION

A system can be coordinated by a single public agency, multiple agencies working together, a nonprofit intermediary or a network of partners, depending on local needs.
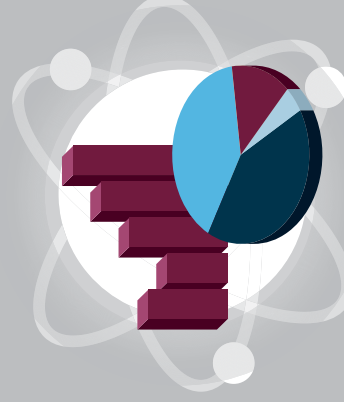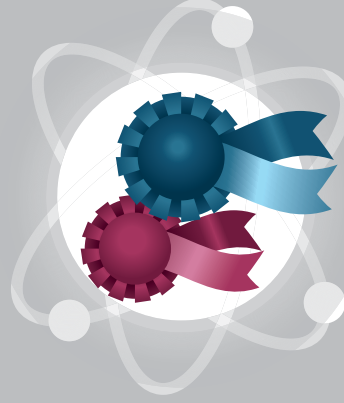
LEADERSHIP

There is no substitute for a committed mayor or superintendent, but for a system to thrive long term, all the major players need to "own" the effort to some degree.

AFTERSCHOOL SYSTEMS BY THE NUMBERS

19.4 MILLION

more children would be enrolled in afterschool if a program were available to them

Source: *America After 3PM*, Afterschool Alliance, 2014

AT LEAST 77

of the 275 largest U.S. cities have put in place at least one element of an afterschool system

Source: *Is Citywide Afterschool Coordination Going Nationwide?*, FHI 360, 2013

4 OUT OF 5

cities in Wallace's first afterschool system-building initiative increased the number of students served

Source: *Hours of Opportunity vol. 1*, RAND, 2010

25%

fewer missed school days: Students who took part in Providence's AfterZone missed about three weeks of school over two years, compared to four weeks for students who did not participate

Source: *AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence's After-School System*, Public/Private Ventures, 2011

67%

of cities with a "highly committed" mayor increased or maintained funding for afterschool system building, compared to only 12% of cities with a "moderately committed mayor"

Source: *Is Citywide Afterschool Coordination Going Nationwide?*, FHI 360, 2013

"The biggest pay-off [of Providence's system-building work] is the consistent high quality of the experience... Graduates can look back on it. Their siblings can look forward to it. Our school principals would be bereft without it. You just don't get that with a patchwork of programs."

—**Hillary Salmons**, executive director of the Providence After School Alliance

CITIES PARTICIPATING IN WALLACE'S AFTERSCHOOL SYSTEM-BUILDING INITIATIVES

CITY	COORDINATION STRUCTURE	FOR MORE INFORMATION…
FIRST GENERATION (2003-2010)		
Boston	**Nonprofit intermediary** Boston After School and Beyond	bostonbeyond.org
Chicago	**Public agency** Originally seated at the city's Department of Family and Support Services, then moved to the Office of Student Support and Engagement in the Chicago Public Schools with support from nonprofit intermediaries (After School Matters, Hive Chicago Learning Network)	cps.edu/Programs/Before_and_after_school/ Pages/Beforeandafterschool.aspx
New York City	**Public agency** City's Department of Youth and Community Development with support from nonprofit intermediaries (The After-School Corporation, The Partnership for After School Education)	nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/after-school/afterschool.shtml
Providence	**Nonprofit intermediary** Providence After School Alliance	mypasa.org
Washington, D.C.	**Nonprofit intermediary** Originally seated at the nonprofit D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, then moved to a public agency, Office of Out-of-School Time Programs in the D.C. Public Schools; D.C. Trust still responsible for program funding and quality evaluation	dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Beyond+the+Classroom/ Afterschool+Programs

SECOND GENERATION (2012-2015)		
Baltimore	**Nonprofit intermediary** Family League of Baltimore	youthbmore.com/initiatives/education-initiatives/school-time/
Denver	**Public agency** Denver Afterschool Alliance in the city's Office of Children's Affairs	denvergov.org/educationandchildren/OfficeofChildrensAffairs/OutofSchoolTimeInitiatives/DenverAfterschoolAlliance/tabid/444267/Default.aspx
Fort Worth	**Nonprofit intermediary** Ft. Worth SPARC	fortworthsparc.org
Grand Rapids	**Public agency** Our Children's Community in the mayor's office	grchildren.us
Jacksonville	**Public agency** Jacksonville Children's Commission	jaxkids.org
Louisville	**Network of public agencies and nonprofit intermediary** Building Louisville's Out of School Time Coordinating System with representatives from Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville Metro Government and Metro United Way	louisvilleblocs.org
Nashville	**Public agency** Nashville After Zone Alliance, originally seated at the mayor's office, then moved to the Nashville Public Library	nashvillez.org
Philadelphia	**Network of public agencies** PhillyBOOST with representatives from the city's Department of Human Services, Parks and Recreation, School District of Philadelphia and Free Library of Philadelphia	PhillyBOOST.com
St. Paul	**Network of public agencies** Sprockets with representatives from the mayor's office, Parks and Recreation Department, St. Paul Public Library, St. Paul Public Schools with support from Community Advisory Council	sprocketssaintpaul.org

> **Cities should consider the full menu of options available to them and choose the [coordination] structure that best meets their local needs. And if those needs change — or if other conditions shift (say, the economic forecast or political landscape) — then cities should be willing to change their approach.**

ELEMENT #2: COORDINATION THAT FITS LOCAL CONTEXT

Let's say your mayor believes in afterschool systems and has funders, families and the superintendent of schools believing, too. What's next? When we say that then-Mayor David Cicilline of Providence launched PASA, what is it exactly that he brought into being? PASA is a *coordinating entity* responsible for an array of functions, including planning, raising and distributing funds, assessing the quality of programs, connecting program providers with training and coaching, collecting and analyzing information, and communicating and advocating on behalf of the afterschool community. Such centralized coordination is the essence of an afterschool system, the way cities knit together disparate programs, raising overall quality and access.

In the cases of Providence, Nashville and a number of others, a single organization was created by the city to assume responsibility for coordination. Such entities are often called intermediaries or "backbone" organizations. Intermediaries need not be created from scratch, however. An existing organization can be designated as an afterschool intermediary, as in Baltimore, where the Family League of Baltimore, a funder and organizer of efforts to help families in the city, has been responsible for distributing local dollars to afterschool programs since 2006 and took on a formal coordination role in 2012.

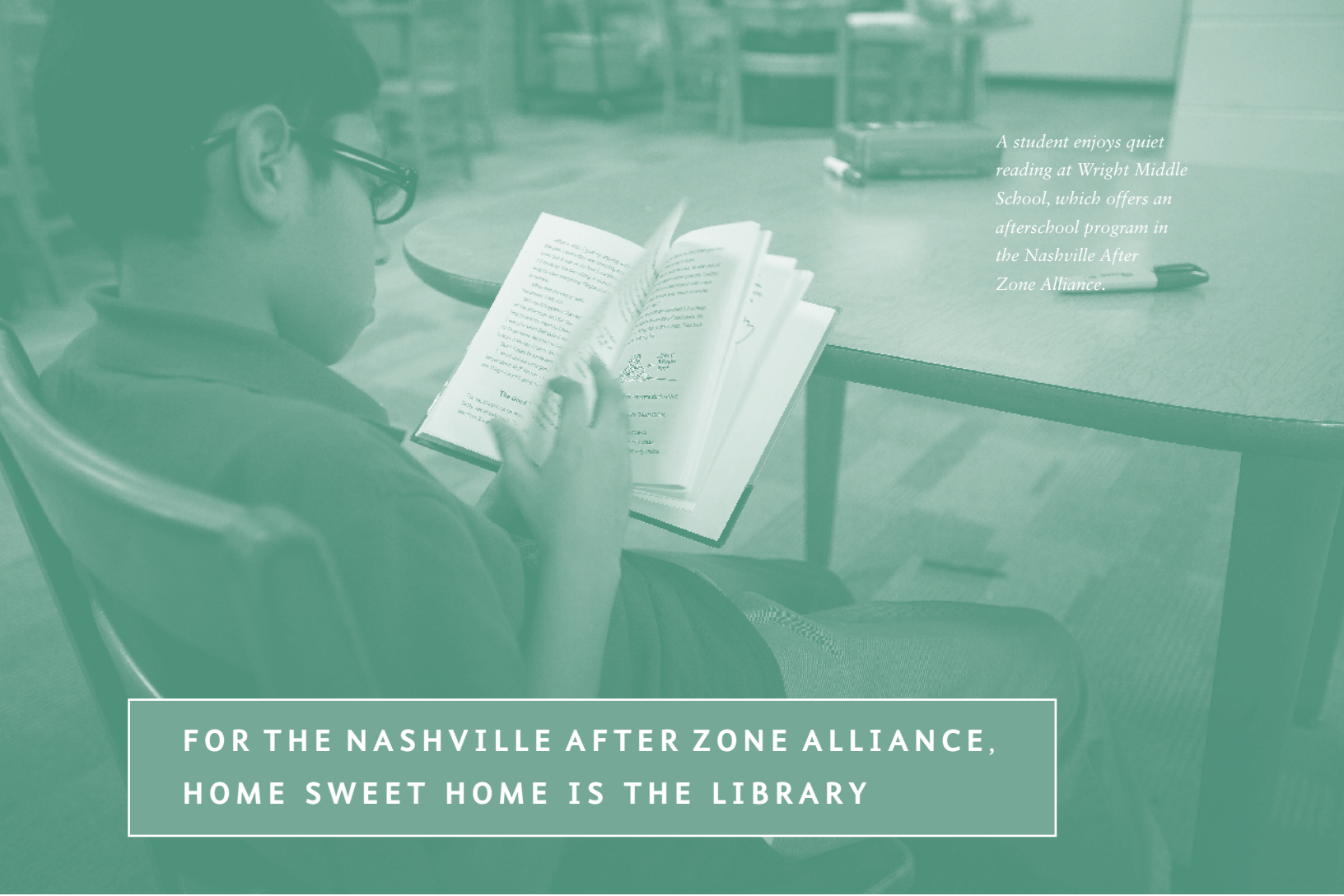A first-of-its-kind survey of afterschool intermediaries conducted in 2012 confirms that these organizations come in all shapes and sizes. Of the 212 intermediaries surveyed, 56 were local nonprofits; 37 were multi-service nonprofits, including historic social service agencies like the YMCA; 25 were state networks; and 16 were local foundations. Fifty were classified as "other," suggesting even greater variation. (The survey only included nonprofit organizations, so government entities were not represented.)[10]

The term intermediary – and even more so backbone organization – brings to mind a single authority, but this isn't always the case. In fact, it may not be practical for one organization to take full responsibility for coordination of afterschool, particularly in cities where the municipal government and the school district are separate jurisdictions or the required know-how is spread among multiple entities (say, a university, a national nonprofit and a leading local provider). In these cases, empowering a single intermediary can even set off turf wars that contribute to some of the very problems afterschool systems are intended to solve.[11]

Indeed, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to coordination. On the contrary, the experience of cities on the cutting edge of system building, as well as mounting research, points to a range of

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10 *Making the Connections: A Report on the First National Survey of Out-of-School Time Intermediary Organizations*, Every Hour Counts (formerly the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems), 2012, 9.

11 Jeff Edmonson, "Backbone Organization or Backbone Function?" *Striving for Change: Lessons from the Front Line*, StriveTogether, December 3, 2013. http://www.strivetogether.org/blog/2013/12/backbone-organization-or-backbone-function/

FOR THE NASHVILLE AFTER ZONE ALLIANCE, HOME SWEET HOME IS THE LIBRARY

When Nashville's afterschool system moved into its new home in the public library, it found much more than just a welcome mat.

The Nashville After Zone Alliance, known as NAZA, approached its fifth anniversary in 2014 with much to celebrate, including the knowledge that over the years it had expanded from serving 200 children at four sites to serving 1,250 children at more than 40 sites with activities ranging from homework help to field trips to making ice cream and stained glass. Data from the 2012-13 school year showed NAZA students posted improved attendance, fewer disciplinary referrals, increased focus on academics and higher test scores in math and science.

But according to NAZA coordinator Candy Markman, the students' reading and language arts scores still lagged.

That's a major reason why NAZA saw the Nashville Public Library as such a beneficial partner. Libraries, says Mayor Karl Dean, "play a key role in providing community services and provide a great place for kids to hang out." More than that, however, the library offered the promise of a laser focus on reading skills and the expertise and materials that afterschool programs would need to help students improve.

With its new base in the library, NAZA is now providing afterschool programs with access to Limitless Libraries, an initiative that offers instructors an array of teaching materials and books for children's independent reading time. Instructors also receive free training in reading education from a literacy coach, employed by the Nashville Public Library Foundation, who runs workshops, demonstrates teaching methods with students and provides classroom resources.

"It's about reinventing our afterschool space in Nashville and turning it into a culture that promotes a love of reading," Markman says.

For NAZA and the kids it serves, home is where the resources, support and inspiration are.

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An afterschool system has many moving parts, but the oil that makes all the gears turn smoothly is data. Program providers, city agencies, school, funders, families and youth – they all need up-to-date, accurate information to make sound decisions.

distinct models. Coordination can be the responsibility of:

- *A single public agency*, such as the mayor's office, the department of parks and recreation, the public library system or a department specifically devoted to youth services. In New York City, for example, the afterschool system is managed by the Department of Youth and Community Development.

- *Multiple public agencies working together*. Philadelphia, for example, while ultimately seeking an independent coordinating entity, has relied in the interim on liaisons from four "anchor agencies": the Department of Human Services, Parks and Recreation, the library system, and the school district.

- *A nonprofit intermediary organization* created or empowered by the city, as in Baltimore, Boston, Ft. Worth and Providence.

- *A network or coordinating council with representatives from city government, the school district and an intermediary organization*, as in Louisville, where the intermediary is Metro United Way.

Cities should consider the full menu of options available to them and choose the structure that best meets their local needs. And if those needs change — or if other conditions shift (say, the economic forecast or political landscape) — then cities should be willing to change their approach. For example, Nashville's coordinating entity, the

Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA), started life in 2009 in the office of Mayor Karl Dean, the city's chief champion of afterschool system building. Within a few years, though, NAZA was facing a dilemma: Because of term limits, Dean would leave office at the end of 2015, and there was no way of knowing whether the next mayor would consider afterschool a priority. The solution was to move the operation out of the mayor's office and into the Nashville Public Library, a stable home, with its own sources of public and private funding. [For more on NAZA's transition, see the sidebar on p. 15.]

Similarly, Ft. Worth's afterschool initiative, SPARC (which stands for Strengthen after-school Programs through Advocacy, Resources and Collaboration), originally resided in Ft. Worth's Parks and Community Services Department, but after deliberations led by Mayor Betsy Price, SPARC formed its own nonprofit organization so that it would endure after her administration ended.

ELEMENT #3: EFFECTIVE USE OF DATA
So you've designated a coordinating entity, be it a government agency, a single intermediary organization or a network. All the key players in your city are at the table, and they're ready to get to work on increasing access to programs and improving their quality. Now what? What is it you're supposed to be coordinating, anyway? An afterschool system has many moving parts, but the oil that makes all the gears turn smoothly is data. Program providers, city agencies, schools, funders, families and youth — they all need up-to-date, accurate information to make sound de-

cisions. City agencies, for instance, need to know where the demand for programs is highest, so they can allocate resources accordingly. Families, in turn, need to know where to find good programs with open slots for their kids.

Collecting such information can be a challenge, but it's only a first step. Cities need to know how to interpret it, how to get it into the right hands and how to act on it effectively. That's where the afterschool system comes in. The cities leading the way in system building are discovering there are many ways to put data to use.

Assessing the supply of, and demand for, programming. In a time of tight budgets, cities want to make sure the precious dollars earmarked for afterschool are going to the neighborhoods and populations that need them most. Mapping can help identify not only those neighborhoods that lack programming but also those that house large concentrations of children in need. When New

York City began its afterschool system in 2005, it zeroed in on three groups — youth living in poverty, English language learners and youth in state-subsidized child care — to determine the ZIP codes with the greatest need for afterschool services, then devoted 70 percent of all funding for elementary and middle-school programs to these ZIP codes.[12] (By 2014, the city had expanded its focus to include all students.)

Recruiting and retaining students. If demographic data help cities assess the need for afterschool, direct input from families about their interests and concerns — gathered from surveys, focus groups and other forms of market research — helps cities shape programs in ways that boost enrollment and encourage young people to stick with them. In Providence, a survey revealed that many

Organizers of Denver's Afterschool Alliance attend a planning session.

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12   Jennifer Gill, "'X' Marks the Spot: Using Data to Map Needs and Supply," *After-School Data: What Cities Need to Know*, Wallace Foundation, 2012, 2.

SETTING UP A MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (MIS): FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Building an afterschool Management Information System (MIS) is no simple matter. The National League of Cities has identified the following practical considerations for cities weighing whether and how to proceed:[1]

PURPOSE: "The first rule of management information systems," the National League of Cities says, "is not to begin any discussion by talking about management information systems." Rather than starting with the technology, system-builders should convene community leaders with a stake in afterschool, settle on a common set of goals and then figure out what information would help accomplish those goals.

TIME: Setting up an MIS takes time. How much depends on variables such as whether your city sources its MIS from an outside vendor or chooses to develop its own unique system. When coming up with a timeline, make sure to factor in the need to consult with the city agencies, schools, providers and other parties that will be using the system.

COST: Cost is often a factor for cities that decide to develop their own MIS rather than buy a commercial system. Either way, it's important to keep in mind that your system will require adjustments to accommodate new needs and partners. Cities that dedicate funding specifically to MIS maintenance are able to plan ahead for system growth and adapt to changing conditions as needed.

EXISTING DATA USE: Most providers already generate and use data in one way or another. System-builders must determine how a new MIS will support, replace or change the practices already in place and answer the "what's in it for me?" question.

PILOT-TESTING: To troubleshoot the inevitable glitches, build trust and win supporters, cities often opt to pilot their MIS with a limited number of their most enthusiastic providers. This will extend the timeline for getting your MIS up and running systemwide.

DATA-SHARING AGREEMENTS: For most cities, establishing an information-sharing relationship with the public schools, as required by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, is the most difficult obstacle to overcome. Be prepared for this to take more than a year of ongoing negotiation.

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1   Chris Kingsley, *Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities*, National League of Cities, 2012, 15-39.

parents saw a safety issue in sending their children to programs in facilities where older youth would also be present. In Chicago, young people pointed to the fact that they couldn't use their bus passes after 6 p.m. as an obstacle to taking part in afterschool.[13]

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13   Pat Wechsler, "By the Numbers: Using Data to See the Successes and Shortcomings of Afterschool Programs," *Afterschool Today*, Fall 2012, 8.

New York City recognized that the name of its afterschool initiative, Out of School Time, had become a generic term and didn't mean much to young people. Working with a market research and branding firm, the city renamed the initiative the Comprehensive After School System of NYC, or COMPASS, and gave its programs for middle school students a catchy moniker of their own: School's Out NYC (SONYC, pronounced "sonic"). The name, one of nearly 400 submitted by

young people as part of a city-sponsored contest, was chosen after extensive market research, focus groups and testing. "I wanted the name to be short, catchy and to the point but also knew it should reflect the fun, interesting activities that young people could do outside of school hours," 17-year-old contest winner Joel Forcheney said at the time.[14]

Market research isn't the only type of data that cities can use to inform their recruitment and retention efforts. At a 2014 meeting of Wallace's afterschool system-building grantees, a staff member at the Family League of Baltimore noted that a dip in program attendance in the winter months may indicate the need for a coat drive to ensure that young people are warm enough to walk to their programs.

Measuring quality and performance. Raising the quality of programs is one of the central responsibilities of an afterschool system, and use of data is an increasingly essential means of defining, evaluating and improving quality. Cities gauge the quality of their programs, in part, by tracking their performance. There are a number of ways to measure this, from using assessment tools like the David P. Weikart Center's Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA), which rates programs on the basis of observations and interviews, to examining student "outcomes" like school attendance and grades, which may be especially important in cities where boosting student achievement is an afterschool system priority.

One of the most versatile and valued measures of program quality is actually the simplest. Program attendance is often considered a proxy for quality because it's believed that children "vote with their feet." But attendance data can reveal far more than just whether young people enjoy a particular program's offerings. Numerous studies, including the evaluation of the Providence AfterZone, have found an association between the degree to which children benefit from afterschool and how frequently they attend and over what period of time.[15]

In fact, systems rely on attendance data for everything from calculating the daily cost of programming per child and monitoring programs' compliance with their contracts to helping managers decide how many staff members to hire and snacks and meals to order.[16]

Robert Balfanz, a Johns Hopkins University research professor who has highlighted the importance of school attendance in academic success, cites the role of afterschool in cultivating a "culture of attendance." "Afterschool can be the engaging thing, the hook, that gets the kids to come [to school] every day," Balfanz said at Better Together, a 2013 Wallace-sponsored conference. With this in mind, some cities compare afterschool attendance data to students' school attendance records to assess whether the former is linked to the latter.

Advocacy. Even in the best of times, every city has limited resources and tough choices to make. Policymakers who believe in the value of afterschool understand that, to persuade others, they have to connect its benefits to broader civic priorities. As St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman put it at an event in 2013, "Supporting afterschool programming is part of our education improvement strategy, economic development strategy, neighborhood development strategy and crime prevention strategy."[17] Politicians and officials are hungry for solid information that will help them make that case, and afterschool system-builders are finding creative ways to meet the demand.

In Grand Rapids, Our Community's Children, the local afterschool coordinating entity, working with the police department and university researchers, showed that young people who participated in afterschool programs were generally not involved in juvenile crime during the peak hours after school let out. In fact, juvenile offenses dropped by 25 percent at a time when the com-

What It Takes to Achieve It," *Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*, Number 10, The Harvard Family Research Project, 2008, 6.

16   Leila Fiester, *Afterschool Counts! A Guide to Issues and Strategies for Monitoring Attendance in Afterschool and Other Youth Programs*, The After School Project of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2004, 5-9.

17   Tim Mudd, "New Compendium Highlights Value of Afterschool Programs," 2013, National League of Cities.

14   "City Launches 'COMPASS' and 'SONYC' Campaigns to Attract Young People to Expanded and Enhanced Afterschool Programs" (press release), New York City Department of Youth & Community Development, July 21, 2014.

15   "Afterschool Programs in the 21st Century: Their Potential and

> While cities are beginning to collect, share and act on information in a variety of ways, data use is still a relatively undeveloped element of the system builders' work. Of those cities surveyed in 2013 that said they were doing some form of afterschool coordination, only 34 percent had a common data system. Almost twice as many had quality standards or a coordinating entity.

munity increased the number of afterschool programs.[18] Of course, afterschool advocates need to be careful when making these kinds of connections. It can be tempting to leap from correlation (juvenile offenses dropped *at the same time* as afterschool slots were added) to causation (juvenile offenses dropped *because* afterschool slots were added), but such overstatement can lead to unrealistic expectations and burned bridges when those expectations aren't met.

Policymakers aren't the only audiences for data-driven advocacy. In Louisville and New York City, the local coordinating entities have made a point of sharing positive findings with individual program providers. The goal is for providers to use the information to advocate on their own behalf with private funders and the public.

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Gathering and sharing data on a large scale takes infrastructure, and that means both a staff of skilled professionals and the technology to track and organize information. In *Hours of Opportunity Vol. 2: The Power of Data to Improve After-School Programs Citywide*, RAND studied the way the five cities in Wallace's original afterschool system-building initiative approached the collection and use of data and came away with several lessons for cities looking to set up a management information system (MIS):[19]

- Contrary to what some cities may anticipate, the introduction of an MIS was not subject to major push-back from program providers. The majority agreed that their city's MIS provided valuable information and reported that they used that information in a number of ways.

- Providers did express frustration, however, if they had to enter the same data into more than one MIS (say, a state agency's, in addition to the city's). Those who had to use more than one MIS were significantly less likely to find their city's MIS useful.

- The cities had to make a number of decisions during the development stage (e.g. whether to use an in-house or external developer, whether to pilot the system with a few providers before rolling it out citywide) that subsequently affected the way their MIS could be used. Understanding from the outset the goals for the MIS and how those goals supported the larger aims of the afterschool system was critical.

- At the same time, the cities allowed their systems to evolve over time, adding features, changing

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18 Jennifer Gill, "Using Data in Advocacy Work," *After-School Data: What Cities Need to Know*, Wallace Foundation, 2012, 2.

19 Jennifer Sloan McCombs, et al., *Hours of Opportunity vol. 2*, RAND Corporation, 2010, 70-76.

USING DATA TO IMPROVE PROGRAM QUALITY? FOUR QUESTIONS TO ANSWER FIRST

Let's say your city sees raising quality as one of its main goals and wants to plan its data efforts accordingly. Answering the following questions can set you on the right path.[1]

What types of data will drive the improvement we're seeking?

Attendance records and program assessment tools can help measure program performance. So can feedback from participants and their families. Your city may have other interests or needs that call for additional data. For instance, Baltimore, Grand Rapids and St. Paul see social-emotional learning — the cultivation of attributes beyond reading and math skills that young people need to succeed — as a focus of their afterschool programs and have begun to collect indicators of social-emotional development.

When and how quickly do our data need to be analyzed and conveyed to providers in order for them to get the most use out of it?

Some types of data, such as an individual child's absence from school, will be most relevant to a provider in "real time." Others — say, a comparison of attendance trends across all programs in a system — may take time and guidance to properly digest, and therefore may be distributed only periodically.

Should our program providers assess themselves or should they be assessed by outside observers?

Some cities ask their providers to use a self-assessment tool to monitor their own performance. Others send staff from their coordinating entity to conduct observations and interviews. Nicole Yohalem of the Forum for Youth Investment says, in an ideal world, they would do both. "When the focus is on improvement, even staff who may feel uneasy about being observed tend to find the fresh perspective extremely useful."[2] There are also cities, including Baltimore, Grand Rapids, New York, Providence and St. Paul, that go a step further, hiring external evaluators to provide an objective take on the performance of the system as a whole.

How can we make the data we collect meaningful?

There are a number of ways to make sense of performance data — by comparing each program to all the other programs in the system, for instance, or by tracking improvement (of individual programs and the system as a whole) over time. Cities may also be interested in seeing how the performance of their system stacks up to similar efforts across the country. Deciding in advance what types of analysis your city values will help you determine the MIS capabilities and human capital you need to get the job done.

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[1]   Nicole Yohalem, et al., *Building Citywide Systems for Quality: A Guide and Case Studies for Afterschool Leaders*, Forum for Youth Investment, 2012, 18.

[2]   Jennifer Gill, "From Good to Great: Using Data to Assess and Improve Quality," *After-School Data: What Cities Need to Know*, Wallace Foundation, 2012, 2.

Students rehearse for a performance at an event marking the Nashville After Zone Alliance's fifth anniversary.

the types of data collected, making them more user-friendly, as needed. San Francisco, for example, actually reduced the amount of data collected to minimize the burden on providers.

- As the previous point suggests, providers and agencies were more likely to use an MIS that was customized to meet their specific needs.

- Providers were also more likely to find their city's MIS useful if they received high-quality training. They particularly wanted training in data analysis and the use of data.

[For some additional factors to keep in mind when setting up an MIS, and some questions for cities interested in using data to improve program quality, see the sidebars on p. 18 and p. 21.]

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While cities are beginning to collect, share and act on information in a variety of ways, data use is still a relatively undeveloped element of the system builders' work. Of those cities surveyed in 2013 that said they were doing some form of afterschool coordination, only 34 percent had a "common data system." Almost twice as many had quality standards or a coordinating entity.[20]

One challenge cities face as they try to get the most out of the information they collect is navigating among multiple data systems. In New York City, for instance, attendance data is housed in one system, case management and funding information in another, and program quality assessments in a third. This makes it difficult to correlate the data and identify trends.[21] The city recognizes the issue and is currently building an MIS that will integrate the different types of data it collects. Such challenges show that, when it comes to data use in particular, even the most advanced afterschool system is a work in progress.

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20 Simkin, et al., 13-15.

21 Jennifer Sloan McCombs, et al., *Hours of Opportunity vol. 3,* RAND Corporation, 2010, 35.

> **Providers are unlikely to embrace a set of quality commandments chiseled in stone and handed down from on high. Rather, fostering a shared understanding of quality — not just specific standards but the importance of standards in general — will help ensure buy-in for the system's quality improvement work.**

ELEMENT #4: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO QUALITY

The elements we've discussed so far are all crucial to achieving the fundamental goals of increasing the availability of afterschool programs and improving their quality. Now let's take a step back and consider quality from all angles. What is it? Why does it matter? What makes one program higher quality than another? How can a city not just measure quality but also improve it?

First, it's important to recognize that not all afterschool programs are beneficial to young people. In 2007, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning analyzed studies of 73 afterschool programs and found that, while some programs were effective in promoting positive feelings, attitudes and social behaviors and in boosting grades and test scores, others were not. What's more, it was possible to tell the effective programs from the ineffective: Successful programs focused intentionally and explicitly on building specific skills using active forms of learning and a set sequence of activities.[22] This, in essence, is what it means for a program to be high-quality: an approach, founded on best practices, that yields measurable benefits for young people. Understanding that only high-quality programs get results, cities are increasingly making quality improvement one of the central goals of their afterschool systems. Research and experience point

to a range of activities involved in the design and application of quality improvement measures. These activities fall into two broad categories: setting standards and meeting standards.

Setting standards. Before cities can get down to the business of improving the quality of their programs, they have to decide what quality means to them, and it is vital that they involve program providers and other stakeholders in the process. Providers are unlikely to embrace a set of quality commandments chiseled in stone and handed down from on high. Rather, fostering a shared understanding of quality – not just specific standards but the importance of standards in general – will help ensure buy-in for the system's quality improvement work and pave the way for assessments and interventions that might otherwise be met with skepticism, resistance or mistrust. Prime Time Palm Beach County, an afterschool coordinating entity in South Florida, spent 13 months working with providers, funders, city agencies, social service organizations and the local state college to review examples of standards from across the country and develop their own. The results were then vetted by more than 1,800 parents and 200 afterschool staff members.[23] In a recent email exchange, Prime Time's director of quality improvement Dominique Arrieux said of the process, "Some days meetings became a little heated and sometimes people grew frustrated trying to hold on to their ideals. While it's easy to get people to come together to talk about what they

22   Joseph A. Durlak and Roger P. Weissberg, *The Impact of After-School Programs That Promote Personal and Social Skills*, Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2007, p. 18-20.

23   Yohalem, et al., 15-16.

> **"**
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> *Cities believe their providers are generally eager to get better and are more willing to work at it with the system's coordinating entity when it plays a supportive rather than a punitive role.*

do well, it becomes a balancing act when you are trying to build something that meets the needs of an entire county with everyone looking at it through a different lens. It requires that everyone leave their agendas at the door."

So developing quality standards takes time and resources. The good news is that other cities and organizations have already made that investment, and there's no need to reinvent the wheel. You may even find other efforts to define quality in your own backyard. When it merged with an initiative overseen by the Boston Public Schools, Boston's afterschool system, for example, was able to piggyback on the schools' standards.[24]

Creating brand new standards or adopting existing ones aren't the only options. Many cities (e.g. Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York and Providence) have modified existing standards to better fit their conditions and needs. Cities that choose to go this route still have the option of using an existing research-validated assessment tool, like the YPQA, to measure programs' adherence to their standards.

Meeting standards. Putting standards in place is only the start of the quality journey. Cities face a number of decisions, considerations and challenges as they work with programs to live up to the standards they've adopted.

For starters, they will need to decide how "high stakes" to make their quality assessments. It is certainly possible to create a high-stakes accountability regime by, for instance, taking away fund-

ing from programs that do not meet standards. For the most part, though, system-building cities have decided that this would be counterproductive, given that demand for high-quality programs generally exceeds supply. Better, then, to help shaky programs up their game than to eliminate slots that families depend on. Speaking at the 2013 Better Together conference, Elizabeth Devaney, a consultant to PASA said, "We… felt pretty strongly that the high-stakes approach would just alienate the people we wanted to partner with. We needed to build a system where we were raising all boats."[25]

On the other end of the spectrum, cities can make adherence to standards entirely voluntary, but they may find it more difficult to engage providers in quality improvement. The middle ground — occupied by Atlanta, Austin, New York City, Palm Beach County and others — is to make participation in the improvement process a condition of funding but let providers know that the scores they get on assessments will not affect that funding. (New York City does assess penalties of up to 10 percent to providers that do not meet attendance benchmarks.) These cities believe their providers are generally eager to get better and are more willing to work at it with the system's coordinating entity when it plays a supportive rather than a punitive role.[26]

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What does participating deeply in the improvement process involve? The short answer is a lot. In

24   Bodilly, et al., 45.

25   H.J. Cummins, *Better Together: Building Local Systems to Improve Afterschool (A Conference Report)*, Wallace Foundation, 2013, 12.

26   Yohalem, et al., 17.

fact, the phrase "improvement process" is incomplete without the word "continuous." "Continuous improvement" means that programs should expect more than a single assessment and a single round of feedback. Rather, assessment and feedback take place regularly, along with planning sessions, technical assistance, on-site coaching and off-site training, distribution of resources (like curricula, research and field publications) and meetings with fellow providers to exchange ideas and tackle shared problems. The experience can be intense for providers that aren't accustomed to it, and even the most willing participants may find it difficult. It's incumbent on the city's coordinating entity, therefore, to make the process both clear-cut and attractive. One way to do the former is by providing guidelines that explain, for example, how assessment works, when providers can expect it to happen and how they will be asked to act on it. To do the latter, coordinating entities should make sure providers are fully aware of incentives for participation. These may include financial rewards, as well as access to system-wide data (and help understanding and using it) and free training and coaching.[27]

Training and coaching are particularly important because quality improvement isn't possible without skilled afterschool workers. Professional development is one of the areas in which a coordinating entity can be most helpful to providers, whose employees tend to be low-paid part-timers with varying degrees of experience. "We know that for the majority of our staff, this is their first job, so we've taken on the responsibility organizationally to prepare them to do the work we want them to do," Tommy Brewer, director of staff development at LA's BEST, said in a 2013 interview.[28]

A student at a program run by CommonBond Communities, one of the partner organizations in the Sprockets afterschool effort in St. Paul, gets one-on-one homework help in math.

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27   Ibid, 30.
28   Cummins, 24.

Prime Time Palm Beach County decided it wasn't enough to rely on national curricula for its professional development offerings, so it created its own set of core competencies that would be expected of its afterschool workers. Grouped into eight categories, the competencies include "Family and Community Relationships," "Youth Observation and Assessment" and "Health, Safety and Nutrition."[29] Prime Time also formed a partnership with Palm Beach State College, which offers certificate and degree programs for youth development professionals, working with the school to make sure its curricula reflected the new core competencies. Workers at sites participating in Prime Time's quality improvement process can get a wage supplement of up to $3,000 for completing educational milestones such as a certificate or degree program. "It's our 'we-want-you-to-stay-in-the-field' incentive," Suzette Harvey, executive director of Prime Time, told the Better Together conference.[30]

New York City has many professional development opportunities for afterschool workers, but they're scattered and hard to navigate. To fix this problem, the Department of Youth and Community Development, with funding from Wallace, commissioned the Afterschool Pathfinder website, which allows afterschool employers to post jobs and youth development professionals to search for training sessions and programs, some of which lead to certification they need to advance in their careers.[31]

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Quality improvement calls for more than just good, well-trained people. It calls for money, as well, and not an insubstantial amount. The most significant system-level costs associated with quality improvement involve the capacity to manage logistics (i.e. hiring, scheduling, planning, etc.), maintain an MIS, and deliver observation, coaching and training to providers.[32] In a 2009 study of six cities, researchers found that these

costs varied significantly from place to place. For example, ongoing investments in technical assistance, training and professional development ranged from $76,000 in Denver, which had two main partners for training and TA at the time, to $4.6 million in Boston, which had seven major initiatives. Investments in standards and evaluation ranged from $117,000 in Denver, which had around 300 programs in its system, to $700,000 in New York, which had more than 700. The cities tapped a wide variety of funding streams to cover these costs: city agency and public school budgets, private foundations and individual donors, community fundraising, federal grants and fees charged to participating providers. Differences in how much the cities spent on various aspects of their systems largely had to do with how much funding, particularly foundation funding, was available to them.[33]

No matter how many sources of funding it cultivates, a city is likely to face the reality that budgets are tight. To the extent that decision-makers see afterschool as a priority at all, they may prefer to allocate precious resources to maintaining or increasing the number of slots rather than improving the quality of programs. As one agency leader told RAND in 2012, "There is a lot of political pressure to prioritize direct service. Evaluation, training, or internal staff — those are always where we are asked to make cuts." RAND found, however, that it is possible to resist these pressures, even in times of budget cuts.[34]

There are several reasons why a city might decide to cut the number of slots rather than its investment in quality. In some cases, the size of that investment may be too small to make a significant dent in budget shortfalls. In others, private funders may step in and insist on a commitment to quality improvement as a condition of their continued support. In still others, a savvy agency head may find creative ways to protect investments in quality, say by cutting funding for slots

29   Betsy Starr, Nicole Yohalem and Ellen Gannet, *Youth Work Core Competencies: A Review of Existing Frameworks and Purposes*, Next Generation Youth Work Coalition, 2009, 25.

30   Cummins, 12.

31   Yohalem, et al., 88.

32   Ibid, 20.

33   Cheryl Hayes, et al., *Investments in Building Citywide Out-of-School-Time Systems: A Six-City Study*, Public/Private Ventures and The Finance Project, 2009, 32-34, 68-70.

34   Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Sheila Nataraj Kirby, and Joseph Cordes, *Tough Times, Tough Choices in After-School Funding: Pathways to Protecting Quality*, RAND Corporation, 2012, 9.

> Cities with more advanced systems are now developing strategies to ensure that their work survives and thrives over the long haul. They are rallying public support; securing stable, dedicated funding; and institutionalizing policies and practices. But even for cities just starting to incubate their system, it's never too early to start thinking about sustainability.

in neighborhoods where it is likely to be replaced by private donations, or arguing that quality should take precedence over quantity precisely because the public is more likely to demand that cut slots be restored in the future.[35]

So system builders, be advised: Scaring up the resources for quality improvement is just like the improvement work itself — a continuous process.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Thanks to the hard work of system-building cities across the country and much new research, we've come a long way since *A Place to Grow and Learn* was published in 2008. We now know that system building makes it possible for cities to provide afterschool programming to more young people and take on efforts to improve the quality of that programming. We also have a more fully developed understanding of the elements that constitute an effective afterschool system. And we know that the concept is clicking with a large number of cities that have taken the first steps toward a coordinated, data-driven, quality-focused approach to afterschool.
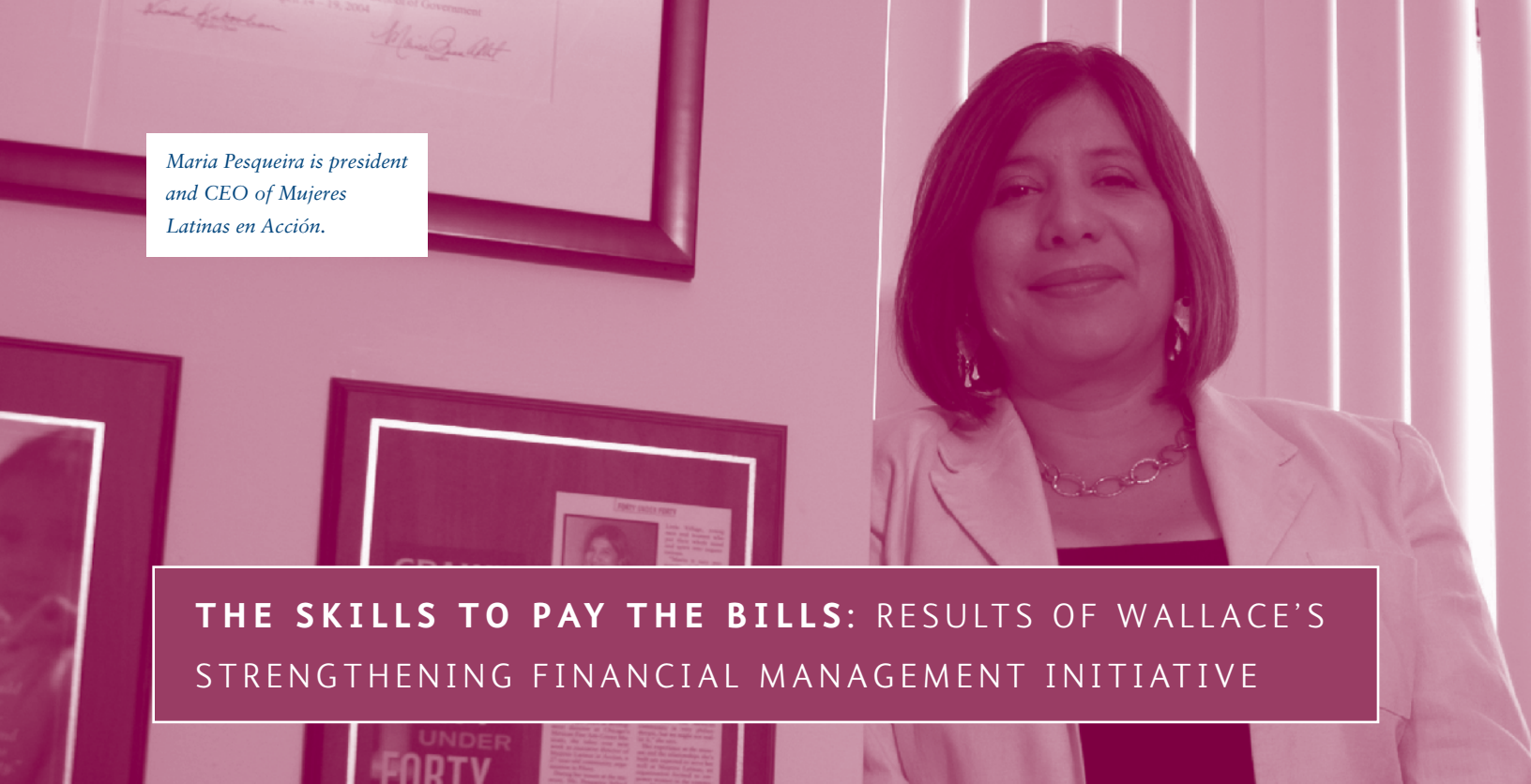
Still, we have a long way to go to make high-quality afterschool available to all who could benefit from it. The 2013 survey found that only 22 percent of cities that identify themselves as system-builders currently have a coordinating entity, quality standards *and* a shared data system.[36] On the other end of the spectrum, however, a number of cities now have systems that are entering maturity. The Providence After School Alliance, for example, celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2014. These trailblazers are still forging ahead, exploring new opportunities, tackling persistent problems, setting the agenda for the future of the field. Let's conclude with a look at some of the opportunities and challenges that loom largest for the nation's afterschool system builders.

Sustaining the work

The growing literature on afterschool system building and other collaborative approaches to community change suggests that they are often slow to develop, fragile and difficult to keep going. The White House Council for Community Solutions calls such efforts "promising" but cautions that "the work remains immensely challenging."[37] Of course, afterschool system builders don't need research to tell them this. It's the reality they're living every day. Cities with more advanced systems are now developing strategies to ensure that

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35 Ibid, 11, 13-15.

36 Simkin, et al., 10.

37 Michele Jolin, Paul Schmitz and Willa Seldon, *Community Collaboratives Whitepaper: A Promising Approach to Addressing America's Biggest Challenges*, Corporation for National & Community Service, 2012, 14.

THE SKILLS TO PAY THE BILLS: RESULTS OF WALLACE'S STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

What comes to mind when you think of a nonprofit afterschool organization? Its mission to serve young people? Its dedicated, idealistic staff? Its sound book-keeping and timely cash flow projections?

Probably not the latter, and yet, without strong financial management, an afterschool provider — no matter how dedicated — may not be able to fulfill its mission. That's why, between 2009 and 2013, Wallace hired the consulting firm Fiscal Management Associates (FMA) to help 25 Chicago providers improve their financial management skills and practices. At the same time, Wallace sponsored an effort by Donors Forum, a membership association for philanthropies and nonprofits in Illinois, to work toward streamlining the state's grant, funding and reporting practices.

The initiative tested two models of professional development, and a study by MDRC and Child Trends found that both were effective. Nearly all the nonprofits demonstrated better financial skills, financial data system use, financial reporting, and collaboration between program and financial divisions. What's more, the organizations that received less expensive group training improved almost as much the ones that received customized coaching (albeit in three years rather than two). The Donors Forum's advocacy efforts met with mixed results. The state created a repository that permitted nonprofits to submit standard financial information once a year instead of multiple times a year. However, the biggest challenge the nonprofits faced — late payments from the state — was not addressed because of Illinois' budget crisis.[1]

In a 2013 interview, Maria Pesqueira, president and CEO of Mujeres Latinas en Acción, one of the nonprofits that participated in the initiative, explained how her organization has changed its approach to financial management: "One of the things that we've been doing with all our program directors is really have them think about their budgets as a tool and a map... as opposed to looking at it as, 'The numbers, oh my God, leave that to accounting,' owning it, because it's what's there that allows them to do their work."[2]

To help providers get started on this path, Wallace and FMA launched StrongNonprofits.org, a website offering more than 60 free tools, how-tos, articles and other features.

1   Karen Walker, et al., *The Skills to Pay the Bills: An Evaluation of an Effort to Help Nonprofits Manage Their Finances*, MDRC, Child Trends, 2015, 77-80.

2   "Helping Nonprofits 'Own the Numbers,'" Wallace Foundation, 2013, video. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/view-latest-news/events-and-presentations/Pages/VIDEO-Helping-Nonprofits-Own-the-Numbers.aspx

> **It is important that afterschool system builders earn a seat at the collective impact table, not only because they can make a vital contribution to any initiative that involves the education and well-being of young people (to say nothing of the economic stability of their families), but also because participating in a citywide, multi-sector partnership can help embed an afterschool system in the public consciousness and policy agenda.**

their work survives and thrives over the long haul. They are rallying public support; securing stable, dedicated funding; and institutionalizing policies and practices. But even for cities just starting to incubate their system, it's never too early to start thinking about sustainability. These are some of the critical considerations that go into an afterschool system's sustainability planning:

Partnerships. We've acknowledged that mayors, superintendents and other civic leaders — as important as they are in getting a system up and running — will not be around to champion your system forever. In recognition of this reality, all the cities in Wallace's next generation initiative are looking to forge partnerships that connect afterschool with other fields and sectors, not just schools, parks and libraries, but also higher education, business and philanthropy. These partnerships serve two basic purposes: 1) to shore up support for, and strengthen the work of, the afterschool system itself; and 2) to bring the power of the afterschool system to bear on the city's broader priorities.

Moreover, a number of cities are now launching "collective impact" initiatives, rallying an array of civic institutions and players around a common goal. It is important that afterschool system-builders earn a seat at the collective impact table,

not only because they can make a vital contribution to any initiative that involves the education and well-being of young people (to say nothing of the economic stability of their families), but also because participating in a citywide, multi-sector partnership can help embed an afterschool system in the public consciousness and policy agenda.

This has been the case in St. Paul, where the afterschool coordinating entity, Sprockets, works with Generation Next, a public-private partnership that seeks to close the achievement gap between white students and students of color from kindergarten through college. Similarly, Louisville's afterschool system is a partner in 55,000 Degrees, a collective impact initiative, positioned primarily as an economic development project, with a goal of adding 55,000 post-secondary degrees to the city by 2020.

System leader transitions. Just as mayors come and go, many of the longer-running afterschool systems are finding that their own leaders (initiative coordinators, intermediary CEOs and the like) are moving on to new opportunities. How to prepare for such transitions has emerged as a pressing question. One answer is to cultivate the next generation of system leaders so that, when there's change at the top, they are ready to take the ball and run with it. That calls for time and re-

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People generally pursue a career in the afterschool field in order to make a difference in the lives of young people, not to show off their book-keeping skills. But when the budgets and contracts get bigger and more complex, and the payments from funders are coming late, as they often do, sound financial management can no longer be an afterthought.

sources, says Priscilla Little, Wallace's afterschool initiative manager and former associate director of the Harvard Family Research Project. "Many afterschool systems don't have the funding in place for a designated 'second in command,' but that's money well spent in the long term," she says.

Another way to avoid rocky leadership transitions is to make sure the head of your coordinating entity isn't the sole point of contact with the outside world. When a leader leaves, at least some mid-level staff members are likely to stay behind or even move up the ladder, so it makes sense for them to have meaningful responsibilities and their own working relationships with peers in government, the school system and partner foundations and nonprofits.

Funding. "[W]hen you're in an economically constrained environment, you have to flip the sofa cushions, look for your money, and then you figure out how you can stretch it as much as possible." So said Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake of Baltimore at the Better Together conference.[38] Securing reliable streams of funding is perhaps the single most daunting challenge facing afterschool systems. Systems run by nonprofit intermediaries rather than government agencies may find it difficult to extract funding from the city budget process. Conversely, systems housed in a mayor's office or school district may find their funding at risk when a new administration takes the helm.

Leading cities are finding a number of inventive ways to overcome these obstacles and bring financial stability to their afterschool systems.

For example, one of the reasons the Nashville Public Library proved to be such an attractive new home for NAZA is that it has a robust funding model consisting of both public and private sources, including the Nashville Public Library Foundation, which was already raising between $1 million and $2 million a year when NAZA came into the fold. Denver and New York City have created line items in the city budget specifically dedicated to their afterschool systems. Ft. Worth funds afterschool programs – though not its system-building work – through a special sales tax levy, approved by voters, intended to support crime fighting and prevention strategies. Grand Rapids charges providers a membership fee for full participation in the system (which includes access to data and technical assistance), but it's an insignificant amount ($150 a year) meant more as a token of buy-in than a serious source of revenue. Cities contemplating a more substantial membership fee would have to weigh the risk of alienating or even excluding some providers. But that doesn't mean they can't sell their services to other cities around the country. Prime Time Palm Beach County is doing just that through its Prime Time Ventures, which provides consulting services to rookie system builders in other communities.

As Mayor Rawlings-Blake understands, finding a dollar is one thing; stretching it as far as it will go

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38 "Mayor and Philanthropist: Why We Support Afterschool Systems."

is another. That's why system organizers are constantly looking not just for new and renewable funding but also for ways to make it last. Austin, Texas, for example, trains volunteers from local afterschool organizations to conduct its program quality assessments. In exchange, the organizations get an assessment of their own programs.[39] Now that's cost-effective.

Provider capacity and capabilities. As afterschool becomes more valued and coordinated in a city, there can be an unintended consequence: without adequate preparation and support, providers get squeezed by the pressing needs of families, youth and communities on the one hand and the growing expectations of funders and intermediaries on the other. A 2013 paper in the *Journal of Youth Development* called this "the accordion effect."[40] The accordion effect shows up in a number of ways, one of which is the financial management burden that comes with growth and an increased emphasis on quality. People generally pursue a career in the afterschool field in order to make a difference in the lives of young people, not to show off their book-keeping skills. But when the budgets and contracts get bigger and more complex, and the payments from funders are coming late, as they often do, sound financial management can no longer be an afterthought. Without it, an organization can find itself in jeopardy, and if enough organizations find themselves in jeopardy, then the sustainability of the whole system will be compromised. Wallace launched the Strengthening Financial Management initiative in 2009 to help providers sharpen the skills they need to get their financial house in order — and make funder policies and procedures fairer and more efficient. [You can read about the promising results in the sidebar on p. 28.]

Communications and policy. In a crowded policy landscape, the work of afterschool system building often goes unnoticed; worse it can be perceived as unneeded bureaucracy that detracts from core services, especially, as noted earlier, when budget cuts are on the table. System builders are increasingly coming to the realization that sustainability depends on making their story as compelling and relevant as possible. Efforts are under way at the national, state and local levels to do exactly that. Every Hour Counts, a national organization representing afterschool system builders, has teamed up with organizations like RAND and the American Institutes for Research on projects to build a common understanding of what success looks like for afterschool systems and individual programs and help program providers, policymakers and funders track their efforts and show that they lead to improved outcomes for students.

Such efforts to frame system building in national terms are a boon to the field, but states and cities are where the policy and funding sausage mostly gets made. That's where statewide afterschool networks (SANs) and local intermediaries come in, acting as afterschool systems' chief advocates, spreading information about the value of systems and building relationships with important influencers of public policy, including political candidates, elected officials and philanthropists. EHC's 2012 survey of afterschool intermediaries found that of all the various types of intermediaries surveyed, SANs and local afterschool intermediaries were the most likely to play an important role in passing legislation to support better policies and more funding, establishing new funding streams for afterschool, and shifting and repurposing funding.[41]

Going deeper with data

As we discussed earlier, effective use of data is the element of a successful afterschool system that is least developed in the field at large. The nine cities in Wallace's next generation afterschool system-building initiative have some of the most advanced systems in the country, and they are all focusing on collecting and using reliable information as part of their Wallace-supported work. Recognizing a learning opportunity, Wallace commissioned Chapin Hall at the University of Chi-

39   Yohalem, et al., 36.

40   Dana Fusco, et. al, "The Accordion Effect: Is Quality in Afterschool Getting the Squeeze?" *Journal of Youth Development*, Vol. 8, No. 2, National Association of 4-H Agents, 2013, 7-8.

41   *Making the Connections: A Report on the First National Survey of Out-of-School Time Intermediary Organizations*, 14.

cago to analyze what the nine cities were doing with data and report back with useful insights for the field.

One of Chapin Hall's early findings is that, for systems to be effective in their collection and use of data, they need to invest in more than just an MIS and related technology. Equally important are human capital — that is, a well-trained workforce with the skills and expertise to use the technology and interpret the data appropriately — and "social processes" (i.e. norms, routines, procedures and values) that encourage fruitful analysis of data. For example, St. Paul collects a variety of information from providers, including indicators of participation, program quality, youth outcomes and youth experience. This is the technology piece of the puzzle. But Sprockets, St. Paul's coordinating entity, recognizes that all that data can be overwhelming to providers, and it isn't always obvious to them how they can use it to improve their programming. So Sprockets has taken a number of steps, training more than 40 program supervisors to serve as quality coaches (human capital) and developing a workshop to walk providers through the process of creating a quality improvement plan using the range of data available to them (the social process).

Considering connections to social-emotional learning

Parents, employers and those who work with young people have long understood that it takes more than strong math and reading skills to succeed in life. Success also depends on a range of attributes that society values — behaviors like persistence and conscientiousness; attitudes like self-confidence and openness to new ideas; and abilities like self-control, time management and goal setting. These attributes are variously re-

ferred to as "soft skills," "social-emotional skills," or "noncognitive factors," and afterschool providers have long seen developing them as one of their essential roles and strengths. Now system builders are figuring out how to better capture the effect of their work on the social-emotional development of young people. Baltimore, Grand Rapids, Boston and St. Paul have all begun measuring social-emotional outcomes that research suggests are linked to success in school and life. Providence and Chicago are experimenting with "digital badges," online profiles that gives young people recognition for the skills and experiences they gain outside the classroom. (Examples of badge-earning activities include pitching business plans to local firms and designing smartphone applications at Brown University.[42]) The digital badge system allows employers or college admissions officers to view an individual student's badges with links to the work he or she did to receive it, giving them a more complete picture of the student's interests and accomplishments. "Badges give currency to the social-emotional competencies that afterschool systems are beginning to measure and account for," said PASA director Salmons.

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It's no surprise that leading afterschool system builders are driven to better understand, measure and capitalize on all the many ways that afterschool can benefit young people. For years, they have recognized afterschool's potential and taken ground-breaking steps to unlock it. We are now beginning to see what the system itself can do when it's built with vision and sustained with care. The years ahead will no doubt bring many more lessons and insights as system-building cities across the country continue to grow and learn together.

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42   Nora Fleming, "R.I. Students Gaining 'Badges,' Credits Outside School," *Education Week*, Vol. 32, Issue 20, 2013, 12-13.

Suggested Further Reading on Afterschool Systems

All of the following knowledge products – and many more – are available free of charge from Wallace's Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

The Skills to Pay the Bills: An Evaluation of an Effort to Help Nonprofits Manage Their Finances
This report examines two effective models for improving the financial management skills and practices of nonprofit afterschool providers.

Is Citywide Afterschool Coordination Going Nationwide? An Exploratory Study in Large Cities
This study finds that many U.S. cities with populations of 100,000 or more are coordinating afterschool programs.

Better Together: Building Local Systems to Improve Afterschool (A Conference Report)
When teams from 57 cities discuss building local afterschool systems, ideas fly about improving access to high-quality afterschool, as documented in this conference report.

Strong Directors/Skilled Staff: Guide to Using the Core Competencies
This handbook describes a major city youth-service agency's conclusion about key skills needed by afterschool workers and offers tools to develop these skills.

Building Citywide Systems for Quality: A Guide and Case Studies for Afterschool Leaders
This guide and accompanying set of case studies explains how cities and intermediaries can work with afterschool providers across an entire neighborhood, city or region to build quality across a system.

Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities
Do you need to build a management information system for your city's afterschool programming? Get a jump start with this guide.

Making the Connections: A Report on the First National Survey of Out-of-School Time Intermediary Organizations
The first national survey of "intermediaries" finds that these groups are playing a key role in boosting afterschool services.

Tough Times, Tough Choices in After-school Funding: Pathways to Protecting Quality
This paper argues that building understanding of the need for high-quality afterschool programs could help sustain support for quality even in tough times.

After-School Data: Six Tip Sheets on What Cities Need to Know
Six tip sheets offer an easy way to learn about using data to boost afterschool programming.

Fiscal Fitness for Nonprofits: Project Puts Chicago After-School Programs and Funders Through a Financial Workout
A description of a Wallace-funded effort to give financial training to executives of afterschool nonprofits and support a re-examination of state contracting practices.

Collecting and Using Information to Strengthen Citywide Out-of-School Time Systems
Practical guidance to city leaders on using data to improve afterschool programming.

AfterZone: Outcomes for Youth Participating in Providence's After-School System
The first evaluation of a citywide afterschool initiative finds that the effort, in Providence, produced educational benefits for children.

AfterZones: Creating a Citywide System to Support and Sustain High-Quality After-School Programs
A study finds notable successes and some challenges in Providence's implementation of its citywide system of afterschool programming for middle school kids.

Fair and Accountable: Partnership Principles for a Sustainable Human Service System
These six principles for states contracting with nonprofits cover everything from effectiveness of services to timeliness of reimbursement

Hours of Opportunity: Lessons from Five Cities on Building Systems to Improve After-School, Summer, and Other Out-of-School-Time Programs (Volumes I, II and III)
This report finds promise and challenges in the citywide approach to improving the quality and accessibility of afterschool programs.

Strengthening Partnerships and Building Public Will for Out-of-School Time Programs
This guide shows how city leaders nationwide have gotten community institutions to work together to improve afterschool programming.

Investments in Building Citywide Out-of-School-Time Systems: A Six-City Study
This report analyzes strategies used in building afterschool systems in six cities (Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Denver, New York City and Seattle) and the costs associated with them.

Financial Strategies to Support Citywide Systems of Out-of-School Time Programs
This guide explores strategies and funding resources cities have used for their efforts to build afterschool systems.

StrongNonprofits.org
These free online resources include tools, templates and guidelines on strengthening nonprofit financial management.

Providence AfterZone students explore an urban farm.

The Wallace Foundation®

The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy that seeks to improve learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and foster the vitality of the arts for everyone.

Wallace has five major initiatives under way:

- School leadership: Strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement.
- Afterschool: Helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to many more children.
- Arts education: Expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens.
- Summer and expanded learning: Better understanding the impact of high-quality summer learning programs on disadvantaged children, and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students.
- Audience development for the arts: Making the arts a part of many more people's lives by working with art organizations to broaden, deepen and diversify audiences.

Find out more at www.wallacefoundation.org.

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A Wright Middle School student puts paint to canvas in an afterschool program in the Nashville After Zone Alliance.